



# RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

*Journal of the  
Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication*

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**Thích Nhất Hạnh and Socially Engaged Buddhism**

*Shiju Paul, SVD*

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## **EDITOR'S COLUMN**

### **Deorithms – the “Rhythms” of God**

*Anthony Le Duc, SVD*

Every age has its own rhythms. These rhythms are influenced, even determined, by the social, scientific, economic, and technological developments that take place as humanity searches for ways to realize its fullest intellectual capability. Since ancient times, the discovery of fire changed the way our human ancestors consumed food and spent their time in the evening after the sun went down. Before writing was invented and literacy became widespread, storytelling around a common fire was likely one of the most popular evening activities, especially among preliterate and nonliterate societies. It was how people transmitted to each other, especially to the younger generation, age old cultural and spiritual wisdom that could only come about as a result of hundreds, even thousands of years of confronting and collectively reflecting on the trials and tribulations of life by peoples and nations in their respective parts of the world.

Once the printing press was invented in the 1400s, reading was more widely incorporated into the lives of many people who were literate and could get access to books and printed materials. This one single invention which arguably ushered human civilization into the modern age was as revolutionary to the human intellectual culture as the discovery of the fire was life changing to our physiology. Knowledge is power, and the dissemination of knowledge through mass production of print materials meant that information production became a means of amassing power by influencing the thoughts and actions of potentially countless individuals and successive generations. Reading was not just a relaxing past-time activity done by the fire, which now was “domesticated” enough that it could be brought into one’s own parlor room, but a way to be empowered and inspired to transform oneself, to become agents of social change, and even to carry out great social and political revolutions.

The rhythms of human life have continued to change and evolve over the ages with each new discovery, invention, and insight into the way the natural world and the human mind work. In the modern age,

human beings have continued to develop new “rhythms” in the way we act, perceive ourselves, and interact with the people and things around us – biotic and abiotic. A great part of our daily life nowadays is influenced by digital technology, particularly computer algorithms. Algorithms are employed in a mathematical process to solve a problem using a finite number of steps. In the world of computers, an algorithm is the set of instructions that define not just what needs to be done but how to do it. For example, algorithms are being developed by engineers for self-driving cars and, ironically, all the ethical “decisions” involved in this important activity. In the case that an unavoidable accident would occur, the car’s algorithms would be expected to decide whether to let the accident take place, effectively killing its owner; or swerve to the right, which would kill a homeless man sitting on the sidewalk; or crash into a teenager riding a motorbike on the left, which might also cause the young woman to die a tragic death.

While self-driving cars are still mostly in the experimental stage at the present, most of us encounter algorithms in our own use of the internet, especially the various social media platforms that have become a ubiquitous part of our daily lives. Algorithms written by software engineers determine what posts are delivered to us when we log in to our account. They decide the advertisements that we will see when we go online. They choose what videos to suggest to us when we access YouTube, what merchandise to introduce to us when we go on Amazon, and what movies we might want to watch when we open Netflix. These actions taken by algorithms are results of information about users that are harvested whenever we access the internet to send email, to post photos and statuses on our social media account, to buy things online, to comment on a friend’s or a stranger’s post, etc. They are also the result of information collected from other people who apparently share our tastes. Therefore, when suggestions are provided to us based on a combination of our own personal habits as well as those of people similar to us, we are more likely to select new products just because others like ourselves have chosen them. In many ways, our modern life and our everyday choices are increasingly being influenced and nudged by the computer algorithms which have permeated our digital culture. Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, however, caution that “surprise and serendipity can be fun for people, and good for them too, and it may

not be entirely wonderful if our primary source of information is about what people like us like. Sometimes, it's good to learn what people unlike us like – and to see whether we might even like that" (Thaler and Sunstein 2021).

With ever increasing prevalence of digital technology in human life with developmental trends towards transhumanism, futurist Gerd Leonhard (2016) has responded to this prospect by introducing the neologism "androrithms" to call attention to the uniqueness and value of being human with our own peculiar ways and idiosyncrasies. "What makes us human," says Leonhard, "is not mathematical or even just chemical or biological. It involves those things that are largely unnoticed, unsaid, subconscious, ephemeral, and unobjectifiable." According to Leonhard, a super-computer might excel at a chess game or an extraordinarily complicated game like GO (a famous Chinese game), but it currently cannot communicate with a two-year-old infant. Sometimes it takes us only a few seconds seeing someone to have some basic understanding about them, not even having to speak to them. With a computer, however, despite the hundreds of millions of data points that it collects from us over the years, there is no guarantee that it really understands our values and feelings.

For Leonhard, androrithms include human traits such as empathy, compassion, creativity, storytelling, mystery, serendipity, mistakes and secrets. He asserts that "we should not attempt to mend, fix, upgrade, or even eradicate what makes us human" even if some of these traits may seem inefficient and clumsy compared to computer systems. Thus, "We need to insert balances that ensure a truly human development process, tempering every exponential progress step of technology with human concerns, throwing a human monkey wrench between the 0s and 1s that are starting to dominate our lives."

Even though algorithms are threatening to "eat the world," in the words of Marc Andreessen (2011) – and perhaps they have already finished the task – it is important that technological development not ignore the uniqueness of being human and make human flourishing its primary objective. To this end, the value of unique human qualities must be respected, preserved, and promoted. Indeed, humans are built for a

wide range of existential states and functions, unlike the one-dimensional nature of machines. The Dalai Lama, at a conference on compassion and technology in the Netherlands, observed:

Machines are very important, but they are controlled by human beings. We human beings are not only physical entities; we also have minds. When we are motivated by positive emotions our physical actions will be constructive. Modern psychology knows about sensory consciousnesses, but doesn't distinguish them clearly from mental consciousness, which involves emotions like anger. (The Dalai Lama 2018)

Decades ago, Picasso sarcastically remarked of computers, "Computers are useless – they only provide answers." Even though computers have evolved a long way since the 1960s, they remain basically tools to seek answers but cannot raise questions. It seems that asking questions is a characteristically human activity to express our discontent with the status quo and to satisfy our deepest longings to understand ourselves, the universe and the transcendent.

Indeed, in the face of the world being increasingly under the control of the technocratic paradigm, which according to Pope Francis, perceives the human person as a mind-body machine (*Laudato Si* 2015), the call for resisting this tendency and retaining our human "idiosyncrasies" is worth paying heed to – if we wish to retain our humanity, as imperfect, finite, and inconsistent as it is. Otherwise, submitting to this paradigm means placing all of humanity under the control of formulas and methods devised by science and technology, and enabling the transformation of human beings into machine-like creatures operating and living our lives in accordance with scientific efficiency and precision. Unsurprisingly, Pope Francis argues that "there needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm."

The sentiments of Leonhard and Pope Francis in challenging present trends of technological development and calling for greater caution not to eradicate human qualities for the sake of efficiency are prophetic and completely sensible – not what some might deem to be unnecessary

alarmism. Only when we make the conscientious effort to preserve our own humanity can we be distinguished from robots and other computer systems. Pope Francis asserts, “We can once more broaden our vision. We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral.”

To do what Leonhard and Pope Francis are advocating, however, as people of religious faith, it is important to remember that in addition to the human “rhythms” that we need to preserve and promote, there are also the “rhythms” of God. Let’s call these divine rhythms “*Deorithms*” (to coin my own neologism) – the eternal and profound ways of God, which are not created, changing, or ever mistaken. “Deorithms” are the “processes” of God, whose presence and inspiration are found in the Divine Spirit in our midst. We are called to be keenly aware of the “Deorithms” as we go about critically reflecting on various matters in our lives and discerning the individual and communal choices, both big and small, that we make each day. Deorithms cannot be found in mathematical formulas (algorithms) or in human neurological processes (androrithms). Rather, Deorithm is found in the creative breath of the Divine Spirit that imbues an otherwise inert world with amazing life, animating the human body and soul as well as the entire creation. This Divine Spirit lies at what Henri Nouwen (1998) calls the “heart of existence,” which for this spiritual master means “the center of our being, that place where we are most ourselves, where we are most human, where we are most real.” However, being truly human does not imply an isolated, non-relational existence independent of divine presence and untouched by the unceasing prodding and whispering of the animating Spirit deep within.

Deorithm is also found in the unquenchable fire of the Divine Spirit that impels each person to live out and advocate for the ideals of justice, peace, and harmony in the world. In one of the Catholic Church’s most important documents, *Gaudium et Spes*, published by the Second Vatican Council in 1965, the council fathers wrote:

Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by

its divine Founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice. The common good of humanity finds its ultimate meaning in the eternal law. But since the concrete demands of this common good are constantly changing as time goes on, peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly. Moreover, since the human will is unsteady and wounded by sin, the achievement of peace requires a constant mastering of passions and the vigilance of lawful authority. (No. 78)

Thus, Deorithm is the Divine Spirit reminding us that love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness must be spread to all corners of the world, to every nook and cranny, and to every recess where the transformative wind of that Divine Spirit might blow. Deorithm is also the profound wisdom of the Divine Spirit that guides us towards words and actions that promote integral human development, mutual respect, dialogue, the common good, solidarity and unity. Oftentimes, the working of deorithm serves as the only plausible explanation to the human idiosyncrasies that betray mathematical and scientific logic which tells us that things should be done otherwise. In other words, the quest for peace, justice and other noble human values involves a conscientious effort at controlling and eliminating the negative “androrithms” as well as mastering the proper use of “algorithms” so that the human social structure is built and operated in accordance with the Deorithms (the eternal law).

As we approach the third year of the coronavirus pandemic, we understand that algorithms may help us to predict where the next cluster or even the next pandemic will take place, but it cannot force people to put on masks or take jabs. In fact, depending on which algorithms exerting their influence on us, they may even cause us to do the opposite. As we witness the independent country of Ukraine being brutally ravaged by a power-hungry authoritarian regime of a neighboring country, we realize that androrithms can turn a comedian into a wartime hero just as much as a once respected national leader into a war criminal. There is not any absolute certainty in technological advances. And there is no assurance of ethical behavior in the ways of human beings – no matter how much money, power, education, or technological assistance we may have access to. While we try to develop more intricate and effective computer algorithms, and reform human thoughts and actions (androrithms),

we must make the humble admission that these “rithms” cannot truly improve without being directed by the “Deorithms”, which serve as the governing principle for all human activities and against which any progress brought about by them is to be measured and evaluated.

Indeed, we are increasingly witnessing the merging of machines and human both physically and mentally – each impacting the other in an endless cycle which no one is certain how and where this will eventually take us. Amid this uncertainty of venturing into uncharted territories, we must try our best to set (or reset) our finite algorithms and androrithms in harmony with the eternal Deorithms (the ways/processes of God), so that we are able to sustain and flourish in our trifold relationships with God, with fellow human beings and with creation in our Common Home. Only when we develop our ever-expanding concentric circles of relationship from the self to the world and the cosmos, and beyond to the transcendent, can we say that we are being truly human. If we opt for employing technology to turn ourselves into a different creature, we are effectively committing a self-imposed extinction of the human race, a form of self-initiated genocide. And that, in our religious understanding, constitutes an immoral and evil act that cannot be ignored, condoned, or gone unchallenged.

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## Newly Constituted Editorial Board

The ARC is pleased to announce the newly constituted Editorial Board of the journal *Religion and Social Communication*. The members of the Editorial Board come from a variety of disciplines, and from diverse geographical, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The newly constituted Editorial Board is part of the ARC's effort to improve the quality of the journal, making it a more beneficial and trusted place for upcoming and seasoned scholars who are looking for reputable journals to publish their opus. The ARC would like to express deep gratitude to all the esteemed scholars who have agreed to serve on the Editorial Board for the term 2022-2024. The members are as follows:



### **Gerhold K. Becker, Dr. Phil**

*Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong*

Dr. Becker is Regular Visiting Professor, Graduate School of Religion and Philosophy, Assumption University of Thailand, Bangkok; Chair Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Hong Kong Baptist University (retired 2004), Founding Director, Centre for Applied Ethics, Hong Kong Baptist University (1991-2000), appointed Member, Hong Kong Council on Human Reproductive Technology and Chairman of Council's Ethics Committee (2001-2004). Editor Value Inquiry Book Series *Studies in Applied Ethics*, Rodopi (New York/Amsterdam), Research Fellow, Centre for Business Ethics, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Founding Member, Macau Association of Business Ethics, Elected Member, European Academy of Sciences and Arts. Becker holds Licentiate degrees in philosophy (Munich) and Catholic theology (Frankfurt) and a Doctorate (Dr. phil.) in philosophy (*summa cum laude*) from the University of Munich, Germany.

Prior to joining Hong Kong Baptist University (1986), he was a member of the department of philosophy, University of Munich. Becker has published on a wide range of issues in religion, philosophy, and applied ethics. His books (as author and/or editor) include: *The Moral Status of Persons: Perspectives on Bioethics* (2000); *Changing Nature's Course: The Ethical Challenge of Biotechnology* (1996); *Ethics in Business and Society: Chinese and Western Perspectives* (1996); *Die Ursymbole in den Religionen* (1987); *Neuzeitliche Subjektivität und Religiosität* (1982); *Communicatio Fidei* (1982); *Theologie in der Gegenwart* (1978).

### **Yoel Cohen, PhD**

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Dr. Cohen is Professor Emeritus on the faculty of the School of Communication, Ariel University, Israel. He is the author of many publications on media and religion, including the books *God, Jews and the media: Religion & Israel's Media* (Routledge, 2012); and *Spiritual News: Reporting Religion around the World* (Peter Lang Publishers, 2018). He is a convenor of the Religion & Communication working group of the International Association of Media & Communication Research (IAMCR).



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Dr. Giordano is a Lecturer in Philosophy and Religion at Assumption University of Thailand. He has also taught at Ateneo de Manila in the Philippines as well as small colleges in Tanzania and South Africa. He teaches and writes on a wide range of topics, but he is particularly interested in the philosophy of mythology and the changing roles of mythology within the present information age. He is also the editor of the journal *Prajñā Vihāra: Journal of Philosophy and Religion*.



### **Paulin Batairwa Kubuya, SX, PhD**

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Dr. Kubuya is a priest in the Xaverian Missionary Congregation. He holds a Master of Arts in Theology from the Maryhill School of Theology (Philippines), and a Doctorate in Religious Studies from Fu Jen Catholic University (Taiwan). Since 2019, he has been serving as the Under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (which will be upgraded to Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue effective June 5, 2022). He is also a member of the “Joint Working Group” of the

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches, and a Consultor for the Editrice Missionaria Italiana.

Prior to being appointed by Pope Francis to his post in the Roman Curia, he had served as Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan, and was the Executive Secretary for the Commissions for Christian Unity and that of Interreligious Dialogue of the Regional Bishops' Conference of China - Taiwan. Among his published work is the book *Meaning and Controversy within Chinese Ancestor Religion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) and the articles "Inculturation of the Church in China: The Case of Taiwan," (*Religions & Christianity in Today's China* 10, No. 1 (2020): 34-43 and "Q.R. Codes of Deities: Digital Media @ the Service of Religion in Taiwan," *Religion and Social Communication* 18, No. 1 (2020): 37-48.

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Dr. Narkurairattana is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, Thailand. She is also editor of the *Journal of Human Rights and Peace Studies*. Her publications in Thai and English address a wide range of topics including: peace and conflict issues, minority rights, social and community development, and interreligious dialogue. She has carried out extensive research on the ongoing religious and ethnic conflict in Southern Thailand.



An example of her research in Southern Thailand is her published article "Micro-minority and Negotiated Lives in a Deadly Conflict Society: A Case Study of Sikhs in Pattani," *Social Science Asia* 5, No. 3(2019): 55-66. In addition to academic work, she is deeply involved in consultation and education work promoting non-violence, human rights, peacebuilding, social development, and religious harmony.

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Dr. Nguyen is an anthropologist and sociologist, presently serving as President of the Social Life Research Institute in Vietnam. Since 2004, he has been working as a researcher and consultant on projects to solve social issues, especially those involving disadvantaged groups, labor and Catholic community in Vietnam. After founding Social Life Research Institute in 2017, he has been continuing his research into the aforementioned target groups, while expanding his expertise into the practical issues of social life (research, social surveys, policy advice, social forecasting, etc.). His published works include *The Transformation of Religious Beliefs in Vietnam Today*, *Introduction to Creative Thinking and Scientific Research Methods*, *Trust and Social Capital*. He is presently also teaching Anthropology and Sociology at many universities in Vietnam.

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Dr. Patrick is Professor and Head of the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, and holds a doctorate in Christian Studies. He was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship in 2004 to do research on Asian religions and Cultures in Hong Kong Chung Che College. In the year 2013, he was awarded the Fulbright – Nehru Visiting Lecturer Fellowship and taught a course on Public Religion: Learning from Indian and American Experiences at the Divinity School, Harvard University, USA. He co-edited a volume with Prof. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza under the title *Negotiating Border – Theological Explorations in the Global Era* (2008). Other publications that he has authored include *Public Theology – Indian Concerns, Perspectives and Issues* (USA: Fortress Press, 2020), *Indian Christianity and Its Public Role* (edited, New Delhi: Christian World Imprint, 2019), *Wings of Faith – Public*



*Theologies in India* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), *Religion and Subaltern Agency* (2003); *Oral Traditions and Theology* (1996); and *Resonances* (Tamil). He has penned 88 research articles which are published in various national and international journals. He has presented 81 research papers in various national and international conferences. He served as the Chief-editor of Indian Journal of Christian Studies from 2012-2016. He was given the Best Researcher Award by the University of Madras for the year 2017-18. He served the University of Madras as Dean, Student Affairs, from 2017 to 2019 and is serving as Dean-Research. Presently, he is a member of the Executive Committee of the Global Network for Public Theology.

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Dr. Pattanayak is the Director of the Institute of Knowledge Societies. The Institute of Knowledge Societies (IKS) holds the exploration of the interface between modern technologies and traditional knowledge systems at its core. Previously, he held numerous positions such as Director of CCTE & the University of Hawai'i, Manoa-India programmes, consultant to the National Skill Development Corporation under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India, Vice Chancellor (i/c), Pro-Vice Chancellor and Dean, Faculty of Expressive Cultures, Media and Communications, Himgiri ZEE University, in Dehradun India, and Global Consultant in International and Cross-Cultural Education and Training.



He is also a Producer /Director at the Indira Gandhi National Open University, and has made several video and audio programs which have been telecast and broadcast on national and international channels on numerous occasions and have been used as classroom teaching aids in several universities and institutions throughout the world. He has produced and directed about 40 videos and about 50 radio documentaries. He has attended and presented scholarly papers in more than 150 National and International conferences and has published in several international

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Dr. Peña is a Catholic priest of the Society of St Paul. He is Dean of Studies of Saint Paul Seminary Foundation (Philippines) and lectures on Intercultural Communication, Mission, New Evangelization and Communication in Asia, Foundations of Social Communication, Ethics and Law, Knowledge Management, Communication Management, Communication, Culture and Society, Communication Research, Religious Identity in Social Media and Social Media Studies at St Paul University Manila (SPUM), Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies, and Maryhill School of Theology. He holds a Doctorate in Communication (*Universita' Pontificia Salesiana - Italy*) and a PhD in Educational Leadership and Management (SPUM).

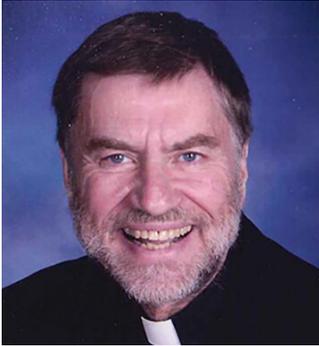
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Dr. Periannan is the diocesan priest of Thanjavur South India. Currently, he is the Secretary and correspondent at Annai Vailankanni Arts and Science college at Thanjavur. Formerly, he has worked as a broadcaster and Director of Tamil Section of Radio Veritas Asia Manila Philippines. After his doctorate from the state University of the Philippines, he was appointed to teach at St. Peters Pontifical Seminary/ Institute in Bangalore, India. He was former Rector of the saminary from 2003 to 2009. He lectures on Social and Pastoral Communication and Research Methodology. In addition to articles, he has published two books, *Social Research*



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Most recently, he has published a book of Biblical meditations on communication, *Out of Eden: 7 Ways God Restores Blocked Communication* (2006) and edited a collection of essays applying Ong's thought, *Of Ong & Media Ecology: Essays in Communication, Composition, and Literary Studies* (2012). A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin (Ph.D., 1985), Soukup teaches in the Communication Department at Santa Clara University, holding the Pedro Arrupe, S.J., University Chair. Fr. Soukup has served on the Boards of Trustees of the American Bible Society and Loyola University of New Orleans; served on the Communication Committee of the U.S. Catholic Conference; and holds membership in the Religious Communication Association, the National Communication Association, and the Media Ecology Association.



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Education Associate (MEA) and has been teaching at UD for over 34 years. Zukowski's current research is in designing prototypes for interactive e-learning for Catholic education, adult faith, lay ecclesial leadership and catechist formation through the VLCFF and the University of Dayton's online graduate programs. She is particularly interested in the influence, or impact that the digital culture is having on new ways of being human in the 21st century. A special research interest is building on the work of Fr. Pierre Babin, OMI (with whom she was associated for twelve years in Lyon, France) for re-imagining his *Symbolic Way* in the light of the digital culture. Her publications include: *Communicatio Socialis: The Challenge of Theology and Ministry in the Church* (2007) published by Kassel University (Germany); *Medias, chance pour l'evangeile* written with Pierre Babin published in Paris (2000) and translated/published into English by Loyola Press entitled *The Gospel and the Internet* (2002). Her book *Voices of Courage: An International Profile of Women in Catholic Communications* (2001) has been translated into Slovakian and other languages (2003). She continues to write numerous articles for international publications.

## Christ, Cross and COVID-19: Words that Never Die in the New Normal Religious Communication

Norman Melchor R. Peña Jr., SSP<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*A correlative resonance exists between the experience of communication in the new normal forced by the COVID-19 pandemic and each of the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross. The words become the new normal way and guiding beacon to how religious communication can be effectuated during the pandemic. They herald hope in God – the first and the last Word of creation. The study begins by defining the global challenge and loss of human lives brought by COVID-19, a new arena of communication that reincarnates the reality of Christ's Last Words on the cross. These words never die but continue to live inspiring a sevenfold praxis of hope: 1) **entreaty**, 2) **disclosure**, 3) **relationship**, 4) **isolation**, 5) **exigency**, 6) **fulfillment** and 7) **entrustment**. Each relates with narrative experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic inviting persons not only to approach communication as a process of transmission but as semiotics offering newfound meanings and significance. Here communication never fails as listeners focus on the self-significance of the message. Religious communication enables people to seek what is best for those who receive the message and centers on how they*

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*could grow not only in faith but likewise as human beings who bear God's image and likeness also in the time of the pandemic.*

**Keywords:** *COVID-19, new normal, Christ, cross, communication*

## **Introduction to New Normal Religious Communication under COVID-19**

Authentic religious belief in any culture is often challenged to preserve what has been ascribed to it and also to deal with crises that come. At the height of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) the House of Congress of the Philippines on April 28, 2020 passed House Bill 6623 – *New Normal for the Workplace and Public Spaces Act of 2020* – which “will prepare and educate the Filipino public for life after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and to adapt to the new norms of physical distancing and institutionalizes a new way of life after the ECQ and serves as a guide to the public.”<sup>2</sup> The Bill explicitly provides standards that apply to: a) universal safety measures, such as mandatory wearing of masks in public places and social distancing; b) administration and regulation of government managed public spaces and privately managed spaces; c) organization of public transportation; and d) monitoring of schools, learning institutions, and private and industrial workplaces.

How do these current realities and prerequisites of the new normal relate to religious communication? Is there not a seeming counter-culturality between communication of religious faith normally practiced for example by Filipinos through the cultural tradition of “faith, fiesta and food” – gatherings in public Mass attendance, celebration of devotions like the Feast of the *Nazareno*, novenas, block rosaries and charismatic gatherings – and the new normal which seems to hinder them? What converging affordances in religious communication become evident between the new normal and the Seven Last Words of

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Filane Mikee Cervantes in “House leaders file ‘new normal’ bill”. *Philippine News Agency*. Retrieved from <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1101214> on April 28, 2020.

Christ on the cross?<sup>3</sup> And how would they impact on communication among different religious faiths?

Religious communication in all religious faiths embodies visions of life and is indelibly interconnected. They are bound together and characterized by a set of beliefs and attitudes. The pandemic can be considered a tragedy which John Morell describes as “life full of incongruence [and] discrepancies between the way things ought to be and the way things are.” The same could be said of religious communication in all religious faiths:

In philosophical Hinduism the whole of our ordinary experience is misleading; in reality all that exists is one unchanging Self. Buddhism denies this one unchanging self, but as part of its general denial that any selves exist. In the monotheistic religions, the world of selves and objects is real enough, but there is irony in the values we attach to this world – too often we place more importance on what is fleeting and trivial than on what is genuinely important. Several religious texts have thematic similarities with tragedies. Buddha’s question was the central question in tragedy: how should human beings handle suffering and death? The Biblical story of Job is similar in several ways to that of Oedipus. Jesus’ cry on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”, sounds tragic.<sup>4</sup>

A correlative resonance exists between the experience of religious communication in the new normal forced by the COVID-19 pandemic and each of the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross. The Words become the new normal and guiding beacons to how religious communication can be effectuated during the pandemic.

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<sup>3</sup> This study utilizes the definition of AFFORDANCE by Meriam-Webster which considers it as, “the quality or property of an object that defines its possible uses or makes clear how it can or should be used. See “Affordance.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/affordance> on October 2, 2020. Throughout the study references to the citations of the Seven Last Words are capitalized.

<sup>4</sup> John Morrell, *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion* (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 41.

For Pope Francis they herald a compass of hope in life and in God<sup>5</sup> and entrustment to Him who is ultimately the Alpha and the Omega – the first and the last Word of creation. Applying an interdisciplinary exploratory method from the biblical, philosophical, psychological and communication fields, this study begins by defining the global challenge and death brought by COVID-19 which has become the new arena of communication representing the reality of Christ's Last Words on the Cross. These Words never die but continue to live inspiring a seven-fold praxis of hope:

1. **Entreaty** - Invocation (*"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* – Lk 23:33-34);
2. **Disclosure** - Accompaniment (*"Today, you will be with me in paradise."* – Lk 23:39-43);
3. **Relationship** - Encounter (*"Woman, behold thy son. Son, behold thy mother."* – Jn 19:25-27);
4. **Isolation** - Human Frailty (*"Father, why have you forsaken me."* – Mt 27:45-46);
5. **Exigency** - Needs (*"I thirst."* – Jn 19:28-29),
6. **Fulfillment** - Healing (*"It is finished."* – Jn 19:30); and,
7. **Entrustment** – Identity (*"Into your hands I commend my spirit."* – Lk 23:44-46).

Each of these relates with narrative experiences during the pandemic where all are invited not only to approach communication as a transmitted process, characterized by effectivity and feedback from sender intent, but to understand it as semiotics where newfound meanings and significance are embedded and effort is exerted to seek and understand the truth in what each interactant expresses. Here communication succeeds more as it encourages both sender and receiver to engage and examine in the significance of the message for each of them. Other than a process, God's communication can also be considered semiotically. It seeks what is best for persons as recipients and centers on how they could grow not only in faith but likewise as human beings who bear God's image and likeness.

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Robin Gomes in "Pope: crucifix our compass and hope in life", *Vatican News* (March 24, 2021). Accessed <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-03/pope-francis-book-prayer-service-march27-2020-covid19.html> on 25 September 2021.

## Etymology of the *New Normal*

The concept of *the new normal* is neither something “new” nor an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like social media communication, the phrase *new normal* can be considered as a “product of evolution rather than a revolution.”<sup>6</sup> Such phrase made a common appearance during the post-World War I in 1918 in several books and articles. Among these was Henry Wise Wood’s article, “Beware!”:

To consider the problems before us we must divide our epoch into three periods, that of **war**, that of **transition**, that of the **new normal**, which undoubtedly will supersede the old. The questions before us, therefore, are, broadly, two: How shall we pass from war to the new normal with the least jar, in the shortest time? In that respect should **the new normal** be shaped to differ from the old?

Some contend that we should first envisage **the new normal** and carve the measures of transition to suit its requirements. Others believe that we should cautiously feel our way through the period of transition and arrive at what **the new normal** shall be by the road of experience. The first would attempt reconstruction by synthetic process; the second would achieve it by natural growth. Who shall say that a new normal, artificially compounded at this distance from the future, will work? Who shall say that a new normal, patiently sought through trial and error, will not work?<sup>7</sup>

At the outset, the *new normal* was part of the stages of transition that necessitated adaptation. At this stage of transition there was less certainty. Resilience was its primary affordance.

Within the sphere of religious communication, *The Christian Advocate* in 1921 published this: “Let the Church loose itself from the

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<sup>6</sup> Phrase is affirmed by cognitive psychologists Cheryl Coyle and Heather Vaughn in “Social Networking: Communication Revolution or Evolution”, *Bell Labs Technical Journal* 13 (2008): 2,13.

<sup>7</sup> Henry W. Wood in “Beware”, *National Electric Light Association Bulletin* (December 1918).

destroying meshes of the old normal and set itself resolutely and with unshakable faith for the real tasks of the present day. It is the new normal, then, that beckons the Church of God”<sup>8</sup>. The “task of the present day” implies the affordance of existential faith – applying the old normal to current challenges and necessities.

The new normal affordance of freedom was illustrated by Robert A. Heinlein in his 1966 novel, *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, citing: “Citizens, requests may reach you through your comrade neighbors. I hope you will comply willingly; it will speed the day when I can bow out and life can get back to normal — a **new normal**, free of the Authority, free of guards, free of troops stationed on us, free of passports and searches and arbitrary arrests.”<sup>9</sup> The end of freedom points to life going back to the normal.

In the past ten to fifteen years, the “new normal” occurred often with the affordance of a new standard rooted in expectation or experience. This was highlighted in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks with book titles such as: *The New Normal: How FDNY Firefighters Are Rising to the Challenge of Life After September 11* (2002), *Assessing the New Normal: Liberty and Security for the Post–September 11 United States* (January 30, 2003), *After 9/11 in the ‘New’ Normal: Who Are We? Why Are We Here? Where Are We Going?* (February 1, 2003), and *The New Normal: Living a Fear-Free Life in a Fear-Driven World* (2005).<sup>10</sup> They underline a hope for the future.

Other writers persisted in highlighting the belief in novelty rather than conventionality of the phrase. In her 2004 foreword to John Putzier’s book *Weirdos in the Workplace: The New Normal - Thriving in the Age of the Individual*, Libby Sartain claims that the phrase “the new normal” is a recent coinage.<sup>11</sup> In the same year Roger McNamee

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<sup>8</sup> “The New Normal” in *The Christian Advocate* – (Volume 96, 1921), 66.

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Heinlein, *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*. (New York: Penguin Random House, 1966), 152.

<sup>10</sup> To these I add the book I published: *Tragedy and Religious Identity in Social Media: A case study of the textual narrative responses to the YouTube “September 11 2001 Video* (Rome: Pontifical Salesian University, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> See John Putzier, *Weirdos in the Workplace: The New Normal - Thriving in*

writes that “the new normal is a time of substantial possibilities if you are willing to play by the new rules for the long term. In the new normal it is more important to do things right than to succumb to the tyranny of urgency.”<sup>12</sup> Fundamentally, McNamee highlights the correlation of the new normal with the demands of the economy to which most countries are not immune. Here, one can mention China’s economy which in recent years has shown a marked slowdown, with decreased growth rates from double digit levels (before the 2007-2009 financial crisis) to around 7 percent in 2014. In that year, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, indicated that China was entering a “new normal” (Chinese: 新常态).<sup>13</sup> The economic association with the term was subsequently popularized by the press and came to refer to expectations of more stable economic growth and medium-to-long term economic growth rates in China and elsewhere for the future.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the term new normal has referred to human behavior changes in which people have been asked to embrace with additional affordances. These include limited contact between persons, social distancing, diminished handshakes and hugs. In addition, the new situation is also characterized by asynchronous and synchronous flexible learning including utilization of learning management systems, emergences of new commercial strategies, and sharing and witnessing of religious belief as a way of continuing mission and evangelization.

## **The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross**

The Seven Last Words of Christ have always been part of the Holy Week celebration in Christian Churches around the world. They

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*the Age of the Individual.* (New Jersey: FT Prentice Hall, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted by Jan Leusen, in “What is the origin of ‘the new normal’ as a freestanding phrase?” Retrieved from Quora <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-origin-of-the-new-normal-as-a-freestanding-phrase>, December 2020. Roger McNamee has published his thoughts in his book, *The New Normal: Great Opportunities in a Time of Great Risk.* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd.), 2004.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations ESCAP, “China’s ‘New Normal’: Challenges Ahead for Asia-Pacific Trade” ESCAP Trade Insights, Issue 11. July 9, 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.unescap.org/resources/chinas-new-normal-challenges-ahead-asia-pacific-trade-escap-trade-insights-issue-no11#>.

pertain to the Words which Christ communicated before his death on the cross as narrated in the first four books of the New Testament of the Christian Scripture popularly known as the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. No general agreement is made about the chronology and order of utterance of the Seven Words, given that the authors of the New Testament did not make a complete record of them all. Table 1 highlights the traditional sequence of the Seven Words showing their citations across the Gospels with corresponding and emerging elements of religious communication inherent therein. The Words are divided in each of the Gospels with *Luke* communicating the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Words, *Matthew* and *Mark* the 4<sup>th</sup> Word, and *John* the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Words.

**Table 1:** Citations of the Seven Last Words Across the Gospel

Seven Words	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Religious Communication
1. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."			Lk 23:33-37		Entreaty
2. "Today, you will be with me in paradise."			Lk 23:39-43		Disclosure
3. "Woman, behold thy son. Son, behold thy mother."				Jn 19:25-27	Relationship
4. " <i>Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?</i> " (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.)	Mt 27:45-46	Mark 15:34			Isolation
5. "I thirst."				Jn 19:28-29	Exigency
6. "It is finished."				Jn 19:30	Fulfillment

7. "Into your hands I commend my spirit."			Lk 23:44-46		Entrustment
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Each of the Seven communicates a narrative reality of human experience similarly prevalent in the post pandemic times. Tacit agenda themes that anchor on a sevenfold praxis of hope for new normal religious communication can be deduced from each of the Words: *entreaty* - invocation (1<sup>st</sup> word), *disclosure* - accompaniment (2<sup>nd</sup> word), *relationship* - encounter (3<sup>rd</sup> word), *isolation* - human frailty (4<sup>th</sup> word), *exigency* - needs (5<sup>th</sup> word), *fulfilment* - healing (6<sup>th</sup> word), and *entrustment* - identity (7<sup>th</sup> word). They are discussed in the following:

**1<sup>st</sup> Word (Entreaty): “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” – (Lk 23:33-37)**

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, **“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”** And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”<sup>14</sup>

The 1st Word is recorded only by Luke. He is described by scholars as an expert in communicating narrative details of events. In the 1st, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Words of Christ on the cross, Luke communicates a unitary link in the identity of Christ who harmonizes himself with God and humanity: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do” (v. 34). Here Christ invokes the mercy of God for the people who in crucifying him, “do not know what they are doing.” The importance of entreaty in religious communication emerges from the prayer for mercy for the people. This

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<sup>14</sup> Bible references are all taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition* (NRSVCE). Accessed <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-NRSV-Bible/> on 1 September 2021.

invocation demonstrates the dual etymological concept of mercy – *rahamin* (רַחֵם) and *hesed* (חֶסֶד). *rahamin* is synonymous with tender compassion<sup>15</sup> and often induces peripheral acts or resources that can alleviate a felt need of human nourishment. It is noteworthy that Christ, who himself needs alleviation from the felt pain of the cross, makes an invocation of mercy for the people. More than *rahamin* what Christ has communicated is *hesed*, the second etymological meaning of mercy. *hesed* refers to covenantal love, steadfast loyalty, commitment or promise.<sup>16</sup> Christ's invocation of mercy carries an awareness of commitment and steadfast loyalty to his identity as a primary communicator of God's covenantal love. Religious communication in the new normal challenges persons to go beyond peripheral communication which focuses only on transmitting acts and resources of kindness to rooting such acts in commitment to one's identity as children of God.

Mercy in its dual etymological significance is embodied during the COVID-19 pandemic in the reality of the renowned *Maginahawa Community Pantry* initiative in the Philippines, which started on April 20, 2021. Its 26-year-old founder, Ana Patricia Non, emphasizes its goal which she epitomizes in the slogan: "*Kumuha ayon sa pangangailangan. Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan*" (Get according to your needs. Give according to your capacity).<sup>17</sup> It is a localized representation of the international "mutual aid" that embeds the dual meaning of mercy as tender compassion as well as authentic commitment. Currently there are more than 3,000 offshoot community pantries spread throughout the country.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Word Internet Bible College, *God's Mercy, Longsuffering, Patience and Sympathy*. Accessed <http://internetbiblecollege.net/tWIBC/Subjects-01-10/Subject-01/Gods%20Mercy,%20Longsuffering,%20Patience%20And%20Sympathy.htm> on September 30, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Jovan Payes, *Word Study: Jonah and God's Benevolent Love (Jonah 4:2)* in *Biblical Faith at the Corner of Exegesis and Discipleship* (2018). Accessed <https://biblicalfaith.wordpress.com/tag/hesed-and-rahamin/> October 1, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Ana Patricia Non is a graduate of UP College of Fine Arts (Philippines), and an entrepreneur running a small furniture making shop whose operations stopped due to the pandemic. Before the pandemic she has been a volunteer and organizer of activities to help the poor. A brief overview of Non is found in Joseph Pedrajas, "Who is Patricia Non, the woman who sparked kindness through the Maginahawa community pantry?" in *Manila Bulletin*. Accessed <https://mb.com.ph/2021/05/06/who-is-patricia-non-the-woman-who-sparked-kindness-through-the-maginhawa-community-pantry/> on September 30, 2021.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Word (Disclosure): “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” – (Lk 23:39-43)**

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”** He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Word, also from Luke, takes off where the 1<sup>st</sup> has left. With Christ on the cross are two criminals. One of them continues to mock Christ while the other, rebuking his fellow criminal, makes a dual affirmative disclosure of identity: 1) *Themselves*, being, “under the same sentence of condemnation” (v.40); and, 2) *Christ*, saying that “this man [Christ] has done nothing wrong” (v.41). Disclosure requires an honest affirmation of identity, either that of oneself and others. The philosopher Martin Buber considers this disclosure as a manifestation of the *I-thou*:

The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is the combination I-Thou. The other primary word is the I-It; wherein, without a change of the primary word, one of the words He and She can replace It. Hence the I of man is twofold. For the I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It.

Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relations. Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence. Primary words are spoken from the being. If Thou is said, the I of the combination I-Thou is said along with it. If It is said, the I of the combination I-It is said along with it. The primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word I-It can never be spoken with the whole being.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Buber 1937, *I and Thou*, transl. by Ronald Gregor Smith,

Analyzing Buber, Michael Zank, believes that this revelation “is a model of existence... a revelation of ‘presence’” (*Gegenwart*). In contrast to “object” (*Gegenstand*), the presence revealed by revelation as encounter occupies the space “in between” the subject and the other (a tree, a person, a work of art, God). This “in between” space is defined as “mutual” (*gegenseitig*).<sup>19</sup> In the disclosure of Christ and the criminal who defends him, there is a felt mutual exchange of presence. This felt and mutual presence empowers the latter to make his request: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (v.42). It is a religious communication of his belief in Christ and his kingdom where solace abounds. Acknowledging this presence within himself, Christ responds and affirms: “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (v.43). It is worth noting that a criminal, who represents an imperfect instrument of communication, is to be with Christ in Paradise. The apparent imperfection of the instrument of communication is strengthened by the truth of the message that Christ on his part carries and embodies. Religious communication in the new normal invites persons to live and share the same experience. Despite human imperfection, persons are invited to a more authentic disclosure accompanied by a felt *Gegenwart* (presence) and one that is *gegenseitig* (mutual).

The felt presence of the frontliners in the fight against COVID-19 is an excellent exemplification of communication that transmits an authentic encounter. That many frontliners have also died in the hope of saving lives testifies to the true religious communication in the post pandemic time. Experience of sickness as a sign of physical limitation will always certainly be present, yet the representation of authentic service and commitment of many frontliners despite the hardships and risks, offer inspiration and hope.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Word (Relationship): “Woman, behold thy son. Son, behold thy mother.” – (Jn 19:25-27)**

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother,

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Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark. 2nd Edition New York: Scribners, 1958. 1st Scribner Classics ed. New York, NY: Scribner, 2000, c1986, 3.

<sup>19</sup> See Martin Buber in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/> on 3 September 2021.

and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "**Woman, here is your son.**" Then he said to the disciple, "**Here is your mother.**" And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Whereas the Gospel according to Luke is known for its narrative details, the Gospel according to John is known for the depth and intimacy of its narrative conversations. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Word is an example of this narrative conversation: "Woman, here is your son. [Disciple] here is your mother" (v.26-27). John precludes it with the predicate "mother and disciple whom he loved" (v.26) which hints of a close relationship. The dismal situation narrated by Luke with Christ's mother, with Mary, the wife of Clopas, and with Mary Magdalene standing near the cross of Jesus (cf v.25) converges with the equally dismal COVID-19 crisis that has been wreaking havoc in the world for so long. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Word invites persons to open their minds and hearts to new yet equally profound and sound ways of relational encounter not based on blood or usual conventions. The relationship summoned by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Word explicates the encounter advocated by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Word.

Pope Francis hints on this in the 48<sup>th</sup> World Day of Communications Message in 2014. He mentions the positive effect of connections brought by the digital communication, but pointed to their ultimate end as creating authentic relationship and encounter. He affirms:

It is not enough to be passersby on the digital highways, simply "connected"; connections need to grow into true encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves. We need to love and to be loved. We need tenderness. Media strategies do not ensure beauty, goodness and truth in communication. The world of media also has to be concerned with humanity; it too is called to show tenderness. The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people. The impartiality of media is merely an appearance; only those who go out of themselves in their communication can become a true point of reference for others. Personal engagement is the basis of the trustworthiness of a communicator. Christian witness, thanks to the internet,

can thereby reach the peripheries of human existence.<sup>20</sup>

Religious communication in the new normal works for the creation of not only connections but also authentic relationships. In line with this aim, Pope Francis calls for the deepening of the concept of neighbor through a rediscovery and practice of neighborliness:

Those who communicate, in effect, become neighbors... Jesus shifts our understanding: it is not just about seeing the other as someone like myself, but of the ability to make myself like the other. Communication is really about realizing that we are all human beings, children of God. I like seeing this power of communication as “neighborliness”.<sup>21</sup>

Communication in the new normal as highlighting authentic relationship and creating neighborliness is well symbolized by the Italian words used interchangeably for neighbor: *vicino* (near) and/or *prossimo* (neighborliness). It can be a worthwhile theme for further study how these concepts are applied in different countries. However, in the context of the Philippines, one word is used to describe the distinction of both through their pronunciation. The word is *malapit*. Pronounced unaccented as *malapit* it means near, referring to proximity. Accented as **malapit**, it carries the deeper significance of concern for the other and being one at heart. Bearing in mind the 3<sup>rd</sup> Word of Christ on the cross, religious communication in the new normal invites persons to deepen their relationship and go beyond proximity to real concern for others be they close relatives or not.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Word (Isolation): “Father, why have you forsaken me.”** – (Mt 27:45-46)

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land[a] until

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<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, “Message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day of Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter” (June 1, 2021). Accessed [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140124\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html) on September 25, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, “Message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day”.

three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "**Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?**" that is, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

The dependency of Matthew on Mark explains why the 4<sup>th</sup> Word appears almost identically in both Gospels. Christ cries from the cross in despair for his felt abandonment by God: "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" (v.46). Reflective of Psalm 22:1 (*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me so far from my cries of anguish?*), the Words of the middle utterance of Christ presents a stark contrast to the 1<sup>st</sup> Word of entreaty wherein he asks the Father to forgive the people of their misdeeds. It is a paradox between absolution and abandonment, trust and inquiry, and identity and doubt. Here the feeling of security and certainty seems no longer sustainable as the weight and pain of the cross overcomes Christ's body and echoes isolation, human frailty, and weakness. It is a painful encounter with God, a cry of human pain where He is mostly sought.

COVID-19 experiences of death and isolation manifest such pain. There have been instances when loved ones are taken by relatives to hospitals in the Philippines, and after some days and a large amount of hospital expenses incurred, they are taken back home already in ashes being declared as COVID-19 positive. Sadly, for the many Filipinos who are poor, this has become a common narrative. The 4<sup>th</sup> Word, however, challenges persons to transform the death that comes. Not that the dead are brought back to life, but that their passing away becomes easier to bear for their families. For Philip Goble Jr. the cry of abandonment in an inescapable and impending death is a cry of dereliction. It is a cry from the cross, "spoken in front of those surrounding Christ's execution as a final plea for repentance to those who opposed him and, simultaneously,

as Words of comfort to his followers.”<sup>22</sup> Religious communication in the new normal is clothed with the stigma of isolation and human frailty yet continues to live in the heart that beats a treasured value of hope. By his death Christ has enabled persons to recognize the grace to never be forgotten by God.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Word (Exigency): “I thirst” – (Jn 19:28-29)**

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), **“I am thirsty.”** A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Word from John, “I thirst” (also same as “I am thirsty”) can be interpreted as an extension of the “I am” sayings of Christ. To mention a few: “I am the Good Shepherd” (Jn 10-11), “I am the Light of the World” (Jn 8:12), “I am the Bread of Life” (Jn 6:35). Together they refer to an awareness of identity and response to a need – the Shepherd who looks after the need of the sheep, the world in need of light, and the persons who need nourishment. Shortest among the Seven Last Words, the 5<sup>th</sup> Word communicates a longing satisfaction to a physical need, thirst (v.28). It too rekindles Christ’s conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well asking her of water to drink (Jn 4:1-30). Reference to Christ “knowing all was now finished and to fulfill scripture” (v.28) is found in a prophecy in Psalm 22:15: “My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.” Christ’s actions done in fulfillment of scripture highlight the plan of God for the lives of people.

Awareness of identity and response to a need refers one back to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which he presented in 1943 as part of his work on “Theory of Human Motivation”. It is comprised of **basic needs** (physiological and safety – food, water, warmth rest, security and safety),

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<sup>22</sup> Philip E. Goble Jr., “Eloi, Eloi Lama Sabachthani: Christ’s Final Plea for Sinners, Encouragement for Disciples”, in *The American Journal of Biblical Theology* (Volume 22 Issue 10, March 7, 2021), 19. Goble makes four foundational precepts in this regard: 1) Christ’s purpose of being on earth and His understanding of that purpose; 2) the relationship between Jesus and the Father; 3) an understanding that Christ had the power to choose His path; and 4) the physical toll that Jesus’ scourging and crucifixion had on his human body, 2.

**psychological needs** (belonging, love and esteem – intimacy, friends, prestige and feeling of accomplishment) and **self-fulfillment needs** (self-actualization – achieving one’s full potential including creative activities).<sup>23</sup> In 1998, Maslow added self-transcendence to self-actualization. He defined it as “connecting to something beyond the ego or to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential.”<sup>24</sup>

Religious communication in the new normal champions awareness of identity and responds to fulfill the hierarchy of needs. The 5<sup>th</sup> Word literally fulfills Christ’s need; narrating that at his declaration of thirst, persons “put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth” (v.29). The concept of the Greek τέλειος – *τέλειος* (fulfilment - perfection) in this instance is significant. It becomes an excellent but difficult goal to attain since human beings cannot be without weakness, limitation, or needs. A more plausible attitude is believing that a person can be complete or mature even though he/she carries limitations. A well-known adage confirms this: “It is much easier to be mature and still have flaws, rather than be without flaws. Many are mature, but few if any are without flaw.”

The directives in following the various levels of quarantine and their frequency imposed in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic are examples of strategies that are developing and are not without its own limitations and flaws. Most Filipinos abide by them mindful of the good they can do as a response to the need to be safe and healthy and their representation. Religious communication is also not without its flaws, needs, and limitations. Attentive and abiding by official mandates, religious communication encourages authentic help that can fulfill the needs of peoples and be safe from COVID-19.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Word (Fulfilment): “It is finished” – (Jn 19:30)**

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “**It is finished.**” Then

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<sup>23</sup> Abraham Maslow. “A theory of human motivation” in *Psychological Review*, 50, (1943), 370-396. Accessed <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm> on 20 September 2021.

<sup>24</sup> See W. Huitt. “Maslow’s hierarchy of needs” in *Educational Psychology Interactive* (Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University, 2007). Accessed <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/regsys/maslow.html> on October 1, 2021.

he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Christ's 6<sup>th</sup> Word, τετέλεσται – “It is finished” (v.30), is considered open to interpretation for its referent seem unclear at first glimpse. The indicative passive and perfect tense derivative of word τέλειος – τέλειος (maturity or perfection) which is scantily discussed previously in the 5<sup>th</sup> Word, τετέλεσται means to end; bring to completion and conclusion; complete; accomplish; fulfill; or finish. Scholars believe that anyone or anything that has reached τέλειος – τέλειος has arrived at completion, maturity, or perfection. They also point out that Christ's use of the perfect tense is most significant as it refers to an action made yet continues so that when one action finishes a new one begins:

The perfect tense is a combination of two Greek tenses: the Present tense, and the Aorist tense. The Aorist tense is punctiliar: meaning something that happens at a specific point in time; a moment. The Present tense is linear: meaning something that continues and has ongoing results/implications.<sup>25</sup>

The two senses combined are important because when Christ says, “It is finished,” what he is actually saying is “It is finished and will continue to be finished.” The 6<sup>th</sup> Word therefore signals not a closing or termination. Rather, it opens a door to a new stage of relationship, a turning point when one continues to strain forward towards healing and growth. Rick Renner, a Greek New Testament scholar, hints on this: “[Christ] bore our griefs. He carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. He was chastised for our peace. He was scourged for our healing.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Among the scholars are those from Columbia International University. See *It is Finished! (A Look at the Greek)*. Accessed <https://www.ciu.edu/content/it-finished-look-greek> on October 1, 2021. Simply explained the “perfect tense” concept is like high school students, who in graduating say goodbye to their old school and say hello to a new college school.

<sup>26</sup> Rick Renner, “*Tetelestai - It Is Finished!*” in *Crosswalk.com* (January 12, 2021). Accessed <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/it-is-finished-11571312.html> on October 1, 2021. He further notes four specific applications on the 6<sup>th</sup> Word: 1) This was Jesus' exclamation that He had finished the work the Father had sent Him to do. 2) The word *tetelestai* was the equivalent of the Hebrew word spoken by the high priest when he

Fulfillment and integrality are exemplified in the world's struggle to bring healing and combat the death and ill effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has begun with the observance of health protocols, the numerous lockdowns and its diverse restrictive classifications, disruption of religious and social life and activities, shift to flexible learning modes of education and suspension of face to face (F2F) classes at various levels, production and distribution of vaccines, mutual aid from people similar to community pantries, and prayers of hope and healing from God. Recognizing all these, religious communication in the new normal must be rooted in the perfect tense that recognizes the reality of imperfect communication yet strains towards the τέλειος – *τέλειος*, towards healing, maturity and growth.

**7<sup>th</sup> Word (Entrustment): “Into your hands I commend my spirit” – (Lk 23:44-46)**

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “**Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.**” Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.”

The 7<sup>th</sup> Word parallels the 1<sup>st</sup> Word in its reference to the “Father” and can also be considered as part of an entreaty. Recognizing that everything is finished and that he has done what is asked of him to which he has shown commitment, Christ entrusts himself to God. It is an entrustment of someone who is very much aware of his identity in relationship with God. To God, Christ commends (συνιστάω, *synistaō*) his spirit (v.46). Bible Concordances translate συνιστάω, *synistaō* with commend or entrust associating it with, “set together, i.e., (by implication) to introduce (favorably), or (figuratively) to exhibit; intransitively, to stand near, or (figuratively) to constitute”.<sup>27</sup> It

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presented a sacrificial lamb without spot or blemish. 3) In a secular sense, the word *tetelestai* was used in the business world to signify the full payment of a debt. 4) In classical Greek times, the word *tetelestai* depicted a turning point when one period ended, and another new period began.

<sup>27</sup> See Strong's Concordance, Greek Dictionary (συνιστάω, *synistaō* G4921). Accessed <https://www.quoteskosmos.com/bible/bible-concordance/>

is synonymous with commit, confide, consign, delegate, deliver, entrust, give, give over, hand, hand over, leave, pass, recommend, repose, transfer, transmit, and trust.

Unique in the 7<sup>th</sup> Word scene are: the “darkness that came over the whole land” (v.44), the “sun’s light failed” (v.45), and the “curtains of the temple torn in two” (v.45). They are indicative of an unpleasant narrative event that has occurred. Amid these is Christ’s loud cry of entrustment, “Father, into your hand I commend my spirit” (v.46) that becomes a kaleidoscope of hope enabling constructive victory to be gazed – “when the centurion saw, he praised God and said: ‘certainly this man is innocent’” (v.47). The 7<sup>th</sup> Word is a stark contrast to the 4<sup>th</sup> Word where Christ utters words of being abandoned and forsaken. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Word, the felt presence discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Word earlier becomes alive anew and this time referring itself to the “Father”, the God who always loves – Alpha and Omega – the ultimate and Word who never dies and is always trustworthy.

Religious communication in the new normal reminds person what and whom to trust and how to communicate such trust. Authentic trust is built on an authentic relationship which is what Jesus has with “the Father”. It communicates a felt presence that nourishes and inspires. The emergence and spread of and uproar against *Fake News* during pre and post-pandemic represent the continued narrative reality of “good and bad” in media communication. In the Philippines, there is frequent circulation of contrasting information regarding the conspiracy theories underlying COVID-19, the benefit of being vaccinated, which vaccine is best, political hoarding of vaccines and *ayuda* (material aid to needy persons during lockdowns), billion dollar deals on face masks, changing policies on lockdown classifications, limited percent of Church attendance, and the counter-culturality of the pandemic to the religious tradition. In all these, the transmission of trust and confidence in God becomes the undying panacea and the Words of Christ that brings out goodness in each person and assures longevity until the end of days.

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G4921.html on October 3, 2021. Among the biblical texts citing συνιστάω are in the Epistles of Paul, eg. Rom 3:5, Rom 5:8, 2 Cor. 3:1, 2 Cor 4:2, 2 Cor 5:12, and 2 Cor 10:18. As a transitive verb, it is defined as, “entrust for care or preservation, recommend as worthy of confidence or notice, and mention with approbation”. See Merriam-Webster online Dictionary. Accessed <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commend> on October 4, 2021.

## Sevenfold Praxis of Hope in Religious Communication

The cross during COVID-19 pandemic becomes the new arena of religious communication awaiting hope. Praxes of this hope emerge in the current study founded on the correlational affordance between the Seven Last Words of Christ on the cross and the post pandemic narrative experiences, approaches and strategies in dealing with the reality of COVID-19.

1. **Entreaty** involves invocation that roots in greater ownership of selves and dialogue. In religious communication, this should be holistic and integral – heart, mind and will. Christ acknowledges a double identity in his 1<sup>st</sup> Word: *God and Self* (Christ identifies the Father and their relationship) and the *Other* (invocation for those who “know not what they do”). Acknowledgement of identity is a key to a successful dialogue and invocation. During the post pandemic period, entreaty necessitates recognition of identity of the interactants and a sincere commitment to preserve its integrality which would aid in dialogue.
2. **Disclosure** comes with accompaniment. It exudes a symbolic presence of “paradise” (2<sup>nd</sup> Word) that nourishes and shares in the journey of life. Religious communication in the new normal allows persons to act and express their sorrows and joys and successes and failures. This is the experience narrated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Word. In the new normal, persons are invited evermore to communicate, interact and strain forward armed with a network of limitations but equally with an embodied promise network of hope.
3. **Relationship** is always an encounter. It is created and defined anew in the religious communication of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Word. It goes beyond linkages of blood and can win over the daily battles in life. In the light of tragedy of the cross and COVID-19, religious communication can be considered as an expression of felt experience and presence that portrays what it is to be human and the often contrasting and extreme emotion that comes with it – sadness and joy, hope and despair, hate and love.
4. **Isolation** in communication is often a result of human frailty which can be considered as noise and barriers in process communication. Isolation is a deafening noise alongside being forsaken. Felt presence in religious communication during the pandemic is the

panacea for the noise of isolation. It transmits strength amid weakness. The pandemic evoked despair, isolation, and death. Religious communication is equal to hope and to God's felt presence as Emmanuel.

5. **Exigency** is described as awareness of needs. Like entreaty in the 1<sup>st</sup> Word, it includes awareness of identity and response to a need that longs for satisfaction. All persons have needs and every representation and satisfaction of a need is communication. Religious communication in the post pandemic period encourages interactants from highlighting and living communication as process (mainly focusing on transmission and feedback of information) to valuing and living communication as semiotics (empowering through the construction and exchange of meanings). Truth reveals itself in the construction of meaning. It respects individuality and needs and leads to a greater realization of one's potential.
6. **Fulfillment** associates itself with healing and integrality. To many, life with God brings fulfillment. Religious communication strains forward towards this fulfillment through integrality and healing. It is not limited solely to religious terms (grace, sin, God, Christ) but open to the foundational significance of such terms (goodness, love, forgiveness). They express religious identity "in other words". While they have a role to play in the construction of religious identity, religious communication can also play a role in its deconstruction. Here the role of negotiation is vital. Fulfillment reveals a need for greater vigilance towards acceptance, rejection, reconfiguration, and innovation in religious communication.
7. **Entrustment** is an affirmation of identity. An interplay of identities is presented in the Seven Last Words and the 7<sup>th</sup> Word shapes them all as one. Responsibility is part of such shaping. In the new normal religious communication, authentic responsibility ensues one's narration of self, in a sort of evolution illustrated with the transformation of the common concepts of *homo sapiens* to *homo technologicus*. Religious communication in the new normal encourages further studies of this transformation to becoming truly *homo Dei*. It provides people with the capacity and opportunity to become people of God. Here God becomes the pandemic hero

present amid conflict and suffering. He invites people to a response that affirms or reaffirms their identities in relationship with Him.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, it is important to highlight the question of counter-culturality brought about by COVID-19 and its disruption of the communication of religious faith, particularly the Filipino religious traditions, made at the start of this study. Here the distinction between the religious communication of faith as belief (creed) and religious communication of the expression of faith (rituals) becomes pertinent. Both are part of the dimensions of religiosity that complement one another. Faith as encountered and lived will always be paramount in religious communication during the pandemic. While belief can be enriched and nourished too by the expression of faith, the latter must be guided by the former and not vice versa. The communication of religious tradition should not only be limited to rituals. Rather, these rituals should be guided by our religious creed. Rituals can never be the sole norm of faith. Rituals attain their significance if they are based on creed. These can be best communicated in the age-old Christian dictum: “Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor like yourself” (Lk 10:27) that can be a good measure for the communication of Filipino religious devotions and thus part of the new normal. “Loving our neighbor as ourselves” becomes a great miracle where healing can begin and where communication of religious identity can be best understood. The sevenfold praxis of hope in religious communication bears witness to this.

Second, the converging affordances from the Seven Last Word of Christ on the cross and COVID-19 demonstrate that religious communication is very much a part of God and part of his created world. Religious communication in the new normal strongly affirms God’s relationship with creation and the realities and events. In tragic events like the COVID-19 pandemic, religious communication offers and invites persons to a new perspective and attitude. It allows those in situations of isolation to deepen relationships acknowledging personal limitations and trust. It is an invitation to an entreaty and encounter that strains forward chained within a network of limitation but equally armed

within an embodied network of hope. The pandemic comes as an event awaiting hope and entrustment. Here God is always the communication hero who champions it. He is present and invites people to a response that affirms and reaffirms the human spirit clothed with the image and likeness that is His very own.

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## Israeli Information Policy, COVID-19 and the Ultra-Orthodox Haredim

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### ABSTRACT

*Against the background of the COVID-19 crisis in Israel, the country's ultra-orthodox population, the Haredim, were faced with seemingly insuperable dilemmas of compromising their religious standards for the sake of dealing with the virus. The government launched a public relations campaign to persuade this public, but its success was qualified. This study examines Israeli governmental information policy towards the Haredi population during COVID-19.*

**Keywords:** *COVID-19 crisis, religion. Haredim, Haredi Jews, Israel, communication*

When the COVID-19 crisis hit Israel in March 2020, and Israelis were instructed by the Israeli Government in social distancing, rabbis in the ultra-Orthodox Haredi sector – against the instructions of the Health Ministry – instructed their followers to continue attending the synagogue and engage in Torah study in the *yeshivot* (institutions of advanced Jewish learning) and schools. Social distancing appeared to clash with

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cardinal values of the Haredi community: the religious obligation (*mitzvah*) of learning Torah and communal prayer. The number of Haredi Jews (ultra-orthodox) who were sick and dead from Corona in spring 2020 was very high – higher than the average in the Israeli population as a whole. The fact that many Haredim have large families and live in cramped housing conditions only added to the danger. While the Haredi press has been described, much less attention has been given to case studies of the flow of information to this audience. This study examines the role of Israeli governmental public relations and advertising and the obstacles to reach the Haredi population to observe the regulations and later to receive vaccinations.

## **The Haredim**

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, 12 percent of Israel's population identify themselves as Haredim. The Haredi lifestyle centres around the *yeshiva* hall and synagogue. There are several streams and sub-streams of Haredi Orthodoxy. These are non-Hassidic Haredim, Hassidic Haredim, and more recently Modern Haredim. The first, the non-Hassidic Haredim, are inclined towards study of religious texts, notably the Talmud, in religious seminaries (the *yeshiva*). This group originated in the *yeshivot* in Lithuania. While the man studies, the wife is the breadwinner and goes to work. In practice, today many of the men also work part of the day or all the time, which signifies recognition that exacting study of the Talmudic texts is not suitable for all men. The study of the Torah, both for its practical application in everyday life as observant Jews and for its own sake, is considered the highest ideal. Studying the Talmud, in the framework of partners learning together, for many hours, is considered a virtue. The Hassidim or Hassidic Haredim express their religious identity also emotionally 'from the heart', and religious experience. Divided into different Hassidic courts, the head of the Hassidic court, an *admor* is counseled for an array of decisions including marriage of children, decisions concerning education of children, place to live and work. The Hassidic rabbi is, therefore, the spiritual leader, a role combining those of teacher, source of inspiration, judge, and advisor.

The "Modern Haredim" seek to find a bridge to the modern world, including academic education, an admission of the need to be educated in

order to attain a better standard of living (Zicherman & Cahaner 2012).<sup>3</sup> A fourth group, Haredi sub-stream are Sephardi Haredim, many of whom identify with one of the three ideological approaches described above. Priority is given among all the Haredi branches to education of children. The Haredim contrast with the modern Orthodox of Judaism (who account for an estimated 15 percent of the Israeli population), which seeks to synthesize between adherence to the Torah and the modern world, as well as being full partners in modern Zionism.

### **Jewish Spiritual Life during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

What were the implications for Haredim of the COVID-19 crisis? As the first international disaster (apart from terrorism) since the invention of the Internet and the growth of social media, it is useful to examine how the digital media has affected Jewish spiritual life (Pearl, 2014).<sup>4</sup> In terms of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Jewish communities, attention has been focused on the question of its impact on synagogue life. The closure of synagogues in Israel raised questions about alternative strategies including online prayer services. The dangers of leaving one's house have raised questions regarding the potential of the online media in religious worship.

The COVID-19 crisis raises wider questions like what are the consequences, if any, of the Internet for Jewish prayer worship, and even what ethical message Judaism may offer for the Internet era. Orthodox Judaism, including for the Haredim, has so far rejected the possibility of online religion and online prayer services. Its leaders often cite the dictum in the Jewish law code, *Shulkhan Arukh*, that a *minyan* – the minimum number of participants needed to hold a communal prayer service – requires 10 men to be in the same room *physically*. It does not recognise the possibility that individuals located in different places being able to link up through, say, the telephone to form the *minyan*. Some prayers may only be recited as part of the *minyan*. These include the weekly Bible reading from Torah

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<sup>3</sup> Haim Zicherman and Lee Cahaner, *The Emergence of a Haredi Middle Class in Israel*, Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2012 (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> Sharrona Pearl, "Exceptions to the Rule: Chabad-Lubavitch and the Digital Sphere," *Journal of Media and Religion*, 13, No. 3 (2014).

scrolls on the Sabbath, or the *kaddish* prayer recited for most of the year after the death of a blood relative.

Yet it is at times of concern and death when people most want to reach out and pray to God for divine help. People in isolation at home also need psychological sympathy and to be able to remain in touch with other people. Therefore, the Jewish legal qualification regarding streaming religious services provided was costly (non-Orthodox streaming services overcame the religious limits) (Frost & Youngblood, 2014).<sup>5</sup> In reality, there were outdoor prayer services which replaced the sheltered synagogue, such as the “balcony *minyanim*” where participants living on the same street joined from their balconies – with limited numbers of up to 20 male participants. It was a recognition by the authorities that it was better to allow some, albeit limited, communal prayer because otherwise, individuals would form their own services under more dangerous conditions.

The New Year (*Rosh Hoshonah*, when the ram’s horn [*the shophar*] is blown in synagogues) and the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) in autumn are peak times for communal prayer. Religious holy days are occasions for gathering together, and the Israeli authorities, in advancing their guidelines of social distancing, were concerned about the dangers of these festivals in spreading COVID-19. One of the most potent festivals was a minor annual festival, *Lag Ba-Omer*; which occurred in the late spring when thousands of Haredi Jews paid homage to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai by visiting his grave at Mount Meron in northern Israel. A physically very small area, it was a breeding ground for COVID-19.

Another springtime festival is Passover which celebrates the Biblical exodus from Egypt. On this occasion, families usually gather together for the traditional Seder meal at the onset of the festival to celebrate and re-enact and relate the story of the Biblical Exodus to one another. Against the background of governmental guidelines not to gather together, a group of senior orthodox Sephardic rabbis in

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan K. Frost, and Norman E. Youngblood, “Online Religion and Religion Online: Reform Judaism and Web-Based Communication”, *Journal of Media and Religion* 13, No. 2 (2014).

April 2020 suggested that the Seder service at the beginning of the seven-day Passover festival could be held through a Zoom connection, enabling individuals staying alone to link up to their families. It was a revolutionary ruling since Orthodox Judaism prohibits activating electricity on holy days (as this is considered as work and therefore, an infringement of the biblical law of “rest on the Seventh Day”). A survey conducted by *Maariv* newspaper on the eve of Passover 2020 found that 33 percent of respondents said that they planned to hold their Seder via Zoom (Rosner, 2020).<sup>6</sup>

Lifecycle events such as marriages, burials, and religious celebrations like the *barmitzvah* (entry into Jewish law for boys at 13) as well as the circumcision on the eighth day after a boy is born are all occasions where people usually come together. Some funerals during COVID-19 were held via Zoom to enable relatives and friends to ‘attend’ the funeral and hear the eulogies. The custom of visitation to comfort mourners in the week following the death of a blood relative had to be limited to improvisation such as via the telephone.

In the early months after the outbreak of COVID-19, there was concern about the hygiene of using communal ritual baths by men and women respectively. The Western Wall at the ancient Jewish Temple site in Jerusalem, a popular site of prayer, was divided into capsules in order to regulate and limit overcrowding. Supervisors of kosher food, whose responsibility was to inspect that foods manufactured in factories were prepared in accord with kosher ritual standards, notably without any ingredients prohibited by Jewish laws, had difficulty to reach factories, especially those situated in far-flung parts of the world, to carry out on-site inspection.

In other spheres of Jewish life, the potential which the digital media offers was taken advantage of during the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of *yeshivot* (colleges of advanced Talmudic study) threatened religious learning. Studying the Talmud is done in the framework of students studying the text together in pairs. Also there are group *shiurim*, or religious lessons, conducted by a rabbi; or in the case of Haredi

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<sup>6</sup> Shmuel Rosner, “What makes the difference?” *Maariv* (April 8, 2020) (Hebrew).

women, religious education (such as ethical thinking or Biblical studies) by a learned female teacher. After the outbreak of COVID-19, some *yeshivot* reorganised the study hall into capsules. However, long distance learning has also entered the world of Jewish learning. For example, one *yeshiva*, the Web Yeshiva has for years provided online *shiurim* enabling individuals in the different time zones around the world to participate in *shiurim*. Skype and Zoom also provide opportunities for individuals – even Haredim who shun the Internet – to study together, ‘the *havruta*’. Online media has also enabled individuals to consult rabbis from afar and seek their advice on a host of Jewish legal questions (*halakhah*) as an alternative to consulting the local synagogue rabbi (Tsuria & Campbell, 2021).<sup>7</sup> It also offers privacy and anonymity, in contrast to the earlier model of consulting rabbis in one’s community which required one to identify oneself.

Nonetheless, the hesitancy of rabbis to exploit the potential which digital media offers raises the question whether the institutional sentiment for self-preservation of the rabbi – whether the rabbi of a synagogue or the rabbi in an educational institution like the *yeshiva* – is also a motivating factor not to fully incorporate the digital media into the life of Judaism rather than solely *halakhic* considerations?

## The Haredi Media Marketplace

Health directives failed to penetrate the Haredi sector. To understand this, it is necessary to appreciate how the media integrates – or more precisely does not integrate into the Haredi way of life (Cohen, 2012).<sup>8</sup> Their rabbis have over the years issued religious decrees (*pesuk din*) against exposure to mass media, which is regarded as a threat to Torah family values. From the appearance of newspapers in the nineteenth century, through to the development of radio and television (Neriya-Ben

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Tsuria and Heidi A Campbell, “‘In My Opinion’: Negotiation of Rabbinical Authority Online in Responsa within Kipa.co.il,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 45 (65-84), 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Yoel Cohen, *God, Jews & the media: Religion & Israel’s Media* (New York & London: Routledge, 2012).

Shahar, 2017),<sup>9</sup> and more recently, video, computers, the internet and cellular phones, Haredi rabbis have enacted decrees in response to these technological developments. Haredim seek to build cultural walls to keep out external cultural influences so as not to ‘contaminate’ true Jewish Torah values as they see them (Blondheim, 2015).<sup>10</sup> Modesty is an important motif in Judaism. The Israelite camp in the Wilderness in “which God walked shall be holy...that God should not see anything unseemly and turn Himself away from you” (Deuteronomy 23:15) is an allusion to nudity being looked on negatively (Tsuria, 2017).<sup>11</sup> Reflecting its philosophy of withdrawal from modernity, and seeking to maintain religious values in a cultural ghetto framework, the Haredi (Hebrew for ‘fearful ones’) community or ultra-Orthodox Jews have felt most threatened by the changing mass media.

The Haredi prohibitions on television and secular newspapers were the most successful of the bans against media with the overwhelming number of Haredim respecting it. Only 14 percent of Haredim read general newspapers. A 2008 survey indicated that only 33 percent of residents of the predominantly Haredi city of Benei Beraq possessed a television set in contrast to most other mixed Israeli cities where the number of households with a television set ranged from a low of 82 percent (Ashdod) to 100 percent (Rishon LeZion).<sup>12</sup> Yet the ease today to access visual content such as YouTube videos through the Internet has placed the efficacy of the ban on television under question.

The monopoly enjoyed by the Haredi party daily newspapers has been challenged since the 1980s by a commercially-orientated independent Haredi media. These are commercial attempts by

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<sup>9</sup> Rivka Neriya-Ben Shahar, “The Medium is the Danger: Discourse about Television among Amish and Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Women,” *Journal of Media & Religion* 16, No. 1 (2017).

<sup>10</sup> Menahem Blondheim, “The Jewish Communication Tradition and Its Encounters with (the) New Media,” in Heidi A Campbell (ed), *Digital Judaism: Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture* (New York & London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Tsuria, “From Sin to Sick: Digital Judaism and Pornography,” *Journal of Religion and Media* 16, No. 4 (2017).

<sup>12</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Jerusalem 2008.

journalists of Haredi background to deploy such techniques as modern graphics, fetching headlines, and covering a broader range of subjects than those in the party 'establishment' Haredi daily press. The openness of the new Haredi press is characterised by the fact that unlike the daily institutionalised Haredi papers, each of which covers only its own political party, the new press reports the activities of all Haredi members of the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. And, while respecting the code of not publishing immoral content which will upset Haredi Jewish sensitivities, a new level of press freedom has been introduced in an otherwise highly hierarchical media environment. It reports and discusses behind the scenes' wheeling and dealing of, for example, the Council of Torah Sages (the umbrella board of Haredi rabbis in Israel), the politics inside the Haredi political parties, and instances of corruption in Haredi institutions.

Moreover, the Haredi news websites, including *B'Hadrei Haredim*, *Kikar Shabbot* and *Haredim 10* are an even greater challenge to rabbinic hegemony given a sweeping ban by Haredi rabbis against the Internet because of sex-related content. These Haredi sites attempt to provide a 'kosher' Internet and exclude, for example, sex-related content. The Internet is used by a considerable body of Haredi Jews today. The exposure of Haredi Jews has been heavily influenced by their spiritual leaders. In contrast to the independent weekly press or the radio stations, the websites are an even greater challenge to rabbinic hegemony given the ban by Haredi rabbis against the Internet (Cohen, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019a).<sup>13</sup> Despite rabbinical bans, rallies and other forms of mass persuasion and pressure against computers and the Internet, it is used by an estimated 30-40 percent of Haredi Jews today, albeit with control measures stipulating that

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<sup>13</sup> Yoel Cohen, "Haredim and the Internet: A Hate-Love Affair", in Michael Bailey & Guy Redden (eds.) *Mediating Faiths: Religion and Socio-Cultural Change in the Twenty-First Century* (Britain: Ashgate, 2011); Yoel Cohen, "Israeli Rabbis & the Internet", in Heidi Campbell (ed.), *Digital Judaism* (New York & London: Routledge, 2015), 183-204; Yoel Cohen "Orthodox Jewry," in August E Grant, Amanda F C Sturgill, Chiung Hwang Chen, and Daniel A Stout (eds.), *Religion Online: How Digital Technology is Changing the Way We Worship and Pray, Volume 2* (California: Praeger Press, 2019a); Yoel Cohen, "Awkward Encounters: Orthodox Judaism and the Internet," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, Donner Institute, Abu Akademie Universitat, Finland, No 25, 2013, 42-54; Yoel Cohen, "The Media Challenge to Haredi Rabbinic Authority in Israel," *Essachess: Journal for Communication Studies* 10, no. 2 (2017): 113-128.

computers can only be used at work. In fact, Haredim have lower exposure to computers and to the Internet than other groups. A 2005 survey of Israelis without a computer or the Internet found that Haredim comprised the largest sector in the population. 42 percent of Haredim had no computer at home in contrast to 29 percent of the general Israeli population. Among those who possessed computers but were not linked to the Internet, 27 percent were Haredi Jews. Haredim Jews were also less inclined to be heavy Internet users. By 2015, 55 percent of Haredi households in Israel possessed at least one computer (compared to 82 percent of all Israeli households), (14 percent of Haredi households had a touchscreen computer/tablet [compared to 41 percent of all Israeli households], and 1.4 percent had a videogame console [compared to 15 percent of all Israeli households]). But the Internet was far less spread. 31 percent of Haredi households in Israel were linked to the Internet in 2015 as compared to 79 percent of all Israeli households.<sup>14</sup> All this would impact negatively when there was an urgent need during the COVID-19 for the Health Ministry to send instructions to citizens.

Haredi radio stations like Radio Kol Chai and Radio Kol Barama are governmental initiatives in recent years to pluralise and decentralise the Israeli broadcasting map in terms of geography and sector (Cohen, 2019b).<sup>15</sup> It reflects how religious populations, in particular the Haredim, feel estranged from mainstream Israeli life. Up to the mid-1990s, there were no legal religious radio stations – as opposed to a string of pirate radio stations, yet mostly religious in orientation. Some of the pirate radio stations were affiliated with supporters of the religious Shas political party, *Radio Emet* ('The Radio of Truth'), Radio 2000, mostly broadcasting inspirational content comprising religious lessons (*shiurim*) and religious songs. Mainstream radio stations (Israel Radio and Galei Zahal) fail to give expression to the Haredi belief system.

### **The 'Education' of Haredi Rabbis**

In understanding the public relation challenges for the Israeli government in distributing health directives to the Haredi population, it is

<sup>14</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Jerusalem 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Yoel Cohen, "Israeli Haredi Media and the 'female factor': the case of the Kol Barama radio station," *Israel Affairs* 25, no. 2 (2019b).

instructive to examine political and social developments inside the Haredi population in general and the conflicting – and superior – messages from their rabbis to their followers. In March 2020, governmental instructions for social-distancing, lockdowns and curfews during religious holy days and prohibitions on praying together were all perceived by Haredim as a threat to their core values and strongly felt beliefs. Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, regarded as one of the spiritual leaders of non-Hassidic Haredi Jewry in Israel, issued a directive to the faithful not to obey the rules of social distancing, but continue with synagogal worship and *yeshivot*. The Torah protects us, intoned the learned rabbi. But as more and more Haredim got sick, some *yeshivot* and schools, however, did close their doors. So did many synagogues.

Many Haredim, not being exposed to television and the Internet, and in some cases, even a radio set, were not themselves exposed to the news about casualties from COVID-19, and acceded to the rabbi's instructions. In a certain sense, the hesitancy of Kanievsky and other Haredi rabbis to 'support' the government directives may be seen as reflecting Haredi rabbis' lack of secular education, leading to suspicions of scientific research including medical research. The unknown nature of the virus in the early part of 2020 only strengthened the rabbis' refusal to renege on challenges to the all-embracing dictum to study the Torah.

In a letter which was intended to be published in the newspaper *Yated Neeman*, which is identified with non-Hassidic Haredim, Kanievsky explained his position why *yeshivot* should stay open. Nonetheless, in an unprecedented step, and on the instructions of another rabbi, Gedaliah Edelstein, head of the elite Ponevezh Yeshiva in Benei Beraq, the paper did not publish it. Edelstein instead favoured adhering to the government instructions. In part, all this reflects the wide gaps between the Haredim and the modern Israeli state. Other protective measures such as not wearing a mask were seen as a declaration of protest. But it was also a statement of trust in a Higher Being. Indeed, the even more extreme wing of the non-Hassidic Haredim, the so-called Jerusalem faction, which identified with the later Rabbi Shmuel Aurbach, was even more resistant. Thus, the very fact that a secular state body like the Health Ministry instructed a ban on social distancing was itself a reason not to respect it. On the other hand, Sephardim Haredim were more inclined to accept the government

directives. Much depended also on each Hassidic stream; the Gur Hassidim, one of the largest groups, accepted the governmental directives.

The Haredi media itself walked a fine line between, on the one hand, publishing the views of the rabbis in rejecting the directives, in particular in those Haredi daily newspapers published under the auspices of the rabbis themselves (Baumel, 2005),<sup>16</sup> and publishing and even supporting the directives of the government by, for example, documenting the number of deaths as well as the overcrowded situation in Israeli hospitals (Cohen, 2021).<sup>17</sup> However, by September 2020, the situation worsened when thousands of Haredim became sick. In August 2020 Haredi schools reopened despite government directives otherwise. In actuality, some Haredi schools did institute distance learning via the telephone, but this was not very practical for pedagogic reasons, with offline interaction in the classroom far preferred. The months of September and October were a time of communal prayer and various activities celebrating the New Year, Day of Atonement and even the seven-day long Tabernacles (Sukkot) Sukkot Festival. Thus, in October 2020 Haredi towns like Bnei Beraq and Modiin Illit had a daily average of 223 and 293 COVID-19 cases out of 10,000 residents, respectively. On the other hand, mixed or non-Haredi towns like Givatayim and Hod Hasharon only averaged 21 and 24 out of 10,000 residents per day, respectively.

With the governmental closure of key Haredi towns and restricting movements in an attempt to stop the virus from spreading to other parts the country, riots against the police occurred. In the face of this situation, Haredi politicians also lost face in ‘the Haredi street’ for failing to influence the government to reopen the cities and getting government dispensations for the closure of educational institutions. This was despite

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<sup>16</sup> Shmuel Baumel, *Sacred Speakers: Language and Culture among the Haredim in Israel* (Oxford & New York: Berghahn, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Yoel Cohen, Bruria Adini, and Ahuva Spitz, “The Haredi media, religious identity, and the COVID-19 crisis,” *Israel Affairs* (August 2021); Bruria Adini, Yoel Cohen, and Ahuva Spitz, “The Relationship between Religious Beliefs and Attitudes towards Public Health Infection Prevention Measures among an Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Population during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19 (2022): 2988.

the fact that the Health Minister, Yaacov Litzman himself came from a Haredi political party. In part, after the death of Rabbi Leib Steinemann in 2017, who had been the recognised leader of non-Hassidic Haredim, the absence of a successor meant there was no single rabbi who could quell the riots.

The arrival of vaccines to Israel at the end of 2020 and programmes to mass vaccinate in 2021 heated matters yet further. Governmental policy sought to encourage rather than force people to be vaccinated, notwithstanding that those unvaccinated were required to take antigen tests to verify that they were not affected. Because there was uncertainty about the effects of vaccinations, more Haredim than secular people declined governmental calls to get vaccinated. Consequently, in February 2021, Haredim made up then 28 percent of COVID-19 victims in Israel, despite accounting for only 12 percent of the population. This reality added to secular-Haredi tensions, with some in the broader secular public charging the Haredi with endangering the entire public by not getting vaccinated or ignoring social distancing directives. The secular Israeli media became important means for expressing these charges aimed at the Haredim. Yet, as more understanding about the vaccines emerged, by summer 2021, many rabbis, including Kanievsky, were more supportive of vaccinations – even for those under the age of 20. Indeed, Kanievsky said that teachers who did not become vaccinated should be suspended from work. At the same time, the Education Minister herself was inclined to keep schools of all types, religious or not, open at all costs.

### **Israeli Public Health Media Relations during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Israeli governmental public relations are characteristic of other Western democratic societies. Falling back on major wars, including the 1967, 1973, and 1982 Arab-Israeli Wars, and the 1990 Gulf War, or low intensity conflicts like the Intifada, there exists an infrastructure as well as experience among successive governments in public relations for dealing with national emergencies. The Army Spokesman and Foreign Ministry had exceptional experience in dealing with the public during

times of national conflict. But the COVID-19 crisis found the Health Ministry's public relations effort to be lacking and its spokespersonship inadequate. Moreover, the initial lack of medical and scientific knowledge about COVID-19 caught them unprepared. The fact that the government also improvised and changed strategies frequently to cope with the crisis only complicated and confused the Israeli public.

The government's Bureau of Advertising, a service agency for governmental advertising, played a pivotal role in transmitting the Health Ministry instructions to the Israeli public. The Health Ministry worked in PR during COVID-19 to the Haredi population as they did in the general Jewish population. The second of two special audiences was aimed at the Arab population. In preparing the PR material, attention was given to Haredi language, culture, leaders, and customs. But while PR targeting the general Israeli population began with the outbreak of the disease as early as January 2020 with the outbreak in Wuhan, China, activities targeting the Haredi population only began on March 2. Consequently, for the initial period, there developed a gap in the knowledge level between the Haredi and the general Israeli populations.

The relationship between the Haredim and the Israeli state is complicated for multiple reasons. Notable is the Haredi opposition that the Jewish state is not run strictly in accordance with religious law (apart from matters of personal status such as conversion, marriage, and divorce) as well as particular questions like the national draft for Haredi young men. The way the state has responded to the Haredim over the years has created suspicions and enmity. In addition, large families and crowded dwellings complicated the public relations effort, both in terms persuading them to adhere to preventive measures like social distancing. Moreover, unlike the mainstream Israeli Jewish population, the Haredi population was not exposed to the media through which the Health Ministry conducted the main public relations campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic, notably television, which the Haredim do not possess. In the beginning the Health Ministry used fliers and film advertising with the participation of senior doctors in the medical sphere. In addition, it used telephone messages as well as chat messages transmitted through various social network platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram - despite that

most Haredim are not on social media. Unfortunately, there was a failure prior to the arrival of the coronavirus to Israel (at the end of February 2020) and afterwards to identify the channels for reaching the Haredim. The Bank of Israel in 2020 reported that the Haredim was 6.2 times more likely to get sick from COVID-19 than the broader Israeli Jewish population. At the beginning of February 2020, the Health Ministry began a public relations programme for the general Israeli Jewish population emphasising the importance of hygiene. The material was also distributed to the Haredi press and Haredi websites. Beginning in March, a film suitable for the Haredi population was produced. It had the participation of a Haredi doctor, and messages were put out on the Haredi radio station, Radio Kol Chai, and wall posters, which is the traditional way for rabbis and religious Haredi bodies to reach their followers. The public relations operation targeting the Haredi population was much more limited than the one aimed at the general Israeli Jewish population.

In March 2020 the limits on social gatherings were strengthened. The first religious event was the Purim Festival in March. On March 12, 2020, a decision was made to close schools and gatherings of more than 10 people were prohibited. On March 15, universities and large sections of the economy were also closed. Limits were also placed on the number of people who could enter stores, and shopping malls were also closed for certain periods of time. Certain Haredi towns were later declared closed zones, including the Haredi towns of Bnei Berak, Bet Shemesh, and Netivot as well as certain Haredi sections in Jerusalem. On April 2, following a high level of sickness in the Haredi city of Bnei Beraq (situated near Tel Aviv) it was declared a closed or restricted area with limits on people coming in or leaving. There were delays in preparing information sent out to the general Jewish population until it was edited, and framed, and stylised for the Haredi audience.

Towards the Passover Festival in April there was an increase in PR activity to warn visitors about social distancing. In addition, there were direct mailings, pashkevillim, loudspeaker announcements in Haredi neighbourhoods totaling 360 hours. There were also announcements in the Haredi newspapers and news magazines, five Internet websites, and two Haredi radio stations (Radio Kol Chai and Radio Kol Berama).

The campaign also made use of about 50 brief films which included calls by rabbis to social distance, and some 13 booklets, of which four were distributed each with 200,000 copies. Another means to spread the information was IVR (Interactive Voice Response) telephone messages totalling 13 million notices. The information campaign also included interviews with experts from the Health Ministry which appeared in Haredi media, PR material intended for children and women,<sup>18</sup> and films especially prepared for the Haredi population with speakers modestly dressed, few women, and if so appropriately dressed.

Towards the second half of March 2020, the Israeli authorities urgently turned to a public relations company specialising in the Haredi population to strengthen the PR effort targeting this group. In July 2020, the Bureau of Advertising recruited some advertising personnel who were closely acquainted with the Haredi population. As a result, PR operations increased in the form of direct mailing to Haredi houses, wall posters, loudspeakers announcements, telephone calls propagating the information from the Health Ministry.

By the second half of March, another agency, the Israeli Army's Home Front,<sup>19</sup> became involved. It was asked to beef up the overstretched resources of the Health Ministry. Because the IDF drew on reservists, it was suitable for the work of going from house to house in Haredi areas to distribute materials including food and other materials. Soldiers who spoke the Yiddish language used among some Haredim were called up for the task. All this was necessary because 31 percent of Haredim said they did not know either the website or the telephone number for information of the Health Ministry (and 46 percent did not know the address of the website or the telephone number for the Home Front). Only 19 percent of Haredim knew just the telephone number for information, while only 1 percent knew just the website. 49 percent knew both the website and the telephone number; and regarding the Israeli Army's Home Front - 46 percent. Fifty-three percent of Haredim knew the telephone number of the Health Ministry. 60 percent of Haredim said that

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<sup>18</sup> There is a long tradition of special women's magazines in the Haredi sector.

<sup>19</sup> The Israel Army's Home Front dealt with such work as the distribution of gas masks during the Gulf War to the Israeli domestic public.

the answers they got from their inquiries were sufficient; 33 percent were unsatisfied; 2 percent got the information they wanted from another source; and 5 percent replied that nobody answered their inquiries.

In addition, the Health Ministry turned to Haredi public figures such as rabbis on the assumption that communication by community religious leaders would be accepted among the Haredim who insisted on holding public prayer and on keeping schools open for the sake of education. Beginning in March 2020 the Health Ministry issued hundreds of press releases, brief films with rabbis and with COVID-19 patients to emphasise the need for social distancing and good hygiene. Once vaccines from Pfizer were available and began to reach Israel in December 2020 and January 2021, the public relations effort began to focus on encouraging Israelis to get vaccinated. However, the policy was encouragement rather than force. Eventually access to certain institutions, including educational venues, became limited to those who were vaccinated or could prove they were not infected by the virus.

*Budgeting:* A seeming imbalance in advertising and public relations activities continued to 2021. Between January and November 2020, a total of 217 million shekels (65.8 million USD) were spent in advertising for COVID-19 mostly to the broader Israeli Jewish population. 36 million shekels (10.9 million USD) was spent for advertising and public relations activities targeted to specific streams: 13.7 million shekels (4.2 million USD) for the Haredi sector which proved to be a considerable increase, partly following criticism of an alleged imbalance. Other streams included: the Arab sector (accounting for 21 percent of the population) - which was allocated 15.3 million shekels (4.6 million USD); the Russian sector (reflecting the large number of immigrants to Israel from Eastern Europe) - 3.6 million shekels (1.1 million USD); modern Orthodox (15 percent of the population) - 2.6 million shekels (0.8 million USD). The smallest portion was allocated to the Ethiopian immigrants (who speak Amharic) - 639,000 shekels (193,600 USD).<sup>20</sup>

Of the 5 million shekels (1.5 million USD) which had initially been allocated for the Haredi sector, 33 percent was spent on advertising

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<sup>20</sup> Report of the Knesset's Center for Research and Information.

in the digital media sector,<sup>21</sup> 28 percent in printed Haredi daily newspapers and magazines, and 24 percent on wall posters. The remainder was used for street loudspeaker campaigns; in the early days of the COVID-19 crisis, on public relations campaigns. In addition, they spent 4.7 million shekels in external consultations and beefing up for special audiences such as the Haredim audience. 82 percent of the budget went to the general Israeli Jewish audience, and 5 percent to the Haredi audience. 10 percent of the budget was used targeting the Arab audience, and 3 percent on other groups.

In the first two months of the COVID-19 crisis (up to mid-2020), of the 34,325,000 shekels (10.4 million USD) spent in advertising by the government's Bureau of Advertising, only 1,580,000 shekels (479,000 USD) was allocated to the Haredi sector, which at the time felt the brunt of COVID-19 with a large number of people hospitalised. The imbalance in budgeting against the Haredi population was the subject of an investigation by the Haredi newspaper, *Hamevaser*.<sup>22</sup> The report claimed that there was great imbalance in budgeting considering that the Haredim accounted for 20 percent of the Israeli Jewish population. Although the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the governmental unit for examining trends in the country's population, believes that the Haredim only account for 10-12 percent of the population, the imbalance in advertising budgeting remains true.

The State Comptroller's Report on PR during the COVID-19 crisis, however, has argued that it would be wrong to measure this breakdown according to the size of the population because, for example, advertising on television was the most expensive operation, but most Haredim did not watch television. Only 8 percent of Haredim possessed a television set. On the other hand, newspaper advertising (used in the Haredi case is clearer), as was using rabbis and Haredi public figures was inexpensive, and wall posters, or advertising in the digital media were also cheaper than television advertising.

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<sup>21</sup> This was despite that 42% of Haredim do not have a computer at home, and 72% have no Internet connection.

<sup>22</sup> Yaacov Lustingman, "Hitalmut Hamevaser" (June 12, 2020) (Hebrew.).

Advertising and public relations in an open democratic society does not have sole monopoly of the flow of communication reaching the public. Far more important is the free media, which drew on governmental and non-governmental sources. Specialised medical reporters were in part dependent upon sources inside the Health Ministry. Other news sources depended upon by reporters were health funds and academic medical experts. Yet, as Ido Efrati, medical reporter of the *Haaretz* daily found, the information flow to Israeli journalists from the Health Ministry was limited. According to Efrati, only a select group of people were granted access to the raw data collected by the Health Ministry, and which was not accessible to the public at large, public health officials, or researchers. The feeling inside the Health Ministry was that releasing the information might lead to various interpretations and so it was best to grant only certain people access to the information.”<sup>23</sup> In this sense, the Health Ministry information campaign had fewer opposing messages reaching the public, and therefore greater control over the message to the people.

*Effect of the Public Relations Campaign:* The final and ultimate question in any public relations operation is: What was the result? Was the audience influenced or not? The initial question is: What was the level of exposure to government communications? But the second or more important question is whether people were persuaded or not to act according to the communication. A survey conducted by the State Comptroller’s Office in December 2020 found that the medium most seen was advertisements in the Haredi media – 76 percent (by comparison to 73 percent with the general Israeli Jewish audience). The level of exposure to other media is as follows:

- Announcements made by rabbis and Haredi public figures were seen by 75 percent of Haredim (general Israeli Jewish - 12 percent);
- Explanations and articles of experts - 55 percent (versus 65 percent);
- Press releases by local authorities – 54 percent (versus 48 percent);
- Stories of COVID-19 patients – 52 percent (versus 50 percent).
- Press conferences – 35 percent (versus 74 percent).

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<sup>23</sup> Ido Efrati, “Crucial Coronavirus Info Unavailable to Israeli Public, Ministers, and Decision Makers,” *Haaretz* (April 23, 2020).

In terms of the effects of these channels, there were major differences between the effect and the exposure to the channels. For Haredim, the percentage of people who were persuaded by various media is as follows:

- Press conferences - 40 percent (35 percent exposure among Haredim);
- Stories of patients recovering from COVID-19 - 38 percent (52 percent exposure);
- Announcements from rabbis - 25 percent (75 percent exposure);
- Commentaries and articles by experts - 22 percent (55 percent exposure);
- Handouts by local authorities - 22 percent (54 percent exposure);
- Advertisements – 17 percent (76 percent exposure).

The results of the survey are of utmost significance. Apparently, advertisements - one of the major efforts which took a hefty part of the budget - was not very persuasive in the final analysis. In addition, announcements by rabbis, which were expected to have a lot of impact, were only found persuasive by a quarter of Haredim, despite having seen by 75 percent of the respondents. (Also noteworthy, by contrast, is that in examining the Arab sector in Israel, the State Comptroller's report found that 87 percent of the respondents said they were persuaded by their religious leaders). On the other hand, stories of COVID-19 patients, while listened to by 55 percent of the respondents, had an impact of 38 percent. Finally, only 22 percent of the respondents were influenced by expert assessments, which had a 55 percent exposure.

There were significant similarities and differences in comparing the data from the Haredim to the general Israeli Jewish audience. According to the survey, commentaries by medical experts were persuasive for 55 percent of the general Israeli Jewish audience in contrast to only 22 percent of Haredim. As for press conferences broadcast on television, only 15 percent of the general Israeli Jewish population found them to be persuasive, in contrast to 40 percent of Haredim. This is surprising because Haredim, in contrast to the general Israeli population, are not exposed to television which broadcast the press conferences. The only similarities shared by these two groups are seen in the level of influence from stories by recovering patients: 38 percent for Haredim and 40 percent for the wider Israeli Jewish audience);

and most surprisingly, rabbis' statements: 25 percent for both groups (State Comptrollers Report 2021).<sup>24</sup>

The need to avoid social distancing was particularly difficult to convey to Haredim. So, the key question of whether Haredim listened to the Health authorities or to the rabbis is not conclusive. As seen from the State Comptroller's Report, while 75 percent of Haredim listened to the announcements by rabbis, only 25 percent of them were persuaded by what they heard. One of the reasons why the PR effort failed to have an impact among the Haredim was that calls for social distancing failed to relate to the importance of religious education in the *yeshiva*; almost all the Haredim did not possess necessary technological equipment for Zoom communications, nor does the superior importance given to communal prayer.

## Conclusion

As a country encouraging immigration to the Jewish homeland, the need for Israeli officialdom to address differently in tone specific religious audiences is not new. This is in addition to some 20 percent of its population comprising Arabs. COVID-19 was one of the first emergencies in Israel's seventy year long history when a government information campaign had to be conveyed in different terms, using different cultural symbols, and different channels to an audience. Problems of targeting messages to the audience go back at least to 1968 with the arrival of television in Israel – upon which Haredi rabbis imposed a ban. But COVID-19 was the first event since the development of the Internet and social media. Yet the government, including its Bureau of Advertising, failed to draw upon a collective memory in reaching out to the Haredi population. Moreover, the key question of the influence of Haredi rabbis over their community – and that in practice, their followers were not so persuaded as the first impressions might have led to believe – underlines the need for the Bureau of Advertising to evaluate critically the best means through which to reach religious audiences and the appropriate resources to deploy.

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<sup>24</sup> The State Comptroller's 'Office, *Hasbara* (Public Relations) during the COVID-19 crisis. The data in this section draws from the Report.

The Israeli case study is relevant to studying how other societies with different religious groups function at times of emergency. First, in the United States, many Haredim in New York died from COVID-19 in similar circumstances to those in Israel. But it is also instructive for studying in other societies where information technology is either not available or prohibited, and how key medical information fails to reach certain groups. One by-product though in the Israeli Haredi case was that some of their members, notably from the Modern Haredim sub-stream, became linked up to the Internet in order to gather health related information. Given the longitude of COVID-19, their exposure to the Internet technology may become permanent in the long term.

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## ***SIMBAHAY: Flipping Church Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic Uncertainty and Implications to Spirituality***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Guided by the relational prayer theory (Baesler, 2002), this paper analyzed how Catholics flipped their homes as church to be saved from COVID-19 uncertainties by attending online masses at the Manila Cathedral (MC). Through Facebook Analytics, the study determined the number of attendees to online masses from March 2020 to March 2021. Implications of mass attendance to spirituality were validated by a survey of 104 MC online mass subscribers through snowball sampling. As triangulate measure, two key informants were interviewed. More than 200,000 tuned in to online masses monthly with an average of 69,863 with the highest frequencies on Sundays. Survey results revealed that one out of three respondents attended the 8:00 AM Sunday mass without fail and who prayed together as a family using smart television. They prayed not to get sick and were thankful for answered prayers and blessings received despite the crisis. As a form of mission and indulgence, they help others and donate to the church or pray fervently to ask for forgiveness. Given the choice, an overwhelming majority wants to physically attend the mass to confess and receive the Holy Communion. It can be surmised that flipping church services from offline to online became a regular Sunday ritual which implies that spirituality can occur anytime, anywhere, especially during a pandemic.*

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*SIMBAHAY*, a fusion of the words *Simbahan* (church) and *Bahay* (home) in Filipino as a mnemonic explains the behavior of flipping the church through its purpose of Salvation, Indulgence, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habitual, Altruistic, and Yes, we can!

**Keywords:** *flip service, relational prayer theory, online Mass, prayers, communication*

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about many challenges as a global health crisis (WHO, 2020) that pervaded countries from almost every continent. It has severely altered the normal way of life with millions of people infected, dead, and continuously suffering from the deadly virus. Many people lost their jobs, businesses went bankrupt, children's schooling interrupted, and countless people died (The Innovations for Poverty Action, 2020).

Places of worship regardless of creed especially the Catholic Church were not spared. Due to strict community quarantines implemented by the government, the Church had to close and cease the physical celebration of religious activities to help prevent the spread of the virus. The demand to cater to the public's physical health during this time of crisis and attend to their mental and spiritual needs heightened (Castillo et. al., 2020).

The outpour of emotions in thirst for physical exercises of faith was distressingly accepted by the faithful as quarantine measures prevented these. Since the pandemic halted the physical celebration of these activities, the Church needed to take a step forward in bringing itself to the people instead of the people going to it. Coincidentally, the community quarantine began in the midst of the Lenten season in 2020 – a period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in the Church calendar to commemorate the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Churches across dioceses of the Philippines and different congregations initiated the online celebration of the Holy Mass, prayer

brigades, simultaneous praying of the rosary, online retreats and recollections, and other events like Eucharistic processions (Castillo, et. al., 2020). Online counseling and pastoral guidance were also provided for the needs of the people. Although there were some cases in which there was no online substitute, such as the sacrament of confession, marriage, funeral masses, and the actual reception of Holy Communion, the Church ensured the safety of the lay faithful without compromising the sanctity of the celebration. Social media ministries were created to flip service from offline to online.

Other than the flipping of celebrations to online, the Church also extended its hand to the nation. Churches may be closed for public Masses, but each family's home with candles lit on the altar while tuned in to Holy Mass online became an individual church itself; for "where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them" says the Lord (Matthew 18:20). Gifts may not have been offered by the people to the altar, but countless aids were convened and were offered to help the poor communities all over the country. People may not have been able to hold hands singing the Lord's Prayer, but countless people shared their time and effort to lend a helping hand to support frontliners, victims of COVID-19, and the many Filipinos wailing in the peripheries of society.

Castillo, et. al. (2020) asserted that "religious and spiritual interventions play a crucial role in public health crisis." They stressed that the faith of the people guided them in finding meaning and acceptance during this pandemic while engaging in the deepest questions about life. These interventions of faith in some way helped provide counsel, refuge, and hope for the faithful who needed these interventions through prayers.

As well, Pillay & Barnes (2020) accounted that the COVID-19 pandemic and endless lockdowns have changed society as a whole including the Catholic Church. It forced the Church to reimagine itself on how to continuously thrive despite the challenges brought about by the virus. The lockdowns have flipped church services and celebrations to go virtual, particularly the sacraments (i.e., Holy Mass).

Through the Relational Prayer Theory, Baesler (2002) believes

that there are inputs or factors that influence the different types of prayer. He stated that these prayers predict various outcomes appealing to the praying individual, in this case, the pandemic. In making sense of these changes in spiritual practices during the pandemic, this experience has been labeled through the mnemonic, *SIMBAHAY* which stands for Salvation, Indulgences, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habitual, Altruistic, and Yes, We Can. *Simbahay* is a fusion of the words *Simbahan* (church) and *Bahay* (home) in Filipino. This is both a literal and figurative interpretation that during the pandemic, each Christian home was flipped to a church.

## Objectives

Thus, the study aimed to find out the attendance of the Catholic faithful to online daily Holy Mass celebrations in the Manila Cathedral through Facebook analytics. It also determined the trends of engagement that led to the concept of *SIMBAHAY*. The paper also sought to explain *SIMBAHAY* as flip service.

## Literature Review

### The Manila Cathedral Facebook Page

The Manila Cathedral, formally known as the Minor Basilica and Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, is considered the mother of all churches in the Philippines. It is located in Intramuros, the walled city of Manila. It was initially built as a small parish church made of nipa and bamboo by Juan de Vivero, a secular priest in 1571. The Manila Cathedral is currently the seat of Jose F. Cardinal Advincula, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Archbishop of Manila. The cathedral's shrine rector is Rev. Fr. Reginald R. Malicdem, together with him is his assistant, Rev. Fr. Khali Pietre M. Llamado.

The Church made its presence in social media on Instagram (@Manila Cathedral), Twitter (@CathedralManila), YouTube (Manila Cathedral), and Facebook (facebook.com/themanilacathedral). As of September 3, 2021, its Facebook Page had 404,836 likes and 807,401

followers. Services and activities include broadcasts of weekday and Sunday Masses, recitation of the Holy Rosary, music videos of hymns sung by priests of Manila, church traditions like the senakulo and Stations of the Cross, and online reflections and homilies of Cardinal Advincula, Cardinal Tagle, Bishop Pabillo, Fr. Malicdem, Fr. Llamado and other clergy members of the Archdiocese of Manila. Their FB Page also streams events from the Vatican such as General Audiences, and Masses with the pope. The page also serves as an online shop where sacramentals like rosaries and images of the Immaculate Conception, coloring books, devotionals, and calendars among others are sold.

### **Catholic Church in COVID-19**

One of the most evident initiatives of the Catholic Church is the non-stop brigade of prayers. A prayer that resonated almost every day in each broadcast of the Holy Mass was the *Oratio Imperata* for protection against the COVID-19 pandemic. This obligatory prayer was crafted and released by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in January 2020. The prayer consists of intentions for those who have contracted the virus, the health workers, the vaccine developers, those who have died because of the virus, and pleading to the Lord to stop its continuous spread. The prayer ends with an ancient prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century known as the "*Sub Tuum Praesidium*" or *We Fly thy Protection* (From the Roman Breviary, #333). Angels and Saints are invoked to intercede for the people, including the two Filipino saints, Sts. Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod.

The Church has been made more accessible and easier for the people to partake in its celebrations. For example, the government of South Africa realized the role and importance of the Church and their ability to help the people by providing services and assistance. Niemandt (2019) affirmed this to wit:

... Faithful presence means, taking your bodies, your location, and your community very seriously, as seriously as God in Christ took them: 'Faithful presence invites you to act on the belief that God is giving you what you need to be formed as disciples within your location'. Faithful presence implies a

specific kind of presence in all the places that Christians find themselves – and in such a way that it affirms the integrity of Christian faith...

The experience with COVID-19 showed a clearer understanding that the mission is not solely focused on being present in church but the church present to other people. Apart from the usual Sunday Mass obligation, this time has allowed to put into practice what has been learned and received from the Church. The Church became a beacon of solidarity and networks of compassion, empathy, healing, and emotional support (Pillay & Barnes, 2020).

### **Spiritual Wellness**

During the pandemic, individuals have been trying to maintain their own wellness specifically spiritual wellness. Wellness is defined as the optimal state of health of individuals and groups to realize their fullest potential – physically, psychologically, socially, economically, and spiritually; and the fulfillment of one’s role expectations in the family, community and society (Laude, 2021). Wellness is also defined in the dimensions of mind, body, and spirit. Spiritual wellness, together with the other dimensions are necessary to achieve total wellness. According to Elkins (1999), spirituality is a coping skill; a “switch off button” to negative thinking, even in depression and obsessive disorders.

The etymology of the word “spirit” comes from the Latin word “*Spiritus*” which means breath or life. Deborah Cornah presents spirituality as achieving a sense of purpose, connectedness to self, others, nature and God (or a divine being), a search for harmony/hope/wholeness or finding what completes a person. Spirituality also emanates a sense of transcendence or the sense that there is more to life than what is seen.

### **The Catholic Church, Social Media, and Communication**

The Church has expressed its desire in the use of media and social communication in evangelization. According to Foley (2002) of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, the Church has taken a fundamentally

positive approach to the media. Even in the Second Vatican Council, it was described as a “marvelous technical invention” that does much to meet human needs. Social communications is considered to contribute greatly to the “enrichment of men’s minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God” (Foley, 2002).

The Church has a two-fold aim with regard to media. One aspect is encouraging the use of the media for the sake of human development, justice, and peace. Given this valuable role of social communications with the building of society, the Church seeks “honest and respectful dialogue with those responsible for the communications media” primarily to its shaping of media policy. Pope Paul VI encouraged the use of media saying that the Church “would feel guilty before the Lord” if it failed to use media in evangelization. In Foley’s reflection, he says that in using all other media of social communications, we recall that Christ is “the perfect communicator,” the norm and model of the Church’s approach to communication, as well as the content that the Church is obliged to communicate.

### **Social Media during Crisis Situations**

Social media is a term used to define the interaction between different groups and individuals that happens in a virtual community. It is also said that social media helped individuals, particularly the younger generation to discover ideas and manage risks in different situations (Akram and Kumar, 2017). Engaging with social media is varied. Sarmiento (2019) conducted a study to assess the effects of social media to the health and psychological well-being of a person. The paper found how social media have become an important platform for the LGUs to interact with its community members. However, her study also found the weak experience and knowledge of Local Government Units (LGUs) in implementing communication campaigns in social media.

In another study, Congjuico (2014) proved that social media can bring support for LGUs during disasters and risks. Hence, both LGU and its constituents can benefit from it. This is then supported by Misra and Jana (2017) who explained how strong the effects of social networks in influencing the community to different events including disaster and other crisis events.

Social media have become not just an accessory to human life but as

a very significant tool in everyday situation. Chan (n.d) in an article entitled, “The Role of Social Media in Crisis Preparedness, Response, and Recovery” identified four social media functions such as information dissemination, disaster planning and training, collaborative problem solving and decision making, and information gathering. These functions can aid social media tools in improving crisis communication used by different organizations and government institutions. He recommended that social media should be used for crisis management. It must provide and encourage citizens and community members to perform their roles in preparing and managing crisis.

Therefore, it is established in an article published by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (2020) entitled, “Addressing Communication Challenges during an Infectious Disease Emergency Response: State Experiences from the H1N1 Pandemic” that the use of social media since it is an inexpensive communication tool, helped the local government in overcoming problems including security and IT barriers. However, they suggested that a social media policy must be done to avoid confusion or misinformation during the pandemic.

Similarly, the migration of the church to online was caused by a crisis. Thus, in these trying times, the role of the church is equally important which was delivered online. As social media users, it was not difficult for worshippers to navigate FB to do their church obligations.

## **Theoretical Framework**

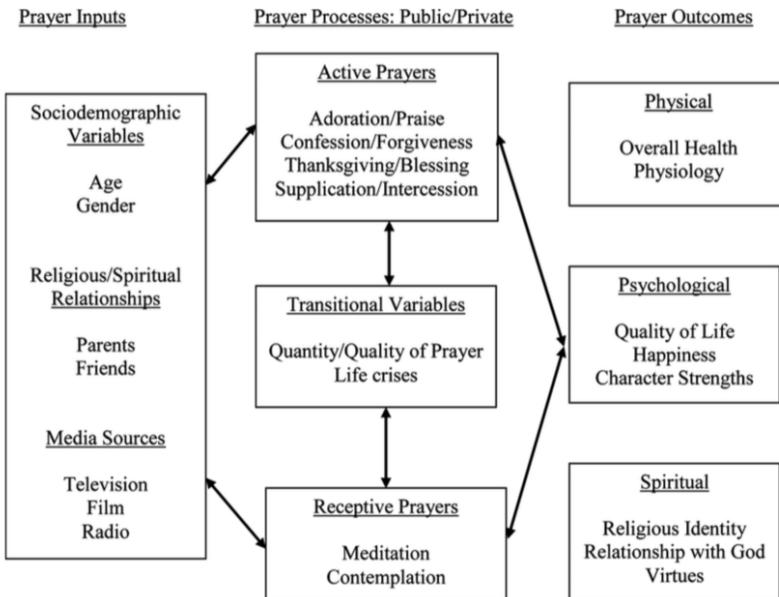
### **Relational Prayer Theory**

The Relational Prayer Theory (2002) posited by E. James Baesler accounts for the different inputs or factors that influence the different types of prayer. Baesler (2002) stated that these prayers predict various outcomes appealing to the praying individual. Different prayer inputs such as sociodemographic variables, religious or spiritual relationships, and media sources served as contributing factors that an individual considers in what kind of prayer to invoke. Active prayers include the basic types of prayers such as adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Receptive or passive prayers consist of meditation and contemplation. Just (2020) said

that active prayers are prayers where an individual engages in practice; he/she is much more specific in certain intentions or requests to achieve certain outcomes. These can also be defined as verbal prayers. Receptive prayers focused more on the natural flow of grace from prayers which are portrayed in meditation and contemplation. These are more of non-verbal prayers that can be exhibited through reading the sacred scripture, appreciating God’s creation in nature or expressions through art and literature, or simply mere silence and solitude.

Active and receptive prayer processes were contextualized either done privately or publicly affected by the quantity and quality of prayers and factors such as life crises. The outcomes of prayers include physical healing, psychological help, and spiritual wellness (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Relational Prayer Theory (Baesler, 2002).



## Conceptual Framework

Guided by the Relational Prayer Theory (Baesler, 2002), the study assumed that prayer inputs such as media sources like television, radio, and social media ministry served as channels of communication for Catholics to continue the practice of hearing Mass albeit electronically. Flipping service online allowed Catholics to attend the Holy Mass regularly.

This experience can be labeled through the mnemonic, **SIMBAHAY** which stands for **Salvation, Indulgences, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habitual, Altruistic, and Yes We Can**. *Simbahay* is a fusion of the words *Simbahan* (church) and *Bahay* (home). This is both a literal and figurative interpretation that during the pandemic, each Christian home was flipped to a church. These SIMBAHAY concepts are assumed to lead to physical, psychological, and spiritual outcomes.

Salvation refers to the desire of the worshipper to be spared from contracting the coronavirus. This was measured in terms of the number of live views that the online Mass garnered. Hypothetically, it can be surmised that the higher the number of live views, the more Catholics pray to be saved from the dreadful virus. The belief that God can save them from contracting the virus is high because He is the protector of all mankind.

Indulgences point to the desire of the faithful to be forgiven from their sins through confession. This was measured by asking the respondents about what they do because confessions cannot be done virtually.

Mission encapsulates that holding masses online can extend the church services to engage with the faithful despite the absence of physical communion and the rationale to continuously provide spiritual nourishment. This was measured in terms of the different church services offered those respondents attended.

Blessings are those that Catholics must be thankful for from sheer waking up in the morning and receiving help from others and keeping their jobs even if it meant working from home. Attendance in online mass is a blessing because of the propensity to share what one has and what can be received from God. This was measured by asking respondents what they

pray for and how were these prayers answered.

**Affordances** refer to what online Mass has made possible to worshippers. The focus on listening to the readings and the sermon were made more meaningful because there were minimal distractions during the Holy Mass. This was measured by asking respondents to describe how they hear mass online and what are the benefits and disadvantages of online church services.

**Habit** points to the transformation of flipping the home to become the church regularly with most doing it on Sundays, holy day of obligation, or special church events that call for the participation of the Catholics. This was measured by asking the respondents about the frequency of attending Sunday Masses.

**Altruism** alludes to the sacrifices that Catholics make to help others. Donating to the Church as gratitude for providing flip service will not only feed the mind but the inner self that doing good to others is what God wants His followers to do and emulate His goodness. This was measured by asking respondents what they did during the pandemic.

**Yes, we can!** Establishes that as worshippers online there is nothing impossible to a persistent heart. The ability to shift from offline to online Masses and transforming their homes is an indicator that the faithful is ready to assume whatever mode of Mass celebration. This was measured by asking respondents how they attend online Masses at home.

Thus, it is assumed that *SIMBAHAY* when practiced can lead to outcomes such as physical, psychological, and spiritual that could strengthen the Catholics' faith to continuously pray regardless of mode and with the guidance of the priest, the prayerful can be cleansed from sins for eternal salvation.

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

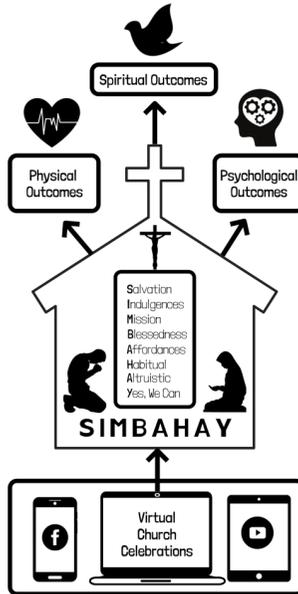


Figure 2. *SIMBAHAY* Model of Flip Church Service

## Methods and Materials

This study employs the secondary data analysis research design. According to Cnossen (1997) as cited by McCaston (2005), this refers to the analysis of data or information gathered by others such as researchers and institutions. However, in this study, the second-hand data analysis was based on Facebook analytics of the Manila Cathedral as subject of the study. Data on online Mass attendance was based on the actual number of live views for daily Masses and compared those on the average monthly attendance from March 2020 to March 2021.

Data was tracked, encoded, analyzed and interpreted as determinants of *SIMBAHAY*, which can be categorized into physical, psychological, and spiritual outcomes. Graphs were created to explain the results and interpreted. The trend in attendance of worshippers served as grounding in interpreting the practice of flip service in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was validated by tracking the live streaming of a Sunday Holy Mass and determining which part of the Mass was most engaging measured by the highest number of attendees.

As triangulate measure, a one-shot survey among respondents who were attending online masses at the Manila Cathedral were surveyed through snowball sampling. Two key informants who have also attended masses at MC were interviewed to validate secondary data gathered.

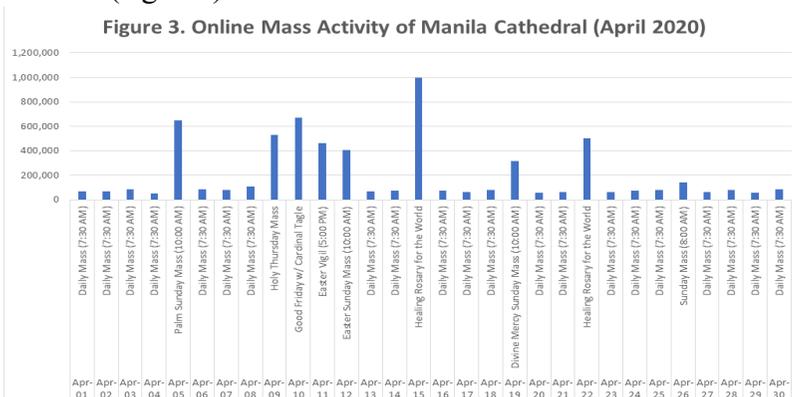
## Results

### Attendance in Online Holy Mass Celebrations

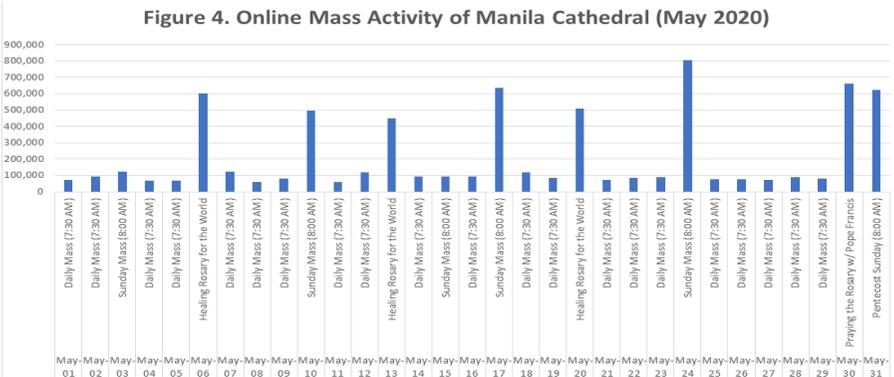
Online attendance to the 7:30 AM and Sunday 8:00 AM Masses was tracked daily and on a monthly basis (other Masses held daily were not included). After which, average daily views were computed to determine attendance for the period observed.

For the month of March 2020, tracking started on March 14, 2020, the first online Mass on MC. From March 14 to 31, the total live views was 1,117,800 in 16 days with a daily average of 69, 863 having the highest peaks on Sundays. The lowest number of views was on March 17 with 21,000 and the highest on March 29 with 125,000 views. Other than Sundays, feast days also were highly accessed like the Solemnity of the Annunciation of Mary on March 25 with 111,000 live views (Figure 2). This implies that special events and Sundays usually were highly attended compared to daily masses in the morning.

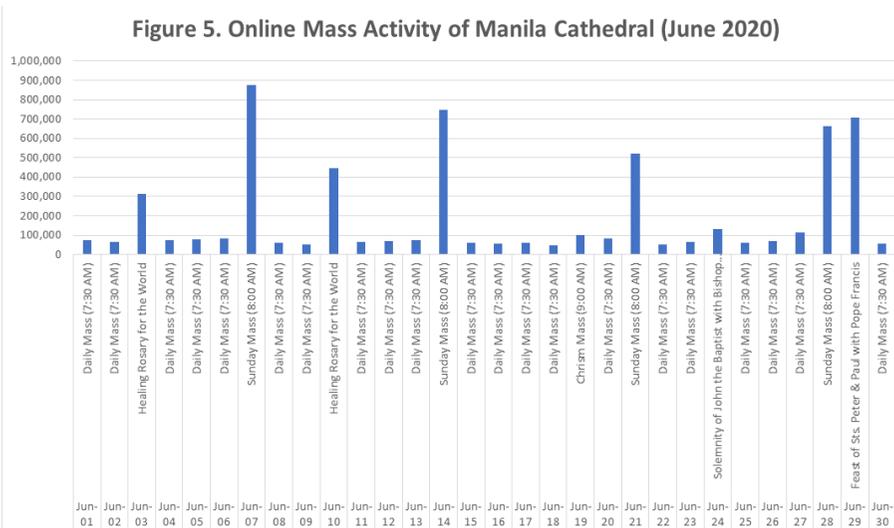
In April 2020, which observed the Lenten season, the highest number of live views was on April 15, the praying of the Healing Rosary for the world with 1M. A total of 6,223,600 live views was registered with a daily average of 207,453.3333 (Figure 3).



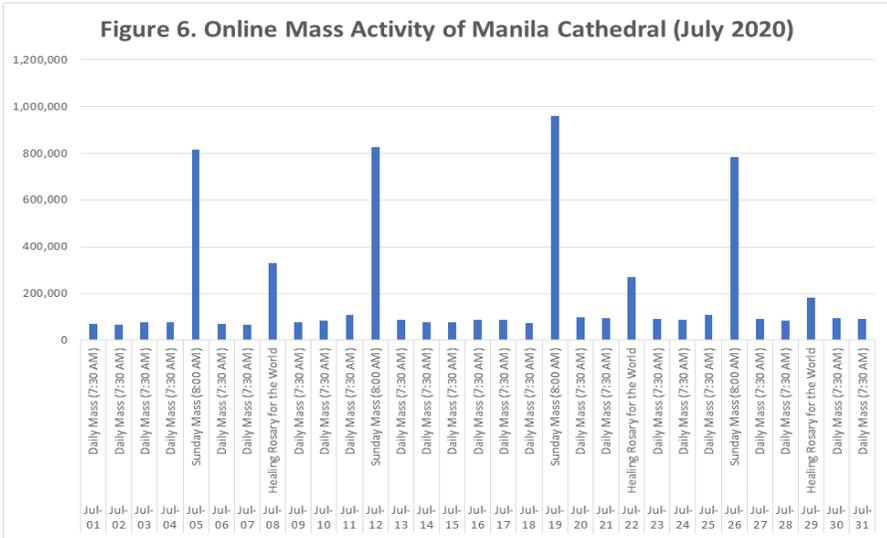
In May 2020, there was a total of 6,760,200 live views with a daily average of 218,070.9677. The highest views include Palm Sunday, the Holy Week celebration of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil, as well as the Easter Sunday Mass. The highest number of views for this month was the Healing Rosary for the world on April 15. The lowest attendance was on May 8 with 59,800 and the highest with 807,200 on May 24, a Sunday (Figure 4).



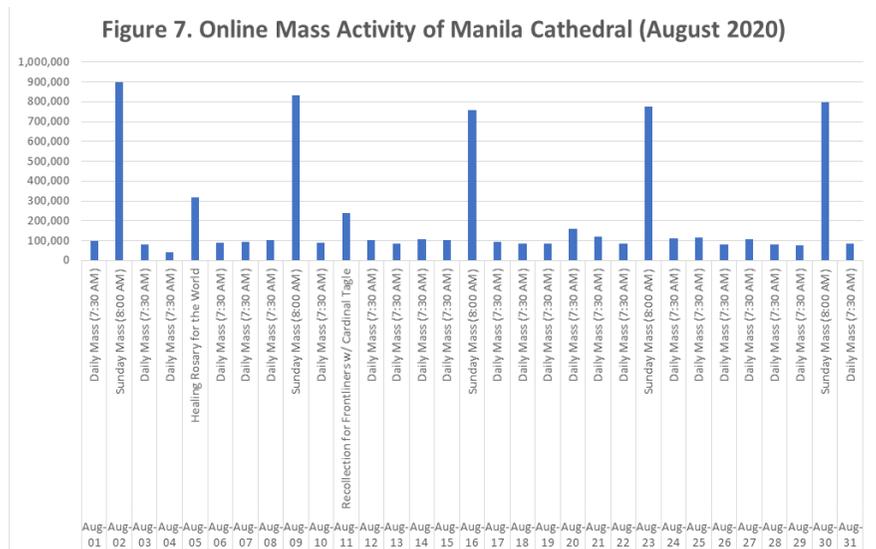
In June 2020, a total of 5,922,900 live views were registered. Of these, the average daily live views was 197,430. While the June trend seemed to decline, the highest number of live views was on June 7 with 873,700 and the lowest at 49,100 (Figure 5).



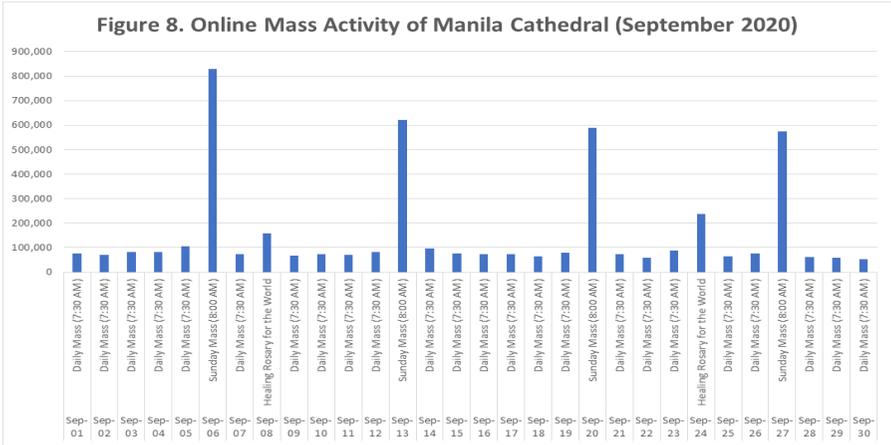
In July 2020, the total number of live views was 6,196,100 with an average daily view of 199,874.1935. The highest live views were on July 19 at 959,500. The lowest was 66,400. Apparently, the trend appears increasing in terms of daily views (Figure 6).



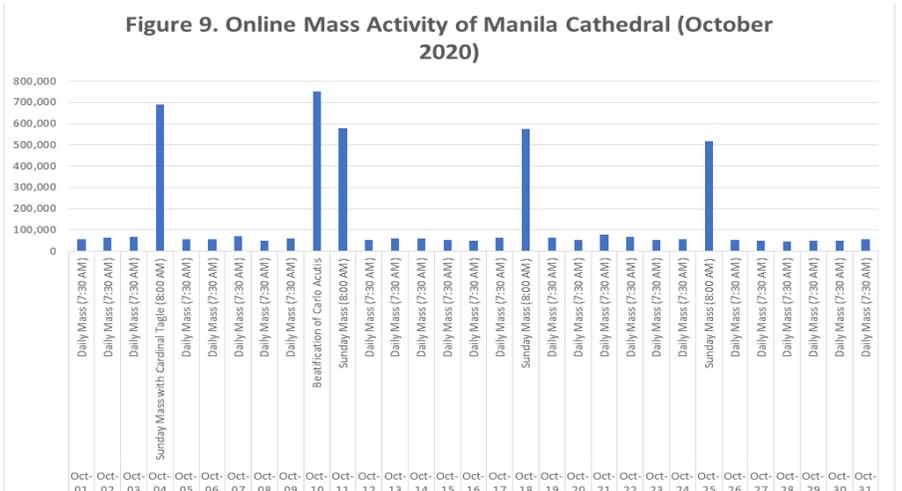
In August 2020, MC’s online 7:30 AM and 8.30 Sunday Masses had almost 7M (6,886,900) live views with a daily average of 222,158.0645. The highest attended ceremony was on August 2, a Sunday with 898,300 live views (Figure 7).



In September 2020, a total of 4,796,800 attended the online masses observed with a daily average of 154,735.4839, quite a dive from the previous months of at least 2M. The highest number of live views on September 6 was 829,300 and the lowest at 54,100 (Figure 8).

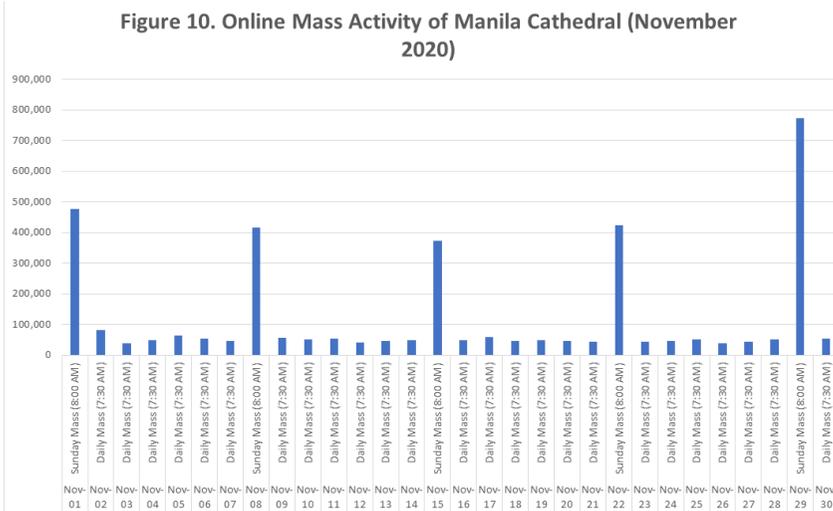


In October 2020, a total of 4,590,800 viewed the online Masses being tracked with a daily average of 148,090.3226. The highest views were on October 10 with 750,100 during the Beatification of Carlo Acutis. The lowest registered views was on October 8 with 47,400 (Figure 9.).

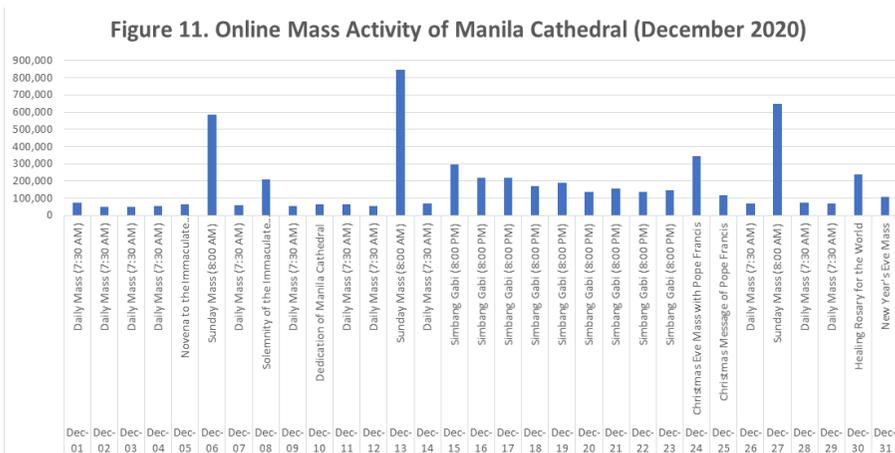


In November 2020, the total number of live views dropped to 3,717,700 with a daily average of 123,923.3333. The highest number of

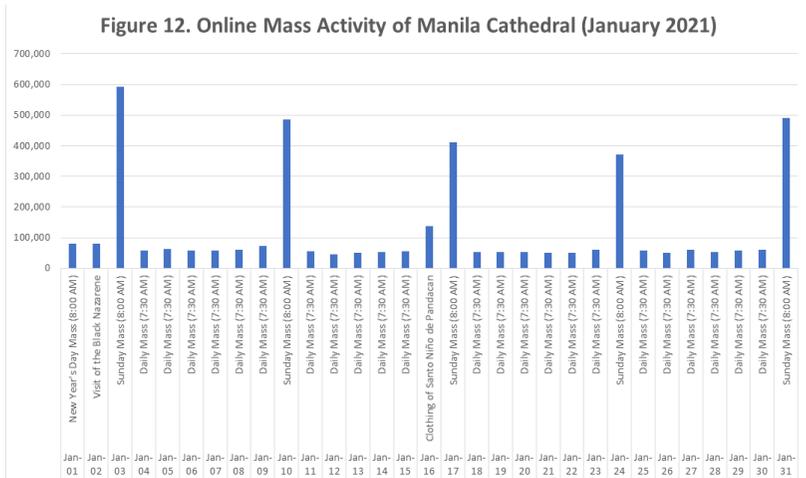
live views was on November 29 with 772,600 while the lowest daily live views was 42,400 (Figure 10). This figure is 3M less compared to the previous months.



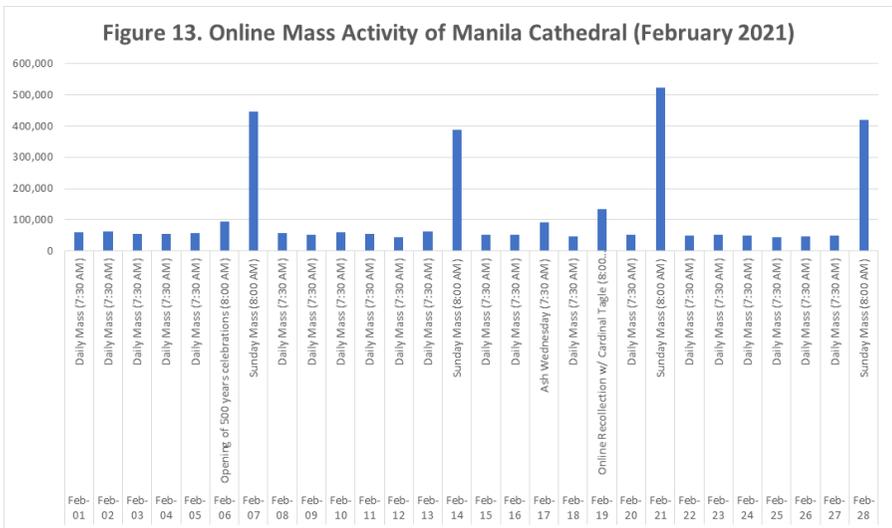
In December 2020, the tracking included the special events, the Simbang Gabi and Christmas and New Year’s Eve. The total number of live views increased to 5,639,600 with a daily average of 181,922.5806. The highest views were made on December 13 with 845,400 and the lowest on December 2 at 49,000. The figures increased highly due to the Simbang Gabi celebrations. Surprisingly, Christmas Eve had 342,800 live views while New Year’s Eve had only 107,100. It could be that preparations for the events were prioritized but the consistent attendance to the daily Simbang Gabi as tradition may have compensated for it (Figure 11).



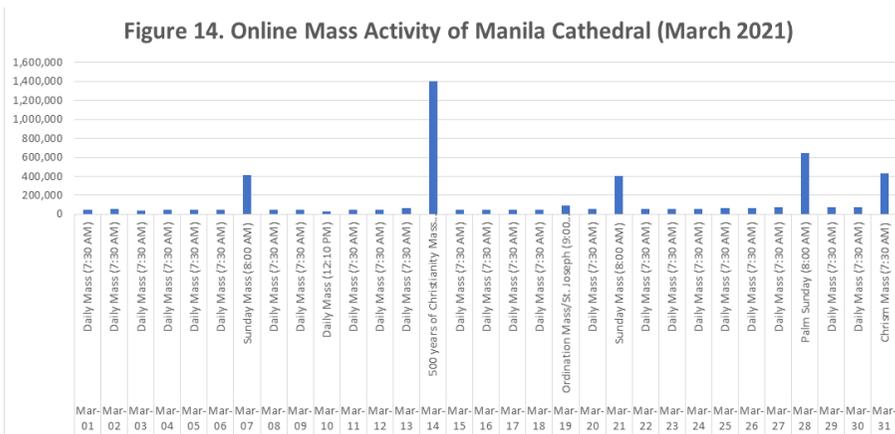
The following year, 2021, the January live views registered at 3,936,700 which was again a deep dive from the figures in December 2020. The daily average was 126,990.3226. The highest number of live views was on January 3, a Sunday at 593,800 while the lowest was on January 26 with 49,500 (Figure 12).



In February 2021, MC had a total of 3,207,200 with a daily average of 114,542.8571. The day with the highest number of live views was on February 21 with 523,500 while the lowest was on February 25 with 43,700 (Figure 13). The last month of tracking the data was made in March 2021.



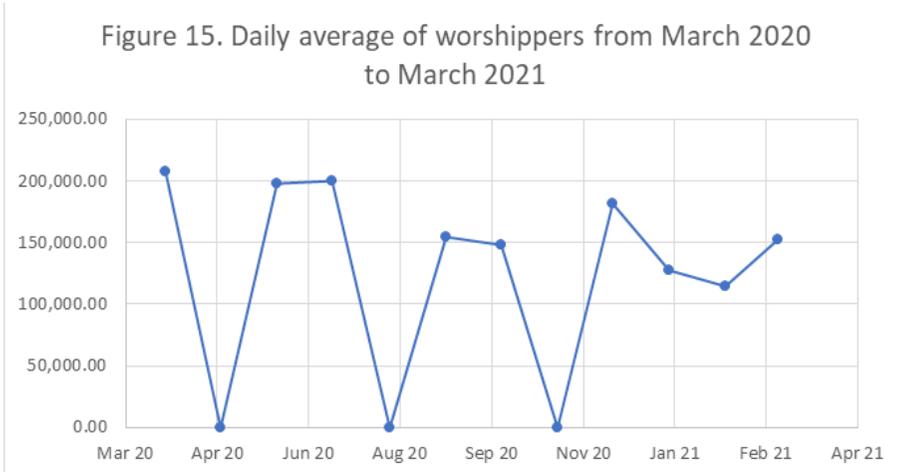
For this month, the total number of live views was 4,724,700. The highest number of Mass viewed was on March 14, one year after the first Holy Mass went online with 1,400,000 to coincide with the celebration of the 500 years of Christianity Mass (with Pope Francis). It had a daily average number of live views at 152,409.6774. The lowest number of live views was 42,400. While the trend appeared to be declining, the numbers were still high (Figure 14). The highest ever was made on March 14 as a manifestation of being a Catholic. It can be surmised that the number of people attending the daily Masses has been consistently high albeit intermittently.



### Trends of Engagement Leading to the Concept of *SIMBAHAY*

Engagement in FB can also refer to the number of those actually seeing or attending the Masses online. Looking at the monthly averages from March 2020 to March 2021, a pattern seemed to surface a fluctuating trend in accessing the online Masses of the Manila Cathedral held in the mornings (Figure 15). Note that these figures only captured one daily Mass schedule. It could be that the rest of the worshippers have attended other Holy Masses scheduled within the day.

These trends in engagement seem to allude to how worshippers have allocated their time for worship given the predicament that they are in. The huge number of attendees from 69,863 to more than 200,000 per day implies that flipping the home as church has gone a long way.



### Profile of Respondents

Of the 104 respondents, age ranged from 16 to over 70 with a mode between 21 to 25. Almost 70 percent (72 or 69.20%) attended college with almost 29 percent (30 or 28.8%) having an advanced degree (Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Age Range	n	%
16-20	8	0.96
21-25	14	13.4
26-30	13	12.5
31-35	11	10.57
36-40	5	4.80
41-45	10	9.61
46-50	10	9.61
51-55	9	8.65
56-60	6	5.76
61-65	8	7.69
66-70	9	8.65
71-75	1	0.96
Education		
Elementary	0	0
Junior High School	0	0
Senior High School	1	1.00

College	72	69.20
Graduate School	30	28.80
Not Applicable	1	1.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Attendance to Church Activities

Respondents were asked about the schedule of the Sunday Mass did they attend. Almost 32 percent (33 or 31.7%) attended the 8:00 AM Mass followed by the 10:00 AM with 32 (30.8%). Respondents also attended other online celebrations like online rosary, Simbang Gabi, Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feasts of the Saints, etc. in adherence to the mission of the Church. In terms of frequency of attendance to the online Mass, more than the majority (60 or 57.7%) attended Sunday Mass without fail (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by attendance to Sunday Mass and other celebrations

<b>Time</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
8:00 AM	33	31.7
10:00 AM	32	30.8
12:00 PM	4	3.8
6:00 PM	20	19.2
Others	15	14.5
<b>Other celebrations</b>		
Online Rosary	46	44.2
Simbang Gabi		
Masses	55	52.9
Feasts of the Virgin		
Mary	37	35.6
Feasts of the Saints	17	16.3
<i>Urbi et Orbi</i> Blessing	9	8.7
Papal events	18	17.3
Others	10	10.0
None	4	4.0

**Frequency of attendance**

Every Sunday without fail	60	57.7
Every other Sunday	15	14.4
Once a month	10	9.6
Others	19	18.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>

**Medium Used in Accessing the Online Mass**

Less than half (50 or 48.1%) used television (smart TV) to hear Mass while a little over 40 percent (43 or 41.3%) had mobile/cellular phones. Almost all (101 or 97.10%) have their own internet connection or WIFI at home (Table 3).

Table 3. Medium used in accessing online Mass

<b>Medium</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Television (Smart)	50	48.1
Mobile/Smart phone	43	41.3
Laptop/Computer	42	40.4
Tablet	15	14.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Connectivity*</b>		
Own internet connection (WiFi)	101	97.1
Own internet connection (LAN)	6	5.8
Cellular data	11	10.6
Internet connection from others	1	1

\*multiple responses

**Manner of Attendance**

Respondents were also asked to describe how did they attend the online Mass. Almost two-thirds (69 or 66.3%) heard Mass together as one family. They were also asked to depict what is the situation at home while hearing Mass. Almost half (51 or 49%) said there were little distractions like dogs barking, asking for alms, etc. but as much as possible avoid it unlike in

the church which was more solemn. Some (39 or 37.5%) lit candles during the Mass, seated in front of the altar (26 or 25%), put a cross on a clean table (24 or 23.1%). Majority (57 or 54.8%) had gadgets placed on the table. A big majority (61 or 58.7%) tuned in to the Masses on time. The same percentage (38 or 36.5%) disconnected during the recessional or after showing the donation account numbers. When asked if they donated to MC, 74 or 71.2% said no (Table 4).

**Table 4: Description of manner of attending the online mass**

<b>Attendance type</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Together as one family	69	66.3
Alone	28	26.9
Together as a community	1	1
Others	6	5.8
<b>Situation at home</b>		
With some distractions	51	49
See to it that there will be no distractions	31	29.8
Solemn just like in the church	22	21.2
<b>Preparing the home</b>		
Gadget on the table	57	54.8
Lit some candles	39	37.5
Seated in front of the altar	26	25
Cross on a clean table	24	23.1
Have some flowers at the altar	9	8.7
<b>Preparing the self</b>		
Be presentable	42	40.4
As is (the moment you wake up)	28	26.9
Take a bath before attending mass	20	19.2
Wear clean clothes	14	13.4
<b>Time tuned in</b>		
On time	61	58.7
		24
15 minutes before the scheduled time	25	
FB Notification	8	7.7
Gospel Reading/sermon	0	0
Others	10	9.6

**Moment disconnected**

During the recessional	38	36.5
After showing the donation accounts	38	36.5
After Communion	7	6.7
Others	21	20.3

**Donated to MC**

Yes	30	28.8
No	74	71.2

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>
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**Kinds of Prayer**

Respondents also shared what they prayed for. Almost 30 percent (30 or 28.8%) prayed that they will not get sick while more than 15 percent (17 or 16.3%) said not to get infected with COVID-19. They were also asked what prayers they thought were granted and why. They said that their prayers were answered because they were safe, well, physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy.

Table 5: Distribution of prayer intentions

<b>Kinds of prayer</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Not to get sick	30	28.8
Not to get infected with COVID-19	17	16.3
For our family members who are health workers	11	10.6
For scientists and researchers to discover vaccine	3	2.9
For our health workers' safety	3	2.9
Have enough stock of food and amenities at home	2	1.9
Others (personal)	38	36.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>

**Disadvantages and Indulgences**

While they said it was convenient to hear Mass at home there were challenges like dropping internet connection due to poor signals, but

the greatest constraint was not being able to confess and receive the Holy Communion. This is why when asked what indulgences do they make, they said that they practiced fast and abstinence, and donated to Caritas Manila, almsgiving, asked for forgiveness to God, and gave financial help, etc. They also said that they helped others during the pandemic. They gave food to drivers, frontliners, prayed for them, and donated, etc. They shared their blessings with others.

Finally, they were asked what they would do in case regular attendance to church will be allowed and without the pandemic, an overwhelming majority (84 or 81.6%) said they will attend mass physically.

## Discussion

The FB analytics provided an anchor to explain the behaviors of Catholics during the pandemic. The first online Mass during the pandemic on March 14, 2020, displayed that people prayed more for **Salvation**. Every practicing Catholic gave an outpour of prayers and intentions to spare themselves and the whole world from the devastating coronavirus. This was also what the survey respondents prayed for.

People offered **Indulgences** for the benefit of others during this period of trial. In Catholic terms, to be indulged is to be remitted from the entire temporal punishment for sin. The term plenary indulgence is obtained to be free from all attachments of sin in one's soul. However, Pope John Paul II exclaimed in a general audience in 1999, indulgences are not quick tickets to heaven. "It is only an aid for the real conversion that leads to happiness." Respondents also resorted to indulgence to repent for their sins in the absence of the Sacrament of Confession.

On March 27, 2020, Pope Francis delivered a special *Urbi et Orbi* blessing to Rome and the whole world to pray to end the COVID-19 pandemic. This blessing is usually a colorful event and is attended by thousands of pilgrims in the Vatican and is reserved only for Christmas Day and Easter. It was extraordinarily bestowed unto the whole globe who were confined in the safety of their own homes. He said that plenary indulgence shall be

bestowed to all the faithful who will watch or listen. Pope Francis exposed the Blessed Sacrament imparting his Apostolic Blessing to everyone tuning in via television, radio, and social media.

It has become a **Mission** of everyone to help make the world a better place by attending the various events offered by MC. MC offered different church services available for access. Attending online celebrations like online rosary, Simbang Gabi, Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feasts of the Saints, etc. is an adherence to the mission of the church. As members of the church, it is also part of the faithful to attend these events as an obligation.

People continued to pray for **Blessings** for family, friends, relatives, and the rest of the world due to the lack of resources limited by lockdowns. This was evident in the survey and the KII as they were thankful that prayers were answered. They also shared what they have even if they do not know where to get the next resource. Any extra income that they got was shared with the needy because they empathized with them. Empathy is a technique in psychology where one looks at a situation through the perspective of those involved and not merely as a spectator. Through this, hearts and minds become more open to be filled more abundantly with God's graces that flow to other people.

The **Affordances** that people got from hearing Mass from home by understanding the words of God better because they can focus to the readings and the sermon with little distractions. The opportunity to reflect and act made sense of how people can better themselves. Before the pandemic, it was difficult to fit into one's schedule attending Holy Mass. Now, one could easily attend Sunday Mass in the Vatican celebrated by the Pope himself made possible through telecast and livestreams. Even the online *visita iglesia* allowed people to visit different churches while praying the Stations of the Cross in the safety of their homes. Practicing one's faith has never been this easy; through technology, connections were made stronger and more accessible form of worship.

Practices as Catholics during these trying times became a **Habit**. It has become the normal way of life. Each has their own routines in practicing their faith, from daily online Masses, simultaneous praying of the *Oratio Imperata*, praying of the Angelus and the 3'o clock

habit, and the evening rosary. Different groups opt to pray together via videoconferencing applications. Prayer is the means of communication to God. Having candles of one's home's altar lit in every online mass has been an automatic move as a signal that it is time for prayer. Attending online Sunday Mass or holy days of obligation transformed Sunday activities during the pandemic. Weekends normally are spent outside the home and may miss attending the Holy Mass. However, during the pandemic, everyone stays at home which led to the development of flipping the church online and the habit of helping others if needed. Respondents' attendance to the Sunday Masses became habitual and even praying the rosary. According to one of the key informants, "praying the rosary was done daily which became routinary."

**Altruism** is to have that unselfish concern for others. This character should be embodied most especially during this pandemic where everyone is struggling hard to survive each day. In an article by J. Maximiano (2018), he considered the Catholic Church as the world's biggest charitable organization. Some may believe that the Church is a spiritual institution alone, but it has addressed not only the spiritual needs of the people but also the corporal needs.

Caritas Manila, a social action group of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, immediately responded to the needs of the community by donating P1-billion worth of gift certificates to around 4 million poor individuals across 10 dioceses in the country. According to a report in Radio Veritas, Fr. Anton Pascual, the head of Caritas Manila, they distributed the donations through their *Oplan Damayan* program through the generosity of businessmen and individuals who are partners of Caritas Manila. Each parish church from every diocese had its own initiatives by spearheading donation drives, feeding programs, fundraising activities, and community pantries. Donations did not always have to be done physically. The emergence of easy money transfer applications such as GCash and Paymaya, allowed donations to different programs. Solidarity spread like a virus through every community where selfishness had no room. Respondents and interviewees were open to help others as evidenced by their actions during the pandemic.

If people were asked if they can thrive in this pandemic, the

answer could be **Yes, we can!** The Church is a vessel of healing in these most trying moments. It serves as a venue for consolation and recovery from sins and shortcomings. In hospitals today, priests visit the patients even in the most dangerous of encounters. News about a noble priest took the risk of anointing a critically ill COVID-19 patient the last sacrament despite the risk making him a suspect for quarantine. The ability to shift from offline to online masses and transform their homes is an indicator that the faithful is ready to assume whatever mode of Mass celebration.

### **Implications of *SIMBAHAY* as Flip Service**

The flip service points to the new normal of worship. It may mean that Catholics have resorted to online attendance to the holy Mass because there was no other way of doing it as a form of response to crisis communication. The various obligatory prayers like the *Oratio Imperata* and the suggested list of intentions in the Catholics' daily rosary have contributed to the heightened communal prayer that led to its amendment. This is an empirical result that prayers can indeed move mountains if people pray together as one.

The high engagement or live views of one daily schedule at the Manila Cathedral displayed how desirous Catholics are to listen to the Word of God. This number could possibly be more if all mass schedules were investigated. The sustained attendance could also be attributed to how Fr Kali's and Fr Regie's sermons may have influenced to continuously participate in online Masses. These sermons were shared in *Taglish* to ensure that the teachings were understood. One of the key informants said that the footage of MC is well-planned which entices one to attend and listen attentively. She even read the assigned readings prior to hearing mass to better understand those.

Flipping the church led to the development of a new worship culture which has changed how the Filipino Catholics have transformed the way the online Masses were designed. This design that starts 15 minutes before the schedule was to give time to the faithful to prepare. It opens with requests for Mass intentions that run for at least five minutes which implies the high number of people who want to pray for their

families, death of a loved one, or recovery from COVID-19. This also connotes that these requests may come with donations as support to MC's sustenance and continuous flip service to the online congregation. The Mass ends with a list of bank accounts of MC for prospective donations so that the Church can help others as well. This in a way shows how the congregation has been working together even if they are not physically present in the church.

The ability of the Church to gather its flock through its social media ministry has successfully delivered and gathered God's followers to join as one church albeit in their own homes. This arrangement is a necessary step to ensure that the faithful always remain with the church regardless of delivery mode. The flip service may continue to be so beyond the pandemic of the new social order created by the pandemic.

The mnemonic, **SIMBAHAY** (Salvation, Indulgences, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habit, Altruism, and Yes, We Can) aptly explains why engagement is high. People ought to have a healthy mental health by feeding both psychological and spiritual needs. Through flipping the church at home, it became the practice to attend online Masses that strengthened religiosity. The use of social media to propagate attendance to online Masses has created a sense of self-preservation and protection due to this intervention. Being prayerful and holding on to prayers somehow played a significant role in addressing anxieties and reducing uncertainty. The ability of the religious to pray with the presence of the priest and other religious online together had created a ripple effect among Catholics.

Trials and tribulations in these trying times are indeed a burden to one's mind and heart. One's peace of mind may be too hard to grasp in the current situation. Despite all these, trust in God is a must; as simple as it may seem, believing in his ability to deliver people from these is indeed a leap of faith – a leap worth risking to the strongest of hearts. He is not deaf to prayers. He is omnipresent and ever-loving to His children. God does not permit endless sorrow. *“For the more we sorrow in the present, the greater will be our joy in the future.”* – St. Isidore Seville.

Given the results, it can be construed that spiritual, physical, and environmental outcomes indeed envelop the need for flip church service that social media made possible.

## Conclusion

These opportunities provided by technology paved the way for people to observe the different points of *Simbahay*: Salvation, Indulgences, Mission, Blessedness, Affordances, Habit, Altruism, and Yes, We Can. *Simbahay* posits that the Church is not confined to the corners of the physical structure of worship but the wholeness of people as members of the Church and what has been done as followers of Christ even in the safety of one's own homes. All of which are embedded in the prayer processes of an individual be it active or receptive. Through *Simbahay*, prayers are fulfilled and answered which eventually led to desired outcomes be it physical (health, recovery, surplus of necessities), psychological (happiness, sanity, calmness), or spiritual (divine providence and fulfillment).

Pope Francis says that this pandemic gives people the chance to give way to positive change and reconnect with the real world. There is a need to appreciate how vital the role of the Church is for Catholics, that one's faith practices are not mere routines but essential actions as followers of Christ. This time paved the way for people to deviate from all the distractions of life and focus on the more important aspects – health, families, and an unshakeable relationship with God. This pandemic is a mere challenge than can be overcome if there is faith in God. People must not be afraid because the Lord God will always be with people and will never forsake them (*Deuteronomy 31:6*).

The pandemic may have become an obstacle to physically attending offline Masses, but it has also afforded an opportunity to reflect and renew oneself. It became a state of survival in these trying times and with *Simbahay* people will survive the pandemic or beyond and **Yes, we can!**

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## Is Truthmaker Theory Sufficient to Solve the Gettier Problem?

Caiqin Liu<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*The Gettier problem arises out of the scenario in which a justified true belief (JTB theory) is only true by chance; it is generally conceived as a “lucky guess” rather than knowledge as the justifications of the subject are false. Thus, most epistemologists think that the traditional definition of knowledge (knowledge is justified true belief) is not sufficient. Since then, the issue of what is the sufficient condition for someone to know a proposition became a big deal. Adrian Heathcote believes that some extra conditions are needed in addition to JTB. According to Heathcote, knowledge is a justified, true belief, and the evidence that constitutes justification is identical with the evidence of the very state of affairs that makes the believed proposition true. This paper will focus on Heathcote’s definition of knowledge and his solution to the Gettier problem. The paper will analyze the nature of the truthmaker and truth-making relationship and argue that the truthmaker theory of Heathcote is insufficient to solve the Gettier problem comprehensively and much less provides sufficient conditions for knowledge as it claimed. However, it lays a groundwork for a deeper epistemological exploration, and its inquiry on the issue of tracking truth and truthmaking relationship is helpful for us to find the truth in a world of misinformation, and it is also helpful to improve the current polluted informational environment.*

**Keywords:** *Gettier; truthmaker; justification, true belief, causal mechanism*

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## 1. The Gettier Problem

As Stephen Hetherington comments, the Gettier problem “arose as a challenge to our understanding of the nature of knowledge,”<sup>2</sup> especially the propositional knowledge (knowledge that P), which is “knowledge of a truth or fact — knowledge of how the world is in whatever respect is being described by a given occurrence of ‘P’, with ‘P’ being replaced by some indicative sentence),”<sup>3</sup> such as ‘Pandas live in China.’ Generally speaking, when epistemologists discuss knowledge in the context of Western philosophy, they are talking about the propositional knowledge. The question is: What exactly is such knowledge? What is the nature of such knowledge? The traditional knowledge analysis provides a “generic three-part analysis of what it is for a person to have knowledge that P (for any particular ‘P’),”<sup>4</sup> which are belief, truth and justification. It means when we say a person *knows* that a proposition P is true, it suggests: 1) The person *believes* that P; 2) P is *true*; and 3) The person is *well-supported* or *justified* in believing that P, such as he/she forms a belief based on some good evidence or reasoning, solid and rational justification.<sup>5</sup> If those three conditions are satisfied, it is generally conceived as a case of knowledge. In other words, as Hetherington states, the traditional knowledge analysis “presents three individually necessary, and jointly sufficient conditions for having an instance of knowledge that P.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the traditional analysis conceives knowledge as *justified true belief* (JTB), which has been widely accepted by many philosophers.

However, the American philosopher Edmund L. Gettier challenged the analysis in his very short paper “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” in 1963, in which he argued that it “does not state a sufficient condition for someone’s knowing a given proposition.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Hetherington, “Gettier Problems,” <https://iep.utm.edu/gettier/>, accessed on February 24, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Hetherington, “Gettier Problems.”

<sup>4</sup> Hetherington, “Gettier Problems.”

<sup>5</sup> Hetherington, “Gettier Problems.”

<sup>6</sup> Hetherington, “Gettier Problems.”

<sup>7</sup> Edmund L Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” *Analysis* 23, no.6 (1963):123.

Gettier sketched a situation in which an epistemic agent had a belief that was true and well-supported by evidence, but the belief just *happened to be true*. So almost all epistemologists thought that the epistemic agent did not really *know* that the proposition was true in that case. Gettier's paper had a striking impact on contemporary epistemologists, who generalized Gettier's original views into a broader concept known as a Gettier case or problem, which is beyond the case that Gettier proved in his original paper. This is the Gettier problem discussed in this paper, which is a broader concept about the understanding of the *nature* of knowledge, i.e., what it is for someone to *know* a given proposition. Gettier constructed two thought experiments to prove that the JTB theory (knowledge is justified true belief) does not state sufficient conditions for someone's knowing a proposition. This section presents his two counterexamples: Case I and Case II.

In Case I, Gettier supposes that epistemic agent Smith is justified in believing the following proposition: (d) "Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket."<sup>8</sup>

Smith's evidence for proposition (d) are that: (1) The president of the company assured Smith that Jones will get the job in the end; (2) Smith had counted that there were ten coins in Jones' pocket.

On the grounds of the proposition (d), Smith further reasonably accepts the proposition: (e) "The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket."<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Smith is justified in believing a true belief (proposition (e)); but it turns out that all the evidence that Smith relies on are false. The fact is that, unbeknown to Smith, (3) he himself is the person who gets the job in the end; and (4) he has ten coins in his pocket as well.

So, does Smith *know* the truth of proposition (e)? Almost all epistemologists would deny that. Rather, it is just a lucky guess since Smith is entirely ignorant about the facts of (3) and (4). Rather, the evidence (evidence (1) and (2)) that Smith has for proposition (e) are

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<sup>8</sup> Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" 122.

<sup>9</sup> Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" 122.

neither true. In short, Smith is justified in believing in a true proposition (e) *by chance*. Therefore, Gettier argues that Smith's justified true belief does not grant him knowledge. Afterward, Gettier stated the second case to further solidify the claim that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge.

In Case II, Smith is justified in believing the following proposition:

(f) "Jones owns a Ford."<sup>10</sup>

All the evidence Smith has is: (5) Smith remembered Jones owned a car, which is a Ford; (6) Jones was driving a Ford to offer Smith a ride.

And Smith has no idea where his friend Brown is. And he chose three places fairly randomly and forms the following beliefs:

- (g) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Boston;
- (h) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona;
- (i) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Brest-Litovsk.<sup>11</sup>

Each of the three propositions are entailed by the proposition (f), which Smith has strong evidence of. Smith thus is justified in believing (g), (h) and (i). However, unbeknown to Smith, the facts are that: (7) Jones does not own a Ford; (8) but Brown really happens to be in Barcelona, which means proposition (h) is true. Hence Smith is well justified in believing in a true proposition (h).

Again, does Smith *know* the truth of the proposition (h)? Most epistemologists would deny that as it turns out that all the shreds of evidence that Smith has are not true. Neither of those facts (7) and (8) was known by Smith. The proposition (h) is accidentally true. Therefore, Gettier argues that again, Smith's justified true belief does not guarantee him knowledge. Gettier concluded that these two cases show that "it is possible for a belief to be true and justified without

<sup>10</sup> Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" 122.

<sup>11</sup> Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" 122-123

being knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the generic three-part (belief, truth, and justification) analysis of knowledge does not present a sufficient condition for knowledge. This is known as the Gettier problem. In addition to Gettier’s own cases in his paper, there are many other Gettier-like cases, for example, the case of the sheep in the field proposed by Chisholm, and the case of fake barns from Goldman, etc.<sup>13</sup> There is one thing in common among those different kinds of Gettier cases, that is, the epistemic agent forms a belief which is true and well justified but without being knowledge, which arise out of the following two common characteristics:

(1) Fallibility. The evidence or justification that the epistemic agent has within each case is false.

(2) Epistemic luck. In any Gettier case, it is an epistemic luck that makes a well-supported but false belief true.

## 2. The Truthmaker Theory’s Solution to Gettier Problem

Since Gettier raised this challenge, many theories to cope with the Gettier problem have emerged. Given the above two general characteristics of Gettier case, theorists have tried to address the problem from two aspects, namely, either to ensure the authenticity of evidence and justification or to eliminate the interference of epistemic luck, such as no false lemmas theory, reliabilist theory, causal theory, which entails appending some *extra conditions* on the basis of JTB (justification, truth and belief) so as to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the evidence without negating the premise. Australian philosopher Adrian Heathcote tried to make sure that the justification which the subject holds is identical to the evidence that makes the proposition true. He thus advocated the truthmaker theory, which calls for adding a fourth condition (i.e., truthmaker condition) based on JTB theory. He claimed that the combination of the fourth condition and JTB forms a *sufficient condition* for knowledge.

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<sup>12</sup> Hetherington, “Gettier Problems.”

<sup>13</sup> See more about these other Gettier cases at “Gettier Problems,” <https://iep.utm.edu/gettier/>

According to Heathcote, knowledge could be redefined as: “S knows that  $p$  if (1) S believes  $p$ ; (2) S is justified in believing  $p$ ; (3)  $p$  is true; and (4) the evidence that S has which constitutes the justification is the evidence of the very state of affairs that makes  $p$  true.”<sup>14</sup>

Here the crucial component is the fourth condition, which is the truthmaker condition. It is obvious to see that the truthmaker condition expresses an identical relationship between the evidence that the epistemic agent has which constitutes the justification and the evidence that makes the proposition true. In Heathcote’s opinion, it is because the separation of these two kinds of evidence that gives rise to the Gettier problem. For example, in Case I, Smith’s justification for proposition (e) [the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket] is all about Jones: Jones’s coins in his pocket and the testimony from the president of the company. However, the truthmaker for the proposition (e) is all about Smith himself. So, the evidence that constitutes Smith’s justification is false (Jones will get the job and the testimony from the president that Jones will get the job) and disjoints from the evidence that makes proposition (e) true (Smith will get the job and Smith has ten coins in his pocket). In short, the evidence for Smith’s justification is separated from the evidence that makes the proposition true.

The same situation of separation between the evidence of justification and the evidence of truthmaking happens in Case II. The evidence that constitutes Smith’s justification of proposition (h) is Jones owns a Ford, which is false as Jones is driving a rented car. What makes the proposition (h) true, namely the truthmaker, is the fact that Brown really happens to be in Barcelona, which Smith is totally ignorant about. So again, the evidence that constitutes Smith’s justification is false and separate from the evidence that makes proposition (h) true. Heathcote argues that it is precisely this disjunction that gives rise to the Gettier problem. Hence, he introduces the truthmaker condition and combines it with JTB. He thinks that once the truthmaker condition is added to the JTB conditions, the core elements that constitute the Gettier problem will be shielded. Furthermore, Heathcote argues that combining the

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<sup>14</sup> Adrian Heathcote, “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problems,” in *Aspects of Knowing: Epistemological Essays*, ed. Stephen Hetherington (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006), 165.

truthmaker condition with the JTB conditions would jointly constitute *sufficient* conditions for knowledge. However, can the truthmaker theory really cover all types of Gettier cases and provide a *sufficient* condition for knowledge as Heathcote suggests?

### 3. Questions about the Truthmaker Theory

As stated above, in Heathcote's definition of knowledge, the most important condition is the fourth one, or the truthmaking condition, namely, "the evidence that S has which constitutes the justification is the evidence of the very state of affairs that makes *p* true",<sup>15</sup> which expresses the identity relationship between the evidence of justification and the evidence of truthmaking.

#### (1) *What is a Truthmaker?*

According to Heathcote, the truthmaker of a proposition is the evidence that makes the proposition true. Heathcote's explanation does not clearly delineate what a truthmaker is and the difference between a truthmaker and a non-truthmaker. In other words, it is very vague about the issue as: when we say that A is the truthmaker for proposition <*p*>, what do we mean by that? Is A an entity with form and quality or something else?

First, the truthmaker theory is based on the acknowledgement that truth depends on being, and not vice versa. Truthmaker theorists believe that "the sentence is true because of what exists in the world; it is not the case that the world is the way it is because of which sentences are true."<sup>16</sup> For example, the statement "Pandas live in China" is true in virtue of the fact that there *are* pandas living in China, not vice versa. Thus, truth depends on being is the fundamental idea and the starting point of the truthmaker theory. Based on that, some philosophers (Bigelow 1988: 125; Armstrong 1989c: 88) explain that "*a truth-maker is that in virtue of which something is true* (abbreviation: virtue-T)."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Heathcote, "Truthmaking and the Gettier Problems," 165.

<sup>16</sup> Jamin Asay, "Truthmaker Theory," <https://iep.utm.edu/truth-ma/>, accessed on January 24, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Fraser MacBride, "Truthmakers," <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/>

From this definition, we can see that the connotation of what is a truthmaker depends on “whether we have a clear understanding of ‘in virtue of’.”<sup>18</sup> Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006a: 960-1) believes that the notion of “in virtue of” is unavoidable. But John Bigelow thinks that the notion of “in virtue of” is both vague and avoidable (Bigelow 1988). Therefore, there is a fierce debate among philosophers on the issue of what exactly a truthmaker is. Some philosophers, though not all, such as David Armstrong, John Bigelow, and Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, take a realist stance. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006) argues that the central question of metaphysics is the question of *what* makes some true sentences true, and those who “believe in truthmaking believe in truthmakers, i.e. they believe that truth is grounded in being or entities.”<sup>19</sup> That means that there is something that exists in the world making a proposition true. According to Rodriguez-Pereyra, the word “something” could be interpreted as “some *thing*” or “some *entities*”. Therefore, they believe that the truthmaker is the entity.

As Rodriguez-Pereyra claims that “if a proposition is made true by something, it is made true by *some thing*, it could be a fact or state of affairs, a trope, or any other sort of entity. That is, a truthmaker is an entity in virtue of which a certain proposition is true.”<sup>20</sup> Along with this line of thought, Rodriguez-Pereyra discusses about the five attractive and popular definitions of truthmaker in his work of *Truthmakers* (2006) as follow:

- (1) Entity *e* is a truthmaker for proposition <P> if *e* exists, <*e* exists> *entails* proposition <P> (Abbreviation: Entailment-T).
- (2) Entity *e* is a truthmaker for proposition <P> if <P> is true and <*e* exists> *relevantly entails* <P> (Relevance-T).

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truthmakers/, accessed on January 27, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> MacBride, “Truthmakers.”

<sup>19</sup> Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Truthmakers,” *Philosophy Compass* 1, no.2 (2006): 186.

<sup>20</sup> Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Why Truthmaker”, in *Truth and Truth-making*, ed. E. J. Lowe and A. Rami (Cape Town: Acumen Publishing, 2008), 17.

- (3) Entity *e* makes <P> true if <P> is true *in virtue of e* (Virtue-T).
- (4) Entity *e* is a truthmaker for <P> if it is part of the *essence* of <P> that <P> is true if *e* exists (Essence-T).
- (5) If *e* is a truthmaker for <P> then, *necessarily*, if *e* exists then <P> is true (Necessitation-T).<sup>21</sup>

Given the definition (1), it means that the very existence of entity (*e*) entails proposition <*p*>. The central concept in the definition is the word “entails”, which makes *every existent entity a truthmaker for every necessary truth*. For example, the proposition that “2 plus 2 equals 4” would remain true no matter how the world changes. It suggests that every entity, such as panda, swan, unicorn, apple, etc. could be the truthmaker for the proposition that “2 plus 2 equals 4”, which is obviously incredible. Definition (2) is no better than the definition (1). The core factor within the definition is the word “relevantly”. The restriction of relevance aims to avoid the problem of irrelevance in definition (1). However, the problem is that there are many relevant logic systems. It is very unclear which one is the system to which the truthmaking belongs.

Considering definition (3), the most important concept in which is the expression of “in virtue of”, which, as stated above, is a very obscure notion. When we say that something exists in virtue of something else, it could mean that it owes the truth value of the sentence solely to *the entity that exists* in the world. For example, the sentence that “pandas live in China” is true in virtue of the entity of pandas being present in China. We could reinterpret it as: a sentence is true in virtue of *the fact* when its truth can be *known* merely based on the fact. Now considering the proposition “copper is copper”. One might think that the existence of copper can serve as the truthmaker of the proposition. However, even if we know that copper exists, we still do not know for sure whether copper is made of copper or something else. That is to say, the entity of copper or obtaining the fact of copper does not guarantee the truth of the proposition that “copper is copper”. There is no one-to-one correspondence between language and existence. Thus, definition (3) cannot explain analytical and conceptual knowledge.

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<sup>21</sup> Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Truthmakers,” 186-187.

As for definition (4), the key ingredient is the expression “part of the essence of”, which emphasizes that the truthmaker is part of the essence of the truth value of the proposition. The question is: What is the essence of the truth value of a proposition? One answer is that it should be consistent with something, some notion, or some statement. The essence is the actuality rather than semblance, which sounds attractive and rational. Let us think about the proposition that “Smith is a free being”. We are generally inclined to take freedom as the essence of the truth value of the proposition. Then what is the essence of freedom? One might say that Smith can do many different things; does it mean that Smith can choose to do whatever he wants to do? This would not be agreeable in a civilized society. Therefore, the concept of “essence” is also very vague and elusive, and it raises a lot of controversies.

Finally, in definition (5), the crucial factor is the word “necessarily”. Although this term looks credible, it is not free of problems. For example, Rodriguez-Pereyra raises a challenge to this definition:

Taking in consideration the proposition that if it is necessary that everything exists, then everything exists necessarily. But it is necessary that everything exists. Therefore, everything exists. Now, if everything exists necessarily, every truthmaker exists necessarily. And if every truthmaker exists necessarily, (5) entails that every truth with a truthmaker is a necessary truth. So no contingent truth has a truthmaker! This is contrary to what most truthmaker theorists have thought since they are usually prepared to let necessary truths lack truthmakers, but not contingent truths.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, Benjamin Schnieder (2006a) believes that “the objects which are usually taken to play the role of truthmakers fall in either of two categories: that of individual moments (comprising particularized properties like Socrates’ paleness, and events, like Little Voices singing), or that of fact.”<sup>23</sup>

In fact, the view that truth is grounded in entities is very

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<sup>22</sup> Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Truthmakers”, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Schnieder, “Truth-Making without Truth-Makers,” *Synthese* 152, no.1 (2006a): 22.

controversial. Not all philosophers agree that a proposition is made true by what entities exist in the world. Hornsby Jennifer (2005), for example, believes that truth exists without truthmaking entities, which is the stance that it is not entities that make a proposition true but *how they are*. For example, in the true proposition <The rose is red>, we might say that the proposition is made true by the rose's being red or the redness of the rose, and those who believe in truthmaking entities would say that the rose's being red, or the redness of the rose are entities that serve as the truthmaker of the proposition. However, those philosophers who endorse the stance that truth is grounded in how things are would deny that the rose's being red, or the redness of the rose are entities; rather, it is the state of *how the rose is*. As Rodriguez-Pereyra concludes, those who believe in truthmaking without truthmaking entities believe that "there is no entity that makes the proposition true. What makes it true is *how the rose is*, and how the rose is is not an entity over and above the rose."<sup>24</sup> Based on that, Joseph Melia (2005) defends the possibility of *truthmaking without truthmakers*. Pablo Rychter asserts that "although every true proposition is made true by reality, there need not be particular entities (like facts, states of affairs, or tropes) that make such propositions true."<sup>25</sup>

## ***(2) Do All Truths Have Truthmakers?***

Putting such doubts aside, let us now consider the issue regarding whether all truths have truthmakers. Truthmaker Maximalists, such as David Armstrong (2004), believe they do; otherwise, the truth will 'float free' of reality. However, the view of Truthmaker Maximalism has also incurred many suspicions, especially in the negative existential truths and general truths, such as the truth of the proposition that [there are no penguins in the North Pole] and [all swans are white]. Armstrong proposes the "*totality state of affairs*" to support *Truthmaker Maximalism*. But Ross P. Cameron (2008) objects by saying that there are no 'positive' entities in the world to guarantee that there are no penguins in the North Pole. Regarding the general truth, the challenge is that we cannot be sure if there are potential facts that makes the proposition false, for instance, the black swan that found in Australia is a good counterexample, which

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<sup>24</sup> Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Why Truthmaker", 17.

<sup>25</sup> Pablo Rychter, "Truthmaker Theory without Truthmakers," *Ratio* 27, no.3 (2014): 276.

makes the proposition that all swans are white false. Thus, there have been heated disputes among philosophers on the issue of the negative existential truths and general truths about *Truthmaker Maximalism*.

Perhaps we should compromise and admit that not all truths have truthmakers. As Rodriguez-Pereyra claims, “Just some proper subset of truths (such as the positive truths or synthetic truths) have truthmakers.”<sup>26</sup> That is, there is a truthmaker gap; some truths, such as the negative existential truths and general truths have no truthmakers. Hence, Rodriguez-Pereyra puts a restriction on the category of proposition to establish a restricted version of the truthmaker principle in his paper of *Why Truthmaker* (2008). He argues that “not all truths, but a *class of synthetic true propositions* including inessential predictions have truthmakers.”<sup>27</sup>

Taking the stopped clock case as an example. Suppose one afternoon, Smith looks up at the clock in his room, which shows that it is 2.00 o'clock now; and it has always worked reliably and accurately in the past. Smith thus takes that to be good inductive evidence that it is working reliably now. Smith further believes that [it is 2.00 pm now]. But unbeknown to Smith, the clock was broken and stopped at 2.00 o'clock (2 am) *last night*. But, quite coincidentally, the moment that Smith looks at the clock, it is in fact 2.00 pm. Therefore, Smith's belief that [it is 2 pm now] is true. However, does Smith's belief have a truthmaker? Heathcote believes that it has. The question then is: What is it? To the truthmaker of the time issue, Heathcote responds as follows:

What is the truthmaker for the sentence ‘It's now 2.00 o'clock in the afternoon?’ It is for the place where the sentence is uttered to stand in particular relation to Greenwich Mean Time, its time zone, as established by administrative or governmental fiat, on top of which there are laid governmental ordinances regulating daylight saving for each time zone. Underneath these, there are *stipulations* concerning the length and number of hours in a day, which are related to the natural fact that the Earth spins on its axis so that there are (stipulated to be) 24 hours in a day. All of these *stipulations and decisions* make it an objective, though not natural,

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<sup>26</sup> Asay, “Truthmaker Theory.”

<sup>27</sup> Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Why Truthmaker,” 18.

fact that it is now, for me here, 2.00 o'clock in the afternoon.<sup>28</sup>

To put it simply, Heathcote reckons that it is *governmental regulations* that determine the fact that it is 2.00 o'clock in the afternoon at where Smith is. Although it is related to natural facts, the truthmaker for a time ultimately depends on *stipulations and decisions*. As Heathcote states, "*Decisions create facts* that are perfectly firm. The stipulation that a loaf of bread is sold for X dollars, makes the sentence 'this loaf costs \$X' objectively perfectly true."<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, the response is clearly controversial with the starting point of the truthmaker theory, which is that the truth of the sentence depends on what exists in the world. But being or reality refers to the things as they are, which means what exists cannot be created. Hence the response raises another crucial issue, namely, what kind of objects or things can serve as the truthmaker of a proposition?

### ***(3) What Kind of Objects Can Be a Truthmaker?***

If we acknowledge that a proposition is true by *some thing*, then what exactly is that *some thing*? In other words, what kind of objects can serve as the truthmaker? As Asay comments,

For many truthmaker theorists, there is no restriction on the kind of object that can be a truthmaker. To be a truthmaker, something just needs to *appropriately account for* the truth of some truthbearer. On this view, truthmakers are just whatever sorts of things are ontologically available. Other views impose restrictions. For example, one might argue that only *facts or state of affairs* are properly thought of as truthmakers.<sup>30</sup>

If we reckon that only facts or state of affairs can be a truthmaker, it means that an entity is not the truthmaker of a proposition. Now thinking about the proposition that [Socrates exists], then "Socrates could not be a truthmaker for 'Socrates exists', because Socrates himself is not a fact or state of affairs. (At best, he is a sort of abstraction from

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<sup>28</sup> Adrian Heathcote, "Gettier and the Stopped Clock," *Analysis* 72, no.2 (2012): 310.

<sup>29</sup> Heathcote, "Gettier and the Stopped Clock," 311.

<sup>30</sup> Asay, "Truthmaker Theory."

various states of affairs or facts.).”<sup>31</sup> Rather, what makes the sentence [Socrates exists] true is either *the fact* that Socrates exists, or *the state of affairs* that are combine the particular (Socrates) with the existence property (Socrates’s being existence). This explanation is less attractive. As stated before, Armstrong proposes that the *totality states of affairs* serve as the truthmaker for negative and general truths. However, not all truthmaker theorists accept Armstrong’s approach, as negative existential truths and general truths are big challenges to the approach. For example, some epistemologists argue that *tropes* are necessary and sufficient for contingent predictions. David Lewis (2003) uses *counterpart theory* to resist the above arguments for states of affairs and tropes. Lewis maintains that “*objects under counterpart relations* can be truthmakers for contingent predictions.”<sup>32</sup>

All in all, perhaps there are *entities, states of affairs, universals, tropes, regulations, or counterparts* that could serve as the truthmaker of a proposition. Besides the questions raised above, there are still many other problems faced by the truthmaker theory. We will not discuss them one by one but focus on questions as stated. And it is an open question as to how many truthmakers we need. As John F. Fox states, “If every truth has a truthmaker, we can survey those things which we think are true, and ask what the inventory of the universe must be for them to be so: neither multiplying entities beyond necessity nor pruning them beyond sufficiency.”<sup>33</sup> That is obviously incredible and impossible to do. In summary, there is no convincing definition of the truthmaker, and truthmaker theory still faces the challenges of whether a truthmaker must be an entity; what kind of objects can serve as the truthmaker, especially in terms of the negative existential truths and general truths; and furthermore, whether we even need truthmakers.

#### 4. The Category and Hierarchy of Truthmaker

As stated before, if we take *Truthmaker Maximalism* as our stance, namely, admitting that all truths have truthmakers, then it should

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<sup>31</sup> Asay, “Truthmaker Theory.”

<sup>32</sup> Asay, “Truthmaker Theory.”

<sup>33</sup> John F. Fox, “Truthmaker,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 65, no.2 (1987): 192.

be emphasized that the truthmaker should be more than just entities. Other types of truthmakers should be placed in categories such as non-natural stipulations, testimonies, and memories, etc. In short, the truthmaker, or the state of affairs that makes a proposition true could be categorized into two main types: objective state of affairs and subjective state of affairs.

### ***(1) Category of Truthmaker***

Consider the following statements:

- i. Smith is sitting in a chair. (Objective truth)
- ii. The painting is beautiful. (Preferences)
- iii. Blue is a kind of color. (Stipulations/decisions)
- iv. Murder is morally wrong. (Social/ethical standards)

The truth of proposition (i) that Smith is sitting in a chair is determined by the fact that Smith is really objectively sitting in a chair right now. The sentence is true just because it corresponds to the objective fact (Smith is sitting in a chair now). Thus, facts determine truth. In other words, truth depends on being, which is exactly the standpoint of the truthmaker theory. There is no doubt that facts, entities, or beings – all those objective existences – determine truths. It works well in such objective domains as the physical sciences since we can verify the truthfulness with facts. Hence, we can say that the type of proposition such as proposition (i) is an objective proposition, and we need *an objective truth or objective state of affairs* for it.

Regarding proposition (ii) that the painting is beautiful, what can we do to verify it as true or false? When we say that the painting is beautiful, what are we talking about? Are we talking about the painting or are we talking about ourselves and our preferences? We all would agree that we are talking about individual opinions or preferences. We are telling the listener that we *think* the painting is beautiful through the statement. The truth of the statement is about the subject, so it is a subjective truth. Another example might better explain the notion of subjectivity. Considering the proposition that “Smith is thinking of someone”. Is there anywhere we can go through that might give us any indication as to the truthfulness

of the statement? Of course not. It is absurd to tell the listener that the person is not on Smith's mind. What is true in Smith's mind cannot be perceived or experienced by the rest of us. This is because the truth of the proposition is what we call *a subjective truth*.

For statement (iii), if we believe that all truths have truthmakers, there is no doubt that the proposition is true, and it has a truthmaker. However, what is the truthmaker here? If we reckon that truthmakers are only objective entities, then proposition (iii) has no truthmaker since there is no objective entity of "blue" and "color" in the world to make it true. It means that it is a true proposition, but its truth is floating in the air. That is contrary to the claim of the truthmaker theory and *Truthmaker Maximalism*. Heathcote notices the complexity of the truthmaker in the stopped clock case as well, which is why he proposes that stipulations and decisions are the truthmaker of the time issue. Similarly, when we say that blue is a kind of color, what we are talking about is that we, as a community, set a series of *stipulations* to decide what color is and how many colors we recognize; we also categorize and name them according to our standard. So, whether blue is a kind of color is determined by our stipulations. These stipulations would be true on the Earth but might be false on Mars. This kind of truth completely depends on what stipulations are made, a kind of *non-natural subjective fact*.

Given proposition (iv), there is much debate as to whether murder is morally wrong, which depends on the social or ethical code in a particular society. In ancient times, soldiers took pride in killing enemies, and in some societies, murder is not morally wrong as well. Thus, the truth of the proposition that murder is morally wrong depends on the social or ethical standards of each particular society and community. Likewise, whether the painting is beautiful or not is determined by personal or social aesthetic standards. Precisely because we, as a community, set the standard for what counts as being beautiful and morally wrong, we can decide that kind of thing is beautiful, and what is morally wrong or right. Therefore, the moral, aesthetic, regulative and mathematical properties are something that we impose onto the world rather than something originally existing in the world. That is, it is the subjective state of affairs that makes the proposition true.

To sum up, different kinds of propositions, such as the scientific propositions, mathematical propositions, moral propositions, and social or institutional propositions, have completely different attributes. Therefore, it is impossible to find one kind of truthmaker (entities or others) that works best across all range of cases. The truthmaker theory works well in some Gettier cases, but it does not work in all situations. Thus, one strategy to support truthmaker theory is that it must be admitted that there are different kinds of truthmakers, such as, objective truthmaker, *viz* objective state of affairs, and subjective truthmaker, *viz* subjective state of affairs to serve as the truthmaker for different kinds of propositions.

## ***(2) The Hierarchy of Truthmaker***

Moreover, truthmaker is plural. A proposition might have *multiple truthmakers* rather than only one. At the same time, a truthmaker might also play a role in the truthmaking process of *multiple propositions*, that is, the truthmaking relationship between the proposition and truthmaker could be a many-to-many relationship. For example, the truthmaker for the proposition “the rose is red” includes the existence of rose and the redness of rose. On the other hand, the existence of rose could serve as a truthmaker for the proposition “rose is a flower” and “rose is a plant”, etc. Similarly, the redness of rose also could serve as a truthmaker for the proposition “roses are bright red” and so on. Therefore, the truthmaking relationship is complicated. It is much deeper than a superficial identification between the evidence of justification and the truthmaker characterized by Heathcote.

At the same time, there is a priority of importance among all the truthmakers of a proposition. While some truthmakers are crucial and others less important for a proposition, they jointly serve to make a proposition true. For instance, while the existence of snow will be a crucial and indispensable truthmaker for the statement “it is snowing”, the presence of wind will be a less important truthmaker for this statement. The reason is because sometimes it snows with wind, and sometimes it snows without wind. Although the presence of snow is a crucial truthmaker for the truth of the statement “it is snowing”, it is superficial one since the truth of the statement “it is snowing” is ultimately grounded in some more fundamental truthmakers, which are the conditions for snowfall. Snow

will only appear when the temperature is low, the water vapor is saturated, and there are condensation nuclei in the air. So air temperature, water vapor, and condensation nuclei are more fundamental truthmakers of the statement “it is snowing” compared to the presence of snow.

In short, the truthmaker of a proposition is hierarchical, which means that some truthmakers are more fundamental, while others are superficial for the truth of a proposition. One might ask whether there is something in the world that serves as an ontological ground for a truth. This is related to the goal of our metaphysical inquiry. If our perspective on the truthmaking theory is the realist stance, then *what exists* makes a proposition true should be our primary concern. But if we focus on the semantics of the truthmaking theory, then *how* the truthmaker makes a statement true is our primary concern. As Kite Fine concludes in his work of *Truthmaker Semantics*,

If our aim is to understand the world, then our focus should be on the ultimate truthmakers, on *what* in the world ultimately makes something true, and the question of how the truthmakers make the statements of our language true is of no great concern. But if our aim is to understand language, then our focus should be on the immediate truthmakers, not the ultimate truthmakers, and the question of *how* they make the statements of the language true will be of greatest concern.<sup>34</sup>

Since the truthmaker theory takes the view that truth depends on reality as its starting point, then the aim of the truthmaker theory should be to try to understand the world and focus on the ultimate truthmaker rather than the immediate or superficial truthmaker. In other words, according to truthmaker theory, the truth of the proposition “2 plus 2 equals 4” should be *what exists* in the world *ultimately makes it true* rather than what the representational features (superficial truthmakers) of the statement makes it true. For instance, in the case of the stopped clock, we can say that the superficial truthmaker of the statement “It is 2.00 o’clock in the afternoon now” is the reading that is shown by a properly working clock and

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<sup>34</sup> Kit Fine, “Truthmaker Semantics,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language, Second Edition*, ed. Hale Bob et al. (New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2017), 557.

contextual parameters. Nonetheless, what is the ultimate truthmaker of this statement? What exists in the world ultimately makes the proposition “It is 2.00 o’clock in the afternoon now” true? Those should be the primary concern for truthmaker theorists.

Besides, the truthmaker theory also faces other challenges. For example, “Is the truthmaking relation a necessary relation or a contingent one? Is it a kind of supervenience, dependence, or something else? What, if anything, makes negative truths true?”<sup>35</sup> The truthmaker for the general proposition and negative proposition is in fierce debate. All of these are the cross-examinations that the truthmaker theorists cannot handle. Therefore, even though Heathcote’s truthmaker theory can deal with the case of substantial and exemplary causal mechanism, it cannot solve the Gettier problem comprehensively. It still faces many challenges and problems.

## 5. Truthmaking and Misinformation

Epistemology centers on the issue of what we know and how we know it. In the Gettier case, the subject is quite unsure about which evidence or testimony is true and who he/she can trust. The individual can be easily misled by false evidence. In fact, the cognitive environment faced by the epistemic agent in the Gettier case is exactly the polluted informational environment we are facing today. We are living in a post-truth world in which we are continually bombarded by fake news and disinformation. Justin McBrayer observes that “the peddlers of news and information often have incentives to stray from the truth, we often lack incentives to believe the truth and have incentives to believe what’s false.”<sup>36</sup> In such a world, as an audience, we are quite uncertain about which news is really true. This is very ironic as the mission of journalism is to deliver *truth* and *facts*; but today’s news media organizations have deviated from their original mission due to capital and market manipulation. Therefore, the so-called authoritative media agencies and experts have lost our trust because we have been lied to and fooled too many times. Thus, we are

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<sup>35</sup> Asay, “Truthmaker Theory.”

<sup>36</sup> Justin P. McBrayer, *Beyond Fake News: Finding the Truth in a World of Misinformation* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 105.

in a situation where we do not know where the truth is and who we can believe and rely on. But truth matters. Then as individuals, how can we improve the odds of getting to the truth in such a world? And can we shape our epistemic environment to achieve that? Truthmaker theorists' inquiry on the issue of truth tracking and truthmaking relationship might be helpful for us to approach to the truth more reliably in a world full of fake news. As stated before, truthmaker theory starts its inquiry with the acknowledgement that truth depends on being, hence truthmaker theorists focus on the issue of the relationship between the justification (evidence) and truth in order to confirm what we believe is knowledge. Although the truthmaker theory is not good enough to cope with the Gettier problem, it does provide some guidance on how we can approach the truth.

First, the truthmaker theory could be helpful for the producer of the news to reflect on how to maintain the ability to think carefully and independently. Its inquiry into the truthmaking relationship could help journalists treat all the information that they receive everyday cautiously, and distinguish between dependable and undependable sources and testimonies. It can train us to think rationally and prudently, which is crucial when faced with the current situation of misinformation. On the other hand, as the consumer of news, we need to think carefully and judge prudently, and enhance our ability of discern true and false news to make sure that we are not manipulated by others, such as politicians. For instance, as McBrayer suggests, we can judge the credibility of a news website or agency by "looking at a news source's ratio of links to other news sites."<sup>37</sup> However, that is still not enough, as it is quite difficult to know who and what to trust. We can take inspiration from Rene Descartes' advise that "we must step back from our assumptions about the world and the crowd in which we find ourselves and evaluate each from a *neutral point of view*."<sup>38</sup> That is, as an audience or consumer of news, what we can do is to take a step back and delay our belief and exercise caution when we watch or read a news report. But it does not mean that we do not need to trust others. We do need to trust those *real experts* or any others who are with truth-related incentives and make falsifiable but accurate judgments to help us approach the truth.

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<sup>37</sup> McBrayer, *Beyond Fake News*, 123.

<sup>38</sup> McBrayer, *Beyond Fake News*, 133.

## **6. Conclusion**

The truthmaker theory starts with the view that truth depends on being. Considering this point, the truthmaker theory could be a good solution to some kinds of Gettier cases that have an ontological, model causal mechanism between the proposition and its truth. It means that, in these cases, there are ontological entities to make the proposition true. But there are many other kinds of non-natural propositions that the truthmaker theory cannot cope with, as there are no ontological entities to make them true. Thus, if truthmaker theorists take a realistic stance, they should be clear about what the truthmaker is and lay out a detailed explanation about it first. But it does not mean we should define the truthmaker by one definition. Because we have so many kinds of propositions, the truthmaker could take various forms. Therefore, the feasible way would be to categorize the truthmaker instead of limiting it by one definition. Second, truthmaker theorists should state what kind of objects could serve as the truthmaker clearly. Finally, they need to explain what the truthmaking relationship is. Those issues are very crucial to refine the truthmaker theory. In short, this paper demonstrates that the truthmaker theory has many flaws and it cannot provide sufficient conditions for knowledge. Nonetheless, it lays the stage for a deeper epistemological exploration, which is beneficial for the pursuit of metaphysical inquiry and for navigating the current environment of misinformation as well.

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## **The Future of Religion: Human Life - Education - Spirituality**

*Pravat Kumar Dhal<sup>1</sup>*

### **ABSTRACT**

*In true sense, religion is not the communal or sectorial beliefs. It is eternal. Neither reason nor religion, but spirituality will be the future religion. Religion binds human beings together. Truth, Beauty and Goodness are the core characteristics of religion. It is not the cause for destruction of civilization. It is meant for wellbeing of society. It is created by God, which provides peace, truth, justice, knowledge, love, beauty, power, and light, etc. It is the gateway for spiritualization. Religious people get the divine, which is the sole motto of human life. A true religion embraces all religions. It does not attack others, like a flower does not attack other flowers. It was originally a means to awaken the human mind to the existence of higher power and higher realms of existence, got bogged into organization setup with its own creeds and dogmas, decrying of other systems.*

*The entire world is a school and all of life is education. The educational institutions should be a place of high concentration, aspiration and effort even as Temple, Church or Mosque, a House of God charged with power and grace. The teacher is the link, the channel of communication, the willing paraclate, like a mother whose ambience of love fosters the child between the pupil and God, the source of all knowledge. A real teacher enacting the power of divine love helps the child's buds of consciousness to open out petal by petal, and to achieve fullness of bloom and ripe fruitfulness in the catalytic environment of the academy. The amalgamation of spirit and matter creates new vistas of a peaceful, harmonious and fine world.*

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*Spiritual life is a life of inner culturing of consciousness. Spirituality is a matter of inner being, the living in the soul. It provides Truth, Bliss, Light, Power, Beauty and Peace. It helps in raising the consciousness. The outcome will be harmony and peaceful coexistence. It is only a spiritual orientation of life which can provide an everlasting solution to problems. All religions have to overcome divisions through spiritual unity. It harmonizes science and faith. It synthesizes spirituality and materialism and embraces life in its wide variety. Religion has to surrender in spiritual knowledge, feeling, and in spiritual life. It will act to prepare the human being for a higher, spiritually progressive life and for realization of God. Organized religion will move towards evolution of spiritual consciousness as leader of human progress. All life will be the manifestation divine unity.*

**Keywords:** *future of religion, human life, education, spirituality*

*“Only when man has developed not merely a fellow-feeling with all men, but a dominant sense of unity and commonality, only when he is aware of them not merely as brothers, that is fragile bond, but as parts of himself, only when he has learned to live, not in his separate personal and communal ego-sense, but in a large universal consciousness, can the phenomenon of war, with whatever weapons, pass out of his life without possibility of return.”*

*--Sri Aurobindo, SABCL. Vol.15, p.587*

## **Introduction**

History teaches us that each world war has brought some basic changes in the world consciousness. The globe witnessed sweeping changes brought about by the French Revolution, the American Civil War, the Meiji Restoration in Japan, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the Communist Revolution in China. These events in most cases replaced monarchies with republics and the concept of nationhood visualized. The acute revolution resulted in World Wars I and II. The outcome of these two events was the establishment of the League of Nations, a precursor to the United Nations, which came into existence in 1945. The next leap in

the world consciousness as it were was brought on by the Internet, which brought the world suddenly much closer.

In 1995, the WTO was established. It aimed to bring down barriers and make the world seamless in terms of trade. The remarkable changes noticed was that while the earlier changes were accompanied by violence, the later ones were meant for progress or prospects of progress. As a consequence, all the inert parts got heavy stroke. The effluence part of the civilizations with their core potentialities unfolded. The whole world is awakening to peace and harmony, and an enlightened humanity is emerging.

The ancient scripture of India says, '*Basudheiba Kutumbakam*'. The great communication philosopher McLuhan has also said the same thing: "The world is a village." History has taught us many things. "During the dark middle ages, the language was inert silence. Then, the Renaissance gave a new awakening where the language of logic emerged – intellect being the driving force. Next came the era of the Industrial Revolution. Machineries were invented. Automation was generated. Functional English of today is the physical manifestation. With leisure developed the language of aesthetics manifesting as art, literature and culture" (Brahmachari, p.9).

Gradually digital machines cornered analogs and analogies! The digital computers surpassed the previous days and have now settled into binary mode of zero and one; it may be the concept of one globe. The predominant language of the world today is the language of violence. Most may not like violence, but the oppressed today become the oppressors of the future. The action of cruelty and barbarism continues. We are now living in a dangerous world. The inner human spirit is craving for a new language, which is the language of consciousness, the language of love, the language of bliss! This will happen by true education only. In ancient times, education took place with the support of religious institutions.

## **Religion**

Presently, colossal problems have sprung before us. Widespread riots have occurred. The foundation of socialism lies in a centralized controlling system which inevitably developed into Goondaraj. Now the world has briefly dabbled in small local battles, and the results have been so disastrous that humanity has developed a distaste. Besides, a number of riots

happened due to communalism in the form of distorted religion. Mother Earth is trembling very often due to the explosion of nuclear weapons being tested. In the name of 'jihad' lakhs of people, children have lost their lives. The newborns are also affected by terrorism, which is now a global issue. Use of nuclear weapons deform beautiful human civilizations. To fulfil the ego-desire of a few people or countries, several wars were started. These events reflect the negative aspects of human thinking.

History says that in the name of religion, many people have died and much property has been destroyed. According to J.P. Singhal, "If one religion worships human being as God, another denies the existence of God altogether. If one worships an idol with incense, another breaks with hammer"<sup>33</sup> (S. Baring Gould, *Origin Folder of Religions Beliefs*, p.1078). Due to ignorance human beings have made several mistakes in the name of religion. When the word "religion" is spoken, it conjures terrible ideas among many common people. Hence Karl Marx says that religion is opium of the human mind. Bertrand Russell also asserts that "religion encourages stupidity and insufficient sense of reality."

In actuality, religion is supposed to bind human beings together. Truth, Beauty and Goodness are the core characteristics of religion. Religion is not supposed to be the cause for destruction of civilization. It is meant for the wellbeing of society. God comes to earth to establish the Dharma. This dharma provides peace, truth, justice, knowledge, love, beauty, power, and light, etc. It is the gateway leading to spirituality. Religious people comprehend the divine, which is the sole motto of human life. A true religion embraces all religions. It does not attack other religions, just like a flower does not harm other flowers.

### **Moral Life, Religious Life and Spiritual Life**

There is a general confusion about what constitutes moral, religious, and spiritual life. A moral life is one in which a person adheres to some ethical rules or codes, and conforms to ethical requirements in order to maintain righteousness. He does not speak untruth, harm others, or encourage others to speak falsehood. In every country, civilization and tradition, there is a set of rules which were originally established in order to civilize its people. These rules are called mores. They were created not so much for individual progress as for the building of the society to ensure that the individual does

not harm the collectivity. There are certain people who are very meticulous in following these rules. They feel self-righteous and condemn others who fail to observe these rules. Such individuals generally cease to achieve great progress due to their self-complacency.

Religious life refers to the situation where a person is aware of the existence of something higher than oneself – some divine power, person or personality, God or gods – and the person attempts to establish a link with the divine through such actions as praying, worshipping, reciting the rosary, attending temple and church services, and observing practices laid down by the priests or religious leaders for the benefit of the members. The whole aim in the beginning was to awaken the person to the existence of the transcendent beyond the material world, and help the individual to weave it into his or her consciousness and establish connection with the divine. Humans have been taught to recognize their limitations and rely upon higher powers in order to resist evil actions that impede personal progress. In the course of time, religion became organized into something resembling a political system. It had its hierarchy of priests, interpreters, custodians of its scriptures, and other things that turned it into a complex organization. Because of this complex structure, the entire complexion of religion was changed. What was originally a means to awaken the human mind to the existence of a higher power and higher realms of existence got bogged down with institution building with particular creeds and dogmas, its monopoly on truth, which leads to the decrying of other religious systems. The best aspects of religion were clouded by these changes. Religiosity became a formality to fulfil the external requirements like attending rituals at the church or temple, and subscribing to creeds and dogmas. The development of human consciousness stopped at these superficial acts. Hence a new movement is essential, one that emphasizes the spiritual dimension.

Spiritual life is a life of inner culturing of consciousness by which a person exceeds the material bounds. The individual not only believes in the presence of a higher power, a transcendent realm, but exerts him or herself continuously and strenuously in going deeper and higher in consciousness, searching for truths and expressing these truths in daily life. The person's life is built upon spiritual principles. A religious person may not be a spiritual one, but a spiritual person must be religious. To be spiritual may not require external rituals or religious observances. There are various modes of inner disciplines by which consciousness towards God or the Spirit can be developed. There are many types of

spirituality as well as disciplines of spiritual cultivation. It is quite apt to say that religion in its best sense serves as a door opening into the realms of spirituality. Nonetheless, it becomes an obstruction or a barrier to authentic spiritual life when it is insistent on its dogmas, creeds, rituals, and its claim of exclusively possessing the truth.

Religions are formed during times of great incarnations and great descents of higher consciousness and power, as in the case of Jesus Christ, Buddha and Krishna. Originally, these figures seek to preserve the true message of the central religious themes among the people. After their passing, however, their religions got bogged down. The incarnated figures came into the world and did their work to promote consciousness. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo says that the earth cannot bear the torch of Light for too long a time. The flame slowly ebbs away; only a few catch the fire while the rest sink down to the normal level. A few keep up this spirit, the real meaning, and the lived messages of the incarnations. Others get diluted and wrongly interpreted. Controversies arise and attempts at settling these conflicts are carried out. Consequently, the teachings become organized and are closed in a coffin. Any further revelation is shut off. This tendency among builders and shapers of religious systems hinders the growth of spirituality. A person that is spiritual has a spiritual afflatus which radiates spiritual vibrations and maintains equanimity. Spirituality can change a sinner to a saint. Spirituality is a matter of inner being, the soul. It provides Truth, Bliss, Light, Power, Beauty and Peace. It helps to raise the consciousness, which will promote harmony and peaceful coexistence.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is based on an experienced integralism. It is a synthesis of idealism, realism, pragmatism, naturalism, humanism and spiritualism. He aimed for the gradual spiritualization of society. He welcomed an age of the Super-mind, where the realization of the good, freedom, and unity will predominate in all social groups. The unity of the human race can be achieved through integral living and through the development of integral personality (Dhal, p.65). The human civilization is presently passing through a crucial moment. There are turbulences everywhere. Perhaps it is the outcome of the battle between the old and the new. As a consequence, many of the traditional values are getting rapidly eroded. Sri Aurobindo believes that all human problems are basically problems of consciousness. It is only through a spiritual orientation of life that an everlasting solution to these dilemmas

can be found. All the religions have to overcome the divisions through spiritual unity with science and faith being harmonized. Religion must synthesize spirituality and materialism, and embrace life in its wide variety. The central perception of Sri Aurobindo's ideas is that evolution is a continuous process from stone to the plant, from plant to the animal, and finally to human. Humans have achieved great progress in mental development but still remain ignorant and imperfect. Through a conscious effort, human beings can reach a new level of consciousness, beyond the mind, and evolve into a higher being – the Supramental. Human life will then become perfectly harmonious, good, beautiful, and happy. Life is transformed and all its activities are given new orientations.

### **Religion in Human Life**

Although human is the creation of God, the connection to the source of creation has been removed in the process of evolution. Therefore, the role of religion is to re-unite the person with the divine, the source of creation. If religion is used by organizations in other ways for self-satisfaction, it loses its value. While it is true that religion does not exert any impact on the evolutionary process during the progress of human civilization, it does not mean that there is no need of religion in individual life. There are innumerable ways to the divine. The guiding principles, morals, and truths, etc. provided by religion are meant for controlling animal tendencies present in human beings. It is conceptualized in the religious mind that this Universe is governed by some higher principles and an unseen Power. In the beginning, it was the goal of religion to awaken the human being; to raise the existence of physical life to a higher level of consciousness. To be more conscious means to be connected with a higher being. Religion helps the person to realize one's own limitations, to exercise self-control with moral principles, to be dependent on higher powers, and to reject evil ways.

The eternal, intransient, and supreme absolute is the ultimate base of human life. The aim of life is to unite with that Absolute. Religion provides us the simple ways to reach this goal. It may be considered as an innate tendency, perception, activity, and discipline of the human being. If people's life and activities are governed by this religion, they can become good individuals and ideal members of society. They can also reach the higher Powers. For ages humanity has given higher respect to

religion. How often people derailed from religion in their life journey; but eventually, they would return to the religious path because of the realization that religion was integrally related to the inner being. Despite modern civilization often attacking religion, it does not extinguish the innate religious tendencies within the human being.

In the course of history, religion became deteriorated. This often happened because of the priests or religious leaders who were ignorant and served as obstruction to religion. Hence religion was rejected by some people. However, human must make the effort to be free from this deterioration. In ancient India religion was related to philosophy and science. Now it is considered as a gap between the old and the new, West and East. Whatever it may be, it is admitted that religion is first and foremost an all-inclusive object. Religion should be a guide, light, and sovereign of life. It should be helpful for inner opening towards the soul. Nonetheless, it may obstruct the path of progress if it becomes attached to principles, symbols, means of worships, institutional norms, and certain beliefs.

Religion has two dimensions – external and internal. The external comprises the institutional, intellectual, and symbolic elements, and means of worship. These things are meant for the general people. It grips the hard non-flexible norms and principles. It gives much importance to religious organizations. On the contrary, whoever understands the root inspiration of religion is able to progress inwardly. This is the true dimension of religion. True religion is spiritual. It wills to govern the dimensions of life in higher light of consciousness and spiritual principles.

Religious life is a life where the person awakens to higher beings, God and Goddesses and other divine powers. Activities such as prayer, worships, chanting, reciting, going to church or temple, and participating in religious ceremonies serve to unite the person with the transcendent. These activities may be needed before spiritual realization. Those activities may be helpful but are not the true potential. Hence, the person cannot take these activities as the sole principles of life. They should be transformable and flexible. The spiritual essence in religion should be our goal. Life should be governed by it. Aldus Huxley rightly says that when religion becomes a climate in one's life, appropriate yoga is possible, and one can connect with the higher beings.

## The Dialectic of Secularization

According to Seibert (2013 & 2014), in the critical theory of religion, or dialectical religiology, which has been developed in recent decades, religion is the longing for the totally other than the horror and terror of nature and history; for perfect justice and unconditional love; that the murderer shall not triumph over the innocent victim. Each particular, positive, and historical religion has a dynamic, dialectical, and trinitarian structure. Any positive religion consists of: 1) its notion: the God or the Gods; 2) its judgment: the relationship to the believers; and 3) its conclusion: the cult as the relationship of the believers to their God or Gods, and the believers' transition into the social world, family, civil society, state and history. Dialectic means determinate negation. In world history, one positive religion determinately, or concretely, or specifically negates the previous one – critiquing it, but also preserving some of it, and combining it with new elements.

Seibert further explained that in critical religiology, three forms of dialectics are differentiated: 1) the dialectic between the religious and the secular; 2) the dialectic in the secular; and 3) the dialectic in the religious. The secular Enlightenment movements wanted to free people from their fears and make them into masters of their fate. The unconscious was to become conscious. Where Id was, Ego was to appear. But then the secular Enlightenment turned against itself. The bourgeois enlightenment movements and revolutions turned into fascism; the socialist enlightenment and revolutions into Stalinism, or Red Fascism; the Freudian enlightenment and revolutions into the porno society. The founder of Christianity, Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, pronounced the Truth and Love. But then the Church fathers made a positive *religion* out of Jesus' teachings, transforming him from a subject of imitation into an object of worship. Christianity then allowed itself to be used as an ideology, in the critical sense of false consciousness, necessary appearance, and untruth in order to legitimate the domination by slaveholders, feudal lords and capitalists, and initiated loveless heresy trials, crusades, inquisition tribunals, and torture, e.g. Waterboarding was to be inherited by the Gestapo and by the CIA, until it was ended by the Obama Administration. Today, we have again, against all this, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *religion-less* Christianity, and Christian imitation ethics, and his consequent martyrdom of freedom under the first wave of fascism or corporatism: a theology and ethics transcending the modern antagonism

between the sacred and the profane. Today both religion and secular enlightenment are in desperate need of rescue and renewal.

Nonetheless, unity in diversity and synthesis in dissimilarity are the core hymns of Indian culture, which embraces all religions. Religion is understood widely. If it draws to communality it becomes narrow. It is not true religion. Religion is God. It is unending, eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent. It threads together all of the living and non-living worlds, planets, and the universe. It exists in realms above, below, inner, outer and anywhere. It is whole and transcendent. All are equal in the eyes of religion. The philosophies of Mogal emperor Akbar, Lord Buddha, Mahtma Gandhi, and Sri Aurobindo etc. are all based on secularism. There may be different views but unique essence among all. Religious people love everybody. They love the Universe. They see the divine everywhere because they feel that the universe is the creation of God.

The Indian constitution relies on secularism. It gives respect to all religions. Christ teaches to love one's neighbor as oneself. Islam says to love one's colleagues. Lord Buddha's compassion and Jain's non-violence are examples of secularism. The foundation of secularism depends on leaving others to follow the enlightened path. The land of India is meant for all religions. The people of all religions stay here and make it their home. People of different religious backgrounds participate in the Indian parliament. Mother India embraces all religions.

Toynbee proclaims a good message that our successor will not be like the Westerners. They will be successors of Socrates, Plato, as well as Confucius and Lao-tsu. The followers of Christ will also be followers of Gautama Buddha. They will accept Elias, Elisa, Saints Peter and Paul as well as Yarathrust and Muhammad; like the successor of Clemson, they will be the successor of Shankar and Ramanuja. They will receive Basue as Ebon Khaldun, along with the successor of Cromwell, George Washington and Majid. They will be the successor of Lenin, Gandhi and Sun-yat-Sen. This idea is really based on secularism. All ethics and legality, in order to have real motivating power, must ultimately be rooted in the insatiable longing of people for the Supreme and for the Ultimate Reality.

## The Future of Religion

Sri Aurobindo says, “It is to be hoped that in time the present mentality will pass away and both, and communities (Hindu and Muslims) learn to live as children of the same mother. If they fight neither is likely to gain, but both will lose” (Collected from Dhal’s *Dharm Gigyansa* p.9). In his book *Education Today*, Dewey asserted that a religion can be realized itself only through science, that is through ways of understanding human nature in its concrete actuality and of discovering how its various factors are modified by interaction with the variety of interaction with the variety of conditions under which they operate. Without science the religion is bound to become formal, hypothetical and a mass of dogmas (pp.148-49).

Actually, religion was created for wellbeing of individual, nation and society. Religion has a definite role in the human evolution process. In the course of time, however, it has deteriorated and changed into a social organization. People have realized that religion has become a barrier in the development of human consciousness. Thus in the future, organized religion will no longer exist. In the evolutionary process, religion has helped human to advance in consciousness. It has been applied for self-development, and has opened the door to spirituality. The development of consciousness is essential to spirituality. However, spirituality will become free of religion, which has to surrender to spiritual knowledge, feeling, and a spiritual life. This does not mean that religion will be completely extinguished. Rather it will act to prepare the human being for a higher, spiritually advanced life and for realization of God. Organized religion will move towards evolution of spiritual consciousness as leader of human progress.

In the future, religious views, dogmas, mores, means of worship are not to be followed. The core potentialities of religion: relying on Faith, Freedom, and Unity – these will be enlightened in a new light. In the primary stage of spirituality the place of religion will be meant for the development of consciousness of the human being. If religious leaders wish to help in this direction, they will take the needful and responsive role in the progressive human civilization; otherwise they will be neglected in the evolutionary process. The Mother in Sri Aurobindo Ashram says that in a Supramental world, there will be no place for religion. All life will be the manifestation of divine unity. The present God and Goddesses will be the friend and collaborators of Supramental

beings because the ultimate divine truth will have manifested among the beings of the new Supramental world.

## **Human Life and Education**

Education is not merely a security against the uncertain challenges of the future but also an adventure into unknown possibilities. In each new generation there is a new excitement and expectancy. The child is constantly learning, discovering, aspiring, advancing, growing in knowledge, ever acquiring newer skills, rising on the wings of contrivance and complexity, and trying to rise higher and higher still. There is always a need to look beyond the irrelevance and insufficiency of formal education, and to rely on lifelong self-education, self-reliance, and to be in constant readiness to face and master the unexpected as a hero warrior. With the rise in life expectations observed today, there is quickened mental obsolescence, and growing in age has more worries and frustrations than delights and realizations. There is an overwhelming bulge of learners coming to educational institutions and there is a threatening bulge of information and technological invention. Now we have to prevent these two bulges from bursting in order to safeguard the future.

Within a broad theoretical framework, the pupil should be encouraged to learn through doing, through self-experimentation, and to venture boldly into the unknown. Pupils have to acquire through self-effort as far as possible the sort of competence and self-confidence that will help them to possess the needed skills to meet future challenges. Education should thus try to provide the energy of the body, readiness of mind and especially deeper support of the spirit that will develop the relevant skills as and when required. Hence, our education should basically aim at awakening and developing the pupil's diverse and dormant faculties of observation, experimentation and speculation rather than passivity and frustration. It should encourage community and communion instead of isolation and alienation.

There are various modes of education available in our society including open schooling, distance education, vocational education, job oriented education, deemed university, autonomous institution, professional education, and technical education, etc. It is not enough

to take an inter-disciplinary approach to education, but everything has to be seen in relation to the whole – the very ground of Reality. Neither the horizontal nor the vertical view education, but rather the integral view of education holds the key to success. In this view the center is everywhere but the circumference is nowhere. The current scenario of unbridled specialization and knowledge fragmentation needs integral education, which “relates each branch of knowledge to reality, links all the segment of the felly to the hub of the wheel. Each stage of education will no doubt involve its own problems of integration; and the divers discipline for the body, mind and soul have to ensure an integral growth of the whole human personality. ‘Every life’, said C.G. Jung, ‘is at the bottom of the realization of the whole,’ and the essential postulates of integral education would be the unity of matter and spirit in man, and the role of man to enact a visible efflorescence of this integrality, this wholeness, the light and puissance of unity” (Iyengar, p.11).

For a sustainable society, formal education has to aim at helping the pupil to gain knowledge of the physical world, the biological world, and the social sciences. There is both the need for the horizontal integration of the curriculum year by year so that it may be a clear and decisive movement in education. There is also a need for vertical integration so that each stage may be natural linked to what has gone before and what is to come afterwards. The striving of today should be grounded in all the achievements of yesterday and point to the summit of the future. Besides these horizontal and vertical dimensions, an even more important task is the integration of spirit and matter as well as the integration of the interior aspiration and the external struggle and victory. The goal of education is indeed to help the pupil evolve into a noble specimen of the race, a witness to Truth in its four fold aspects of Love, Knowledge, Power and Beauty. The aim of education should be the flowering of human personality through the leadership of psychic being inherited in the soul.

According to Sri Aurobindo,

Each human being is a self-developing soul, and the responsibility of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities, and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into

a particular form like an inert plastic material. It is not yet realized what this soul is or that the true secret, whether with a child or adult, is to help the individual to find his deeper self and the real psychic entity within. It must be given a chance to come forward, and still more called into the foreground as ‘the leader of the march set in our front’. Itself will take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of our psychological being towards a realization of its potentialities of which our present mechanical view of life and man external routine methods of dealing with them prevent us from having any experience of forming any conception. (*The Human Cycle*)

Hence, in education the most important issue is to awaken the soul within and make it “the leader of the march”. Human civilization has faced a population explosion, knowledge explosion, and the threat of nuclear explosion. Life, knowledge and power – all threaten to destroy by their very surfeit. The real thing which is lacking is love. Love fails us because our understanding is partial and defective. A fuller understanding requires an integral education centered in the soul or the psychic entity.

The right education is needed in the changing global situation today; a partial, personal view of education has to be replaced by the integral view comprising the needs of the individual, nation and all humanity. In addition, it must emphasize the harmonious development of body, mind and soul, and the enduring gains of the past, the thrusts of the present and the possibilities of the unfolding future. The individual should be helped to realize one’s utmost potentialities and enabled to establish one’s relation with the social group and nation. Moreover, the person should be encouraged to find one’s true place in the global human community. Hence, there are personal, social, national and global dimensions to education which together promote a living, evolving and progressively realizing dynamic of puissant consciousness.

Education without spirituality is non-knowledge; it is an illusory or false knowledge. It is a partial, limiting and falsifying experience. We should not consider the other merely as fellow brother, a fellow human being, but rather as myself, ourselves – lit by the spirit within, and marked for the same goal of transformation from human to divine. All the subjects of the curriculum should be seen as different petals of

one flower, different tunes of a single musical instrument, and different colored rays of the same rainbow that feed the same illumination. Not the individual person alone, but rather the community, nation, race, and human society have a soul, an evolving soul within and as like to like, rapport at the level of the soul is easy to establish – rapport between person and person, and between person and society, nation, and the global human family. On this foundation and sourcing from the power house of illumination, all other super structures and communication systems could be safely reared.

Education is not isolated from life. If education were indeed progressive, it must go with self-knowledge, self-discipline, self-gathering, self-unfoldment and self-realization, and must be co-extensive with life. The learners will be an unceasing learner and will grow in consciousness. All of life is education, which is a lifelong process of evolution and growth. Pupil and teachers are both learners. The aim of our endeavor in education is thus to take hold of the hidden animal with its *tamasic* (obscurity) and *rajasic* (king-like) traits and set it on the path of soul-awakening, purposive effort and *satwik* (*yogic*) realization.

It is observed that the present system of education is overburdening. In this place let us encourage the pupil to exploit his/her innate buoyancy and curiosity and learn legitimately through self-effort. The pupil should be encouraged to embark on open self-initiated projects with formulated objectives, and seeking solutions through self-regulated programs of work-experience. The pupil needs to be encouraged to engage in group activities or co-operative work with fellow students who are also gaining knowledge and skills through community involvement and service. Flexibility and dynamism rather than uniformity and rigidity should be the governing principle of the educational process, and both the teacher and the pupil will be participants in this educational adventure. Exceeding the dichotomies, integral education would regulate wholeness by the center, mobilize the diverse faculties and powers, and group them together into a lifelong journey of continuous aspiration and effort and extension of consciousness.

The entire world is a school and all of life is education. The educational institutions should be a place of high concentration, aspiration and effort even as temple, church or mosque, a house of God endowed with power and grace. The teacher is the link, the channel of

communication, the willing paraclete, like a mother whose ambience of love fosters the child between the pupil (who seeks knowledge) and God, the source of all knowledge. A real teacher, enacting the power of divine love, helps the child's buds of consciousness to open out petal by petal, and to achieve fullness of bloom and ripe fruitfulness in the catalytic environment of the academy. If the academy and teacher fail to implement these roles, they mislead childhood and adolescence.

For future learners, education is not about acquiring skills or qualifying for a degree or diploma, but rather an adventure to be undertaken, similar to a hero warrior charged with a battle to be fought in order to be victorious in the future. That battle is not with nuclear weapons, but a far more crucial inner battle of gaining knowledge and cultivating a new consciousness and self-transformation. Everyone has to first wrestle with the ego's propensity towards division, selfishness, narrowness, stupidity and fear, and bring the *psychic being* (the power of Spirit) into the forefront. "If thus the psychic being could be awakened and invoked and installed as 'the leader of the march set in our front,' this will produce much better result than our current mechanical view of life and our market place incentives for work and study" (Iyengar, p.21).

Parental ambitions and the evils of the education system infect the children of today. The children's spontaneous curiosity about the entire universe is undermined steadily by the modern human drive towards specialization. Parental anxiety for a mere continuation of the family 'traditions' must also mean a denial of the evolutionary drive, even a wanton obstruction to the native flowering of consciousness. On the contrary, the child has the right to grow in his/her own way, responding to the urges of his/her own caliber, careering on the hero warrior's path and marching on towards the beckoning goals. A child of a manual worker may grow into an authentic poet, a musician's child into an expert builder, a teacher's child into an artist, a carpenter's child into a social engineer. To be a hero warrior is to be free – free from all mental constructions, free from egoistic likes and dislikes, and transformed into a servant of the divine.

Further Iyengar said, "An environment is to be created, an ambience provided that will facilitate the child discovering and activating the psychic being within, and thereby beyonding the ego's purblind assertiveness, establishing rapport with the soul or the psychic

being in others, and progressively losing all sense of separativity, having become one with the universal spirit” (p. 23). It may be difficult for adults to accomplish but not quite so difficult for children. The divine presence in school atmosphere, the dedicated love of the teachers that gently open the doors of the pupil’s psychic self, the stimulating feelings of other pupils, the unending curiosity of life, the thrilled satisfaction of doing things in one’s own way with spontaneous collaborative effort – these are the tools of educational enterprises that will transform our children into the ‘hero warriors’ of Tomorrow’s World. This adventure of education must ultimately comprehend the individual, social and global perspectives.

Education should be meant for growth of consciousness, for the free world of tomorrow and for personal and social transformation. This goal can be achieved through modernization of the curriculum, elimination of deadwood, making pupils learn by themselves and taking up projects on their own rather than being content with swallowing tabloid of knowledge, encouraging pupils to cultivate a lively interest in the neighborhood, and promoting healthy teacher-pupil dialogues. Yet all will fail in the end unless the psychic revolution takes place for enhancement of consciousness, to realize the sense of others, and the living perception of the deeper unity. The ego will diminish its tempo; the psychic being wins its release and is able to see, hear, feel, aspire, plan, achieve, and enjoy life with freedom and certitude. The human being must race beyond present limitations and win the sovereignty of an integral consciousness. It will provide a new dimension of experience, a new understanding and power, a new foundation of ordaining, and varied harmonious play of life.

The content of the compulsory course may be reduced, free time may be available to pupils for their own projects or studies. Choice based subjects may be provided to suit the varied aptitudes and preferences of the pupils. The teacher will be a friend, philosopher and guide, collaborator and fellow-adventurer rather than a salesman, examiner, policeman and magistrate. Few minutes of silence, meditation, and self-introspection in order to look deep into the innermost truth of beings have good benefits. The attempt to give an inner orientation to education may be expected to achieve an accession of keenness, freshness, vitality, open-heartedness, and clarity of vision. With the new Seeing Eye, the pupil moves with a poise and purpose, sees more and understands more,

finds all knowledge and experience, all information and indices, marvels of revelation, illumination and affirmation. The future learner will sign with flame of freedom in the soul and the light of knowledge in his eyes; and the pupil will also be ready to engage in God's labor of danger and difficulty for sheer joy of it. This is not utopian thinking, but a practical reality that the author has experimented for more than twenty years.

## **Spiritualization**

Sri Aurobindo writes:

A certain amount of concentration, an inner aspiration in the heart and an opening of the consciousness to the presence of the Mother and to the descent from above is needed... There are three conditions which are indispensable for the achievement of this central inner revolution and new formation; none of them is altogether sufficient in itself, but with their united three-fold power the uplifting can be done, the conversion can be completely made. Firstly, life is a movement of desire, and it has built in us as its center a desire-soul which refers to itself all the motion of life and puts in them its own troubled hue and pain of an ignorant, half-lit, baffled endeavor for divine living. This desire must be abolished and replaced by a purer and firmer motive power, the tormented soul of desire dissolved and in its stead, there must emerge the calmness, strength, and happiness of the true vital being which is concealed within us. Next, life is driven or lead by the impulse of the life-force, partly by a mind that is mostly uneasy and not too luminous or competent in its role as guide and mentor. In order to attain divine life, the mind and the life-impulse must cease to be anything but instruments and the inmost psychic being must take their place as the leader on the path and the indicator of divine guidance. Lastly, life is turned towards the satisfaction of the separate ego, which must disappear and be replaced by the true spiritual person, the central being. Life itself must be turned towards the fulfilment of the divine in terrestrial existence; it must feel a divine force awakening within it and become an obedient instrumentation of its purpose. (SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 907)

Once we have grown into the truth-consciousness, its power

of spiritual truth of being will determine all. That truth will transform the body, mind and life. Light, bliss, beauty and perfection of the spontaneous right action of all the being are present as the native powers of the supramental truth-consciousness. These elements will transform the body, mind and life here on earth. Facing a lot of difficulties a human being has developed a soul and is capable of further development. It may become a shrine and impression of the spirit. It helps reveal a secret spirituality of matter, becomes entirely conscious, and be able to reach a certain oneness with the spirit. The amalgamation of spirit and matter creates a new vista of a peaceful, harmonious, and fine world.

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## **Empathy: the Key to Handle Digital Communications Post-Pandemic**

*Albertina Navas<sup>1</sup>*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This essay establishes the four phenomena that have characterized the pandemic and digital communications. This refers to infodemic, which is the abundance of information and difficulty to manage it; hypersensitivity, indicated in classifying actors as heroes and villains; the development of atypical cycles, which refers to the alteration of behaviors and habits among the population; and disinformation, understood as the presentation of false events with the purpose of manipulation. This work focuses on Jesus as the Communicator par excellence and empathy. Communicators must be empathetic before posting content, in order to guide digital platform users to find what they are seeking for. Therefore, empathic communication is more than speaking kind words of encouragement, sympathy, and consolation. It requires concrete actions as evidence of solidarity, trust, and support. A comprehensive pastoral communication plan for the digital age reflects this paradigm of communication and is cemented in real actions through empathy as a legacy of truth and loving your neighbor.*

**Keywords:** *pandemic, infodemic, hypersensitivity, atypical cycles and disinformation, empathy, digital communications, post-pandemic.*

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## 1. The Four Digital Communication Phenomena Witnessed During the Pandemic

With over 4,480 million social media users as of 2021,<sup>2</sup> these digital platforms have become the most popular means to share everyday stories such as family gatherings, trips, new jobs, weddings, as well as pertinent information such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the top 20 most popular digital networks are Facebook which amasses over 2.8 billion active users<sup>3</sup> globally, Twitter, which has 400 million users worldwide, Instagram, which registers over a billion users, and Tik Tok, claiming 800 million users.<sup>4</sup>

It was precisely the expansion of the pandemic that showed that communication is a complex process, increasingly mediated by digital media through mobile devices. In fact, 7 out of 10 internet users are unique mobile phone users.<sup>5</sup> According to the global firm IPSOS, in the context of the pandemic, the quarantine became a cycle divided into stages. In the first stage, we went through a long period of uncertainty, which alternated between moments of adjustment and resistance to finally adapt to the new reality. The second stage marked the coming out of lockdown during which relief and fear continued to co-exist. This cycle of constant uncertainty, adaptation, and fear has been the foundation for the rise of four communication phenomena: infodemia, hypersensitivity, atypical cycles, and disinformation, which are defined

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<sup>2</sup> According to Diego Santos, “There are 3,800 million social media users, number which increased over 9% since 2019.” Diego Santos, “97 statistics on social media in 2020,” *HubSpot* (blog), published on November 4, 2020, <https://blog.hubspot.es/marketing/estadisticas-redes-sociales>, paragraph 6.

<sup>3</sup> A social media active user is someone who logs in to the site and/or completed some sort of action (liking, sharing, posting, etc.) within the previous 30 days of the data collection. Seek Visibility, “What it means to be active on Social Media – And why is it important?” published on May 27, 2016, <http://www.seekvisibility.com/2016/05/active-on-social-media/>.

<sup>4</sup> We are social & Hootsuite, “Digital 2021. July global stats report,” published on July 21, 2021, p. 110, <https://es.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2021-july-global-statshot-report-v02>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 75.

below.<sup>6</sup>

**Infodemia** is a process that unfolds in a parallel manner with the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is characterized by two factors: (1) Overload of information, which overcomes the management capacity of each person (*infoxication*); and (2) Lack of capacity to identify valuable data among those that are not and differentiate which sources are user trustworthy and which ones are not.

**Hypersensitivity** refers to the management of narratives that have the intent of manipulation. It presents opposite situations in which some actors are demonized, and others consecrated, presenting or exposing heroes and villains, the good and the bad, the conscious and unconscious. In the communicative environment, the concern is the polarization of balance, which leads to a focus of reality without the different shades that characterize it.

**Atypical cycles** are behavioral changes that people display during the pandemic regarding the months previous to the expansion, including habits related to the use of the Internet and digital media. The alteration of cycles influences the overload of information and therefore, the generation of amplified favorable and unfavorable reactions. As an example, in 2020, social media presented five times more posting density than usual.<sup>7</sup> In 2019, Twitter had an average of 500 million tweets per day (7,000 tweets per second); and in 2020, it registered an average of 700 million tweets per day (9,000 tweets per second),<sup>8</sup> which represents a daily post increase by close to a third. Meanwhile, Google, since February 2020, registered 100 times more searches than those identified in December 2019, 60 percent of them were related to COVID-19.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Albertina Navas, “Infodemia: ¿cómo evitar la desinformación en redes sociales?” published on October 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GolEpJBosc>.

<sup>7</sup> Diego Santos, “97 statistics on social media in 2020,” paragraph 6.

<sup>8</sup> Internet Live Stats, “In 1 second, each and every second, there are,” accessed on October 9, 2021, <https://www.internetlivestats.com/one-second/>.

<sup>9</sup> Google Trends, “El año en búsquedas 2020,” accessed on October 9, 2021, <https://trends.google.com/trends/yis/2020/GLOBAL/>.

Finally, **disinformation** is the phenomenon commonly referred to as fake news. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Orihuela in the article “Information disorders (better than fake news),” “The framing fake news is too ambiguous for an increasingly complex phenomenon, which includes the spatial or temporal decontextualization of news, humor, memes, errors, political manipulation, and social alarm.”<sup>10</sup> Based on this statement, it is recommended to employ the term disinformation rather than fake news because it implies either delivering real news in false contexts, false information in real contexts or false information without context. The actual intent of this misleading or distorted information is that audiences are bound to make conclusions that are not valid (Bounegru, et al, 2018).

A study conducted in Spain during the peak months of the pandemic confirmed that 6 out of 10 hoaxes were related to COVID-19. However, in most cases, it was not possible to determine the channel through which misleading information was transmitted. In addition, it was identified that the most common platforms used with that intent were WhatsApp (25%) and Twitter (14%). To sum up, in 74 percent of the cases the sources were being supplanted or anonymous. Thus, it can be inferred that educated, informed, and critical audiences shared these data or supported them.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Communication Should be a Theological Matter

The term “communication”, etymologically speaking, comes from the Old French word *comun*, meaning “common, general, free, open, public”, from Latin *communis*, meaning “in common, public, shared by all or many; general, not specific; familiar, not pretentious.” This is from a reconstructed compound *\*ko-moin-i-* “held in common,” compound adjective formed from *\*ko-* “together” + *\*moi-n-*, suffixed form of root *\*mei-* (1) “to

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<sup>10</sup> José Luis Orihuela. “Information disorders (better than fake-news),” *Medium* (blog), published in Jan 22, 2018, <https://jlori.medium.com/trastornos-de-la-informaci%C3%B3n-mejor-que-fake-news-7a9ae44f7cc7>, paragraph 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ramón Salaverría et al., “Disinformation in Times of Pandemic: Typology of Hoaxes on Covid-19,” *El profesional de la información* 29, No. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.15>.

change, go, move,” hence literally “shared by all.”<sup>12</sup>

Even though Theology and Communication are presented as conceptually distinct disciplines, for some scholars studying subjects related with Religion, these two concepts are intimately connected. Based on the Second Vatican Council’s document *Inter Mirifica* (1963), the Pontifical Council for Social Communication’s *Communio et Progressio* (1971/1975), and *Aetatis Novae* (1992), the processes of communication in Church and society opens the door to a more cultural grounding of communication. Therefore, this should be of interest to theologians.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Avery Dulles<sup>14</sup> calls Christianity “a religion of communication,” based on the elements of Trinity, Revelation, and Incarnation. These elements refer to the great mystery of self-communication, understood as follows:

- **Trinity.** The Christian understanding of God’s self-communication is based on God’s character as God who relates and communicates with his creatures.
- **Revelation.** The entire Scripture speaks about God as a communicating God. He communicates with His creatures.
- **Incarnation.** This is the central Christian doctrine that God became flesh, that God assumed human nature and became a man in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity. Christ was truly God and truly man.

Therefore, Christians should be inspired by the example of Jesus as the communicator *par excellence*, since He refers to Himself as the

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<sup>12</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*, communication (n.), accessed on February 6, 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/communication>.

<sup>13</sup> Paul A. Soukup, “A Dialogue on Communication and Theology: Theological Reflection and Communication,” *New Theology Review* 8, No. 4 (1995): 5-12, access <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1077&context=comm>.

<sup>14</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Communication of Faith and Its Content* (Washington D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1985).

Way, the Truth, and the Life. In addition, on being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the Kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘there it is,’ because the Kingdom of God is in your midst”. Consequently, Christians are at their best and most relevant when they courageously uphold the truths that have been taught by Jesus and through the Church.

In this context, there are some challenges associated with religion in the Internet domain. The main concern is the lack of moral and religious authority over all the content that is promulgated online since anyone can become a prosumer (producer + consumer) of information, intentionally or unintentionally misleading rather than informing. The Internet is full of ideologies and propaganda as well as content aiming to proselytize and sow seeds of mistrust and hatred towards and among religions.

Analyzing this environment, Grant Kien<sup>15</sup> classified twenty-two cyberbullying tactics, from posting cruel information and damaging reputations (dissing) to publicly revealing sensitive information (doxing), including different forms of intimidation (flaming, hate speech, dogpiling...) and usual ways of stalking and harassing. Some digital communication forces social media users to face the combination of speed, global reach, and simulacra signification, all elements conspiring to create a new scale of emotional appeal, which is both exceptionally gratifying in digital consumer culture while disorienting the sense of practical judgment.

Therefore, in a self-replicating, emotion-based, and virally distributed distorted system, Jesus is the role model to follow based on His specialized custom-made communication (parables) to an inclusive approach recognizing and respecting the interlocutor’s world view, culture, knowledge, and experiences. All this is accompanied by deep listening and non-verbal demonstrations such as wholeheartedly touching sick people’s hands, while transmitting His healing power. Matthew remarks that the crowds were amazed at His teachings because He had moral authority, not as their teachers of the law (Mat 7:28-29). Therefore,

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<sup>15</sup> Grant Kien, *Communicating with Memes. Consequences in Post-truth Civilization* (Lexington Books, 2019).

Jesus is present in all communication that seeks to carry his Word and serve others, that is to say in all the Good News of the Gospel that should be spread to all.

### **3. Empathy: The Key to Handle the Post-Pandemic Digital Communications Phenomena**

Technology has been responsible for creating significantly useful resources, which place all the information we need within our reach, but at the same time, it has dramatically changed our daily lives. There are three main impact areas of technology: 1) Structural—the way it impacts our daily life, marking the rhythm of encounters; 2) Relational—the way it strengthens or weakens the link among individuals, including their roles; and 3) Social—the way it fosters public interactions and conversations with stakeholders.<sup>16</sup>

Communicating life is more than speaking kind words of encouragement, sympathy, and consolation. It requires concrete actions that communicate solidarity, trust, and support. A comprehensive pastoral communication plan for the digital age reflects this paradigm of communication and is concretized in real actions on behalf of the people of God. In this sense, digital social media has been consolidated as the opportune channel to unite speakers around the world, beyond geographic and cultural elements, as well as to promote relations characterized by interculturality and interaction.

In this scenario, empathy is the key as it is an invitation to put ourselves in the suffering person's place and imagine their predicament as our own. Nonetheless, empathetic behavior can sometimes extend its circle of concern. Subjects will tend to experience compassion toward the people and projects that are being served. This is why the moral achievement of extending concern to others does not necessarily precede compassion but can be coeval with it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sara Malo Cerrato, "Mobile Phone's Impact in 12 to 16 Years Old Teenagers' Lives," *Comunicar* No. 27 (2006): 105-112, ISSN: 1134-3478.

<sup>17</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, "Compassion & Terror," *The MIT Press*

Occasionally, empathy is confused with sympathy, but these terms differ. While empathy implies putting oneself in someone else's shoes, sympathy is a legitimate concern of an individual for what another person is going through and the intent to offer alternative solutions from a personal point of view, but without establishing a deep connection with the interlocutor. This leads to an approximation of the pain of the other in a superficial manner and without abandoning the particular point of view, which does not allow connecting with the feeling of the person facing the problem.<sup>18</sup> In empathy, three components are interrelated: the cognitive, the emotional, and the compassionate.<sup>19</sup>

**The cognitive element** implies the intent to see the situation that the other person is going through from that individual's own perspective, setting aside one's personal opinion when facing a problem.

**The emotional element** requires sharing the other person's emotions, even if one does not understand the other's feelings or share the same experiences.

**Finally, the compassionate element** encourages one to face another person's pain, offering spontaneous support to make the other feel better,<sup>20</sup> even if no definite solution is offered.

Therefore, in empathy the emotion of one person is shared without judgment from the other person, supporting them throughout the process, from their own perspective and at their pace.

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132, No. 1 (2003), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20027819.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup>Terrie Black, "Empathy, Not Sympathy," *Rehabilitation Nursing* 45, No. 5, (September/October 2020): 243-244, doi: 10.1097/RNJ.0000000000000286.

<sup>19</sup>Joris Janssen, "A Three-Component Framework for Empathic Technologies to Augment Human Interaction," *J Multimodal User Interfaces*, No. 6 (2012):143-161, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12193-012-0097-5#Sec2>.

<sup>20</sup>Albertina Navas, "Empathy: the compassionate link between self and others," (presentation *Program Faith Communication in the Digital World*, April 24, 2021), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NiKKJO7VXeaw7GjNTdXyJMxX9PbrK7DN/view?usp=drive\\_web](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NiKKJO7VXeaw7GjNTdXyJMxX9PbrK7DN/view?usp=drive_web).

As stated by Matthew Carpenter, former Latin America Partner Manager at Twitter, during a personal interview: “The key competency in understanding digital environments is decoding how a person produces and consumes information.” In the same perspective, Henry Jenkins has studied more than a decade the concept of convergence culture. “Convergence does not take place through media devices, however sophisticated that these can become. Convergence occurs in the brain of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others.”<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, in the digital world, when presenting and posting content, it is important to proceed with empathy. This means that information to be delivered should be seen from the perspective of potential recipients, meditating on the fact that users are in search of the truth, regardless of its nature or how a person would like to have access to that truth. Taking as a foundation the definition of empathy and its elements, there are seven suggestions<sup>22</sup> established in order to promote connections with interlocutors in social media and to avoid the saturation of information, the confrontation of those considered heroes and villains, atypical cycles, and disinformation.

These recommendations might be useful either for religious leaders active in social media or for those responsible for managing social media profiles on behalf of religious institutions:

**a. To be present for others:** This aims to offer attention and respect to users, through the presentation of content according to the nature of each platform. Pope Francis sets a strong example of being present for others. He excels in the four digital leadership characteristics stated by Juan Narbona:

- 1) Appropriateness,
- 2) Timeliness,

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: The Media Convergence Culture* (Barcelona, Spain: Paidós, 2008), <https://stbngtrrz.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/jenkins-henry-convergence-culture.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Melody Wilding, “7 habits of highly empathetic people,” published on January 7, 2019, <https://www.inc.com/melody-wilding/7-habits-of-highly-empathetic-people.html>.

- 3) Technical specializations, and
- 4) Relationship.<sup>23</sup>

This good practice refers to the combination of Appropriateness and Technical specialization, which means being consistent with the context in which the leader is a reference point, while posting information adequately adapted to specific language, formats, and frequency of the platform. For example, Pope Francis' Twitter account, @Pontifex, usually shares tweets about the love of God, Christ, and the Church using hashtags and mentions (@), while his Instagram account (@Franciscus) is full of pictures and videos, several of them, tailor-made for that social network.

**b. Active listening:** This refers to dedicating time to identify the preferences and motivations of users based on social listening tools. These tools gather and analyze social media users' data from a variety of platforms. Commercial brands use this data to improve marketing, operational, and business metrics, religious leaders and institutions may take advantage of social listening tools in order to identify the needs, fears, and hopes of their communities. In that context, they may build a discourse aimed to either support or encourage people, based on a robust narrative enriched with ethical, functional and emotional arguments.

**c. Tuning in with non-verbal communication:** Emoji is a Japanese term used for ideograms, which are those kinds of little drawings that represent concepts typical of Japanese writing. Emoji is the union of the word *image*, which in Japanese means "said", and *moji*, which in Japanese means "character". Emojis are the emoticons used in text conversations through digital devices in order to represent an emotional reaction toward something that is said or written—it is a kind of non-verbal language of chats. The use of emojis is wide-spread and it is a sign of being familiar with the digital environment. Even though the use of emojis is recommended for all social media users, some religious leaders have raised a

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<sup>23</sup> Juan Narbona, "Digital Leadership, Twitter and Pope Francis," *Church, Communication and Culture* 1, No. 1 (2016): 90-109, DOI: 10.1080/23753234.2016.1181307.

point of caution. For example, Ahmadullah, a prominent Muslim cleric from Bangladesh, has issued a ruling on a contended point of Islamic law against people using the “Haha” emoji (😂) to mock other people. In his decision statement, Ahmadullah writes, “Entertainment is not prohibited in Islam. But your entertainment should not be the cause of other’s pain.”

**d. Taking time to pause:** In the digital environment, it is very easy to engage in useless, irrelevant, and toxic conversations. Therefore, taking time to pause is an invitation to reflect before replying, especially when receiving negative or inappropriate comments. Many people post negative comments to pursue a negative response from the other individual in order to portray themselves as victims. This is the reason why pausing is an opportunity to learn about the audience, to listen actively, while trying to identify the main arguments of the criticism. It is recommended to wait five to eight minutes before replying to a negative post; the key is to take this time to develop a comprehensive response that would be indicative of a respectful, empathic, and sensitive behavior consistent with the expectations of either a religious leader or institution.

**e. Asking instead of advising:** It is usual for religious leaders and religious institutions to be exposed to personal comments on their social media feeds. This is not uncommon since many people follow a religious leader’s social media to find support. In that scenario, the recommendation is to not reply publicly, instead to reply through a direct message. A good practice is to ask questions to build closeness before giving advice. Some of these questions to create greater connection might include: How do you feel about it? Can you tell me more? What would be helpful? The objective is fostering dialogue, incentivizing interaction, and showing that religious leaders or institutions are open to listening and understanding the situations of the people.

**f. Prioritizing the “we” before the “I”:** The problems and opportunities created by new technology, as it is enhanced by globalization, deregulation and privatization of media, present new ethical and spiritual challenges, particularly to those who work

in social communications. In this context, it is recommended that regardless of the content of a third-party's post on social media, to use "we" instead of "I" in the reply by a religious leader or religious organization. Speaking in first-person plural (we) helps to generate a sense of belonging and empowerment among users, making them feel not alone. In his 2019 World Communication Day Message, Pope Francis affirmed the position of the Church regarding ICT when he said that the Internet is "a resource of our time." Therefore, a compassionate and inclusive approach to using social media is a way of serving the people of God.

**g. Imagine other people's point of view:** In social media, before posting content, it is imperative to put oneself in the other users' place and reflect on their needs, fears, challenges, and expectations. If their needs are clearly understood, it is easier to offer support; and if their fears are understood, ways to eliminate them can be proposed. If we connect to the people's expectations, we can more effectively motivate spiritual advancement by the people. These actions reflect empathy, which according to Rene Brown, is feeling with the person, climbing down the hole to sit beside him or her, making oneself vulnerable to sincerely connecting with the other person. Indeed, religious leaders must exercise empathy if they aim to serve others with the ability to detect their emotions and understand their perspectives.

#### **4. Final Thoughts**

The phenomena of infodemic, hypersensitivity, atypical cycles, and disinformation were brewing even before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they were aggravated with the arrival of the coronavirus, when facing an unknown reality that affected the life and possibilities of interaction among people worldwide. Therefore, empathy is perceived as the remedy by religious communicators and social media users to make a counterweight to the consequences of these pandemic phenomena. Despite the serious communicational consequences of the pandemic, the people of God may also become carriers of truth and the

Good News accepting differences and promoting interculturality as an enriching nexus.

Based on the fact that digital communication has benefited the Church in implementing her missionary programs, the pastoral communication plan should give due importance to developing digital leadership by taking care to include the following:

- **Digital literacy.** Helping religious leaders to adopt a balanced disposition towards ICT and become aware that digital leadership is a natural and essential component of religious leadership in the present milieu. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many religious leaders resorted to social media to communicate with the flock during periods of lockdowns, some for the first time in their pastoral career. In the digital age, the ability to use different means of communication should be a natural skill in a church leader.
- **Ongoing training.** Training programs for religious leaders should include topics such as pastoral communication theology and ICT, as well as its ethical, theological, and pastoral implications of using these communication media. Without these theological foundations, church leaders may easily fall into the traps of engaging in idle chats, self-aggrandizement, and inappropriate exchanges. Seminary and religious training should include seminars and workshops that address the various dimensions of ICT.
- **Peer to peer knowledge sharing.** Parishes and dioceses should organize workshops and seminars on ICT for lay pastoral leaders. As lay leaders collaborate closely with the pastor, their familiarity and even expertise in ICT will be of tremendous benefit to the pastoral work of the parish. This training should include how to integrate online and offline pastoral activities into a unified pastoral plan, where both support one another .
- It is no longer feasible to compartmentalize the digital

and the analog spheres. Not only what happens in one environment impacts the other, oftentimes, what happens in the physical sphere is the direct result of what has taken place in cyberspace.

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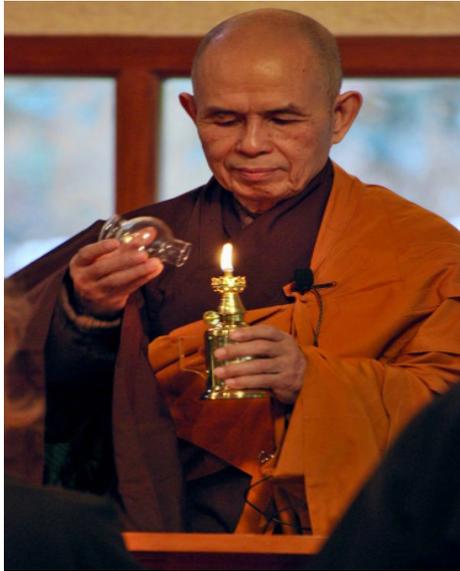
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## **In Memoriam Thích Nhất Hạnh (1926-2022)**



Thích Nhất Hạnh, a global spiritual leader, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, scholar, poet, artist, peace activist, and prolific author (he published 70 books), passed away in his native Hue, Vietnam on 21 January 2022. He was 95. Known as the “father of mindfulness,” Thích Nhất Hạnh was credited with spreading the practice of mindfulness in the West. He lived many years of his life in exile in Plum Village, a monastic community he founded in 1982 in Dordogne, France.

Born Nguyen Dinh Lang in Hue, Vietnam on 11 October 1926, Thích Nhất Hạnh was ordained Buddhist monk at the age of 16. He adopted the Dharma title Nhất Hạnh when he moved to Saigon in 1949. All Buddhist monastics in Vietnam, as in all East Asian Buddhist traditions, adopt “Thích” as their surname, implying that their original family is the Buddhist community, or the Shakya clan. As for “Nhất Hạnh”, the word “Nhất” means “One” while the word “Hạnh” means “Action”. As for the word “Thầy/Thầy” that is often used to affectionately

address or refer to Thích Nhất Hạnh, the term is a Vietnamese word that means simply “teacher”. In Vietnam, Buddhist monks, male teachers and professors, Catholic seminarians and male religious are often addressed as “thầy”. In some parts of Vietnam, fathers are also addressed as “thầy” by their children.

As a young monk, Thích Nhất Hạnh was actively engaged in the renewal movement of Vietnamese Buddhism. During the Vietnam War, he was faced with the dilemma of adhering to the contemplative life or to address the pressing needs of the victims of war. He chose to do both, thus giving birth to the Engaged Buddhism movement. Since then, he dedicated himself to the “work of inner transformation for the benefit of individuals and society.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1961, Thích Nhất Hạnh was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to study comparative religion at Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States. This was followed by teaching engagements on Buddhism at Columbia and Cornell Universities.

Among those he founded is the School of Youth and Social Service—a relief organization rooted in the Buddhist principles of non-violence and compassionate action. He also established the Order of Interbeing, an international community of laypeople and monastics dedicated “to the continuous practice of mindfulness, ethical behavior, and compassionate action in society.”

In 1966, Thích Nhất Hạnh travelled to the West to call for peace and to end hostilities in Vietnam. It was during this time that he met the American civil liberties icon Martin Luther King, Jr. who nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. Due to his activities, Thích Nhất Hạnh was subsequently not allowed to return to Vietnam and forced to live in exile for 39 years. While living abroad, Thích Nhất Hạnh continued to be active and led the Buddhist delegation to the 1967 Paris Peace Talks.

Throughout his life, Thích Nhất Hạnh taught and wrote about mindfulness and inner peace. In the 1970’s, he established the Sweet Potato Community in Fontvannes, France and in 1982, the Plum Village

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<sup>1</sup> <https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography/>

in Dorgogne, France. He continued to found monasteries all over the world, including in California, New York, Paris, Hong Kong, Thailand and Germany. Plum Village is the largest Buddhist monastery in Europe and America, with over 200 monastics in residence. The monasteries founded by Thích Nhất Hạnh are open to the public during much of the year, and provide retreats for various groups of laypeople including families, youth, entertainers, and civil servants, etc.

In his teachings, Thích Nhất Hạnh relentlessly advocates for peace, compassion, harmonious co-existence and mindfulness. He is especially known for communicating profound spiritual insights using language that the listener can easily grasp. Thích Nhất Hạnh once taught that people could become bodhisattvas by finding happiness in the simple things around us like mindfully walking and doing mundane activities such as peeling an orange or sipping tea. He taught his students to see ordinary things in new ways, and even a raisin could be seen as an “ambassador of the cosmos.” For Thích Nhất Hạnh, mindfulness is the key to eliminate our own and others’ suffering. Mindfulness is intimately connected to individual as well as communal compassion, happiness and peace.

In addition to his words, Thích Nhất Hạnh’s gentle and humble demeanor has also been noted by many who had encounters with the monk. In addition to giving spiritual guidance to countless individuals around the world, Thích Nhất Hạnh has also been invited to speak to members of the United States Congress, White House Summit on HIV/AIDS under President Clinton, World Health Organization, Parliament of India, UNESCO, World Bank, and World Parliament of Religions.

In 2005, the Vietnamese government lifted the ban on his return. In 2014, Thích Nhất Hạnh suffered a stroke which left him unable to speak and paralyzed the right side of his body. However, this did not stop him from offering the Dharma and inspiring people. In 2018, he returned to the Tu Hieu Pagoda in the central city of Hue, Vietnam with the intention of living the rest of his life there.

Many people have expressed their sentiments about Thích Nhất Hạnh both when he was alive and after his death.

The Dalai Lama wrote (22 January 2022):

In his peaceful opposition to the Vietnam war, his support for Martin Luther King and most of all his dedication to sharing with others not only how mindfulness and compassion contribute to inner peace, but also how individuals cultivating peace of mind contributes to genuine world peace, the Venerable lived a truly meaningful life. I have no doubt the best way we can pay tribute to him is to continue his work to promote peace in the world.

The Catholic monastic Thomas Merton (1966) observed:

I have said Nhat Hanh is my brother, and it is true. We are both monks, and we have lived the monastic life about the same number of years. We are both poets, existentialists. I have far more in common with Nhat Hanh than I have with many Americans, and I do not hesitate to say it. It is vitally important that such bonds be admitted. They are the bonds of a new solidarity and a new brotherhood which is beginning to be evident on all the five continents and which cut across all political, religious and cultural lines.

Christiana Figueres, the former executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change said (2016):

This has been a six-year marathon with no rest in between. I just really needed something to buttress me, and I don't think that I would have had the inner stamina, the depth of optimism, the depth of commitment, the depth of the inspiration if I had not been accompanied by the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh.

With sentiments as these, it is no wonder that *The New York Times* once characterized Thích Nhất Hạnh as “second only to the Dalai Lama” among Buddhist leaders influential in the West.

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## **Thích Nhất Hạnh and Socially Engaged Buddhism**

*Shiju Paul, SVD*

Many years ago, I did a ten-day vipassana meditation retreat at Dhamma Giri Vipassana International Academy in the town of Igatpuri which is 136 km away from Mumbai, India. Our vipassana teacher was a Catholic priest guiding more than 400 participants from all walks of life and religious backgrounds. It was there that I came across the name Thích Nhất Hạnh for the first time, the monastic name of Nguyen Xuan Bao which was his family name. The contemplative experience of spending ten hours a day in silent meditation co-guided by Buddhist monks impacted me deeply to experience contemplative activism as a way of life in religious life. Most of our seminaries have theoretical inputs on contemplation with not many practitioners of contemplation and action to guide others. That contemplative journey has taken me to many places and ministries, and currently, I am living with refugees in South Sudan. Since my exposure to vipassana meditation and contemplative leaders like venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh, contemplation has become an invaluable tool in my life to help me stay calm, centered, and focused in life.

Mindfulness practices are a source of deep meaning, purpose and direction for many people in recovery programs. When I accompanied a group of LGBTQIA people living with HIV in recovery, mindful breath meditations were their biggest source of support. I remember one participant telling me the quote “Religion is for people who are afraid of going to hell. Spirituality is for those who’ve already been there.” It was always a joy to hear them quoting venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh in their conversations. Practice of simple breathing techniques from his teaching helped them stay calm and focused in their recovery process because breathing is an expression of the activity of the mind. When our hearts and minds are settled, our breath slows down and goes longer. When we are restless and excited our breath gets faster and shorter.

Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh popularized the understanding of Bodhisattva along with mindfulness. It is the Sanskrit word for a being who is devoted to awakening and to acting for the benefit of all that lives,

and which is one of the most radical and powerful of all Buddhist forms of practice. Jesus says, “And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” (Mk13:37). Jesus is a bodhisattva, who invites us again and again to stay awake and pay attention to all that is going on around us and inside of us. This invitation continues until we ourselves become bodhisattvas. I am challenged and encouraged to awaken into the mystery of God through compassion in action. Our highest happiness in religious life is connected with our capacity to stay awake to our call for the wellbeing of all.

Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh revived the spirit of Socially Engaged Buddhism (SEB) by rendering various services such as social services, peacebuilding, and building monasteries and retreat centers. Teachings of mindfulness, kindness, and compassion were at its foundational core. As I reflect deeply, I realize that the need of the hour for us religious missionaries is to build a spiritual grounding for our versions of Socially Engaged Christianity. If not, we end up as mere social workers. It was from our moments of deep contemplation that we took our first steps to walk the path of missionary discipleship. Lasting generative growth and change are possible only if we integrate our activism with contemplative practices. Our capacity for mindfulness empowers our capacity for contemplative activism.

Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote and framed above his death bed the following words: *tro ve*, that means “returning” as he waited the end of this life, liberation from the cyclical nature of existence in Vietnam in a 19th century Tu Hieu Pagoda. Psychologist Elliott Jacques terms it “emotional awareness of one’s mortality.” In these vulnerable times of the pandemic, we live with certain emotional awareness of our mortality. Jose Parappully, a Salesian priest and clinical psychologist says, “What this phrase means is that we recognize as never before, that we are going to die soon, that we have lived more years than we are going to live. When we were young, we knew we would die one day. But that did not really bother us. Why? Because death was far away on the horizon. It would be years before it would reach us. We had then what could be called an ‘intellectual’ understanding. But when we reach the decade of the 40’s, or even in the late 30’s, we have an ‘emotional’ awareness of our mortality. As Daniel Levinson pointed out in his study

of men and women at midlife, we can feel in our bones, in our dreams, in the marrow of our being that we are going to die, that we do not have many more years to live. We have reached the top of the hill and now what is left is the way down.” It leaves us to reassess life and its priorities - *tro ve* “returning!” His final lesson on mindfulness was on how to die peacefully, “Letting go is also the practice of letting in, letting your teacher be alive in you.”

Eliza Barclay, science editor of Vox.com paraphrased Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh’s senior disciple Brother Phap Dung his message on dying in 2019: “Please do not build a stupa for me. Please do not put my ashes in a vase, lock me inside, and limit who I am. I know this will be difficult for some of you. If you must build a stupa though, please make sure that you put a sign on it that says, ‘I am not in here.’ In addition, you can also put another sign that says, ‘I am not out there either,’ and a third sign that says, ‘If I am anywhere, it is in your mindful breathing and in your peaceful steps.’” Yes, he was my *Thay* too, a great guru who helped me walk the Christ Path in contemplative activism.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Ronald F. Inglehart. *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing it, and What Comes Next?* New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. 203 pp.**

In his last book before his death entitled *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing it, and What Comes Next?*, Ronald Inglehart meticulously explores the wide range of data to analyze what is going on in the religious sphere in this modern age. The book employs data from not only Western countries, but over 100 countries in order to examine the conditions leading to the decline in religiosity and the implications this phenomenon holds for the future. The data convincingly suggests that there is a significant difference between the period from 1981 to 2007 and the period from 2007 to 2019. At glance, both periods seem to belong to the same era called modern period. However, this same era has a significant difference for the decline in religion. Then, what is causing the decline in religiosity between those periods? Inglehart uses two terminologies to explain about the change. The majority shift from “Pro-Fertility Norms” to “Individual-Choice Norms”. It appears that Individual-Choice Norms were already in existence long before the period of 1981-2007. Developed nations have gone through the woman’s movement, gay-rights movement and having populations with the problem of obesity rather than the problem of hunger. Moreover, it is more understandable to compare with those who had little material possessions and food after the World War II and with those who enjoyed the financial prosperity from 1960s and 70s and onward. However, if looking at the actual political adaptations in same sex marriage for example, it can be seen that Individual-Choice Norms and the new generations who wholeheartedly believe in those norms became more apparent after 2007 and onward.

A well-known sociologist, Peter Berger (1967), once predicted during the 1960s that as secularization advances, religions or religious movements will fade away. However, in 2014, Berger admitted that his prediction was wrong and that the resurgence of religious movements such as the Pentecostal Church plays a significant role in advanced society in the secular age. However, Inglehart’s book indicates that

Berger's initial prediction was correct from the analysis of statistics from 2007 to 2019. This new discovery provides a valuable insight into how to see the current state of religions and religiosity as well as the future outlook.

The thoroughness of Inglehart in his presentation of the data collected worldwide is evident in this book. The seriousness which Inglehart, who is the world's most cited political scientist, brings to his work is confirmed by Pippa Norris of Harvard University who closely collaborated with Inglehart to study various contemporary issues, including global religious decline. Norris commented, Inglehart "was a pioneer in expounding bold conjectures about social change which captured the contemporary zeitgeist and then also gathering large-scale cross-national survey data monitoring attitudes, values, and behaviors, to test the comparative evidence for key claims in these social theories." In his last book before his death at the age of 86, Inglehart not only analyzes the decline number of religious followers, but also individual's security and insecurity in high income countries when the majority of people are replaced by new generations and insecurity caused by the collapse of Marxism in the former Soviet Union countries. He demonstrates that the radical shift did not occur suddenly with the collapse of communism in various countries. Instead, the data shows insecurity embraced for decades gradually replaced by individual choice norm as a result of secularization. This lag between insecurity and security contributed to the new phenomenon of the decline witnessed in recent years.

The book displays many credible facts and data. It provides important eye-opening insights and caution for those who continue to hold on to the opinion that the numbers of religious followers will not decrease even in the face of ongoing scientific advancement, and technological development continues to lead civil society. The author layout "Midpoint" to classify to scale in high income countries, and he argues that the time that high-income countries crossed the midpoint was not before 1980s but mostly from 2007 and afterwards. It is arguable that the majority of countries had enough food, material possessions and enough freedom to choose individually before 2006. Having said that the data shows that the majority of the religious mindset has shifted to "less religious" only recently as the countries that surpassed

the midpoint. The survey concerning the situation in the United States shows that the majority of citizens think that God is not so important in their lives. The drastic decline of religion has been happening in those recent years for the first time. These results may startle many people who believe that religion will not decline in secular societies. Scandinavian countries have crossed the midpoint earlier and it also co-relates the era when people in those nations became “less religious” too.

In addition, it is after a decade or so that people in former Soviet Union started to gain security about themselves. In other words, religion was needed for a period of time after the collapse of Marxism, which was replaced by individual choice norm as their economic situation improved. It shows that per capita GDP again co-relates to the decline of religion. There are many figures provided by Inglehart in this study which represent more similarities than differences among different countries in regard to the trend of religious decline.

It is uncertain whether the decline of religion with economic growth is one direction or not. Will religion regain its role as the center of people’s life even though the economic prosperity continues to grow from now on? What is certain is that in this book, Inglehart did not propose his ideas based on subjective thinking. Rather he carefully and objectively analyzed the data showing the sudden decline since 2007 to 2020, which may come as a shock for many readers as well as institutional religious leaders.

I strongly suggest that the reader take a look at the data and facts of the latest religious trends presented and analyzed by the author in order to more accurately understand the changes taking place worldwide in the religious sphere. Considering Inglehart’s presentation will help not only the general public, but also professional scholars and students of social science to gain valuable insights into how many factors of social changes have impacted religion in recent decades.

*Fumihiko Matsumoto, PhD*

## ***BOOK NOTES***

**Eric Bain-Selbo. *The End(s) of Religion: A History of How the Study of Religion Makes Religion Irrelevant*. New York: NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 278 pp.**

In this volume, Eric Bain-Selbo employs the word “End(s)” in the title to refer to two main concepts. The first idea, which is presented in a methodical fashion, is the “end” or purpose of religion in human society as interpreted and advocated by various individuals in the last several centuries from philosophers to sociologists. Thinkers discussed in the volume include Kant and Hegel (the ethical/philosophical function of religion); Durkheim and Weber (the sociological function of religion); Freud and Jung (the psychological function of religion); and Eliade and Tillich (the existential function of religion). All these reductionist approaches reduce religion to a particular goal, such as having a set of rational principles, a social function, or a set of practices to cope psychologically with life.

The other meaning of the word “end” in the book refers to the “demystification, marginalization, and ultimately irrelevance and decline” of religion that we are experiencing today. The author argues that the increasing secularization and decline of institutional stereotypical religion can be attributed in various ways to the reductionist approaches in the study of religion by these philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, and scholars of religion. And there is no evidence that this trend will reverse itself in the future.

In so far as religion is interpreted as serving to fulfill a particular human need, the author identifies various cultural practices that have been seen to play a similar role as religion, e.g., sports, arts and entertainment, nationalism and civil religion. Thus, the void left by the end of institutional stereotypical religion can be fulfilled by the “religion of culture”. In other words, what we perceive as fundamental “religious” needs do not necessarily have to depend on the existence of institutional religion. One approach, according to the author, is to turn to humanism, which is “a philosophy or outlook that focuses on the human ability to live moral and meaningful lives in the absence of religious

beings or realities that stereotypically provide us with a moral code or capacity and are the basis or foundation of meaning in our lives.” Through humanism, the religion of culture – sports, theatre, art, film, dance, literature, and music, etc. – can be promoted and protected from forces and dynamics that threaten to do harm to its intrinsic nature and prevent it from achieving its noble ends.

**David DeSteno. *How God Works: The Science Behind the Benefits of Religion*. New York: NY, Simon & Schuster, 2021. 256 pp.**

David DeSteno, the author of the book and a psychologist in this volume sets out to examine how what he calls “technologies” and “tools” (i.e., religious rituals) developed by religion over hundreds or thousands of years benefit people mentally and physically in all the stages of life from birth until death. Each chapter focuses on a specific stage of life – infancy, childhood, the coming of age, young adults, midlife, retirement and the end of life. The author cites numerous scientific studies to demonstrate the veracity of the claim as stated in the book title. Although the title mentions God, the book also cites examples from nontheistic religions such as Confucianism and Buddhism.

The book goes through each stage of life in a methodical manner, pointing out how religious rituals positively affect the individual as well as the people in his or her life. For example, in the earliest stage of life where children are still in their mothers’ womb, the Japanese religion Shinto prescribes rituals that prepare the parents and the community for welcoming them into their midst. These pre-birth rituals as well as those that are carried out in the first months and years of the infants’ lives strengthen parent-child bond as well as community support.

In a similar fashion, DeSteno goes through each stage of the lifespan detailing in a scientific manner the benefits of religious rituals, for example, how Buddhist meditation promotes acts of compassion and forgiveness while reducing hostility towards others; how communal prayer helps people to form stronger social bonds and promote mutual commitment; how Catholic end of life rituals give courage and healing to those facing death; and how Jewish practices at the death of a loved

one help reduce pain and grief. The scientific studies cited in DeSteno's book is not only numerous but highly credible, helping to buttress his argument that religious practices are beneficial for one's emotional and physical health.

As a psychologist, however, DeSteno does not take the stance that the "technologies" and "tools" of religion are not replicable. In fact, he advocates adapting these rituals so that anyone, regardless of religious adherence or not, can benefit from them. The benefits come from the positive psychological effect that these rituals have on the individuals. They do not necessarily have to be connected with theological or metaphysical beliefs that must be adhered to.

**Heidi A. Campbell and John Dyer (Eds). *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*. Norfolk, UK: SCM Press, 2022. 180 pp.**

This volume contains a collection of 12 chapters discussing the theme of the book, which focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications that this crisis holds for the church in the future. The main matter being examined in this book is the ecclesiological challenges and opportunities presented by digital technology in relation to its widespread use in the life of the church during the health crisis.

The book is divided into three sections. "The first part re-examines traditional vocabulary and understandings of digital church. The second section explores specific examples of ecclesiological shifts during the pandemic. The final section looks to the future of the Church in the digital age, offering insight and recommendations for a way forward."

One of the highlights of this book is that it gathered the wisdom and insights from scholars from a variety of disciplines and theological traditions as well as geographical and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the theology of the Church in the digital age being considered and deepened in this volume is not of a particular denomination, but of Christianity taken as a whole.

Besides the 12 chapters, the book also includes an introduction that lays out the basis for this project as well as a concluding chapter that summarizes the common themes and conclusions found in the book. Finally, according to the editors, this book “aims to offer a critical and concrete assessment of the new social conditions and technological strategies the Church is currently being faced with and will continue to face post-quarantine. It seeks to offer talking points that challenge traditional ecclesiological models and theological modes of thinking about the nature of churches and how we might need to begin to think differently about Christian community in the future.”

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