

Where is God when it hurts? Theodicy from the pain of COVID-19



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This article attempts to answer the question of God's compassion during and after the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Many people are asking questions about God's care and love amid situations where they could not mourn the loss of the loved ones and find closure. African philosophy of death, mourning rituals and funeral ceremonies were curtailed or restricted by the government and therefore, mourners were left with wounds because they could not find closure for the loss of their loved ones. The aim is to point out that people are still mourning, as lockdown restrictions limited them from going through a grieving process, and that people, left with post-corona effects, are still asking the reality of God's presence during times filled with pain. The interdisciplinary approach to the reality of situation, press releases and literature review are all combined to locate theodicy during the periods of pain. It is discovered that many who did not mourn and grieve culturally and religiously are still struggling emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Bereavement processes that were muzzled, can still be addressed theologically. Theodicy, as a theological concept, is utilised as a tool to strengthen faith and hope. Hope remains an anchor that keeps humanity floating above the circumstances. Eschatological hope remains the pillar when COVID-19 is deemed as a contradiction to the goodness of God. The conclusion is that, although the character of God such as love, kindness, empathy et cetera, is questioned, the reassuring message remains that God continues to comfort, guide and heal despite crises facing humanity. Humanity still needs post-grief healing and closure in order to reimagine and reassert normality of life.

Contribution: The author aims to highlight the importance of healing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and how to answer the question of theodicy during the crises. How does one reconcile the goodness of God and the devastation of a pandemic during and after sufferings the world has experienced when one's socio-cultural structures are challenged?

Keywords: COVID-19; pandemic; grief; mourning; bereavement; theodicy; God's goodness; hope.

Introduction

The intention of this article is to point out the emotional pressure caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic where survivors did not mourn enough or find closure. Emotional hurts are probably still being carried through into the present. African ways of finding closure when they have lost loved ones were contained and restricted by lockdown regimes; therefore, many people were left with the emotional scars. Bereavement and mourning need some form of closure, both religiously and culturally. Firstly, the African way of dealing with bereavement and closure is examined, the government imposition of lockdown restrictions is investigated, and finally some pastoral and psychological therapies to assist the survivors are proposed. The rationale behind this is an endeavour to reconcile God's goodness and human misery brought by COVID-19, and the mental health impact COVID-19 has left behind on the human psyche. There is no doubt that 'COVID-19 pandemic affects the mental health of communities and their leaders' (Lekoa & Ntuli 2021:1).

In 1990, Philip Yancey, an evangelical author in the United States, wrote a book that gripped the Christian world's attention. The title of the book is *Where is God when it hurts: A comforting, healing guide for coping with hard times*. During the harsh lockdown of 2020 and 2021, I re-read the book for the fifth time since I obtained it in 1992. I always read it when I go through tough times to gain some indescribable comfort, encouragement, and strength from it. The book gives me a precedence and a rationale to write this article, as I observe that its title formulation is a rhetorical question that is also asked by corona survivors. The consequences of COVID-19 are that the reality of its

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impact has psychological consequences for humanity around the world. I agree with Ngema, Buthelezi and Mncube (2021:1): 'Pandemics can cause sudden, widespread morbidity and mortality associated with emotional, psychological, social, political, economic and spiritual disruptions.'

COVID-19 survivors are either suffering due to the loss of loved ones or due to some chronic conditions caused by the virus that, pandemically, made its presence felt throughout the world. The mourning cries can still be heard, because the bereaved had not yet find some closure. The after-effects are real, because 'the effects of the virus touch every sphere and strata of human community and productivity' (Henderson 2021:9). The question that lingers in many peoples' minds is that of 'utter bafflement at how anyone could survey current events and still hold to a cheerful optimism that life is being effectively lured onward by a loving God' (Graves 1988:109). This is the question of theodicy that this article seeks to answer.

The world caught off-guard

When the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, addressed the nation on the 15 March 2020 to declare the state of disaster (South African Government 2020), many thought it will be a passing storm gone within about 21 days. This was the follow-up to the then Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize's announcement of the COVID-19 case in South Africa. The male patient returned from Italy (South African Government 2020a). The declaration of a state of disaster imposed an immediate ban on travel; closure of schools effected on 18th March. On 17th March, the National Coronavirus Command Council was established (South African Government 2020b). The tough lockdown was instituted on 27th March after the first corona death was announced. From then on, life for ordinary people began to take a different form, affecting people's lifestyles, as livelihoods were confined to indoors, businesses closed, road commuting reduced, and painfully, the health services sector became overwhelmed as thousands were infected, admitted and quarantined in special facilities. Death rates escalated daily until November 2021. Lockdown levels were adjusted to try to reopen the economy and normalise life, but the fundamental truth remained that the pandemic surged, and lives were lost.

One of the most agonising lockdown rules was the government's directives as dictated by health authorities, when and how to bury the deceased. In many countries, including South Africa, it was observed how politics positioned itself above religious lives of the populace:

Covid-19 pandemic has inadvertently empowered politicians to now be in positions to dictate terms and conditions under which churches and other religious entities must operate. Such terms and conditions are accordingly the new means that the politicians have imposed on the churches. (Mathipa, Ramorola & Motsepe 2021:4)

This was demonstrated when the government instituted regulations such as corpses to be buried within 72 hours, and

the caskets had to be covered with plastic. Corpses were encased or laminated and could not be viewed as per traditional practices. Funeral attendance was limited to 50 people, no night vigils, no after-tears, and send-off services had to be in well-ventilated spaces and not in houses as per cultural processes. Wearing masks was compulsory, social distancing was the order of the day, register keeping of mourners was strictly enforced with constant disinfection of the people present (Ratau, Monyela & Mofokeng 2021:1). One looks back at this and the emotions erupt. All these so-called personal protection protocols (PPP) conflicted with African ways of mourning the dead. COVID-19 'resultant infections and deaths startled the world'. As a result of the uncertainty, the world experienced 'stockpiling, job insecurity, increased depression and stress-eating' (Zungu 2021:1). The increased depression and stress are the central concern of this article.

African philosophy of death

Death, including the funeral rituals, are deeply embedded in African cultural beliefs, traditions and indigenous religions. The African worldview of life after death, including the power and the role of the deceased ancestor guide the rituals, ceremonies and practices during and after death. It is important to note that African death rituals are designed and expected to ensure that the departed soul is properly rested so that his or her spirit takes the honourable seat or position among the protective ancestors.

Africans view death as the last passage of the elaborate celebration of life cycle, 'a mere passage from the human world to the spirit world' (Kalu in Olupona 2011:54). It is regarded as a rite of passage that prepares the spirit of the deceased to travel to the next realm. Mbiti (1970:264) points out that 'African peoples believe that death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter.' Death is not about the end of life, but about the continuation of life in a new realm, 'a transition into another form of life' (Gehman 2005:220). The spirit of the dead person is believed to continue living with the community this side of the grave. Life and death are regarded as on a continuum of existence, with death conceived as another state of being. This means that, although the person is dead, he or she continues to exist in the spirit world; and, in some cultures, the dead person's spirit can be reincarnated into some living people.

African burial practices

Africans, like other nations around the world, practice rituals for various reasons. 'These rituals help survivors to overcome the critical moment, decreasing the risk of complicated grief' (Cardoso et al. 2020:1). Once the body is buried, the family embarks on the more elaborate cleansing rituals period. This differ from tribe to tribe, but its basic rationale is that it assists people towards closure – something that death caused by the coronavirus did not allow. Correct procedures of burial ensure that the ancestor does not linger around to haunt the living, but instead

rests peacefully and continues to protect the family. The incorrect burial procedures, or if the deceased lived some dishonourable lifestyle, his or her spirit continues to remain in the world of the living to cause harm. Normally, people regarded as witches, sorcerers, et cetera, are not buried according to the correct burial procedures, and automatically denied the place of honour within the community of ancestors.

What is common in many South African cultural beliefs is that, after a person is reported dead, people start visiting the bereaved family to pay their last respects to the dead and comfort the mourning family. Generally, death in Africa brings family and community together. They travel from far and wide (Setsiba 2012:24).

The common practices include:

- Smearing the windows with ashes.
- Turning or covering wall pictures and mirrors. The reason for this is that the dead cannot see themselves.
- Removing the bed from the bedroom and laying the mattress on the floor where the female chief mourner sits, surrounded by some other females who experienced this kind of loss in their lives. The mourning male does not sit on the mattress, but on one selected chair in the same bedroom.
- While mattress arrangements are done in the house for the females coming to pay respects, a *kgotla* [semi-circle enclosure] is erected with green branches as a place where male persons go to pay respects. This *kgotla* is commonly adjacent to the cattle kraal in front of the house, or it may be in the yard where the person died. In the Setswana culture, especially in Sehurutshe, males and females do not mix to pay respects. The same applies to *patlo* [cultural wedding procedures] and *tatolo*, which happens when people return from the graveyard to explain how a person has died, what was his or her family status (marriage, children, family tree, et cetera), and the bereaved are encouraged to be strong in the absence of the deceased.
- One of the people who surrounds the chief mourner on the mattress is selected to *latolela batho* who come into the bedroom. This person announces to visitors that it is indeed true that the person is deceased and what the plans for burial are. In Setswana culture, the same *go latolela batho* is done at *kgotla* for male visitors who also come to pay condolences.
- In many communities, people come daily, especially after hours to pay respect and offer condolences to the family. This is always accompanied by prayers including spiritual songs to comfort the family.

Post-funeral rituals and mourning practices

Death customs in Africa do not end with the burial. Post-funeral rituals and mourning practices continue. It varies from culture to culture, can be elaborate, lively and costly, and continues for a long time (eds. Jindra & Noret 2011).

These rituals contribute towards closure and healing from grief or mourning. The lack of religious or spiritual rituals after mourning can be dangerous to mental health. Ignoring the subject of religion during emotional crises is dangerous to the soul and emotional healing. Africans are inertly religious, as religion permeates all spheres of cultural and social interactions. COVID-19 denied mourners the right and the space to mourn, leaving the mourners facing life that is psychologically harmful. Even though clinical and scientific research regarding COVID-19 tended to avoid explicit questions of faith, the basic questions about religious or spiritual cleansing during and after mourning eras remained embedded in people's psyche. The importance of burial and post-burial rituals are part of African culture and religion. The adherence to COVID-19 regulations is deemed as 'an imposition and an infringement of the rights to practise one's religion' (Zungu 2021:3). Denial of religious and cultural practices, especially during and after grief, leaves some psychological cries on the mourners. Trauma, anxiety and depression do not receive therapeutic attention to find closure. It is true as Zungu (2021) points out:

The suppression of funeral rituals is traumatic and anxiety inducing to family members who are determined to appease the living-dead and keep them on a pedestal. The surviving family members have genuine concerns about the COVID-19 regulations which prevent them from performing the burial rites as custom dictates. (p. 7)

How lockdown restrictions gagged cries and mourning

As of 27 March 2020, most citizens could leave their homes for particular situations such as those providing essential services such as food purchasing, medical care, security services, et cetera. Lockdowns were inevitably imposed by government. 'These lockdowns have also led to the enforcement of limited social interaction and the maintenance of physical distancing' (Naidoo, Israel & Naidoo 2021:1). Most of the strategic measures imposed on the nation as a way of suppressing or mitigating the pandemic contributed a lot towards denial for people to mourn culturally and psychologically. This article deals with three of those restrictions that significantly gagged cries caused by the pandemic. The most stringent of them all was a 'A stay-at-home order'. This goes against people's ordinary lifestyle, because '[P]eople do not live in isolation but rather consider themselves bona-fide members of a common social community' (Mhute, Mangeya & Jakaza 2021:1). Both the affected and the infected people, to a certain degree, experienced some mental and psychological impact during the pandemic. Many people experienced some acute stress disorder, anxiety and depression which manifested in chest pain, physical exhaustion and sleep disturbance as common symptoms (Van Roekel et al. 2021; Wang et al. 2021; Yang et al. 2021). South Africans were quarantined inside their homes, and were restricted from mingling, interacting and being physically present with the bereaved to offer comfort. As people were confined inside homes, their friends, relatives and neighbours who were

mostly in isolation died. The next of kin were robbed of consolation by friends, relatives and neighbours. Trapped inside the house was a psychological torture for those mourning and those sensing obligations to offer support.

The other measure that exacerbated grief was 'movement control order' commonly known as lockdown restrictions. This was a government order to restrict population movement as a mass quarantine strategy for suppressing or limiting the infection rate of coronavirus. Travel ban applied domestically and internationally. Population movement within locales (villages, towns, cities, provinces, etc.) was a moratorium on friends and relatives to travel to pay the last respects and condolences to their acquaintances. The South African 'ubuntu' was devastated, as it 'captures the spirit of the individual connected integrally to the collective community' (Henderson 2021:5). Africans felt the impact of this restriction as Zungu (2021:4) asserts:

The imposition of measures such as social distancing and the support of the bereaved from a distance, go against the spirit of Ubuntu and the communal nature of the African people. (p. 4)

The third and the most atrocious measure was restriction of gathering of people for any cultural or religious purpose. At the level 5 restrictions, the country, in particular the economy, was almost totally shut down. Movements in streets were monitored by law enforcement agencies, and the number of people attending the funerals were limited to 50 and 100, respectively. Events such as 'after tears' were not allowed. No night vigils were allowed. From the start, no church events were allowed. This imposed limitations that robbed Africans of their healing experienced through community:

African people are notoriously communal in orientation; thus the bereaved families attempt to continue that cultural trait after the death of a loved one. Funeral rituals are at the centre of African socio-cultural systems which ensure unity and solidarity post-funeral. (Zungu 2021:2)

The normal rituals of viewing the body as a sign of respect and farewell, were curtailed. The community gathers as companions and consolers of those who are mourning. The evening prayer sessions prior to the funeral is to comfort the grieved and consolidate companionship of the community. The final tribute to the dead is a community affair, because 'when a clan member suffers, the community also suffers and, when he or she dies, part of them dies too as the common life diminishes' (Mawusi 2015:104).

Because Africans are gregarious in all social interactions, whether culturally or religiously, these restrictions shut down all these events dealing with grief or mourning, including the customary rituals that enable healing processes. COVID-19 pandemic regulations 'constrains, restricts and impedes the performance of these ancient customs' (Jaja, Madubuike & Jaja 2020:389) and thus leaves the populations with open psychological wounds. Zungu's (2021) research conclude rightly that:

[T]he enforcement of COVID-19 regulations has led to the suppression of emotions and lack of closure for the remaining

family members. All these rituals prepare the family members emotionally and psychologically to accept the unacceptable feelings; that their loved one will only be with them in spirit from now on. (p. 7)

Risk factors associated with lockdown experiences include negative social connectivity, including social support (Gloster et al. 2020; Ye et al. 2020) and lower-level communication with friends, family, relatives and neighbours (Tahara, Mashizume & Takahashi 2020). Funerals are the family and friends' convergence points; hence the isiXhosa saying one usually hears during the funeral: *Tshotsho Wafa saze sadibana* [You did well for dying to make it possible for us to meet]. It is true that 'funerals draw large crowds and with the restrictions in place, many are not allowed to attend' (Naidoo et al. 2021:4). African cultures have some acute sense of solidarity and community life where 'we' all belong, therefore suffer or rejoice together. Death is an opportunity to express these ideals.

Where is God when it hurts (theodicy)?

The term *theodicy* was termed by a German philosopher and mathematician, Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) in 1710 (Adams 1995; eds. Morris & Parkinson 1973). It is the combination of two Greek terms: *theos* [God] and *dike* [righteous]. Leibniz coined the term to justify God's existence in light of the apparent imperfections of the world (eds. Adams & Adams 1990). He was attempting to defend the idea of a just God in the face of evidential evil. As a theological concept, according to Dembski (2009:8), theodicy attempts to address three questions or assumptions:

- God is good, omnipresent and therefore omniscient.
- The universe was created by God's wisdom, and it exists in a contingent relationship to God.
- Evil in the world ultimately traced back to human depravity (sin), leading to the question: Why?

These three questions or assumptions tell us of Nürnberger's definition of theodicy (2016a:73–74) as 'the question of how a loving God can allow evil, suffering and death to happen in the world'. This notion is further highlighted by Wethmar (2006:256) that it is the problem 'of justifying the reality of God in the light of the existence and occurrence of evil'. Therefore, theodicy is an attempt to justify or defend God in the face of evil in the world – evil which may sound or seem to contradict the character of God (goodness, omnipotence and omnipresence) and disturb God's relationship with his creation. The British theologian, David Ford (2013:70), says it is questioning God 'out of anguish and apparent contradictions which it would be irresponsible to ignore'. In other words, theodicy is the explanation of why a perfectly good, almighty, and all-knowing God permits evil. It is wrestling with the problem of evil. It 'attempts to resolve how a good God and an evil world can coexist' (Dembski 2009:4). One Catholic theologian, Edward Oakes (2001:7), captures it correctly, namely that its task is to 'show that an

omnipotent and benevolent God can coexist with evil in His infinite creation'. This is further elaborated by Sauter (2003:239) that theodicy is 'a justification of God face-to-face with irrational suffering and inexplicable evil'.

Theological studies over the years conclude that theodicy can be studied or perceived under two streams or types. Firstly, it can be viewed under philosophical theology. This discipline begins with theological data and tries to make sense of them philosophically. It endeavours to make philosophical sense of the biblical data concerning evil, sin and suffering. In other words, 'theodicy' is generally accepted by Christians that God allows some evil in the cosmos for the sake of the greater good that could not be achieved without it. Theodicy is allowed in order to give God's image bearers some freedom to grow in love and goodness (Brightman 1947; Geach 1977).

Secondly, it can be viewed under philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion tries to understand generally by examining universally available data rather than to specifically look at the theological data. Using universally available data, it tries to assess how a good and powerful God can coexist with evil. The goal here is an attempt to answer the critics who claim that the problem of evil is unconquerable for Christian theism. A famous scholar in this category is Peter van Inwagen through his monograph, *The problem of evil* (2006). In other words, God has not abandoned the world to fend for itself, but has in incarnation and through the cross, shared its burden with his creation (Hick 1977).

To bring it to our context: Why does the good and powerful God allows the coronavirus to an extent that it kills our acquaintances and loved ones? How can such a good God hold the universe under the ransom of such a pandemic? Can goodness, grace and mercy on the one hand, and evil, suffering and death on the other, coexist? Is it possible for God's passion to exist amid the Corona virus' devastating environment? This even brings some physical science into question whether two matters can occupy the same space at the same time. Can one continue maintaining faith in the loving God while watching the loved ones losing their lives? Is it possible to find closure without mourning and grieving processes? Does this not leave the world's nations psychologically unhealthy? Where is God when it hurts? These are genuine questions of theodicy. Arguments on this matter are endless. Indeed, 'evil in our world is not most adequately met by arguments but by persons living certain sorts of lives and dying certain sorts of deaths' (Ford 2013:74). This brings me to conviction that the question of theodicy is subjective; it is determined by human position and condition at the time of asking it. People who believe in the loving God and are experiencing pain, suffering and death have the stories that are at the heart of authentic theodicy (Ford 2013:74). In agreement with Ratzinger (2004):

[T]he problem of theodicy urgently and mightily demands the attention of us all, this is just one more indication of how little we are capable of defining God, much less fathoming him. (p. 26)

The hidden cries as a result of the lack of closure during bereavement are still going to surface. Humanity is bleeding deeply, and the cure seems to be far-flung. Has God abandoned his creation, leaving the universe, especially humanity on the verge of annihilation? Is the coronavirus a divine judgement over the universe? Humanity is hurting, and God seems to be silent as people continue to lose their lives in families or close-knitted communes. 'How can an all-powerful and loving God allow or cause so much suffering and death to occur in a world "he" created?' (Nürnberg 2016b:95). This situation drives humanity to Wiersbe's notion that 'we find ourselves fighting battles in a war we never declared and carrying burdens for reasons we don't understand' (1984:11).

Theodicy beyond COVID-19

After the storm has passed, what then? Masses of people all over the world are carrying the scars of grief caused by the coronavirus; and some are left with medical conditions due to vaccines or the effects of infections. Those grieving are probably higher in number than those left with some medical conditions. Our limited human rationale is that people who are left with questioning, discussing, agonising are yet persevering in faith. Some continue to struggle with the question of theodicy, just like the Nigerian scholars, Dasaolu and Ofuasia (2019) who battle to bring some balance of theodicy within the Yoruba belief system. It still seems to many that, theologically, COVID-19 contradicts the good God. It is not impossible to have faith in God even after the pandemic. Many who suffered and died, maintained their faith in the living God. Ratzinger (2004) gives some intelligence that the world:

[I]s not merely the endless wheel of suffering, from which we must try to escape. It is something positive. It is good, despite all the evil in it and despite all the sorrow, and it is good to live in it. (p. 26)

This is the message of eschatological hope. It is life lived in and with the triune God. Life is given by God the Creator and it should be lived as he wills. Life is a journey full of dramas, as Jenson (1999) asserts:

The actual life of the triune God with us is a true drama and therefore conflicted and twisting. Since this drama is God's, its conflict is infinite, the conflict of death and life. (p. 23)

The conundrum challenges even *kerygmatis* to proclaim Christian faith amid the pandemic that is universally ravaging humanity, as thousands lost their lives and millions left with the virus in their bodies. Verster (2021:2) is indeed correct: 'COVID-19 is a dreadful disease that led to millions of deaths, massive financial loss, and other community challenges.' A famous theologian of hope, Jürgen Moltmann attempted through his *Theology of hope* to respond to how could Christians move together towards flourishing amid misery of war, hatred and prejudice. In this world-acclaimed book, Moltmann (1993 [1964]:39–42) is of the opinion that hope is the rethinking of eschatology in a world of pain. Eschatology is not a far-off world extinction, but an everyday

life of a believer. Eschatology is not what will happen in the future, but how believers should live now propelled by God's promises wherein humanity is invited to cooperate in order to achieve these promises. Moltmann (1993:84–94) further argues that eschatology speaks of the future of human reality – reality lived and experienced presently. Although eschatology is future-oriented, it encapsulates the reality in which humanity currently lives. Based on this, the Christian faith cannot deny the realities faced by humanity as, for instance, the reality of COVID-19 pandemic of today. Against all odds, '[t]he mission of the church includes *kerygma* on theology of hope, and she should do this incessantly with hopeful outcomes' (Resane in Mudimeli 2022:71).

People with this hope acknowledge COVID-19 as Jacob's limp that will continuously remind them of this painful encounter with the virus which, according to De Gruchy (2016:19), 'is a life-changing encounter with both himself and God'. The reality of pain as a reminder of what humanity has been going through since 2020 hangs over humans of this century as De Gruchy (2016:19) alludes to the fact that 'we will walk with that limp for the rest of our days'. The underlying and the bottom line is 'if God is implicated in human history, then there are also ramifications from divine reasons and lessons' (Henderson 2021:7). Humanity has been offered an object lesson to develop hope amid misery and try to extract some life-changing lessons that will enhance faith in the Creator God who possesses the capacity to heal. In the process, COVID-19 necessitates changes in the worldview. This is attested by Verster (2021) that:

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly influenced the way in which the world experiences life and the situation in which people find themselves. The reaction to the pandemic calls for a new understanding of how rebuilding should take place in the future. (p. 9)

Questions related to faith issues are inevitable, but hope remains an anchor that keeps humanity floating like a *kurkproppie* [bottle cork] that never sinks, but always float. Resane (in Mudimeli 2022) enlarges the understanding of this sustaining hope:

All the time when catastrophe is *miraculously* overcome, hope kicks in that it has been sustaining the hopefuls through that era until some positive outcome breaks in. Hope is a virtue. It is not irrational, but an amazing awe that supersedes the rational and the theoretic. From Christian point of view, human life is impossible without hope. (p. 70)

There is no way except to acknowledge that rebuilding the broken walls is not an option, but a must. 'The church should live out the new relation with God and the world in such a way that people will find new hope again' (Verster 2021:10). There is an urgent need for the church to rethink and redefine the role to play in a broken and suffering world and society (Oliver 2022:1) where hope is dashed or diminished. The question of theodicy arises from the hopeless situation, because as Resane (in Mudimeli 2022:70) points out: 'Lack or loss of hope breeds depression and despair and causes a serious lack of motivation.'

In all circumstances of crises, religious involvement raises the level of confidence to surge through. Surfing on God's mission wave orientates the hopeless towards positivity of life. This fact is confirmed by Kowalczyk et al. (2020) that faith, religious involvement and prayer plays an important role in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

Conclusion

COVID-19 left many people with far-reaching implications, especially on cultural and ecclesiastical practices of dealing with death, grief, mourning and closure. Issues around self-isolation, quarantine and social distancing as well as all lockdown restrictions impacted directly on finding closure and articulation of both cultural and religious expressions. COVID-19 rules and restrictions left many people with the question of God's rule or sovereignty over pandemic (theodicy). The character of God such as love, kindness, empathy, et cetera is questioned, and the reassuring message is that God continues to comfort, guide and heal despite crises facing humanity. Humanity still needs healing or, in many cases, closure of post-trauma or grief in order to reimagine and reassert normality of life.

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K.T.R. is the sole author of this article.

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