

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382  
92 (3), pp. 11-26, 2022

## Religious Mentalities and Attitudes in Times of Pandemic<sup>1</sup>

Caius Claudius CUȚARU

**Caius Claudius CUȚARU**

“Hilarion V. Felea” Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Arad, Romania

Email: c.caius@yahoo.com

### Abstract

The present study focuses on the transformations that human society goes through in pandemic periods, ie when the survival of the human species is called into question. During this time, in the archaic religious societies, they resorted to the help of the founding gods, and in the ancient societies proliferated the divinities responsible for healing diseases, the gods of medicine, all these societies being eminently religious, which required a certain religious type of behavior in any situation of life. The current pandemic has also imposed certain behavioral changes for the secularized contemporary man, who has partially lost his religious landmarks. The period of pandemic, which automatically involved isolation, was for some an opportunity for meditation and a time of introspection on their own human condition, ie a chance not to be missed to approach God. For the believers, the pandemic with the supposed isolation, had the disadvantage of stopping them from attending Holy Services, especially during Lent and Easter, in 2020. Believers, belonging to monotheistic religions, have adapted to the restrictions imposed and the attending of the religious services went online. Here we can notice the danger of becoming too used to the online, which, in the future, could lead to an absenteeism from the place of worship. The next period will shed light on the changes in the religious behavior caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Keywords

Pandemic, Covid-19, religious mentalities, History of Religions, monotheistic religions

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented by the author at the *Evil and Spiritual Combat in a Time of Pandemic* conference, organized by the *Institute for Studies in Eastern Christianity*, at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, on December 11, 2020.

## I. Archaic societies in the face of pandemics

Epidemics or pandemics and, in general, any calamity have as a consequence the problematization of the human being, which is put in front of a major and imminent threat. Hence the changes, the transformations that take place both in the human mind and in the moral-religious behavior.

The current pandemic is such a major crisis that has the gift of reorienting human life, of putting it on another path, has the power to change mentalities, attitudes and behaviors, making man reflect on death, and when it succeeds it can come up with interesting answers.

The fight against the pandemic is on several levels. While scientists, struggling with time and the spread of the pandemic, are studying in laboratories the possibility of discovering a vaccine against Covid-19, many other people seek refuge in religion, have a religious behavior, trust the Savior Jesus Christ, if we refer to the Christian area. Therefore, in this terrible ordeal, the human being needs both vaccines and especially the power of prayer with which to face the dangers that threaten his existence.

In the following we will take a look at the behavior of the religious man always in front of the pandemics that threatened humanity, behavior that, as we will observe, has undergone changes in these limit moments.

As for the religious man of the archaic societies, eminently religious, when confronted with calamities caused by the forces of nature or disease, had an explanation for everything in a religious logic and looked at reality in a key that was always related to divinity, no matter how he imagined it.

### I.1. Equivalences of the archaic religious man: city-cosmos; disease (pandemic) –chaos

In the work *The Sacred and the Profane*, when talking about the equivalence of the city with the cosmos, Mircea Eliade shows that the defense systems of the settlements, consisting of ditches, labyrinths, earth

waves, were probably magical at first, meant to prevent the invasion of unseen enemies (demons and the souls of the dead), than the assault of seen enemies<sup>2</sup>. “In northern India, for example, during a pandemic, a circle is marked around the village, meant to prevent the demons of the disease from entering the precincts”<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, in the medieval West,

“the walls of the cities were consecrated through rituals to serve as a defense against the Demon, the Disease, and Death. In fact, in the symbolic thinking, the human enemy is naturally assimilated with the Demon and Death. In fact, the result of the attacks, whether demonic or military, is always the same: destruction, extermination, death”<sup>4</sup>.

If his own home and the city as his home and of those of his fellows represented for the religious man of archaic societies the cosmos, ie the order and harmony in which you enjoy living, disease, calamities of any kind, introduced in this inhabited space death and therefore chaos, disorder, lack of balance, and the archaic man was not a promoter of a culture of death and disorder, as is the man without God in secularized contemporary societies. That is why he protected himself from the assaults of the seen enemies and especially from the unseen ones by a defense system meant to mislead the attacker. This explains the role and the labyrinthine arrangement of localities in these societies.

M. Eliade pointed out that, even today, the same images are used when

“referring to the dangers that threaten a certain type of civilization: we speak of «chaos», «disorder», of «darkness» in which «our world» will sink. All these expressions mean the abolition of an order, of a Cosmos, of an organic structure, and the relapse into a fluid, amorphous state, that is, a chaotic one”<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Mircea ELIADE, *Sacrul și profanul*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1995, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Mircea ELIADE, *Tratat de istoria religiilor*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1992, p. 341.

<sup>4</sup> M. ELIADE, *Sacrul și profanul*, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> M. ELIADE, *Sacrul și profanul*, p. 46.

## I.2. *Deus otiosus*<sup>6</sup> - a god used in times of epidemic

In the old days, during the epidemics, they resorted to the founding gods, the creators, who otherwise did not enjoy too much honor, being passed in the background by the younger generations of gods, as considered more dynamic. But in pandemics, that is, when people's lives were endangered, this type of gods was used as a last solution.

M. Eliade pointed out that the absence of a sacred calendar of periodic rites and the cultural poverty is the characteristic of most of the gods of heaven as the first generation of gods and supreme gods par excellence, giving several examples in this regard. Thus, in most African peoples, the great cosmic god, the supreme, creative and omnipotent Being, plays only an insignificant role in the religious life of the tribe. It is too far or too good to need its own cult and is invoked only in extreme cases<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the Yoruba people on the Slave Coast believe in a heavenly god named Olorun, who, after the creation of the world began, entrusted it to be finished and led by an inferior god and he permanently withdrew from earthly and human affairs. Therefore, he has no statues, no priests, no temples dedicated to this supreme god, but he is invoked as a last hope during a catastrophe. There are many such situations in archaic religious traditions.

We can thus observe how the religious behavior of the ancients underwent changes during the epidemics when the *otosi gods* were invoked, even if for the rest of the time they were mostly forgotten or overlooked, not having a well-defined cult.

---

<sup>6</sup> By the term *Deus otiosus* we mean a type of creative god who abandoned his work by retiring to heaven and no longer having relations with the created world. *Deus otiosus* means the resting god, the neutral god, the tired god who does not participate in the affairs of the world. In general, some myths explain this abandonment by the forced removal of the sky from the earth, others by the interruption of the earth's communications with the sky. A similar concept is that of *Deus absconditus* or "hidden god" used by the great Western medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and Nicolaus Cusanus. Although Thomas Aquinas was not a deist, the concept of "inactive god" refers to a deity whose existence is known to men only through contemplation or examination of the divine actions. The concept of *deus otiosus* often suggests a god who is tired of getting involved in this world and has been replaced by younger and more active gods, while the concept of *deus absconditus* refers to a god who consciously left this world to hide somewhere else. See in this regard Victor KERNBACH, *Dicționar de Mitologie Generală*, Editura Albatros, București, 1995, p. 149.

<sup>7</sup> M. ELIADE, *Tratat de istoria religiilor*, p. 52.

## **II. Religious attitudes and behaviors in antiquity caused by epidemics**

According to Greek and Latin literary sources, in antiquity, epidemics frequently and virulently struck cities and villages, destroying the institutional, political, social and economic balances of peoples and cities.

Although some Egyptian texts from the second millennium BC. and the Bible tell us about the plague, the first real plague epidemic described in great detail was the one that struck Athens between 430-429 BC. The Greek historian Thucydides carefully described the symptoms and effects of the disease, trying to analyze the causes and consequences of the epidemic.

We recall in this context the profound changes that took place in the Greek world due to the plague of 430 BC. BC, which struck Athens during the conflict with Sparta and led to the death of Pericles. It is a disease that reached Attica through the trade routes of the time, and whose spread, the historian Thucydides, infected in turn but still alive, describes in a long narrative, reminiscent at times of the sad chronicles of today:

“It started in Ethiopia, beyond Egypt, but then spread to Egypt and Libya... It had suddenly reached Athens... Doctors failed to cope with this unknown virus, they died even more than the others because more than the others approached the sick... The disease was such that it struck differently... Some died from lack of care, others died even if they were well cared for... If out of fear they did not want to go to each other, they died alone, and many houses were emptied for lack of those who had to take care of them... All the habits they had before in celebrating funeral rituals were changed and they buried the dead as best as they could. And many used truly unworthy burial methods.”

Francesco Marcatili, an associate professor of classical archeology at the University of Perugia, said that

“although Thucydides had bitterly noted the failure of any religious solution to the contagion, a few years later it was decided to introduce the cult of Asclepius, the Greek god of

medicine, to Athens, which was accepted by the playwright Sophocles, and which he chose to worship in a sanctuary on the southern slope of the Acropolis, not far from the theater of Dionysus. For centuries, the Greeks and then the Romans and with them many other peoples of ancient Italy, lived and practiced healing practices especially in shrines, where *sanatio* – in a desired or just realized way - was confused with *religio*<sup>8</sup>.

In antiquity, the sacred places were the favorite places for therapy, for the intercession between the sick seeking healing and possibly the miracle and the divinity, as it is normal - would say the religious man today, as in the history of the Christian Church, the first hospitals and infirmaries appeared next to the churches and monasteries. Even the main medical schools of antiquity chose the same shrines as their headquarters.

In antiquity the epidemic was considered, like other calamities, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, famine, floods, etc., the expression of a higher will, coming from beyond the world, or a divine punishment.

In Rome, between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. a radical change in the practice of medicine took place when, with the conquest of southern Italy, Sicily and Greece by the Romans, many Greek physicians took refuge in Lazio. But before the arrival of the Greek physicians, the Greek deities who had therapeutic and apotropaic powers<sup>9</sup> had emigrated from the Greek world to Rome, such as Apollo, the father of Asclepius, to whom a temple had already been built since 433 B.C. to stop an epidemic that, according to the Roman historian Titus Livius, caused many casualties among humans and animals, in cities and villages. At the beginning of the 3rd century B.C. it was the turn of the same Asclepius to be introduced as a deity adopted by the Romans after consulting the Sibylline books on the occasion of a new infection. It is said that, the snake brought on this occasion - the incarnation of the god - on the banks of the Tiber, immediately disembarked from the ship carrying him from Greece and swam to the Tiber Island. It was considered a miracle that clearly indicated

---

<sup>8</sup> Francesco MARCATTILI, "Epidemie e religione: uno sguardo al passato nei giorni del coronavirus", May 15, 2020, 17:35, <https://www.perugiatoday.it/attualita/coronavirus-epidemie-religioni-marcattili-unipg.html>.

<sup>9</sup> The word apotropaic refers to an object that is attributed the magical property of protecting its bearer from demons, evil spirits in general, charms, diseases, evil spirits, a kind of amulet. See V. KERNBACH, *Dicționar de Mitologie Generală*, p. 44.

the will of the god, the choice of place for his worship in the Roman land. That small island isolated from the surroundings was naturally suitable for quarantining the sick and not coincidentally maintained for centuries, and it still maintains its hospital function.

In the search for solutions to eradicate epidemics in the history of the Greeks and Romans, the celebration of sacrifices, the consultation of oracles, the raising of prayers to various deities, especially those with healing functions, has never been neglected. To give a few examples we will mention the “Libyan plague” (125-126 BC) or the “so-called Antonian plague” (165-180 AD) contracted by the Roman legions in the East, when according to the work *Historia Augusta*, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius The Philosopher undertakes to “enroll priests wherever necessary, to perform rites of foreign origin, to purify Rome through any kind of atoning sacrifice.”<sup>10</sup> In those dark years, the doctor Galen himself decided to leave Rome and take refuge in his hometown, Pergamum, where there was another important temple dedicated to the god Asclepius (Aesculapius)<sup>11</sup>.

Another testimony of Antiquity is given to us, this time, by St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who recalls an epidemic that struck Asia, Africa and Europe in the middle of the third century AD. According to the Christian bishop, the plague is an opportunity for serious reflection on death and the role of Christians in such trials. In the mind of this Father of the Church, the tragedy they went through was perceived as an opportunity for radical conversion, for return to God both individually and collectively. Here is what he said:

“It, the plague, is useful if those who are healthy help the sick; if the relatives love their loved ones, if the masters show compassion for their sick servants; if doctors do not neglect patients who ask for help; if the violent restrain their violence and the thieves, in view of death, refrain from the reckless desire for possession; if the proud refrain from their own arrogance”<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> See *Scriptores Historiae Augustae I*, trans. David Magie, Harvard University Press, London, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Francesco MARCATTILI, “Epidemie e religione: uno sguardo al passato nei giorni del coronavirus”, May 15, 2020, 17:35, <https://www.perugiatoday.it/attualita/coronavirus-epidemie-religioni-marcattili-unipg.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Francesco MARCATTILI, “Epidemie e religione: uno sguardo al passato nei giorni del coronavirus”, May 15, 2020, 17:35, <https://www.perugiatoday.it/attualita/coronavirus-epidemie-religioni-marcattili-unipg.html>.

In conclusion, we can see how in times of pandemic religious attitudes and behaviors change, giving up some that did not give satisfaction in that trial period and adopting others designed to provide a valid response to the widespread disease. Even the hierarchy of gods changes on this occasion, resorting to the founding gods, founders, until transformed into *deus otiosus* and almost completely deprived of their own worship or introducing the worship of gods whose main function was to cure diseases.

### III. Even modern religion is adapting to Coronavirus

#### III.1. Unprecedented measures in the monotheistic religious traditions

Religious services were interrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic, and all religions and religious denominations allowed for the violation of well-established and strictly observed cultic rules until now, a fact never seen before. The Jews, the Christians and the Muslims have changed their religious habits and behaviors, and thanks to technology, religion has been transferred online for a short time. From the crowds of believers that these three monotheistic religions gathered in different circumstances, such as holidays or on the occasion of various pilgrimages, prayers (at the Wailing Wall), etc., came the virtual communities, which follow the religious services on the screens.

It is an unprecedented experiment, which could leave unforeseen consequences when face-to-face presence is possible or without prohibitions of any kind. Against the background of the sharp secularization of Christian and Jewish societies in the West, this attempt to transfer religion online could accentuate religious absenteeism. In fact, this reality has already been observed in our parish communities this fall and has intensified, these days, when the pandemic is back in force.

In Judaism, there are clear practical provisions in the case of a pandemic, and these refer mainly to hand washing before meals and all sorts of other purifications. If we refer to the way Judaism reacted to the challenges of the pandemic, we can see that the beginning of the Passover celebration fell in 2020 on April 8, the period when the state of necessity



was declared and therefore the isolation of people at home. It is known that in Judaism on the first night of Passover (the 14th day of Nisan), on the occasion of the beginning of the Passover, families gather for dinner to celebrate the Passover Seder (in Hebrew “order”, “order”). On this occasion, a series of symbolic actions are performed, the blessings, the reading of the Haggadah, that is, the story of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, etc.

The health threat and social distancing, the absolute realities of the new period we have entered, have led the religious leaders of the world’s religions to support measures that until a few weeks ago would have been inconceivable. Thus, 14 Sephardic Orthodox rabbis signed a declaration in Israel that allows the Easter Seder to be celebrated by videoconference using communication platforms such as Zoom, etc., to allow families to remain united in a difficult but still festive time.<sup>13</sup>

Another Sephardic rabbi from Israel advised believers not to turn off their phones on the Sabbath, as required by the Jewish religious law *Halahá*, in order to receive government notifications about the Covid-19 pandemic. On Moed, ie holidays such as Passover, the Jewish world forbids all work, even the use of electronic devices, as on the Sabbath. The rabbinic dispensation sparked controversy in Israel, where Ashkenazi chief rabbi David Lau called the decision “irresponsible” and “beyond ridiculous”<sup>14</sup>.

In Israel, where there were many cases of Coronavirus in the spring (2020, nn), the government imposed isolation and banned gatherings of more than 10 people, or it is known that at least 10 adults are needed to say a public prayer in synagogues, the minian. However, the Coronavirus closed synagogues, as did churches and mosques, and obstructed gatherings everywhere, pushing religious manifestations into private space<sup>15</sup>. At the Wailing Wall - the holiest site of contemporary Judaism, only 10 believers were admitted at a time for prayer, because it is outdoors, and only the inhabitants of the Jewish quarter inside the Ottoman walls of the holy city could participate.

<sup>13</sup> Rolla SCOLARI, “Anche la religione si adatta al coronavirus”, December 07, 2020, 09:02, <https://www.linkiesta.it/2020/03/anche-la-religione-si-adatta-al-coronavirus/>.

<sup>14</sup> R. SCOLARI, “Anche la religione si adatta al coronavirus”, December 07, 2020, 09:02, <https://www.linkiesta.it/2020/03/anche-la-religione-si-adatta-al-coronavirus/>.

<sup>15</sup> R. SCOLARI, “Anche la religione si adatta al coronavirus”, December 07, 2020, 09:02, <https://www.linkiesta.it/2020/03/anche-la-religione-si-adatta-al-coronavirus/>.

We see how the state of emergency changes the attitudes, habits and religious behaviors of believers around the world at a time when the world is relying on faith in order to face an unprecedented crisis, which gives rise to anxieties and wanderings, creates much uncertainty about future, threatens the health and destinies of friends, relatives and acquaintances.

It is about the believers of different religions who adapt their own religious experience to the new reality, while the struggle is for the possibility of cultic manifestation, the fulfillment of the usual rites of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and any other religion, about believers who lose the reassuring feeling that community participation gives<sup>16</sup>.

There are clear provisions regarding Islam as well. The recommendation in times of epidemics or pandemics is to get involved to eliminate and slow down their spread. The outbreak of the epidemic must be severely quarantined, the sick person must avoid contacting other people and must be helped until the disease is overcome. There are several *hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet) that clarify the behavior of the Muslim believer in times of pandemic. During the black plague, Muhammad stated, "If you find out about the disease in a certain place on Earth, do not go there! And if it spreads in a certain place, don't leave!"<sup>17</sup>. The first character to impose quarantine in history was Muhammad himself, who said, "The black plague is like the plague of horses. The one who remains is a martyr (*shahid*) and the one who flees is the same as the deserters". So Islam establishes the fundamental principles of quarantine because it forbids the access of the crowd to the area infected by the epidemic and at the same time prevents the crowd from leaving. And this is a modern concept<sup>18</sup>.

In the history of Islam, *adhān*, that is, the 5 daily calls to prayer made by the muezzin in the minaret of the mosque, have remained unchanged. "Hurry to prayer," cried the muezzin throughout the Muslim world for

<sup>16</sup> R. SCOLARI, "Anche la religione si adatta al coronavirus", December 07, 2020, 09:02, <https://www.linkiesta.it/2020/03/anche-la-religione-si-adatta-al-coronavirus77>.

<sup>17</sup> Nezha ed DIFDAI, "Coronavirus: il più facile rapporto tra pandemia e religione", November 28, 2020, 12:27, <https://www.lindro.it/coronavirus-il-piu-facile-rapporto-tra-pandemia-e-religione>.

<sup>18</sup> According to the Muslim scientists, there must be made a distinction between quarantine and isolation. Isolation is applied to those infected by the epidemic. There may be a voluntary or obligatory isolation. Quarantine is for those people who have the risk of being infected. These two strategies efficiently help in the spread of the epidemic.

centuries. Today, due to the pandemic, in Turkey and Algeria, he adds: “Pray at home”.

Mosques were closed during the state of emergency in most Muslim countries, even though the controversy generated by conservative Muslims has not stopped. Imams continued to preach their sermons every Friday in closed-door mosques, and they were heard in communities through loudspeakers, without disturbing anyone or disturbing their peace, as it had happened in a Western country.

The Saudi monarchy, which oversees the holy sites of Islam in Mecca and Medina, has made an unprecedented historic decision by suspending pilgrimages, or accepting only believers already in Saudi Arabia, while Iraq has closed the crowded shrines from Najaf and Kerbala. The same was true for Jerusalem, on the Temple esplanade, in the two famous al-Aqsa mosques and in the Omar Mosque, Muslim believers were not received in prayer in those days of seclusion.

The unexpected spread of Coronavirus has also transformed the religious lives of millions of Christians around the world. Decisions have been taken throughout the Christian world, decisions that have never been made, or in any case, not for a very long time. Extremely rare, unique images could be seen in the Catholic world. At the Vatican, Pope Francis witnessed the procession of the Way of the Cross, broadcast live on television, in an almost completely empty San Pietro Square. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, no one attended the ceremony, which usually takes place at the Colosseum. Two groups took part in the procession: one made up of prison convicts, the other members of the Vatican’s Directorate for Health and Hygiene. An equally sad image was repeated in the following days, when Pope Francis officiated the Resurrection service in St. Peter’s Basilica, also without believers, so that on Sunday, the Easter service would take place in the same deserted place of worship, from where the pope uttered the traditional message “*Urbi et Orbi*”.

The celebration of the Angelus prayer live from the library of the Apostolic Palace was a sign for the delicate moment the world was then, due to the spread of the coronavirus and the way this changed the religious customs of Catholics, and on March 27, 2020 Pope Francis prayed in a completely empty San Pietro square again to call for an end to the pandemic. He did this with the crucifix in the Church of St. Marcellus, which is a true symbol of victory in Rome in the fight against the plague of

1519-1520, another unprecedented image, which speaks of the challenges of the new pandemic, when in the fight against the virus there is used a hopeful religious symbolism.

In the Orthodox world we know what happened during this period: closed churches, the feast of Easter without believers, believers checked by the representatives of the local authority, processions with Holy Relics in different cities, discussions and attacks against the Church of Christ from inside and outside, discussions on the mode of communion of the faithful, *numerus clausus* of the faithful, when they were allowed to access to churches, their permanent counting not to exceed this number, the renunciation to some religious services, which were not of utmost urgency, but especially the absenteeism of the believers during this period, against the background of the multiplication of coronavirus cases in autumn (2020, o.n).

### III.2. Human questions while facing pandemic and possible answers

What is happening in this pandemic period of Coronavirus has changed us and will change us all in terms of our feelings, our own way of thinking, of relating to time, space, our relationships with others, people, with food, money, interpersonal relationships in the family, now having the opportunity to interact more with others, to talk to ourselves and God.

Although we know that today's world is more and more secularized, man living more and more as if God did not exist, as if He had died, certainly some of those, who, until now, were inscribed on these coordinates of a secularized society, being even agents of secularization, wondered, however: where is God in this moment of great suffering caused by the pandemic? Why does He allow so many people to die in such a short time? Why does He let all this happen? Why so much pain and so much misery? "*Si est Deus unde malum?*" - the old question of Blessed Augustine is still asked today and reminds us of the famous question asked by the Jews after the genocide in the extermination Nazi camps: "Where was God at Auschwitz?"

Man is in a permanent search for meaning, he needs meaning to exist, so even in the concrete situation of the pandemic, modern man seeks meaning, and if he is conscious of the issue of the meaning of suffering,

of trials through which he passes, even if he has become aware of all these problems, he has only made the beginning, he has made a good start to a possible process of inner change. As a rational being, man needs to understand the world and what is happening to him, and understanding “he changes the quality of our participation in the world ...”<sup>19</sup>.

The change in the living conditions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic threw many people into an acute lack of meaning, although if they had looked more closely at their lives until then, they might not have found the meaning. But in the absence of well-defined habits, in the absence of stimuli that would set you in motion as before, the lives of these people seemed to have lost their direction. Moreover, the time available to stay with yourself, in a sincere inner dialogue, disarmed many, even if it was, in fact, an extraordinary chance to rethink your life, to put it on other coordinates. That is why Father Răzvan Andrei Ionescu speaks several times about how we should take a spiritual advantage of these pandemic days:

“So we simply have to take advantage of this situation spiritually - he said - to wake up to real life. Sooner or later we had to really meet ourselves anyway, to wake up, we couldn't let life flow like this, without a real understanding of it. We have to understand what we are here for and what we have to do, what the real meaning is”<sup>20</sup>.

For the faithful man, the Savior Christ represents the meaning of his life, the point to which he constantly tends, the end and the goal of his running, as the Apostle Paul very suggestively put it: “But I do one thing: the former, I run to the goal, to the reward of the call from above, of God, in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3,14). The loss of the meaning of life means the approach to the state of hell, and this was acutely felt by the secularized man of today, distant from God and His Church, who has so far found the meaning of life in the passing goods and pleasures of life. Or, with the pandemic, when the very survival of life was endangered, what was the

<sup>19</sup> Pr. Răzvan Andrei IONESCU, *Teologie pentru acum # Flashmob duhovnicesc*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2020, pp. 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> See Pr. R.A. IONESCU, *Teologie pentru acum # Flashmob duhovnicesc*, p. 16.

use of all the materials? Hence all kinds of questions about the foundations of existence until then. And no question is more pressing than the one posed in the vicinity of a possible death.

Therefore, can the challenges to which man is subjected during this period change his relationship to faith, to God? Is he strengthening himself in faith or is he weakening? Strengthening in faith or entering into a crisis of faith depends on the answer that each one gives to these questions.

Although these questions may represent a chance for today's man, from the point of view of the religious phenomenology, the reactions can be diverse.

The believer who has a mature faith, answers that God is with man and in these moments, he is with the man in suffering, they travel together on the way of the Cross, a road so well known by Christ, Who was "a man of sorrows. and knowledgeable of affliction" (Isaiah 53, 3). Christ is with the man who suffers for the death of his loved ones in the solitude and intimacy of his own home. Faith gives meaning to everything that seems meaningless, gives meaning to the absurd and chaos: "*credo quia absurdum*". He who, on the contrary, though faithful, but having a faith devoid of depth, who relates to God in an outward, primitive way, probably lives memories of crisis and panic, isolated from his parish for fear of the virus, devoid of Liturgy and of the other Sacraments of the Church.

He who, on the other hand, did not refer to God as a You with whom to dialogue, who defined himself perhaps as an atheist, unbeliever, agnostic, now losing all scientific and technological certainty, feels small and lost, but the sense of his own limit which he experiences may bring him closer to God. Anything could happen. There may be different attitudes of people but no one can know what is happening in the human soul.

From a theological point of view, the only "profitable"<sup>21</sup> attitude in the crisis is that in terms of repentance. The common denominator of all the saints of the Church of Christ is the work of repentance in their lives. If this

---

<sup>21</sup> Even if the term "profit" is specific for the economic activities, its usage with the spiritual meaning was encouraged by St. Serafim of Sarov who saw the Christian life through the experience gained in his family, his parents being merchants. "As they didn't sell anything without making a profit, St. Serafim of Sarov urges that our living should be done in such a way as to allow only certain gestures and deeds to enrich us, that is to bring a spiritual profit". See Pr. R.A. IONESCU, *Teologie pentru acum # Flashmob duhovnicesc*, p. 26.

work is such a precious experience capable of working in man deification, then it must be discovered and lived, and the pandemic represents a chance in this regard. Repentance is a work of our restoration. First of all man is an icon, because before painting icons, the first icons were made by God Himself and these are the people. So they are the first icons to be restored and Christ is the One who restores us and wants us to become the shining icon that He thought of, and this happens in the mystery of the heart, the pandemic can be the setting in which this restoration takes place<sup>22</sup>.

The inner dialogue with oneself in times of pandemic, giving rise to sincere repentance can be a gain these days, as can be the revelation of God within us.

#### IV. Conclusions

In the religious history of mankind, epidemics and pandemics have always been serious moments of reflection, in which religious people in the past analyzed and rethought their lives in terms of repentance, correction, return to divinity, no matter how they imagined it. In these situations, they resorted to the founding gods, creators, those who were responsible for the creation of the world and, thus, they could also restore a damaged, unstable balance, which threatened the extinction of the human race.

The Covid-19 pandemic currently represents a great challenge to humanity from many points of view: economic, social, political, cultural, humanitarian, etc., but it can also represent a great chance from a religious point of view, in the sense that secularized man - this recent human typology, without history so far - can rethink his life and place it on other coordinates. This period can represent, if we refer to the Christian man, a chance of coming closer to Christ and to His Church. In the face of imminent danger, man can return to the God he has forgotten, and in these circumstances of crisis, *homo religiosus* of archaic societies can be a role model for modern secularized man.

At the same time, however, the dangerous phenomenon in terms of mentality, attitude and religious behavior that the current pandemic can produce is the transition to the online, instead of the physical presence in

---

<sup>22</sup> Pr. R.A. IONESCU, *Teologie pentru acum #Flashmob duhovnicesc*, p. 107.

the place of worship, a phenomenon that can have a negative effect in the future, breaking the believer from the habit of direct participation in holy services. Against the current background of secularization in the Christian world, with its different degrees depending on the geographical areas and the religious traditions in which it manifests itself, there is a danger of depopulation of our churches, absenteeism from Holy Services, loss of the habit of attending the Holy Church. To all these we may add the attacks on the Church from the media.