

Dear Christian, When The Pandemic Hits, This Is Our Time

10/03/2020 | Akos Balogh

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Dear Christian,

I'm guessing you're starting to feel a little nervous.

The Coronavirus situation seems to be escalating (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-08/coronavirus-related-death-in-sydney-hospital/12036410>) day by day.

Yes, people are still in good spirits—and even making light of the situation (as seen by trending hashtags such as #ToiletPaperApocalypse (https://twitter.com/search?q=%23Toiletpaperapocalypse&src=typed_query)). But the increasing numbers of empty rows at the supermarket is getting a little unnerving (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-08/coronavirus-bulk-buying-leaves-low-income-families-struggling/12034522>).

“Yes, people are still in good spirits, but the increasing numbers of empty rows at the supermarket is getting a little unnerving.”



And so we’re wondering: how bad is this crisis going to get? Is our society going to pull together, and get through it together? Or is the panic buying a sign of things to come?

Will we be praising the bravery of our medical staff, like we praised the RFS during the bushfire crisis? Or will many of the hospital staff go AWOL if the crisis picks up, like they did in the Matt Damon movie *Contagion* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sYSyuuLk5g>)?

How bad will this crisis be?

The truth is, we don’t know for sure.

And so as a society, we’re increasingly anxious. Anxious for our loved ones. Anxious for ourselves. It’s a time of fear.

But whatever happens, dear Christian, know this: *this is our time*. God has raised us up for such a time as this. It’s no accident you’re here.

This is our time to think not about ourselves, but about our neighbours. Many of whom are scared, and will only grow more so as the virus spreads.

“This is our time. God has raised us up for such a time as this. It’s no accident you’re here. This is our time to hold out the Word of Life.”



This is our time to hold out the Word of Life to those around us—and give hope to those who are afraid, and are wondering what's going to happen.

This is our time to trust our God no matter what the future brings. For, unlike our secular neighbours, we know where our hope lies. We know where our security lies. We know where our future lies.

It's with the one who conquered *sickness*: who touched the lepers and healed them with a word. It's with the one who conquered *death*—who said to Lazarus 'come out!'. It's with the one who defeated death—*not just for a time*—but forever.

It's with the One who will return to resurrect this world and the bodies of all who trust in Him.

So let's not be afraid. Let's not give way to panic.
Instead, let's serve those around us who are filled with fear.

If this pandemic hits our shores in all its fury, let's be ready to give our energy, our time, and ourselves to serve those who don't yet know Him.

Let's be ready to share His love, and His gospel of Life.

This is our time.
Let's use it well.

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Akos was born in Budapest, and was blessed to be able to come to Australia as a refugee in 1981. He came to faith in late highschool, through the influence of friends, family, and school Scripture. He went on to study Aerospace Engineering at UNSW, before working in the RAAF for five years. After completing his B. Div. from Moore Theological college, he then had the joy of serving with AFES for six years, at Southern Cross University in Lismore.

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How Christians are (Always) Traitors

09/03/2020 | [Tim Thorburn](#)

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In most parts of the world, to be a Christian is to become a traitor—to your family, to your community, to your country.

I had the privilege of growing up in a Christian family, in which my parents prayed for me and my siblings every day. They prayed for our health and education, but especially for our salvation. They wanted us all to know the living and true God and to trust in Jesus. And they brought us up knowing God as our heavenly father. Which meant that, for me, it would have been a betrayal to not be a Christian. I would have had to turn away—which I did for a couple of years.

“In most parts of the world, to be a Christian is to become a traitor—to your family, to your community, to your country.”



But for the majority of Christians across the globe and across generations, becoming a Christian is to betray your family and your community. We can get a feel for what is involved from the apostle Paul’s description of the conversion of the first Thessalonian converts to Christ:

... you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. ([1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#))

They had been idolaters, serving and depending upon idols. But they were not alone—the families they were enmeshed with were idolaters, living in a town in which idolatry was normal and pervasive. And idolatry wasn’t just a Sunday hobby; it was the belief and practice woven deeply into everyday life and culture. The idols were images of the gods that controlled the weather and your health and your wealth. If they did not smile upon you and your family and your town, you faced ruin in every way. Your crops would shrivel, your businesses would sink and your children would suffer. You lived in fear of offending the gods, for to do so was a recipe for ruin.

A Family Affair

Idolatry was not merely an individual faith: it was a family affair. The family rose or fell together. So the family worshipped together, and set up the family idols so they could show their devotion together. And the town rose or fell together. The operation of the idol temples was crucial to the hope of kind rains and warm sunlight for the grape vines to bear fruit and the olive trees to produce. If the temple was neglected, then all felt the dread of bad fortune overtaking. If the worship was stringy or half-hearted, then the chance of the gods being offended increased. And there was nothing so dangerous as offending the gods.

Of course there was always the risk that you unwittingly offended a god out of ignorance. Hence the altar to ‘an unknown god’ in Athens ([Acts 17:23](#)). The trick was to cover all the bases. If Zeus was your favourite, but you became convinced that Hermes was a threat, you didn’t stop worshipping Zeus. You simply added Hermes to the mix.

So can you imagine the effect of becoming a Christian in such a situation? Because a Christian is not someone who simply adds Jesus to their pantheon, but someone who stops serving idols. They repent of their idolatry, because they have been convinced that idols are not really gods. Their idolatry has resulted in them deserving the wrath of the creator for serving created things. There is only one true and living God, the creator of all (see [1 Corinthians 8:4-6](#)). The only way to honour this God is to cease and desist from any service of idols. The only way to be rescued from his wrath is to trust in his Son who died for us and was raised as the Lord of all. Idols are the problem, so they cannot be the solution.

“The only way to honour this God is to cease and desist from any service of idols. But to stop idolatry immediately makes you a traitor ... your ‘ceasing and desisting’ as a threat to the welfare of the family.”



But to stop idolatry immediately makes you a traitor. Because your family members will inevitably interpret your ‘ceasing and desisting’ as a threat to the welfare of the family. Your action will surely offend the gods, and if they are offended, look out! You have put the health and wealth of the whole family at risk. Your conversion is far more than an individual expression of independence –it is perceived as a betrayal.

A Public Menace

And the town will respond with the same perception. Your ceasing and desisting from honouring the gods of the town will cause a real and present danger to the whole town. Neighbours who felt a tangible solidarity with you before will now blame you for every illness and drought and misfortune that befalls them. YOU have brought ruin on them all! The same feelings of betrayal and blame will feed up the system, from town to region to country to empire. No wonder Nero could blame the hateful Christians for the great fire of Rome in 64AD.

For everyone in the first century world, religion was not a private affair. It couldn't be, if the smiles and frowns of the gods effected your life. And so to convert to Christianity—to turn from idols to serve the living and true God—could not be a merely private affair. To become a follower of Christ was to invite suspicion and hatred. And in many parts of the world, this is still the case today. We in the privatised world of West find it hard to comprehend how difficult it is for our friends from more communal cultures to become Christians. But for them, withdrawing from family devotions, and turning their back on the family shrine on the wall of the lounge room, was to betray their family and their community. It was to bring enormous shame on their family. To refuse to take part in honouring the ancestors endangered the whole family.

We see this more easily in the response of Islam to Christian converts. They are likely to be disowned by their families; they face a very real danger of losing their lives in 'honour killings', because they have brought shame on their family and their community.

I experienced a light taste of this when I lived in a small country town in WA. It was not that each family had a couple of idols hidden away in their cupboards, but that loyalty to your town/community was the highest value. With the fear of 'my town' shrinking with depopulation, the drive was to preserve services and protect the future of our community. In a nearby town a Christian family withdrew their children from the local school, because a new teacher was openly gay. This resulted in the school numbers dropping below the threshold, and so it lost a teacher. And how did the town react? With understanding and support? No, the family was mercilessly criticised, ostracised and virtually run out of town. They had betrayed the town, and the town turned on them.

“A Christian family withdrew their children from the local school, because a new teacher was openly gay ... the family was mercilessly criticised, ostracised and virtually run out of town.”



And as I look at the evolving situation across my homeland of Australia, it is starting to feel more like first century Thessalonica. Those who would be loyal to Jesus are finding that we are perceived as threats to the good order of society. Because we don't endorse every expression of human religion and sexuality, we are traitors, spewing 'hate speech'. This is not some strange, unknown experience—this is the norm for those who follow Jesus.

How would Christ have us respond? Tenacious loyalty, gentle love and courageous speech. Tenacious loyalty to Jesus, because the idols of our age (self expression and self protection among them) cannot save them or us; only Jesus can save us from the coming wrath. Gentle love, because that is the way of our Lord who was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And courageous speech, telling our families, our friends and our communities (and beyond) that there is only one true and living God, the creator of all, who sent his Son to win forgiveness and life for idolaters. No matter what the pressures to join the mob idolatry, the only hope for a lost world is the gospel of Jesus. So be prepared to give an answer to anyone who accuses us of being traitors, giving the reason for the hope Christ has given us.

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TAGS

FREEDOM OF RELIGION • IDOLATRY • PERSECUTION
