

Monotheistic Religions in Times of Pandemic. Necessary Adaptations and Transformations

Religious services were interrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic, and all religions and religious denominations allowed trespassing of well-established and strictly observed cultic rules until now, a fact never seen before. Jews, Christians and Muslims have changed their religious customs 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 etc., it reaches to the virtual communities, which follow the religious services through 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 move 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 in these days when the pandemic is back in force.

In Judaism there are clear practical provisions in the event 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 this year 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 families gather for dinner to

celebrate the Passover Seder. On this occasion, a series of symbolic actions are performed, blessings, the reading of the *Haggadah*.

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. Another Sephardic rabbi from Israel advised believers not to turn off their phones on the Sabbath, as required by *Halahá*, the Jewish religious law, in order to receive government notifications about the Covid-19.

In Israel, where there were numerous cases of Coronavirus in the spring, the government imposed isolation and banned gatherings of more than 10 people, or it is known that at least 10 adults, the *minian*, are needed to officiate a public prayer in synagogues. However, the Coronavirus closed synagogues, as did churches and mosques, and obstructed gatherings everywhere, pushing religious manifestations into private space.

We now 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 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.

There are clear provisions regarding Islam here 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* 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!" 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.

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

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 crowded shrines, from Najaf and Kerbala. Neither in 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 made throughout the Christian world that have never been made, or in any case, for a very long time. Extremely rare, unique images could be seen in the Catholic world. At the Vatican, Pope Francis attended 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 consisting of prison inmates, 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 in which the world was then due to the spread of the coronavirus and the way in which this changed the religious customs of Catholics, and on March 27, 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 from 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 that speaks of the challenges of the new pandemic, when the fight against the virus takes even a hopeful religious symbolism.

In the Orthodox world we know what happened during this period: closed churches, the feast of Easter without believers, checked by law enforcement, 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 access to churches, their permanent counting not to exceed this number, the renunciation of some religious services, which were not of utmost urgency, but especially the absenteeism of the last period, this and against the background of the multiplication of coronavirus cases in autumn.

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 the place of worship.

Against the current background of secularization in the Christian world, with its different degrees depending on geographical areas and 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.

At the same time, there is the possibility that man may reconsider his own religious behavior, and that the current pandemic may be a chance for him to be close to Christ and His Church. In the face of imminent danger, man can return to the God he has forgotten.

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