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Ban of Mass Religious Convoking Attributable To COVID-19 Pandemic: The Theological Implications

Abstract

The paper seeks provide answers to the ban of mass religious gatherings, a global phenomenon believed to have rendered some leaders and members of the body of Christ spiritually unstable and thoughtfully provoked, from the theological perspective, while bringing to bear its related theological implications for the Church, both local and universal, and the world at large. Biblical and extra-biblical materials were employed as fundamental means of rectifying all forms of erroneous mindsets and behaviors contrary to Scripture at these challenging times in the history of the Church and the world, to aid clarification of the issue at stake.

An extensive reservation was exercised on the COVID-19 pandemic owing to its ubiquitous nature in all countries of the globe. The paper is categorized into four concise sections for the purpose of the topic under discussion and concludes with the writer's personal remarks.

Keywords

Religious Convoking, COVID-19, Pandemic, Theological Implications, Antiquarianism, Renaissance, Pragmatism, Church, Patristic Era, Modern Era

Scripture as Authoritative and Reliable

In all generations and circumstances in the history of the Church and of the world, the authority and reliability of the Scripture/Bible (terms used synonymously for the purpose of Christian theology), both the Old and New Testament though challenged, has never been defeated. From the Patristic period (c.100-451) to this Modern era (c.1750-to present day), though there have been several arrays of opposition leveled against Scripture amidst the numerous theological developments that span during these periods, none has proven successful. Scripture as the ultimate source of Christian theology cannot be overemphasized in this regard. This is a clarion call on all men, especially Christians, to base their actions primarily on the Holy Scripture at these challenging times.

Extra care must, therefore, be taken at this crucial time of the Church, when trying to comprehend and interpret the Bible, in order not to make provisions for one's sordid gains at the expense of the inerrancy of the Word. The Scripture alone wields unflinching power to turn the nations to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, save the lost, and to provide answers for the problem that seems to have rendered the nations utterly hopeless and engulfed the world at large. Come what may, we must bear in mind that Scripture is grossly authoritative and reliable; thus must never be underestimated or twisted in any way.

Repetition of History

It is noteworthy that most obscene and commendable biblically historical accounts in the Old Testament have been replicated in the New Testament. Mention can be made of notable ancient historical records in the world that have been replicated in modern times. This era, thus, cannot be exempted from the ancient times when the Church dwelt under a siege mentality. In the history of Christian thought, the Patristic period has witnessed the worst cases than the Church is confronted with currently. It could be recalled in the history of the Church that there had once been an appeal for adherence to the true biblical faith of the Church fathers when Gnosticism rose fiercely against the Church. This is not far different from the present issue, though recent encounters might seem deceptive.

All in all, the faithful God who sustained the Church is ever alive and ready to do like wonders in these present times of the Church amidst global chaos (cf. Heb. 13:8). With a clear mindset of the future, this calls for an incessant communication between the past and the present, due to the undeniable fact that to a greater extent, our present agendas influence the interpretation of the past and vice versa. The Church thus must dabble in historicity, while moving slightly from the arena of antiquarianism. Not until the Renaissance era, where the Church experienced a great awakening and rekindling, there have been massive attacks from diverse secularists and other professing religious leaders launched against the Church.

Church history reckons that in the heat of persecution which led to the dispersing of the Church across the globe, the early Church via the admonishment of the Spirit, never forsook communion, instead, they met for fellowship in several houses of some believers (cf. Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 10:2;

12:12; 16:40; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phil. 1:2; Col. 4:15, etc.). The present predicament of the Church calls for such.

The Role of the Church

It is in the face of this pandemic that the faith of the Church is greatly tested. The world is looking up to the Church for answers to these perplexities. It calls for the complete balance of realization of the destiny of the Church and her mission on earth. The Church, though in the world, is not of the world, has the master keys to unlocking all mysteries on earth to the dismay of her arch-enemy, and above all, to the glory of her headship, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 16:18-19). The Church with a clear intention of her earthly mission, is neither to shift blame nor vehemently oppose any form of authority in times like this, instead, must consider all principalities and powers (human governments and spiritual forces) as ordained by God and submit to them consequently (cf. Rom. 13:1-5; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Titus 3:1-5). Care must be taken not to compromise her (the Church's) divine designation as light and salt of the earth (cf. Matt. 5:13-14). In that regard, all precautionary measures outlined by these authorities (heads of states and governments) to forestall orderliness and minimize the vertical and horizontal spread of this viral disease, not contrary to Scripture, must be duly honored in fear of the Lord.

Matthew's rendering of the presence of Christ in the assembly of two or three people in His name was not intended to oppose authority or insist on mass gathering even when prevailing circumstances do not permit that. Instead, he drives home the essence of individual, family, and small group convocations basically for the purpose fellowship (cf. Matt. 18:20). The trio-dimension composition of the Christian, who is constituted of Spirit, soul, and body, suffice this.

In a broader spectrum, it is by this implication that the idea of Home Cell was borne as an essential aspect of worship in the early Church.

The Church must realize the urgency to be glued to the Holy Scripture, her life manual, from which her comfort is derived in difficult moments and in which is embedded the solutions to all worldly chaos, but totally hidden from the world (cf. Ps. 119:105, 130; Luke 10:21). The Church is obliged to be vigilant in times like this, lifting up holy hands and adapting to various forms of biblical prayer patterns and *modus operandi* everywhere possible to demonstrate the power of God to the world (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8; 4:14). The Church is also to be mindful of the end of the world, as evident in Scripture in the light of this pandemic, and guard against it strongly in order not to be taken unaware by her Bridegroom (cf. Matt. 24:3-51; 25:1-13; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:1-36; 1 Tim. 4:1, 6-7; 2 Tim. 3:1-14; 1 Thess. 5: 2-4; 2 Thess. 2:1-17).

Above all, the Church must know that its citizenship and eternal destiny is heavenly, not earthly, in order not to be overly consumed by present mishaps but to leave everything outside her capability in the care of the Father for judgment (cf. Phil. 3:20; Heb. 13:14). Nevertheless, the Church is enjoined not to forsake fellowship in trying moments but to employ the strategy of the meeting by the early Church when they encountered opposition (cf. Heb. 10:25; Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 10:2; 12:12; 16:40; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phil. 1:2; Col. 4:15). However, this must be done in all wisdom by the power of the Spirit to the glory of God the Father, not to double the prevailing chaos. For God never intends confusion, but peace, to demonstrate His glory and power (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31; 14:33; Rev. 4:11). All things must be done in honor of the triune God.

Pragmatism, Remarks, and Conclusion

Christians across the globe are enjoined to completely yield to the Holy Spirit, be scripturally minded and prayerful, to win the ongoing battle and all other subsequent battles that will be arrayed against us. We must realize that structural temples are to be closed, not spiritual temples, for we are the temple of the Spirit of God; thus, they need not lose sight of our commission, irrespective of where we find ourselves on this planet (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:20). In all circumstances, the Lord must be glorified in us (cf. Gal. 1:24). These times are permitted by God for the fulfillment of His divine agenda for all creation, especially humankind (cf. Eccl. 3:1-3). Wright never minced words by indicating that this is an aspect of God's mission; His ultimate purpose for the redemption of all creation in the history of the world. Let us adhere to all precautionary measures at this time, for our safety, always remembering that it is the Lord to whom the battle belongs; by physical wit shall no mortal prevail! (cf. 2 Chron. 2:20).

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