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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE COMPATIBILITY OF SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY
THROUGH THE LENS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY ON CHURCH
LOCKDOWN IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PORT OF SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an argument for the compatibility of science and theology in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This is accomplished through the investigation of the reactions and attitudes of some practicing Roman Catholics towards Church lockdown in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain and beyond. The variegated views towards lockdown signify the complexities involved in the understanding of the relationship between Public Health Measures and the value of Public Worship. Ultimately, they reflect the imbalances in the relationship between science and theology or between faith and reason. While the implementation of Public Health Measures and the lockdown were necessary and aimed at safeguarding human life, their overemphasis to the detriment of Public Worship indicates the absolutist tendencies of science ignoring the importance of Worship. On the overemphasis on faith to the disregard of scientific facts concerning COVID-19 also entails misunderstanding concerning the place of science in faith and the mutual relationship between the two. Hence the deliberately chosen compatibilist contribution to this situation which entails certain dynamic practical recommendations focusing on the need for the education of the Catholic population on the synthesis of faith and science, the rejuvenation of the value of the domestic Church, the family as a basic social sustenance of Catholic culture, and the enhancement of digital evangelization and strategies in reaching out to the homebound and isolated members of Church and society in a renewed spirit of apostolate.

Key Words: COVID-19, Public Worship, Science, Faith, Archdiocese of Port of Spain, Roman Catholic.

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INTRODUCTION

Rationale

The interest in applying the compatibility of Science and Theology discourse to the situation of COVID-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago was prompted by the initial mixed feelings, attitudes and reactions of some practicing Roman Catholics to the idea of shutting down Churches following the Public Health regulations against the spread of the Coronavirus. These mixed sentiments indicated a certain level of general misunderstanding of the relationship between faith and science. While some Catholics saw it necessary to shut down Churches, the whole experience raised some questions concerning their faith. Others outrightly understood shutting down Churches as a sign of the loss of faith. Along the way, having realized the gravity of COVID-19, some would have changed their perceptions towards Church lockdown as they would now express the importance of safeguarding life. However, the experience of staying home and praying at home with the opportunity for virtual worship created even more mixed feelings towards the banning of public worship because of the significance that it has in their lives. The inability to congregate for public worship affected, among other things, Roman Catholic sacramental life. Some other Catholics, on the other hand, still saw it necessary and settled well with the idea of virtual worship yet Church lockdown remains a challenge for there are those who cannot access virtue worship but constitute significant percentage of the Church.

This sharp variation in understanding the relationship between Public Health Measures and faith expression in the context of the COVID-19 crisis among practicing Roman Catholics is alarming because it is the same practicing Roman Catholics who sustain the Catholic faith heritage which holds a plausible synthesis of science and theology (Coyne 7). Hence the writing of this paper is impelled to assess this synthesis in view of the different mixed feelings, attitudes and

reactions towards Church lockdown and the relationship between public health measures and faith practice.

Thesis Statement: A shared perspective in the implementation of Public Health Measures and holding the essentiality of Public Worship in the light of the compatibility of science and faith is a plausible approach to the COVID-19 Pandemic management in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain.

Parameters

The study focuses on the views of some practicing Roman Catholics towards Church lockdown in Trinidad and Tobago. It does not address the views of all Christians although it makes reference to some similar experiences in other parts of the world. Therefore, some practicing Roman Catholics are interviewed in order to understand how they viewed and experienced the lockdown. The views represent those who expressed satisfaction with Church lockdown and those who did not for different reasons. The study does not, however, address the whole population of practicing Roman Catholics but selects as focus groups some members of ‘Committee with the Poor’ of Arouca Holy Trinity R.C. Church, some 2 Lay Ministers and 3 Ordained Ministers.

Objectives of the Study

The core objective of this study is to assess the different views, attitudes and reactions towards Church lockdown in the light of the compatibility of Science and Theology. The study primarily intends to discuss the effects of Church lockdown on some practicing Roman Catholics from the perspective of Sacramentality in the Roman Catholic Church’s life and from the personal faith perspective of some regular Churchgoers. It will raise awareness of the variedness of the perceptions in an attempt to shape the understanding of the relationship between Public Health Measures and the practice and expression of faith.

Another objective of this study is to suggest recommendations that can be undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago to reconcile controversies and misunderstandings in the relationship between Public Health and faith practice. It is expected that such understanding of the compatibility of science and theology can inspire strategies adding to the already existing for authentic practice of the Catholic faith.

Methodology

Data for this study is collected from interviews, documents from the online archives of the Ministry of Health of Trinidad and Tobago and the Archdiocese of Port of Spain on their websites, and personal experience. It also draws from published books and articles from newspapers, magazines, and journals.

10 Interviews are conducted 5 of which are face to face and the other 5 are conducted online using WhatsApp calls, Zoom meetings and Microsoft Teams meetings. With the permission of the participants, Interviews are audio-taped. Some notes are also manually taken during the interviews. The Interviewees are invited to speak freely in order to capture the essence of their views. The use of open-ended questions also helps in this regard. The Interviews lasted about 1 hour to 1 and a half hours. The names of the Interviewees are omitted at their own requests.

This study is based on the religious and social views and assumptions of the participants. This means that it takes the meaning that they give to their experience of Church lockdown as informed by their social and religious beliefs and traditions. Therefore, the approach is qualitative based on the rich data obtained from interviews. However, some statistical information collected from Official Statements from the Ministry of Health and the Archdiocese of Port of Spain have also been used. With this approach, interpretations are made on the views expressed during the interviews by way of analysis.

Chapter Outline

This study consists of three chapters. Chapter one discusses the phenomenon of the Coronavirus in Trinidad and Tobago, the subsequent evolution of Church lockdown and its impact on the Roman Catholic Church's Sacramental life. Chapter two examines the different varying mixed feelings, attitudes and reactions of some practicing Roman Catholics towards the Church's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Chapter three attempts a critical assessment of the findings discussed in chapters one and two in the light of the compatibility of science and theology. It ends with some recommendations and a conclusion.

Literature Review

The literature on the disciplines of science and theology which seems to be boxed in purely scholarly cycles, focuses on debates about the relationship between the two. There is not much literature that explains particularly how such a relationship can be applied to concrete social situations such as the COVID-19 Pandemic. The present study seeks to bring down the debate from simply philosophical discourses to show that a mutuality of science and theology has actual implications for well-ordered social, economic and political life of the citizens, for spirituality and for a reasonable practice of faith in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In their pastoral letter on *Caring for the Earth-Our Responsibility: An Invitation to Reflection*, the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference called Theologians and Scientists to engage in research to explore the truth of creation and the environment. They stated, "We encourage Caribbean theologians and ethicists to accompany scientific research in order to help all of us to understand more clearly the nature of creation and the true worth of every creature" (AEC Pastoral Letter 25). While this is a hint towards integrative approach to tackling global ecological crisis, it does not suggest how practically theologians and scientists can work together.

This study would like to take this invitation for integration from being a mere invitation for research to being a strategy for particularly dealing with the COVID-19 Pandemic.

John C. Polkinhorne in his book, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*, explored the points of interaction between the two disciplines as he studied closely the nature of science and that of theology. Like the AEC Bishops, he saw the physical world being the platform of interaction, among other things, between science and theology. This is definitely relevant in strengthening the arguments for a mutuality of science and theology but it leaves some questions open. For example, what does it mean for people of a nation to say that both science and theology study the same physical world? This study finds it necessary that the opportunities that the interaction of science and theology brings be adequately explored especially now in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are also some gaps left in the article written by Christoph Stueckelberger, *Religious Controversies in the COVID-19*. Although it gives direct background to the topic at hand by detailing the specific ways in which the closing down of Churches affected different religious communities, it does not explain fully the reasons why those religious communities succumbed to the restrictions imposed on them. This study takes Stueckelberger's findings as a raw material for explaining further the religious communities' responses and actions to the restrictions imposed on them in the light of the compatibility of faith and science. It also assesses the different attitudes of religious adherents towards the restrictions in an attempt to justify the need for harmony of the two disciplines and a reasonable practice of faith.

CHAPTER ONE

EVOLUTION OF CHURCHLOCKDOWN AND ITS IMPACT ON ROMAN CATHOLIC SACRAMENTAL LIFE

The Coronavirus, also known as Sars-CoV-2, grew quickly into a pandemic called the COVID-19 Pandemic since the beginning of 2020. According to Stueckelberger and Ciocan (1) “It managed to lockdown at home almost half of the world population under the threat of illness and sudden death.” This was due to the extreme medical advices of containing its spread and damages directed towards social distancing, public gathering cancelation, and contact tracing. In response, many states imposed such regulations restricting all areas of social activity including religious ones.

The Trinidad and Tobago Situation of COVID-19 Pandemic

Trinidad and Tobago reported its first COVID-19 case on 12 March 2020. According to Kalloo, Mitchell and Kamalodeen (1) this was the country’s “first imported case, and by 13 March the Prime Minister declared Schools and all tertiary institutions of education closed.” Eventually, a nationwide lockdown of all non-essential services, businesses and borders was declared. This rapid response was called for considering the gravity of the issue as by 28 May 2020 the daily update of the Ministry of Health read as follows: 116 cases (108 recovered, and 8 deaths) although at that time no new cases had been reported since 27 April (Hunte et al 590). By 19 June 2020, Trinidad and Tobago recorded 8 deaths and 123 positive imported cases and there was no evidence of community spread cases as yet (Kalloo, Mitchell & Kamalodeen 2). This can be seen as the first lockdown in the evolution of COVID-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago.

There were some easing ups of the restrictions until on Monday 17 August 2020 when the government declared the second lockdown after health authorities “recorded 497 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 10 associated deaths” (Gardaworld par 3). This second lockdown was extended through October 11 with mandatory wearing of facemasks, suspension of dining in, cinemas, casinos, clubs, beaches and rivers, gyms, waterparks, sports facilities, teaching activities and services at places of worship. By 13 September 2020, there were 3019 COVID-19 confirmed cases in Trinidad and Tobago with 53 associated fatalities (Gardaworld par 2). However, from 24th October 2020, Trinidad and Tobago announced further easing up of COVID-19 restrictions in which case places of worship were re-opened for services no longer than one hour and with 50 percent capacity.

The descriptions of the lockdown above also represent the country’s response to the pandemic aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19, a response which has been described as successful by some. For example, Hunte et al (2) argue that “Trinidad and Tobago’s response to the COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in the country being ranked number one in a report published by the University of Oxford on May 1, 2020.” Thus, being a small developing state as classified by the United Nations, Trinidad and Tobago tried in its attempts to contain the spread of the virus. Lockdown experience can therefore be termed as a relatively successful Trinidad and Tobago response. Kalloo, Mitchell and Kamaodeen (2) concede that “Given the small size of the twin-island republic and its limited resources, its capacity to manage the virus with such success has been heralded by many global bodies including the World Health Organization.”

Even so, the successful response did not come without a cost to the economic and social wellbeing of the country as the country’s Prime Minister indicated in a Ministry of Health news conference that the lockdown “would result in a financial burden to the state and further cripple

the economy” (The Gleaner 2). Most importantly, it also brought about significant disruption in the life of religious communities. Many religious bodies, especially Christians and in particular Roman Catholic Christianity, hold regular Sunday worship and celebration of Sacraments as essential to the practice of the faith. The inability to congregate for religious purposes brought about by the lockdown meant a deep crisis in many Roman Catholic believers, one which may place some of them somehow at odds with Public Health measures over the strategies employed in the management of the pandemic.

Effects of Church Lockdown on Roman Catholic Sacramental Liturgical Life

In the Trinidad and Tobago context, Roman Catholic Church authorities in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, in their response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, have been quite accommodating to Public Health Measures which outlaw public gatherings, including religious ones. They did so by immediately suspending public celebration of Holy Mass. Indeed, they embraced modern communications technology such as social media and employed the use of Facebook, YouTube and other platforms as a means of providing some sense of religious community. One may, however, legitimately ask; was this too easy? It is one thing to say that prayer or worship can be done virtually but without a complete Catholic ecclesiology this seems to be a partial approach to being a practicing Catholic.

Apparently, there is something very essential about Roman Catholic Sacramental life that has seemingly been damaged by the suspension of official public worship or liturgy. According to *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* “liturgy is an essential constituent of Christian life” (Fink, ed 742). For “It is through the liturgy, especially that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church” (Flannery, ed 1). Pope Francis confirms that “Christianity without liturgy is a Christianity without Christ”

and that “there is no Christian spirituality that is not rooted in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries” (Esteves par 3). Public worship is therefore a visible expression of the Catholic faith that has a social dimension. In Martos (9) St. Augustine is quoted saying that “People cannot be united in any religion, whether it be true or false, unless they are brought together through a common sharing of some visible signs or Sacraments; and the power of those Sacraments is so effective that scorning them is considered sacrilegious.” This explains why Church lockdown challenges Catholic faith expression and identity. Public worship contributes to that identity. Hence its centrality is confirmed with the emphasis that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows” (Flannery, ed 6). It would seem therefore that Church lockdown presents a serious challenge to Roman Catholic Sacramental liturgical theology and life for the latter requires a real religious gathering with full participation. Can one then be authentically Catholic in the absence of normal public worship?

The Trinidad and Tobago situation of the evolution of Church lockdown due to COVID-19 Public Health Measures presents a successful response on one hand, and a crisis on the other. This explains why there would be mixed attitudes and reactions towards Church lockdown.

CHAPTER TWO

VARIEGATED REACTIONS, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS CHURCH LOCKDOWN

The different reactions, attitudes and views of Catholics towards Church lockdown are important and worthy of critical examination because they reveal how crucial the issue of the relationship between public health policies and faith practice is. More to the point, these attitudes are not only observed in Trinidad and Tobago but also among Catholics in other parts of the world.¹ This chapter examines the arguments for and against Church lockdown as they underpin the general theological assumptions concerning the compatibility of science and faith.

Views in favour of the Lockdown

According to Adegboyega et al (5), some people have argued that Christian gathering is of no importance considering the havoc that the corona virus is unleashing and since the Church is a spiritual entity and worshipping via online transmission is not different from congregating at Church. Therefore, worshipping beyond the physical Church building is not really a deep crisis. This corresponds to some of the views of some practicing Roman Catholic Christians in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain. In the view of one priest interviewee,

The shift from face-to-face worship to virtual services has provided an opportunity for us Catholics to reimagine our presence as a Church in Trinidad and Tobago beyond the sanctuary which is a geographical location. Really and truly, the real sanctuary is in our

¹ Different reactions towards Church lockdown from other parts of the world will also be presented in this chapter showing how important the discussion about varying views towards lockdown is.

hearts² and this is a timeless and life-giving approach to worship that is not alien to the universal Church. So, through this Church lockdown, we are recovering, as Catholics, our Christian witness to the God who we believe is making all things new by the power of the Holy Spirit. The lockdown is making the Catholic Church in Trinidad a Spirit-guided Church. In fact, the lockdown is helping in the renewal of the Church and vivifying the long held Christian values of hope, creativity, imagination and the practice of a domestic Church. Lockdown so far has been for me necessary not only for the safety of our faithful and our citizens but also for ecclesial vitality (PI1, *Audio-taped Interview*).³

On the point on necessity of lockdown, Archbishop Patrick Pinder of Nassau in his COVID-19 message to the people of The Bahamas re-echoed; “while lockdowns and curfews are inconvenient and possibly even an imposition, these are for the good and safety of the nation.” He explains: “While being confined is not easy, history offers examples of those who used confinement very positively” (Pickford-Gordon 7). These positive perceptions of the lockdown are significant for they suggest some ways of being Church in the face of the pandemic, a point which will be explored in the following chapter. Most importantly at this point, another Interview with some Catholic lay ministers confirmed this positive perception of Church lockdown. Arguing on the basis of faith, one minister confessed:

I don't think I had a relationship with God until this covid came. The lockdown due to covid did not break me, it strengthened my faith. We have a relationship now that surpasses

² It can be argued that indeed, Jesus said so but this is a partial truth at best. Jesus did more than turn the ‘legalistic’ ritualized religion that he encountered into a ‘religion of the spirit.’ He actualized his continuing presence by a prophetic act, the sharing of bread and wine. Later, the Christians concretized their worship by their acts of charity and sharing with other Christian communities as well as the wider world beyond Christianity.

³ Throughout this chapter, Interview Participants have been identified as PI1, PI2, PI3 and PI4 for the 4 Priests or Ordained Ministers Interviewed respectively. LM1 and LM2 stand for Lay Ministers and other Interviewees have been identified as Practicing Catholics or Regular Churchgoers for the purpose of remaining anonymous.

all things. Things that I didn't know I could do, lockdown showed me that I could do it. I see this as just one of the plagues as it was in the Old Testament. This covid is for us to open our eyes and see where we belong. It is making us realize that we have to come back to Christ and build a relationship with Christ. It is a calling (LM1, *Audio-taped Interview*).

It might be true that COVID-19 calls for a deep spiritual relationship with Christ but building a relationship with Christ is not something in the heart and mind only. It is enflashed in one's lifestyle. Nevertheless, in the view of another lay minister:

The lockdown was a positive thing. It was a growing process. I actually drew strength from that. For me it is the resilience that is positive. It has certain things that we have to do differently now. A lot of things are different now. All yuh are here because all yuh have faith. We now understand what we do in a deeper way, this lockdown has deepened my faith. Like now you can't touch the babies when you are baptizing them but we understand that the blessing has happened even if father didn't touch the babies. It's like when we invoke the litany of all saints, the saints are with us but we don't see them. It is the same thing with lockdown there are a lot of things we are not doing now, it's a time to believe now that those spiritual realities are present. Perhaps covid and lockdown has taught us to not depend too much on visible or physical rituals. A big part of our faith is spiritual. Faith supplies with the things that we cannot do physically due to covid. Hence, we have spiritual communion where you truly believe that Christ comes to you even though you not seeing Him. This covid is history repeating itself. God wants us to be closer to him and to obey. People who never used to pray are praying now. So, I see it as a positive thing, it's an eye opener (LM2, *Audio-taped Interview*).

The positive attitudes towards Church lockdown above are also shared by some Catholic Bishops in Zimbabwe who see the lockdown as an opportunity for the Church to rediscover itself. Embracing the idea of domestic Church, they argue that lockdown “is an encouragement for families to get together and to read Scriptures together and for the faithful to redefine other possibilities so that we manage to continue with worship and other practices” (Karombo 2). This is similar to the contention of the Catholic Archbishop of Port of Spain, Jason Gordon who “called for a return to the family rosary” as a way of being Church in a time of the Covid-19. He said that the “Church was on a mission to bring about a renewal of families, church and civilization” (Pickford-Gordon 8).

While these arguments are plausible and meant to preserve the physical and spiritual lives of the faithful, a cursory examination of other views from within and without Trinidad and Tobago concerning Church lockdown make these arguments debatable.

Views against Church Lockdown

Asked if Church lockdown was a deep crisis, one Practicing Roman Catholic remarked that “When the Church authorities decided to go into lockdown immediately, it wasn’t difficult for me to take it. But when they stopped distributing the Precious Blood, that was when I dissented, that was my biggest problem” (*Audio-taped Interview*). This dissention was shared by many Catholics in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain with a theological question or assumption underlying it. It would seem that those who held this dissention were wondering how the Blood of Christ can transmit the Coronavirus. At issue here is their understanding of Sacramental theology. In Sacramentality, earthly material realities signify, point to and become vehicles of the sacred without shedding all the natural properties they have, as earthly elements. On this basis, if it is possible for a cup of wine to transmit a live virus, then it is more than possible for the consecrated

wine at Holy Mass to act as a vehicle of infection. It is helpful to note for example that in many churches, Holy Water, left out for the faithful to bless themselves at the beginning of Mass, continues to provide a suitable breeding ground for mosquito larvae. Hence, Archbishop Jason Gordon, in response to such conceptions stated that “the Blood of Jesus cannot be contaminated but the passing of the chalice from hand to hand can transmit the virus” (Gordon 8).

Still, considering how important such faith practices like reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, one can note clearly how Church lockdown could be termed as a deep crisis for some Catholics, a sacrifice they had to make in these times. Another Practicing Roman Catholic concurred:

I really like going to Mass and the highest point for me is consecration and to know that I was not being able to participate in what was consecrated that is when I began to look at this whole lockdown thing differently. It was a personal sadness for me and it took me time to settle with the idea of not receiving Christ under both species of Body and Blood.⁴ When I receive the Body and Blood of my Lord and Saviour it is a very very special moment for me. It is what sustains me for the whole week until I come to Mass again next Sunday. To me that is something that is very very special. That is the moment when the Lord comes to me in my humanity (*Audio-taped Interview*).

One can understand from this perception how Church lockdown affected not only communal but also personal faith. It can be argued, however, as noted above, that the inability to participate fully

⁴ This view may seem to indicate a limited understanding of the theology of the Eucharist. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christ is received whole and entire under the appearance of bread and under the appearance of wine (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* No. 1377, p310). Yet in the view above, it would seem receiving either bread or wine alone is somehow incomplete. On the contrary, Body and Blood in Eucharistic theology are biblical language signaling the ‘whole’ reality of Christ. When at the Eucharist Christ says ‘This is my body,’ He is really saying ‘This is my whole self, my very self, which I now give you.’ Same with the Precious Blood.

in the Sacramental worship could have increased the longing for Sacraments and it would have helped Catholics to not take Sacramental worship and Holy Communion for granted, thereby increasing their personal faith. Moreover, according to Pickford-Gordon (8), Catholics in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain were urged to fulfill their Sunday obligation by participating in Mass on *Trinity TV* or on *Power 102 FM*.” Presented with this challenge, the prementioned Interviewee responded that:

Virtual worship wasn't the same. I lost that personal touch. There was a sense of a disconnect. Mass on zoom was like watching TV show. Turning to virtual worship wasn't too difficult but virtual worship had its own problems. When you go to Mass physically, you prepare yourself by dressing properly for example. But with praying at home virtually it doesn't matter if I am having on my pajamas. So, it was like everything became a lot more casual. You lie down in your bed or on your couch and you didn't stand for the gospel. And I had so many choices so I could not really watch or listen to one service. Sometimes if there is something that you didn't like in this virtual Mass you could easily turn to another one. Virtual Church was more flexible and there were so many options so you could not miss Mass, that is a positive thing about virtual worship. The problem that came with this is that some people became so laid back and so relaxed and did not want to go back to physical Mass (*Audio-taped Interview*).⁵

⁵ To emphasize that relapsing from physical public worship is implausible, the Interviewee, during the interview quoted a Bible Verse; Hebrews 10:25 which warns “Some people have given up the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord is coming.” Indeed, the importance of physical public worship has basis in the Bible. This is why lockdown would be seen as a deep crisis for some. Other biblical foundations for Christian physical gathering are expressed in Acts 1:14-16 and Acts 2:1-5.

It would seem from this comment that what seems to be lost in terms of virtual liturgy is the immediacy of the sacramental experience. As Pope Francis maintains, “liturgy is not a spectacle to be observed but a prayerful event where Christians encounter Christ’s presence in their lives.” He further emphasizes that “In the liturgy men and women can truly encounter Christ who is “not an idea or a sentiment, but a living person” (Esteves par 2). There is therefore a missing element in online worship as there is in online relationships; the immediate sacramental presence. Consequently, both attitude and performance seem to be affected on the virtual platform. Another regular Churchgoer shared similar sentiments. She observed that;

Now some people enjoy Mass on Television more than physical Mass and some might not want to return to attending Mass physically even after covid. Receiving the Blood is very essential for me, I feel I have received the life of Jesus Himself. The Blood is what keeps us alive. The Blood is life, if we have no Blood, we have no life.⁶ Even with the few people that come out to Church in this time when churches have reopened, you feel a sense of the Church as really the Body of Christ when you see that person there and can worship together (*Audio-taped Interview*).

One Priest Interviewee attested to the problem posed by virtual worship. He observed that

The whole aspect of Mass online has created a deep crisis for theology. One parishioner told me when I had asked her: ‘I didn’t see you in Church today, what happened?’ ‘father, I attended Mass online.’ The Church lockdown has challenged the fundamentals of the

⁶ This is in fact reflective of Old Testament tradition in Leviticus 17:10-14: ‘And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls (<https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Blood,-As-Basis-Of-Life>).

Roman Catholic Church's life; the Eucharist, the communion of Christian families and celebration of Christian mysteries in concrete ways (PI2, *Audio-taped Interview*).

These views represent the practical significance and centrality of Catholic Sacramentality which was theoretically postulated in the previous chapter. It is also in the context of Sacramentality that some indignation towards Church lockdown can be observed on the international scene. In the context of France, reported in the *National Catholic Register*, some Catholic faithful, following the announcement of a full Church lockdown by the Prime Minister, expressed fears that the life of faith will not become again whole. The following sentiments prevailed concerning the announcement: "something was not respected here." In addition, Bishop Rouge actually lamented a "lack of respect towards believers" on the part of the government. Some went as far as arguing that "It is foolish to think that consumers are more responsible than the faithful, and that contamination would be stronger in Churches, while supermarkets and garden stores are already open..." (Tadie 2). Other Bishops were of the view that COVID-19 restrictions on religious gatherings are an infringement of religious freedom. They insisted that "the Church should be invoking the constitutional freedom of worship-a freedom tampered during these times by safety measures to be meticulously observed within Churches" (Tadie 4). They continued; "Catholicism should not be reduced to a private sphere... Churches were built for public worship, and getting used to this situation would not be a good thing" (Tadie 4). Perceptions of Church lockdown as breach of religious freedom are also shared by Bishop Barron in the United States context. In a video posted on his official Facebook page he argued:

The Church from the beginning of the Covid crisis has been very much aware of the danger of this virus. We have been very cooperative too with various protocols proposed by the government in terms of first shutting down of churches and limiting the attendance. But

there is a certain overage on the part of the state, a hyper control of the worship life of the Church. Sitting in a pew is not just sitting, it is sitting in a community which also matters for us Catholics. Things like gestures, liturgy, sacraments, Church building, symbolism do indeed matter. Sacramental liturgical theology is not just a matter of sheer interiority. Why then is the governor of Virginia, a secular civic authority lecturing us on the nature of worship? This worries me about the freedom of the Church (Barron n.p.).

This view lends credence to Christian gathering as the conduit of social connection and sharing common values. This is to say that the Church is not just a spiritual reality but a real physical community with social nexus and cultural values. Indeed, in his redemptive work, Jesus created a new real Christian family of real brothers and sisters. Therefore, those who sit next to each other in the pew are really brothers and sisters. The physical Church serves people's spiritual but also social, psychological and even physical needs. For example, inspired by the gospel, some Catholics go to visit prisons, hospitals and homes for the aged and the dying, giving them not only prayer support but also food, healthcare and other items for daily use. So, the Church plays an important practical role in the community. All these roles are inspired by the gathering that Catholics do. An Interviewee (Practicing Roman Catholic) shared that "Communion includes visiting the sick, the prison, and the elderly and those who for one reason or another did not come to Church. Church lockdown did not make all this possible" (*Audio-taped Interview*). This is why Church lockdown can be viewed as having a negative impact on the faith practice of many Catholics.

Indeed, it has been viewed as having some psychological impact. Physical Church gathering has some psychological gains. For example, knowing that someone else experiences the same problems one does as this may come out of congregating can be a powerful experience. It is

reassuring, a way of dealing with anxiety, loneliness, fear, and hurting. For this reason, some would argue that the physical Church is a place of gains and it is where people are supposed to be in this time of the pandemic rather than far from it. Other Priest Interviewees in Trinidad argued in this line of thought. One had this to say: “I feel like the Church is even too strict with implementing the covid-19 regulations. The Church is the last place people can get covid. People flood themselves at the shopping malls and then at Church you want to say register and only 50 percent, that is extreme! People queuing up at the Mall with less than 6 feet apart distance in between but at the Church they say 6 feet apart” (PI3, *Audio-taped Interview*). Another Priest who was interviewed via a phone call in Malawi argued that “When there is flooding and other disasters in the country, people flee to Churches, some seek shelter in Church halls and even in the Church building itself. Now, we have this crisis and people are told to flee from the Church, isn’t that a contradiction?” This argument was shared in solidarity with Malawi Catholic Bishops who expressed disappointment with partial lockdown claiming that they were not consulted (Chiuta 2). In any case, this shows how complex the issue of Church lockdown is. Although countries across the globe may have succumbed to it immediately, it produced a lot of mixed reactions and affected relations between states or governments and religious denominations.

The variegated views, attitudes and reactions to Church lockdown in Trinidad and Tobago and beyond have raised significant debates around the issues of religious freedom, Church-State relationship, authenticity of Online worship, ecclesiological identity, piety and spirituality. In the view of this study and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these issues, as they are centered on the relationship between Public Health Measures and Religious Faith, can be examined from

the point of view of the big debate concerning the compatibility of science and theology.⁷ The varying of the reactions indicate that the compatibility of science and theology can be misunderstood or overlooked. Suggesting that this compatibility is not simply assumed or desired but it is a possibility, the next chapter, building on the relationship between faith and reason, assesses these views in the light of that compatibility.

⁷ It could be argued that the variegated reactions reflect the two arms of the Church, namely the liberal and the conservative arms. While this might be a plausible analysis of the varying perceptions, it does not represent the whole truth of the matter because different people hold different views towards lockdown for different reasons. It would be too simplistic to categorize the views into liberal and conservative arms. Moreover, that would leave the reality dichotomous. To avoid such positions, this study examines these views on the basis of the relationship between public health policy and religious faith which indispensably entails a long-time debate about the compatibility of science and theology. The study deliberately takes a compatibilist rather than a dichotomizing approach in the following chapter three in order to find meeting grounds of the different views examined in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE VIEWS TOWARDS CHURCH LOCKDOWN IN THE LIGHT OF THE COMPATIBILITY OF SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

The discussions in chapters one and two indicated that there is interaction between science and faith in the sense of public health measures and liturgical sacramental worship. The views that absolutize the necessity of Public Health Measures while rendering Public Worship insignificant represent the totalitarian tendencies of science. Such tendencies paint the scientific perspective on human life as all-encompassing as if no other rationality or response is needed. In this way, scientific rationality claims, implicitly or explicitly, a dominating view of human life and safety ignoring the value and integrity of faith. Yet faith in the Roman Catholic sense is not opposed to science for the same God who creates is the God who reveals (Amos 4: 13) meaning that faith and science are compatible. Faith plays significant roles many of which would seem to have been undermined with the manner in which public health regulations regarding COVID-19 were implemented. Hence the mixed reactions presented in the previous chapter. This presents an apparent difficulty between faith and science. Hence this chapter, adopting a synthetic dialogical approach, assesses the mixed reactions along the line of the compatibility of theology and science in the light of the mutuality of faith and reason in order to deal with this difficulty more peacefully so as to live a truly integrated fulfilled human existence.

A Synthesis of faith and Science

Aquinas points to the integrative view of faith and science when he claims that “Since all truth comes from God, there can never be, ultimately, any conflict between the outcome of reason and the beliefs of faith, or between the data of the sciences and the facts of revelation...”

(Verschuuren 20). Science and faith are compatible in the way they draw knowledge from each other and how such knowledge informs each discipline's practice. For example, faith can draw from scientific findings the reality of a pandemic and establish a suitable response. As such, faith "must be in vital interchange today with science just as it always has been with philosophy and other forms of learning." Indeed, it "will have to call on the findings of science to one degree or another as it pursues its primary concern for the human person, the reaches of freedom, the possibilities of Christian community, the nature of belief and the intelligibility of nature and history." (John Paul II Par 18). Science too draws from faith which is culturally grounded as John Paul II states: "For science develops best when its concepts and conclusions are integrated into the broader human culture..." He concludes that "Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish." (John Paul II Par 19). To this extent, there is need to explore more meeting grounds of science and faith in the context of the COVID-19 phenomenon.

Faith, Science and Culture

The need to find meeting grounds for restrictive public health measures and the essence of worship is clear when we consider the relationship between faith and culture. In the Trinidad and Tobago context, culture takes into serious consideration physicality. In this background, a religious practice, deprived of its normal 'physical' expression therefore, is one which is severely truncated and utterly unappealing to the worshipper. To this extent, it would not have been so easy for some Trinibagoan Catholics to embrace Religious Restrictions without questioning even though those restrictions were meant for their own safety. This is so because the Catholic liturgy is rooted in the culture which is rich in symbols, rituals, gestures, signs, movements and physical representations.

The attitudes, therefore, of those who would have dissented Lockdown can arguably be seen to display in part the Christian social mindset of Trinibagoans as communitarian people who seize every opportunity for communion and socializing as evident in the common aspects of ‘liming’ and ‘having fete after fete.’ This highly social mindset is particularly relevant today especially with the challenge of individualism infecting and spreading in our societies alongside the Coronavirus. This mindset forms a counter-culture to that of individualism.

There is also a sense in which these physical activities take one to the level of metaphysics, to the divine.⁸ In this case, there is something that science is to understand, that is, ‘transcendence’ which is essential to faith. Science is therefore, challenged with broadening its understanding of human reality by coming to terms with the notion of ‘transcendence’ which is achieved by the concreteness and physicality of human worship. Science also needs to come to terms with the proven social, psychological and personal benefits provided by public religious worship and quantify them in terms of its effect on the public sense of well-being, which, social science may agree is essential to keeping a society together. From a physiological point of view, sincere worship is associated with positive health outcomes and seems to prolong human life. Social and Behavioural Science Research attests to the fact that “people who attend services at a Church, Synagogue or Mosque are less stressed and live longer,” and particularly “middle-aged (ages 40-65) adults-both men and women-who attend church or other houses of worship reduce their risk for mortality by 55 percent.” The reason, as the Research found, is that “being in a place where you can flex those spiritual muscles is actually beneficial for your health.” Hence, it concludes by

⁸ Yet, “it could easily be claimed that there is no physics without metaphysics, or more generally, that there is no science without metascience” (Verschuuren 16). For Niedermeyer (9), “for every physical phenomenon in the natural order of being, there is a corresponding metaphysical phenomenon, which is beyond the physical; hence, for the most part, something in the realm of the supernatural.” Thus, the mutuality of science and theology is not simply a desire, it is a practical possibility.

“encouraging individuals to participate in something” (Patterson 2) for indeed persons participate in worship for something beyond social support and it should be noted that in worship that is where the ideas of compassion and companionship are heightened which have spiritual and psychological benefits.

Religious Worship can also be a source of social cohesion and even social change. The great American Civil Rights icon Dr Martin Luther King was a Protestant Pastor who through faith initiated important political reorganization. This works against totalitarian impulses of scientific rationality which tend to see little need for the insights of faith but it begins with the conformity of worship to physical reality and to culture.⁹ Science then will understand that the decision to suspend public worship was not an easy one¹⁰ but it is because there is what faith has to understand from science as well which it did in the case of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain. It suspended or rather ‘sacrificed’ public worship almost immediately the Coronavirus surfaced in the Island. It should be noted, however, that such a decision was made after consultation and dialogue with the scientific community on the severity of the coronavirus and objective knowledge of how quickly it spreads. Archbishop Gordon (9) mentions that he held conversations and debates with local and

⁹ Sacraments must require a person-to-person encounter for them to be effective. The public health regulations, while they represent a genuine concern for the safety of human life in preventing the spread of the Coronavirus, they seem to undermine the incarnational nature of the Sacraments which is at the core of Catholic life. By their incarnational nature, Sacraments relate to human corporeal being. Human beings are not pure spirits, they are bodies too. Sacramental faith relates to human beings not only as spiritual beings or to their inner life alone but to the physical life as well. As visible signs of invisible reality of grace, Sacraments relate to the body so that they can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart and then the inner life is thus transformed. However, This Sacramental life has always been challenged in times of persecutions, war, famine, illness and more when it is difficult to gather physically to participate in the Sacraments. Catholics in the Archdiocese of Port Spain who are yearning for full participation in the Sacramental life by physical presence should not feel ashamed of that yearning because Sacramentality demands just that. Lange (4) substantiates this view when he says that “Catholics need feel no shame for the longing heightens the desire to be gathered again as a community, in person, in the flesh.” In other words, this time of the pandemic invites Catholics into a spiritual discipline of trust, waiting, vigilance, hope and a deep desire to be united in community. Conversely, the Church-lockdown can be seen as a way of saying Catholic spirituality is not about instant spiritual gratification.

¹⁰ “The decision to close the churches, to tell people not to go to church, was gut-wrenching. I agonized about that decision more than any decision I have made in my time as a bishop” (Gordon 11-12).

international disease specialists and the energy sector which “is at the cutting edge with Health, Safety and Environment (HSE).” He then concludes that “Everything in the science told me to close the churches and the schools...” (10).

The decision to adhere to Church lockdown was therefore informed by science and was based on scientifically established facts about the Coronavirus. Moreover, all the measures taken by the Churches when lockdown was eased were scientifically based. For example, according to Gordon, the guidelines for worship spelled out that “the church has to be well ventilated, length of time matters, the most people you have the shorter it has to be. I actually put out a protocol concerning the capacity of the Churches and registration to attend Church” (Audio-taped Interview). In a sense, that COVID-19 is real was a scientifically established truth which faith accepted and encouraged the intensification of prayer based on that truth. Faith would not have encouraged people to pray hard in the face of the pandemic if it did not first believe the truth of science that covid is real. Harmony therefore exists between the two; when one believes in the truth of science, one is not abandoning the truth of faith, one is simply going into faith because of what one has known from science. Accordingly, by suspending public worship immediately, Church authorities in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain did not lose faith but they understood as Aquinas would advise “Sometimes we need understanding before we can believe; at other times we need faith before we can understand” (Verschuuren 20). He adds that “We cannot live by faith alone or by reason alone, but only by a harmonious combination of faith and reason” (Verschuuren 20). There is no need then to overestimate scientific intelligence over faith. There is no need either to overestimate faith and ignore science. The tendency to ignore scientific facts has serious consequences. Archbishop Jason Gordon cites examples where “In the US, several pastors took this position and we know several died from COVID also killing some of their congregation”

(Gordon 12). He likens this tendency to the second temptation of Jesus in the Bible in Matthew 4:1-11 where the devil told Jesus to throw himself from the highest point of the temple and order angels to catch him. Jesus did not throw himself; he would have been injured or even died if he had defied the laws of gravity. In a similar way, if the Church in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain had defied science which declared COVID-19 real, it would have faced the consequences.

Faith ought to be practiced based on principles which are reasonable. For example, in the context of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, the Church's decision to enter into a full lockdown immediately was, according to Archbishop Gordon, based on reasonable principles of the common good, social justice and pastoral theology. This is because considering the good of all, the effects of COVID-19 on the poor and caring for the most vulnerable persons in society do not conflict with scientific rationality because these principles are reasonable. Thus, inspired by the principles of the common good, social justice and pastoral theology, faith played a major role in saving lives and reducing illness related to COVID-19 through primary support, comfort, guidance, and direct health care and social services such as distribution of hampers. Moreover, through faith, Catholics were able to share health information on different Parish WhatsApp Groups to protect the wider community and advocate for the needs of vulnerable populations. Faith was therefore practiced based on reason not superstition or as blind obedience. Faith and science must therefore always be in a practical mutual conversation. This entails and compels some recommendations.

Recommendations

The Role of Education in the Process of Renewal

Individual parishes in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain must not ignore the opportunity that the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Church lockdown offer them to review and renew everything

about the celebration of Sacraments and the way of catechizing. These phenomena offer them motivation to add training and formation concerning the importance of the Sacraments. The goal is for parishioners to appreciate the essentiality of celebrating the Sacraments in public worship. The Church lockdown can be seen as a time of fasting from normal Catholic Sacramental life. For this reason, training and formation is needed to cultivate in them increased hunger and love of the Sacraments. To achieve this goal, catechesis needs to emphasize on the richness of Catholic Sacramental life in order to promote and encourage Sacramental piety. In this way, the Archdiocese will be sure of active participation in the liturgical Sacramental worship in a post-Covid-19 era.

Education is also crucial in the sensitization of the population concerning the relationship between faith and science. The catechetical program for young people ought to include in the curriculum the compatibility of faith and science. By including aspects of science and technology in catechesis, the Church demonstrates to the young people that what they learn in school about science is not in conflict with what their religion teaches. Catechesis must demonstrate reasonably that public health measures are marks of God's providential care of human beings and that all the resources at our disposal during a pandemic which come from human creativity and ingenuity are fruits of the providence of God (Jones 1). For example, the development of the COVID-19 Vaccine is no doubt an effort of science but if the vaccine helps to sustain and protect life, heal those diseased and provide comfort, then, its development points to God the sustainer, protector, healer and comforter of all life as implied in Colossians 1:17: "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Ultimately, catechesis ought to help them understand the place of science in God's world. If they understand this harmony of the disciplines, they will not tolerate the absolutist tendencies of emphasizing the domination of either scientific intelligence or faith. Also,

Catholics, and other Christians should be taught to express the benefits of religion and religious worship in terms capable to the wider public, including the non-believing public. In other words, they need to be able to defend religion and public worship in scientific terms.

Parishes can also engage parishioners in formal and informal pedagogies by the use of media and physical interaction as platforms in which lay members can directly participate in science-faith interaction activities and debates. Just as parishes hold retreats annually, they may also think of holding seminars, workshops and other activities facilitated by both scientists and theologians in joint collaboration to sensitize the Catholic population about the relationship and the significant differences and difficulties involved in the faith-science duopolies.

Enhancing Digital Evangelization and Apostolate

Church lockdown experience has highlighted, among other things, the need to make strategic use of video conferencing technology. To this extent, this study recommends that each parish in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain employs live-streaming method of evangelization along with the physical celebration of liturgy. The majority of persons who normally fill up Churches as Archbishop Gordon observed and shared in an interview are the aged and the aged are said to be the most vulnerable to COVID-19. This means the majority are still in a kind of Church lockdown for they are advised to stay at home. The Church needs to reach out to those through live-streaming of the celebration of the Sacraments. To achieve this goal, each parish needs to have stable live-streaming equipment to make every liturgy that is celebrated accessible to the homebound and isolated. In this task, ministers ought to seek out more engaging activities for the audience such as devotional tools, invocations, practical prayers and deliberate and particular acknowledgement of those who are participating virtually in order to capture their attention. It is important to note that this, as well as other recommendations, require discernment, financial support, creativity and

commitment on the part of the parishes. Parishes, however, are made up of families. Hence these recommendations must also target this very crucial institution, the family.

Faith and Science in the Household

Since the Church lockdown has produced such slogans as ‘stay at home’ and ‘pray at home,’ the best place in which the campaign for a practical mutual synthesis of faith and science is the home. As Tagoe-Calys (5) writes, “The lockdowns and restrictions only present challenges to our communal prayers but it does not stop us from praying,” families ought to take this determination to do at home what they cannot do at the wider Church gathering. This is where the idea of a domestic Church comes in. In other words, while Catholic sacramentality is not exhausted by public liturgical worship at the physical Church, we can talk of Sacramentality within the context of the domestic Church, the Church at home. The idea of a Domestic Church encourages and promotes fervent prayer, meditation on God’s word, reading, bearing each other’s burdens and strengthening family ties and relationships which could have been otherwise broken by misuse of social media. Bursa (2-3) grounds the idea by saying that “The upending of all of life, the ceasing of incessant activity, the stay-at-home mandate, quite literally, the grounding of the whole family, while it can be viewed with a negative lens, is almost unbelievable opportunity for families to reset.” In this regard, family dinners are to be returned and board games dusted off. One can only look at a screen for so long before signing out and rediscovering the goodness of the “other” sitting under the same roof. Indeed, in this understanding, loving one’s neighbour takes a rather concrete form in those with whom one lives. For the domestic Church, “God seems to be offering an opportunity to set things right, to root out disorder, and to engage in life together” (Bursa 3). In this way, the families will solidly sustain the values of a Catholic Christian culture in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain.

CONCLUSION

Church lockdown ought to be defended on rational, scientific and religious grounds. It would seem that in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, not much was done to give a religious justification for the decision to close worship for clearly some Catholics seemed to have seen only the scientific justification for the closures. This surmounts to a real pastoral and catechetical problem for it reveals that in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, as in much of the Catholic world, the faithful have a poor appreciation of the compatibility of faith and science. This study has thrown up the deficiencies in the education in the faith for Catholics of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, deficiencies in the manner in which the Church lockdowns were justified by both Catholic authorities and the lay faithful and deficiencies in the appreciation of the essentiality of Public Worship by the scientific community (Public Health Authorities). It would also seem that a great percentage of the Catholic faith community justified Church lockdown by the same points on COVID-19 put out by the Public Health Authorities and succumbed to the suspension of worship on purely scientific grounds thereby rendering the triumph of scientific rationality over faith. A better effort ought to be made to justify the lockdown in a religious sense in order to maintain balance in the relationship between faith and science.

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