

Presentation of the 41st Theology Congress by Victor Codina

I am grateful for this invitation to the Congress and I wonder if anything new can still be said about the Covid 19 pandemic. If I dare to speak today about the pandemic, it is not because of my theological competence, but because I have been a victim of Covid, I have been on the verge of death, almost on the verge of seeing the beard of St. Peter..

But to Covid has now been added the cruel war in Ukraine, the risk of a global and atomic conflict, the global economic crisis, the disasters of climate change with droughts, fires and floods, the prospect of water, gas and energy shortages, etc. We are facing a real global pandemic, of which Covid is only the tip of the iceberg.

We have the feeling of suffering an apocalyptic shock, a collective crisis, global collapse, chaos, the desire to return the ticket of life, like Ivan Karamazov, the desire to return to normality as soon as possible, without masks, confinement or restrictions.

Alongside this real and sensationalist apocalyptic vision, fostered by social networks, we must recognise that Covid 19 has also revealed a series of positive aspects of our world: scientists have discovered new vaccines, doctors, nurses and health workers have cared for the sick even at the cost of their health, great solidarity from neighbours and volunteers, communications via zoom, telematic liturgical celebrations, new ways of living the faith outside the temple and the clergy, etc.

We have experienced new human experiences: the experience of the vulnerability of the human being and the emerging need for care, the feeling of community, since we are all in the same boat.

New existential questions have also arisen: is the pandemic a punishment from God, as the Jesuit Fr Penéloux affirmed in Camus' *Plague*, Where is God? What is evil?, What is death?, Is there a meaning to life? Is there something beyond death? We Christians also wonder whether the closed temples might not be a prophetic critique of ecclesiastical clericalism.

On the other hand, the pandemic has been generating a humanistic thinking that perceives the interconnectivity between everything that has happened. The pandemic is not accidental, it is the consequence of a technocratic paradigm that has destroyed nature, it is the fruit of a neoliberal capitalist system that discriminates socially and kills, of a North-Western, colonial, macho and patriarchal mentality that discards the elderly, women, indigenous peoples and populations of the global South, and builds a society based on armaments.

We are facing an epochal crisis, a model of humanity and society that has already exploded; we must go beyond the Anthropocene. It is naïve to think that we have reached the end of history, what we need is resistance, prophetism, because another world is possible and necessary, we must bring about a new era.

New theological questions arise today which this Congress will have to address: are we not facing a sign of the times, a new theological and apocalyptic place, in its revelatory sense, which announces to us that God's project is different from today's social, ecological, cultural and religious system? Is it not that the Spirit of the Lord manifests to us today, through the cry of the victims and the birth pangs of an enslaved earth, that we must change and become Lord? Is it not that this global chaos that we suffer, contains a biblical *kairos*, where the Spirit of Genesis, the feminine *Ruah*, flutters and engenders from below a new life, because the Spirit always acts from below to engender new life?

It is not a question of returning to the old normality of before, but of generating an active resistance, giving a liberating response, building a different world, just and in solidarity, close to the poor, to the Kingdom of God and to the beatitudes of Jesus of Nazareth, sensitive to the Paschal life and hope of the Risen Jesus.

At the beginning of the pandemic, El Roto, the humorist of El País, drew a picture of a prophet, dressed as John the Baptist, who said: "I have found the vaccine". "What is it?" they asked him. "Another way of living", he replied. But they took him for a madman.

In a theological formulation, Ximo García Roca, also a victim of Covid, affirms that today it is a question of humanising God and divinising humanity, that is to say, bringing God closer to our inhuman and cruel world, and making humanity open up to the Mystery of a transcendent beyond, which we Christians call our Father-Mother. The various presentations at the Congress will undoubtedly help to answer these and other questions around Covid 19, will help us to get up and start walking again with hope. Good work!

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