

Warning! A Virus Threatens

America's Future and Christian Civilization

The Catholic Concept of the Common Good Is the Antidote to the Pandemic's Ideological Manipulation



America and the world now face a turning point in history that will define generations to come. In addition to the suffering and death toll, the coronavirus pandemic might trigger the greatest changes that humanity has faced in Christianity's two thousand years.

Transformations are happening, but few commentators alert public opinion with an in-depth analysis or a comprehensive overview. Amid a public calamity presented as an apocalypse, these transformations are being absorbed with resignation by many.

Saying that the world "will never be the same" has become a much-repeated mantra.

Prophets of a post-coronavirus world are appearing. They propose to make the world more egalitarian, ecological, and post-industrial. Their new world will neither correct past mistakes nor introduce a *return to order*¹ based on natural law and the principles of organic society. Instead, some liberals hope for the utopian world of radical ecologists and Indian tribalists. Others dream of one-world rule, first in the area of public health, then ecology, politics and, finally, even philosophy and religion.

To warn against this great danger, and inspired by Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira's essay *Unperceived Ideological Transshipment and Dialogue*, the **American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property—TFP** presents this first analysis of the risks the nation faces at this critical time. We hope this cry of alert will awaken generous but unwary souls, preserving them from the left's ideological manipulation.

We base this analysis on the principles of Catholic social doctrine, which must be remembered now more than ever, particularly because many bishops and priests have long been silent about them.

These principles will provide the necessary guidance for a humanity that trusted in science and technology but now finds itself threatened by an unknown and ominous future.

1. The True Meaning of the Common Good

In the name of the *common good*, public health experts present demands that have all but monopolized government handling of the crisis. However, the common good is not limited to the utilitarian and secular meaning it acquired in modern democracies. Its true meaning is broader with several implications for the current crisis.

We quote from the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

164 . . . According to its primary and broadly accepted sense, the *common good* indicates 'the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.' . . . Just as the moral actions of an individual are accomplished in doing what is good, so too the actions of a society attain their full stature when they bring about the common good. The common good, in fact, can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good. . . .

170. The *common good* of society is not an end in itself; it has value only in reference to attaining the ultimate ends of the person and the universal common good of the whole of creation. God is the ultimate end of his creatures and for no reason may the common good be deprived of its transcendent dimension, which moves beyond the historical dimension while at the same time fulfilling it. . . . A purely historical and materialistic vision would end up transforming the common good into a simple *socio-economic well-being*, without any transcen-

dental goal, that is, without its most intimate reason for existing.²

Separating concern for the economy from other aspects of human life reduces man to his merely *historical and materialistic* dimension. Similarly, unless concern for physical health is harmonized with other human needs, some of which are transcendent, and unless it is subordinated to the moral good, it ends up denying the common good itself.

2. The Common Good Is Above All Spiritual

Therefore, the first inversion of values occurred when government closed churches and religious services, blocking the faithful's access to the sacraments. This action was a denial of society's true common good.

Religious ministry is obviously essential and of public utility. Churches must remain open, public worship must continue, and clergy must administer the sacraments, while respecting all prudential rules to avoid contagion. Like healthcare providers, priests must have the freedom to circulate so that they can serve all the faithful, especially the sick and dying, in homes and hospitals. This priestly ministering is lawful activity explicitly protected under the First Amendment. Thus, as long as health safety measures are respected, the government may not forbid it. Moreover, in sound Catholic social doctrine, the last word on this matter belongs to the Church, not the State.³

In this regard, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, a former papal nuncio in Washington, D.C., stated in a recent interview:

Clearly, I understand and share the basic worries about safety and protection which the authorities require for public health. However, just as they have the right to pass measures for things affecting our bodies, so the Church authorities have the right and the duty to worry about the health of our souls. They cannot deny the faithful the spiritual sustenance they receive from the Eucharist, not to mention the Sacrament of Confession, Mass, and Viaticum.⁴

Respect for religious worship becomes all the more necessary knowing that the human immune system, particularly of those elderly and gravely ill, is weakened by panic, stress, depression, and exhaustion. Thus, depriving the sick of spiritual care that addresses these issues can only harm public health.

Many bishops and clergy went along with this unjust violation of the natural and constitutional freedom to practice the Faith. They raised no protest. This submission was a betrayal of their sacred mission. Sadly, others outdid the authorities and applied stricter health safety measures than those promulgated by local government.

3. The Common Good Results From the Harmonization of Various Interests

While health is an important element of community life, it is not the supreme value. Neither is it an absolute right that overrides the *moral good* or a nation's very existence and future.

Quoting again from the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

169. To ensure the common good, the government of each country has the specific duty to harmonize the different sectoral interests with the requirements of justice. The proper reconciling of the particular goods of groups and those of individuals is, in fact, one of the most delicate tasks of public authority.

Thus, the government must balance its measures to fight the pandemic and the needs of society at large. The latter cannot be harmed by frantic decisions. Hasty actions can lead not only to even more pandemic deaths but also to hunger and loss of life resulting from unpredictable social upheavals.

International agencies, liberal media, and ideological currents that have long advocated the sacrificing of innocent victims through abortion and euthanasia now passionately argue that we must defend life at all costs. The hypocrisy of this paradox reveals that their real motivation is the promotion of ideological agendas.

Some are pursuing a utopian and totalitarian new

world order. Others seek a mad drive to de-develop, dismantle all progress and civilization, and move humanity to the tribal life advocated by the choristers of post-Marxist liberation theology and deep ecology. Both tracks are perverse.

4. For the True Common Good, Government's Executive Branch Must Harmonize Conflicting Interests

Fighting the coronavirus is not just a health issue. It has social, political, economic and religious implications (such as the closing of churches).

The role of the executive branch of government is to gauge the implications of its decisions on each sector of community life—not just public health. Its decisions must suit society as a whole. Moreover, determining the appropriate measures to combat the pandemic is its prerogative. It is not the bailiwick of international organizations, epidemiology experts, the media, or ideological lobbies.

Public authorities receive graces from God (which they can accept or reject) to make these decisions that affect all. Their decisions must be obeyed unless they contradict the *moral good*, which is the foundation of natural law.

5. The Common Good Requires That Restrictions to Personal Freedoms Be Temporary

For years, many leftists were loud defenders of public liberties and personal freedoms. These same activists now champion extreme measures of social control. Moreover, they would impose such rules indefinitely. Some even advocate international control. They acclaim the supposed success of the "Chinese model," which, they say, suppressed the contagion without bothering about individual freedoms.

Such restrictive measures have prevailed. Due to the pandemic, many countries have adopted mandatory shelter-in-place. More than 40% of the world population is now confined to their homes.

Are such "police state" measures legitimate? Can they be reconciled with Catholic social doctrine?

In his masterpiece, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira says that strong government measures are sometimes needed. However, they must necessarily be transitory. Addressing the issue if a State's use of dictatorial powers can be legitimate or not, he wrote: "There are circumstances that demand, for the sake of the *salus populi* [the salvation of the people], a suspension of individual rights and a greater exercise of public power. A dictatorship, therefore, can be legitimate in certain cases."

However, he cites some requirements for the legitimate use of extraordinary powers. The numbering is ours:

1. It must suspend rights to protect order, not to subvert it. By order, we do not mean mere material tranquility, but the disposition of things according to their end and in accordance with the respective scale of values.

2. By definition, this suspension is temporary. It must prepare circumstances for a return to order and normality as soon as possible. A dictatorship, to the degree it is good, proceeds to put an end to its very reason for being. The intervention of public authority in the various sectors of the national life must be undertaken in such a way that, as soon as possible, each sector may live with the necessary autonomy.

3. In contrast, a revolutionary [leftist] dictatorship aims to perpetuate itself. It violates authentic rights and penetrates all spheres of society to destroy them. It carries out this destruction by sundering family life, harming the genuine elites, subverting the social hierarchy, fomenting utopian ideas, and disorderly ambitions in the multitudes, extinguishing the real life of the social groups and subjecting everything to the State. In short, it favors the work of the Revolution. A typical example of such a dictatorship was Hitlerism. For this reason, a revolutionary dictatorship is fundamentally anti-Catholic.⁵

If we apply these criteria to the current pandemic, the restrictions to personal freedoms and normal life must obviously be kept to a minimum. The government should not prolong them beyond what

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urgently and unquestionably needed to cope with the emergency.

6. The Common Good Demands That the Principle of Subsidiarity Be Respected Even in Emergencies

While public authority represents the head of the social body and plays an essential directive role, society's life is the fruit of the energy and activity of all its cells and organs.

Fighting the pandemic is not a State monopoly. All society has a role. The government must not prohibit or hamper the efforts that can be done by intermediary associations and individuals.

Quoting once more from the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*:

185. Subsidiarity is among the most constant and characteristic directives of the Church's social doctrine and has been present since the first great social encyclical. It is impossible to promote the dignity of the person without showing concern for the family, groups, associations, local territorial realities; in short, for that aggregate of economic, social, cultural, sports-oriented, recreational, professional and political expressions to which people spontaneously give life and which make it possible for them to achieve effective social growth. This is the realm of *civil society*, understood as the sum of the relationships between individuals and intermediate social groupings, which are the first relationships to arise and which come about thanks to "the creative subjectivity of the citizen." This network of relationships strengthens the social fabric and constitutes the basis of a true community of persons, making possible the recognition of higher forms of social activity.

From a practical perspective, respect for subsidiarity is even more necessary since the private sector finds solutions and applies remedies more quickly than the plodding State machinery. A proper application of the principle of subsidiarity means that problems are tackled and solved at the lowest possible level.

The private sector's contribution to the pandemic battle is indispensable. It must also participate in the national reconstruction effort that will follow.

7. The Common Good Requires Strengthening National Sovereignty

The pandemic revealed the vulnerability of our interconnected world. Globalization's siren song led countless businesses to sacrifice their roots in local communities to move offshore, especially to China, where labor was cheap and work conditions less restricted. The resulting long supply chains are prone to disruption.

Our present plight should lead to a determined effort to repatriate our manufacturing base and establish ample trade partnerships with like-minded countries. Not only will this policy make our economy independent of communist China's influence, it will also anchor industries at home in our communities.

For the same reason, we must defend private ownership in our energy, healthcare, manufacturing, mining, banking, ranching and agriculture, food processing, insurance, construction, shipping, transportation, and every other sector of the economy. Innumerable businesses will suffer devaluation in the coming economic depression. Ownership control over them must not be allowed to fall into the hands of dubious foreign capital, especially that of large Chinese companies controlled by the Communist Party and State.

Endnotes:

1 See John Horvat II, *Return to Order: From a Frenzied Economy to an Organic Christian Society* (York, Penn.: York Press, 2013). <https://www.returntoorder.org/>.

2 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 164, 170, accessed Apr. 19, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

3 Pope Leo XIII teaches: "It is to the Church that God has assigned the charge of seeing to, and legislating for, all that concerns reli-

8. The Chinese Model of Social Control

Communist China aided and abetted the pandemic with its negligence, lies, and obfuscation. Nevertheless, this same totalitarian regime is now presented as a model on how to suppress the virus. The Chinese Communist Party has widely publicized its use of state-of-the-art technology to identify and track people. Through facial recognition and location software on smartphones, the Chinese rulers can identify each individual's whereabouts and contacts. The latter are forcibly quarantined.

Beijing claims it suppressed the coronavirus. Is this true? No one knows. No reliable data comes out of China since the regime filters both print and social media.

**We should ask God
for His urgent help, through
Mary, His Blessed Mother.
God wants to hear it most
from the President.**

However, based on the "Chinese model" of social control, communists and leftists worldwide are preparing a post-corona, interconnected, globalized, and socialized society inside a dictatorial and increasingly egalitarian State.

This model could not be more opposed to the authentic individual freedoms found in an organic society that respects the principle of subsidiarity.

9. The Danger of Dictatorship

The coronavirus is a real danger to public health that should not be underestimated. Its suppression favors the common good. However, this effort cannot lead to sacrificing values, breaking down ideological barriers vis-à-vis Communism, accepting a "paradigm shift" and ushering in a new world order contrary to Christianity.

It would lead to a dictatorship without morals or metaphysics. This totalitarian regime would silence all those who hold that man is more than a physical body, economy involves more than money, or that the true common good must never dispense with moral values and the Faith.

10. Unperceived Ideological Transshipment

In November 1965, Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira published his study on *Unperceived Ideological Transshipment and Dialogue*.⁶ He described the maneuver through which an entire population can be led to change their perceptions and beliefs without fully realizing it.

Unperceived ideological transshipment should not be confused with *brainwashing*—an unscientific, journalistic term that denies human free will. Through a discreet and profound maneuver operating in hearts and minds, unperceived ideological transshipment influences its unwary victims to shift in their beliefs and values, yet without violence to free will.

The immense pressure on public opinion has whipped up mass hysteria. We might ask if this is not a means to transform society under the pretext of battling a public health emergency. Do we run the risk of becoming unwary victims of a major maneuver of unperceived ideological transshipment?

Consider the comments of the renowned columnist Renaud Girard on April 6, 2020, in the Paris daily *Le Figaro* under the descriptive title "Confinement:

gion; of teaching all nations; of spreading the Christian faith as widely as possible; in short, of administering freely and without hindrance, in accordance with her own judgment, all matters that fall within its competence." Encyclical *Immortale Dei*, Nov. 1, 1885, no. 11, http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei.html.

4 Michael J. Matt, "A Remnant Interview: Archbishop Viganò on COVID-19 and the Hand of God," *The Remnant*, Mar. 29, 2020, [https://remnantnewspaper.com/web/index.php/articles/item/4827-a-remnant-interview-archbishop-vigano-on-covid-19-and-the-](https://remnantnewspaper.com/web/index.php/articles/item/4827-a-remnant-interview-archbishop-vigano-on-covid-19-and-the)

A Cure Worse Than the Disease?"

Long before the appearance of Sars-CoV-2, classic obstructive pulmonary diseases were already killing large numbers. In 2016, according to WHO, they destroyed three million lives. However, that year the planet's economy did not stop.

Last year, traffic accidents killed more than a million people worldwide. However, we do not prohibit driving. . . .

However, prolonged general confinement could greatly increase world mortality due to the disorganization it causes. The cure can be worse than the disease.⁷

Conclusion

In the present emergency, we must raise our eyes to the supernatural plane and consider events from a higher and more long-range perspective.

Throughout history, peoples considered plagues as divine warnings or punishments.

It would be absurd to imagine that God, almighty and all-knowing, is unaware of this pandemic or that He cannot change the course of events radically.

In His infinite wisdom, God has allowed secondary causes to trigger this coronavirus scourge. It is not unreasonable to ask if His mysterious intention was not to correct our sins and vices, like a good Father, who wants to spare his children from eternal damnation.

On the Cross, Our Lord uttered that piercing cry: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). The Savior bore the burden of our sins for our redemption. He was innocent. We are not. Like the Good Thief, we deserve this chastisement. There is much for which we must beg forgiveness.

Over the last few decades, how many changes opposed to Divine and natural law have become accepted in society. How many public blasphemies! More than sixty million innocent Americans were killed through abortion. Same-sex "marriage" was legalized! There are Drag Queen Story Hours for children and transgender bathrooms!

Like the inhabitants of Nineveh in the Old Testament, what God wants from humanity is not death but repentance and conversion. He wants this not only from each individual but also from the American nation so that we can authentically be "one nation under God."

This conversion will require many sacrifices from everyone with a view to the common good. Yet we can always rely on the omnipotence of divine grace and the most powerful intercession of Mary Most Holy. She remained standing at the foot of the Cross. In that supremely tragic hour of suffering and fidelity, Our Lord gave her to us as our mother.

We should ask God for His urgent help, through Mary, His Blessed Mother. It should be done with a sincere purpose of conversion and amendment of life. While all should make this heartfelt prayer, God wants to hear it most from the President and our highest public authorities.

Should this official public prayer be made, God will hear it.

Not only will America then survive this present trial, but it will be well-positioned to joyfully witness the fulfillment of Our Lady's promise at Fatima when she said: "Finally, my Immaculate Heart will triumph!"

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The American TFP

hand-of-god.

5 Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, part I, ch. 3, no. 5, <https://www.tfp.org/revolution-and-counter-revolution/>.

6 Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, *Unperceived Ideological Transshipment and Dialogue*, <https://www.tfp.org/unperceived-ideological-transshipment-and-dialogue/>.

7 Renaud Girard, "Le confinement, remède pire que le mal?" *Le Figaro*, Apr. 6, 2020, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/renaud-girard-le-confinement-remede-pire-que-le-mal-20200406>.

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