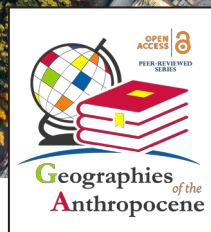


GLOBAL THREATS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: FROM COVID-19 TO THE FUTURE

Leonardo Mercatanti - Stefano Montes (Editors)

Foreword by Paul Stoller

IL Sileno
Edizioni

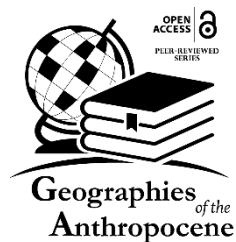


Global threats in the Anthropocene: from COVID-19 to the future

Leonardo Mercatanti

Stefano Montes

Editors



IL Sileno
Edizioni

Global threats in the Anthropocene: from COVID-19 to the future
Leonardo Mercatanti, Stefano Montes (Eds.)

is a collective and multilingual volume of the Open Access and peer-reviewed series

“Geographies of the Anthropocene”
(Il Sileno Edizioni), ISSN 2611-3171.

www.ilsileno.it/geographiesoftheanthropocene



Cover: Picture by Denys Nevozhai published on Unsplash
<https://unsplash.com/@dnevozhai>.

Copyright © 2021 by Il Sileno Edizioni
Scientific and Cultural Association “Il Sileno”, VAT 03716380781
Via Piave, 3/A, 87035 - Lago (CS), Italy, e-mail: ilsilenoedizioni@gmail.com

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs
3.0 Italy License.



The work, including all its parts, is protected by copyright law. The user at the time of
downloading the work accepts all the conditions of the license to use the work, provided
and communicated on the website
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/it/legalcode>

ISBN 979-12-80064-18-9

Vol. 4, No. 1 (May 2021)



Geographies *of the* Anthropocene

OPEN
ACCESS



PEER-REVIEWED
SERIES

ISSN 2611-3171

Geographies of the Anthropocene

Open Access and Peer-Reviewed series

Editor-In-Chief: Francesco De Pascale (Department of Culture and Society, University of Palermo, Italy).

Associate Editors: Fausto Marincioni (Department of Life and Environmental Sciences, Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy), Francesco Muto (Department of Biology, Ecology and Earth Sciences, University of Calabria, Italy), Charles Travis (School of Histories and Humanities, Trinity College Dublin; University of Texas, Arlington).

Editorial Board: Mohamed Abioui (Ibn Zohr University, Morocco), Andrea Cerase (Sapienza University of Rome, Italy), Valeria Dattilo (University of Calabria, Italy), Dante Di Matteo (Polytechnic University of Milan, Italy); Jonathan Gómez Cantero (Departamento de Meteorología de Castilla-La Mancha Media, Spain), Davide Mastroianni (University of Siena, Italy), Giovanni Messina (University of Palermo, Italy), Joan Rossello Geli (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain), Gaetano Sabato (University of Palermo, Italy), Carmine Vacca (University of Calabria, Italy), Nikoleta Zampaki (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece).

International Scientific Board: Marie-Theres Albert (UNESCO Chair in Heritage Studies, University of Cottbus-Senftenberg, Germany), David Alexander (University College London, England), Loredana Antronico (CNR – Research Institute for Geo-Hydrological Protection, Italy), Lina Maria Calandra (University of L'Aquila, Italy); Salvatore Cannizzaro (University of Catania, Italy), Fabio Carnelli (EURAC Research, Bolzano, Italy); Carlo Colloca (University of Catania, Italy), Gian Luigi Corinto

(University of Macerata, Italy), Roberto Coscarelli (CNR – Research Institute for Geo-Hydrological Protection, Italy), Girolamo Cusimano (University of Palermo, Italy), Bharat Dahiya (Director, Research Center for Integrated Sustainable Development, College of Interdisciplinary Studies Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand); Sebastiano D’Amico (University of Malta, Malta), Armida de La Garza (University College Cork, Ireland), Elena Dell’Agnese (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy; Vice President of IGU), Piero Farabollini (University of Camerino, Italy), Massimiliano Fazzini (University of Camerino; University of Ferrara, Italy; Chair of the “Climate Risk” Area of the Italian Society of Environmental Geology); Giuseppe Forino (University of Newcastle, Australia), Virginia García Acosta (Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, CIESAS, México); Cristiano Giorda (University of Turin, Italy), Giovanni Gugg (LESC, Laboratoire d’Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, CNRS – Université Paris-Nanterre, France), Luca Jourdan (University of Bologna, Italy), Francesca Romana Lugerì (ISPRA, University of Camerino, Italy), Cary J. Mock (University of South Carolina, U.S.A.; Member of IGU Commission on Hazard and Risk), Gilberto Pambianchi (University of Camerino, Italy; President of the Italian Association of Physical Geography and Geomorphology), Silvia Peppoloni (Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, Italy; Secretary General of IAPG; Councillor of IUGS), Isabel Maria Cogumbreiro Estrela Rego (University of the Azores, Portugal), Andrea Riggio (University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Italy; President of the Association of Italian Geographers), Jean-Claude Roger (University of Maryland, College Park, U.S.A.; Terrestrial Information Systems Laboratory, Code 619, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, U.S.A.); Vito Teti (University of Calabria, Italy), Bruno Vecchio (University of Florence, Italy), Masumi Zaiki (Seikei University, Japan; Secretary of IGU Commission on Hazard and Risk).

Editorial Assistant, Graphic Project and Layout Design: Ambra Benvenuto, Franco A. Bilotta;

Website: www.ilsileno.it/geographiesoftheanthropocene;

The book series “Geographies of the Anthropocene” edited by Association for Scientific Promotion “Il Sileno” (Il Sileno Edizioni) will discuss the new processes of the Anthropocene epoch through the various worldviews of geoscientists and humanists, intersecting disciplines of Geosciences,

Geography, Geoethics, Philosophy, Socio-Anthropology, Sociology of Environment and Territory, Psychology, Economics, Environmental Humanities and cognate disciplines.

Geoethics focuses on how scientists (natural and social), arts and humanities scholars working in tandem can become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to guide society on matters related to public safety in the face of natural hazards, sustainable use of resources, climate change and protection of the environment. Furthermore, the integrated and multiple perspectives of the Environmental Humanities, can help to more fully understand the cultures of, and the cultures which frame the Anthropocene. Indeed, the focus of Geoethics and Environmental Humanities research, that is, the analysis of the way humans think and act for the purpose of advising and suggesting appropriate behaviors where human activities interact with the geosphere, is dialectically linked to the complex concept of Anthropocene.

The book series “Geographies of the Anthropocene” publishes online volumes, both collective volumes and monographs, which are set in the perspective of providing reflections, work materials and experimentation in the fields of research and education about the new geographies of the Anthropocene.

“Geographies of the Anthropocene” encourages proposals that address one or more themes, including case studies, but welcome all volumes related to the interdisciplinary context of the Anthropocene. Published volumes are subject to a review process (**double blind peer review**) to ensure their scientific rigor.

The volume proposals can be presented in English, Italian, French or Spanish.

The choice of digital Open Access format is coherent with the flexible structure of the series, in order to facilitate the direct accessibility and usability by both authors and readers.

CONTENTS

Foreword <i>Paul Stoller</i>	8
---------------------------------	---

La società resiliente <i>Stefano Montes</i>	12
--	----

Esperienza pandemica e settori di attività (Italian and English languages) <i>Leonardo Mercatanti</i>	27
--	----

Section I

The Resilient Society

1. Temps, espace et situations limites : quelques jalons pour penser la pandémie <i>Christine Bonardi</i>	36
2. « L’invitation à être » <i>Charlie Galibert</i>	52
3. Società resilienti alle future pandemie: governare la crisi nei nuovi scenari globali <i>Barbara Lucini</i>	72
4. Estrazione petrolifera e resistenza: la proposta-risposta dei Sarayaku, comunità kichwa dell’Amazzonia ecuadoriana <i>Federica Falancia</i>	91
5. Turismo sportivo e pandemia: il caso del Tor des Géants <i>Anna Maria Pioletti, Daniele Di Tommaso</i>	117
6. Chirurgia e COVID-19: riorganizzazione, insegnamenti e prospettive future <i>Teresa Perra</i>	134
7. L’Antropocene in questione <i>Francesco Caudullo</i>	151

Section II

Pandemic experience and activity sectors

8. Citizen, Geoscientist and Associated Terra-former <i>Martin Bohle</i>	169
9. La storia, lo spazio e la pandemia ai tempi di Google Maps. Risorgimento e brigantaggio nelle attività didattiche <i>Giuseppe Ferraro</i>	187
10. Gli itinerari culturali europei come modello di sviluppo ecosistemico per i territori marginali <i>Giuseppe Reina</i>	207
11. Italian agriculture in the shade of a pandemic. New and old dilemmas <i>Giorgia Iovino</i>	230
12. Il COVID-19 e la sua dimensione pedagogica nel mondo giuridico <i>Livio Perra</i>	255
13. Tradition and innovation: the controversial relationship between religion and pandemics <i>Giuseppe Terranova</i>	272
14. Geopolitica del Covid-19. La pandemia e i suoi riflessi su piani multipli e transcalari <i>Andrea Perrone</i>	287
<i>The Authors</i>	303

13. Tradition and innovation: the controversial relationship between religion and pandemics

Giuseppe Terranova¹

Abstract

Faced with the threats of the Covid-19 pandemic, many have relied on scientists, others on religion. In South Korea, the religious practices of followers of the Church of Jesus and the Temple of the Tabernacle of Testimony caused a second wave of Covid-19. The faithful were convinced that social distancing was a sin and the virus had to be fought with a prayer to be recited hand in hand. In Brazil, President Jair Messia Bolsonaro supported the group religious practices of the Evangelical Churches during the peak of the pandemic, in violation of the prescriptions suggested by the World Health Organization.

However, religious practice during the pandemic not only accelerated the spread of Covid-19.

In fact, in other cases, such as the Italian and the American one, it has made use of new communication technologies in order not to renounce religious functions, but in compliance with the constraints imposed by distancing and social confinement. Religious ceremonies online have registered a high level of participation and, in some cases, contributed to enlarge the audience of traditional believers.

This article aims to investigate the double, and conflicting, role that religious practice on a global scale seems to have played during the pandemic and the possible causes and consequences on the sociality and domestic life of the populations examined.

Keywords: pandemic, religion, virtual mass, South Korea, Brazil.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the international scientific literature has shown a growing and relevant interest in religious studies (Carta, 2011).

¹ Università Telematica Niccolò Cusano di Roma, e-mail: giuseppe.terranova@unicusano.it.

Globalisation, especially in the Western world, has accelerated the processes of secularisation of society. Scholars from different scientific disciplines have analysed the consequences of this departure from faith on individual and collective spiritual spheres (Havlíček & Klingorová, 2017). The increase in international migratory flows has also changed the "spiritual landscape" of the societies of the host countries. For this reason, the international scientific literature has, for example, paid particular attention to the analysis of religious diversity as an element of strengthening and/or weakening of the social fabric of a given community. Religions play an important role in defining territorial identities and the production of public spaces (Papotti, 2007). The geography of religions is now a structured sub-discipline of human geography (Carta, 2011; Kong, 2010; Hancock & Srinivas, 2008). In the last twenty years there has been a proliferation of monographs and monothematic issues of journals focusing on the Geography of Religions (Galliano, 2002). The current pandemic is intended to intensify and update scientific studies on religions from a perspective of human geography, but also of political geography. The international health emergency seems to have changed the relationship between the individual and religion, and between collectivity and religion. At the same time, policies to combat the pandemic have been partly influenced by religious factors, causing conflicts in domestic and international geopolitics. This last aspect seems to confirm the theory of Rudolf Virchow, physician and founder of cellular pathology, who defined a pandemic as a social phenomenon that has some medical aspects (Walter & Scott, 2018).

Waves of terrible diseases such as the plague, cholera or smallpox have always afflicted humanity. This explains why some terms, such as pestilential, pestiferous or plague, have entered into the common language. The great and feared spread of these diseases does not always have a logical explanation but rather a supernatural explanation in the divine will to punish men for their sins and wrongdoing. Prayers, processions and the creation of symbols of faith such as crosses, columns or churches gave comfort and mediated a possible redemption with God, with the Madonna or with Saints. In Europe in the 17th Century a red cross painted on a house identified those infected with Bubonic plague. But Plague crosses, were also built, usually in wood or stone to indicate places outside cities where markets could be held while minimising the risk of contagion. In England at the base of these crosses a basin of water or vinegar was placed, in which the coins used in the business transactions were dipped to clean them. In the German language areas in the 16th and 17th centuries the representation of Christ crucified was made further dramatic because his skin was covered in boils

and eruptions of blood, as if Christ had also died of the plague. A representation that saw him take charge of all the evil of the world (Pagnini & Terranova, 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the faithful of the various religions found themselves in an unprecedented situation in the contemporary era. Believers of all religions were unable to celebrate together in the normal way within their own communities the great festivities planned mainly in April 2020, during the peak of the pandemic: Jewish Easter, Catholic Easter, Orthodox Easter and Ramadan. The reason being that they were prevented by the rules set by governments in many countries around the world to slow down the spread of the highly contagious virus. The ban on celebrations in places of worship is just one example of the far-reaching restrictions on the exercise of many human rights and civil liberties around the world, brought about by the effort to ensure that physical distance effectively prevents infection. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, there had been no example in Europe of such a restriction of religious freedom or other fundamental rights, which are the backbone of our democracy and the rule of law.

We are witnessing the upheaval of national health systems around the world. Pandemic outbreaks led to contagion and death. Strictly limiting physical contact between people proved to be the only effective remedy, minimising all non-essential activities: commercial, cultural and sporting activities, gatherings and private celebrations. All this has meant a certain limitation of the fundamental rights enshrined in national, international and European law. These include the right to freedom of religion or belief, which means the freedom of every person to express, in their own community but also in the wider community, their religion or belief; in worship, teaching, practice and observance. On the other hand, it is clear that the proper methods of a liturgical celebration, which require gestures, contact, proximity, are not immune, like any human activity, to the mechanisms of the transmission of contagion (Spadaro, 2020).

Humanity needs a vaccine against Covid-19, but it also seems to need the moral strength to deal with the virus that threatens its existence and alters daily habits. While the international scientific community is engaged in a collective race to read the genetic map of Covid-19 and to develop and distribute a vaccine, many people are relying on religion as a protection against this new global threat. In some cases religious practice has been an accelerator of the spread of the virus. In other cases, religious practice has made use of new communication technologies to perform religious functions. In section 2, the case studies of South Korea and Brazil will be analysed. These are examples of countries where pandemic policies have

been complicated by the religious factor. It will be noted, however, that the government of South Korea made every effort, especially through the use of technology, to counteract the contraindications of the religious factor in combating the virus. While the government of Brazil supported the interests of the religious community, contributing to a greater spread of the virus with a consequent high mortality among the population. In section 3, the case studies of the United States and Italy will be analysed. These are examples of countries where, thanks also to new technologies, political and religious institutions have worked together with the aim of maintaining a balance between the protection of the right to health and the protection of religious freedom. We will try to understand if the pandemic has also changed the way of practising the faith in the global sphere.

2. The conflict between faith, politics and science: the case of South Korea and Brazil.

South Korea was among the first countries in the world to be hit by Covid-19. South Korea does not share a border with China, but the two states have a close commercial relationship, and more than 50% of tourists who visit Seoul come from Beijing. At the beginning of the health crisis, the South Korean state succeeded in controlling the spread of the virus by means of an efficient and technological bureaucratic system. Compared to Western States, South Korea was, in fact, ready to deal with the pandemic because in the recent past it had been affected by a number of influenza epidemics, such as the Syndrome Middle Eastern Respiratory (MERS) in 2015. At that time the authorities proved to be incapable of managing the health emergency. South Korea was, among those countries geographically outside the Middle Eastern origin of MERS, the one most affected by it. The failed campaign of management and control of the MERS virus damaged badly public opinion of Park Geun-hye, the first woman president of the South Korea, who was soon forced to resign (Pagnini & Terranova, 2020).

Following the disastrous management of the health emergency in 2015, South Korea invested substantial funds in order to strengthen and modernise the public apparatus for preventing, defending and combating health emergencies. The Korean authorities mobilised sophisticated hi-tech resources to combat the spread of the virus. The government monitored the movement of travellers arriving from China, for example by tracking the use of credit cards, checking CCTV footage or requiring them to download a daily health report application. Those infected have been monitored with

satellite detection of mobile phones, their movements available on the network and therefore immediately tracked in the event of a quarantine violation. The Korean population has shown discipline and respect towards their community. This reaction is rooted in Confucian ethics (Park, 2020).

Confucianism is an ideology of rites, not of laws. The main way to identify the point of equilibrium between Heaven and Earth, therefore, is by example; teaching and persuasion, in the context of respect between every human being according to what is the so-called function assigned to everyone: from the sovereign to the last of his subjects. In short, the authorities have acted promptly, clearly and transparently, transmitting a sense of trust to the citizen. Participation and emulation were the watchwords: no panic, no complaints, no protests. Everyone followed the example, within the assigned function: Confucianism was put into practice as never before (Riotto, 2020).

The sophisticated Korean anti-Covid-19 action plan made it possible, until 17 February 2020, to limit the number of contagions to 30 and avoid fatal cases (Park, 2020). The scenario changed with the discovery on 18 February of patient 31. The cause of the contagion of patient number 31 has been traced back to the religious services of the Shincheonji sect of the Church of Jesus and the Temple of the Tabernacle of Testimony. It is one of the many Korean religious movements, often led by barkers, santons and learned and well-to-do prophets. The Shincheonji sect (the new Paradise and Earth), to which patient 31 belonged, was founded in 1984 by Lee-Man, who proclaimed himself the second messiah after Jesus with the mission of establishing a new spiritual Israel, claims to have over 240 thousand followers. The sect, based on aggressive proselytism, imposes a fanatical attachment to the religious movement, forces its followers to sever all social and family relationships, because they are considered a potential obstacle on the way to perfection. Shincheonij has ramifications and followers in various countries, and is also based in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Its followers have a partnership with the Korean followers of Taegu. Patient 31 was probably infected with the virus during an exchange of visits between Chinese and Korean followers in Taegu or during some sect celebration.

With patient 31 the real emergency from Covid-19 in South Korea began. In a short time Taegu and the region of Kyōngsang recorded thousands of cases. The area was soon isolated, but the Korean authorities found themselves fighting another enemy in addition to the virus: religious fundamentalism. It is one of the major contradictions of South Korea: on the one hand in the vanguard world in terms of technology, on the other hand the home of various types of fundamentalist religious movements (Riotto,

2020). 60% of those infected with Covid-19 in South Korea belong to the Sincheonji sect. The mayor of Seoul condemned the sect for massacre, attempted massacre and multiple injuries (Park, 2020). The 88-year-old leader of the sect was arrested on charges of murder and willful negligence despite an apology on his knees on live television.

The Sincheonji sect has a Christian derivation, its conduct has produced among the Korean population a sense of distrust towards the entire Christian community of the country which represents 30% of the believers in South Korea, of which 11% are Catholics. The reference to Christ and the Bible, even if used in a completely arbitrary and instrumental way with precise purposes of loyalty, has, in fact, had negative repercussions also on Christians not belonging to the sect of Sincheonji, generating a general sense of suspicion towards believers.

Many Korean churches have criticized the Shincheonji sect. The Deputy Head of the Communications Office of the Archdiocese of Seoul, publicly stated that the Catholic Church in South Korea was following the matter with participation and concern. The Korean Catholics remarked on all media channels that they have respected the precautionary and security measures imposed by the government to stop the spread of the virus.

Since March 9, 2020, the Archdiocese of Seoul has suspended religious services and invited the faithful to attend daily television or online mass and offer the rosary prayer at home. While the Korean Catholic care centres for lonely elderly people, abandoned children, homeless and unemployed men and women have reorganised their activities in accordance with the national anti Covid-19 guidelines (Affatato, 2020).

In spite of these difficulties, in contrast to the MERS epidemic, the Korean government has managed to contain the spread of the virus among the population.

Millions of swabs and serological tests, an extensive digital tracking of infections, a sense of community and the common good produced by Confucian ethics, have, in fact, ensured that South Korea is at the bottom of the list of countries most affected by Covid-19.

The government of Brazil, unlike that of South Korea, has not curbed the fundamentalist drifts of some religious congregations. Brazil is among the countries most affected by Covid-19.

The health emergency has produced internal geopolitical conflicts in Brazil, in particular a sharp contrast between the central government led by Jair Messia Bolsonaro and the state and municipal administrations. While the majority of local governments have imposed social distancing together with other public health measures for controlling the spread of the virus,

Bolsonaro firmly opposed such measures, comparing the Covid-19 to a simple flu. The Brazilian President's response to the virus was defined as a mix of populist distrust of science, machismo and nationalist fervour to demonstrate the strength of the Brazilians in countering the threat of Covid-19 (Ortega & Orsini, 2020). However, on 7 July 2020, after a visit to the residence of the US Ambassador in Brasilia to commemorate American Independence Day, Bolsonaro admitted to being positive for Covid-19.

The Brazilian President's anti-virus denialism has had serious consequences for the health of the economically fragile social classes (Conde, 2020), particularly the peripheral communities and the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. The national health system has faced serious epidemics in the past: Brazil was known for its role in promoting global equity in access to health care (Pagnini, Terranova). In response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Brazil, for example, supported a successful campaign for the World Trade Organisation to recognise a moratorium on pharmaceutical patents during emergencies. From 2005 to 2015, Brazil funded and conducted programmes for the technical training of health professionals from Latin American and African countries. Brazil has also contributed to some of the main commitments that the United Nations has expressed in the Declaration on Universal Health Coverage of the 2019.

This long and meritorious tradition of Brazil's right to health on a global scale has been cancelled by Bolsonaro's deniers diktat. The President of Brazil has systematically encouraged the violation of scientific indications on social distancing and the need to wear personal protective medical devices (Ortega & Orsini, 2020). The health emergency management policy supported by Bolsonaro has helped to speed up the spread of Covid-19 but the majority of Brazilian Christians defend the President's choices. As the number of infections increase, the President of Brazil has managed to mobilise his supporters and convince them, for example, that the social distancing rules are a conspiracy against its person, part of a secret plan to establish a communist system in the country.

The political history of President Bolsonaro and the interest groups that support him explains why the Brazilian government did not follow the indications of the World Health Organization against the spread of the virus. In October 2018, Jair Messia Bolsonaro, candidate of the Partido Social Liberal (PSL), won the presidential elections with the slogan *Brazil Above All, God Above All* and the support of three major interest groups: pentecostals, ultraliberal movements and the armed forces. The evangelical followers of the theory of prosperity have a significant socio-political centrality. They represent the main basis of popular support for Bolsonaro.

The current President of Brazil, while being of Catholic religion, in May 2016 was baptized with a great evangelical ceremony in the Jordan River. The Brazilian evangelical congregations have political, but also economic and media weight. The spiritual head of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is the owner of Rede Record, Brazil's fourth largest media conglomerate.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is also linked to the Republican political party, which has among its members two sons of the President. Bolsonaro, in order to strengthen his consensus during the pandemic, assigned important government positions to representatives of the interest groups that support him (Cingia, 2020).

On 5 April 2020 Bolsonaro called for a day of fasting against the pandemic. The proposal was supported by the most important evangelical pastors in the country. Most countries have closed churches, temples and places of worship in order to avoid the gathering and faster spread of the virus. In Brazil, some evangelical groups have pressed the National Congress to maintain religious services in the name of freedom of worship. Thanks to the lobbying action of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, the places of worship have been recognised as essential services by President Bolsonaro, just like supermarkets. The presidential decree was issued on 26 March, but was not enforced however. The local administrations, which have formed a block of opposition to the government of Bolsonaro, maintained the restrictions and therefore closed the places of worship. By decision of the Supreme Court of Brazil, states and municipalities have the autonomy to determine measures to deal with the coronavirus.

Some pastors have also encouraged the spread of false news on anti-Covid-19 remedies and therapies: from hydroxychloroquin to beans, there is a long list of false myths about how to fight the action of the virus on the respiratory tract. The belief in miraculous cures is linked again to the faith of the Pentecostal Church, for which its leaders are legitimised on the basis of their ability to show supernatural powers. The result is that Brazil is among the top countries in the world in terms of the number of deaths and infections.

In this context, the appeal of the Catholic Archbishop of Belo Horizonte, capital of the State of Minas Gerais, who since last May has been asking President Bolsonaro to renounce the denialist policy on Covid-19 in the name of unity and the health of all Brazilians (Domingues, 2020), has gone unheeded.

However, there is no lack of public actors, both Brazilian and foreign in the interest groups that support Bolsonaro, including scientists, politicians

and non-governmental organisations, committed to supporting international scientific cooperation to combat the spread of the virus and above all to identify the vaccine anti-Covid-19.

3. The digital factor between religion and pandemic: the case of the USA and Italy

Religious practice during the pandemic was not only an accelerator of the spread of Covid-19, as was the case in South Korea and Brazil. In other countries, religious practice made use of new communication technologies to practise religious services while respecting social distancing and social confinement. With the advent of Covid-19, Facebook and similar digital platforms seem to have become liturgical spaces (Sintobin, 2020). This is what has happened in some religious communities in the United States and Italy. Online religious ceremonies seem to have confirmed the polarization between believers and non-believers that was already taking place in many countries before the pandemic.

In the United States, for example, the majority of believers say that during the pandemic their faith was strengthened in spite of the closure of churches and traditional spiritual activities normally held in public (Gecewitz, 2020). In particular, this is confirmed by the American faithful of the historically black Protestant churches and those that describe themselves as very religious. A quarter of American adults (24%) say that their faith has become stronger because of the pandemic of coronavirus, while only 2% claim that their faith has become weaker, the majority (47%) say their faith has remained unchanged during the pandemic.

According to researchers at the Pew Research Center in Washington, the opinions on this question vary according to religious affiliation of respondents and their rate of religiosity. In this analysis Christians are more inclined, compared to other religious groups, to claim that their faith was strengthened in the aftermath of the pandemic, a sentiment that is reported by 56% of Protestants, as well as by four evangelicals out of ten (42%) and about a quarter of Catholics (27%). Jews, on the other hand, are more likely to say that their faith remained unchanged during the pandemic (69%). Most religious Americans who pray and participate frequently in services at least during the main festivities, are much more inclined than others to say that their faith has been strengthened as a result of the epidemic of coronavirus. But also among Americans who are not very religious, very few say that their faith has weakened.

Among the interviewees on these issues there are also differences based on ethnicity, gender and age. It remains to be seen whether the strengthened faith that many Americans are experiencing has resulted in increased participation in church services, since most places of worship have been closed due to the political recommendations for social distancing.

Most Christians attending religious services at least once a month, report that their Church has been closed, including nine out of ten or more Protestant evangelicals (92%), Catholics (94%) and Protestants (96%). The faithful cannot physically go to places of worship, but among them, the clear majority (more than 80%) has begun to frequent virtual online worship spaces and declare themselves fully satisfied with spiritual services, even confession, offered via internet, social and streaming by the respective congregations of reference (Gecewicz, 2020).

On the relationship between pandemic and religion, a similar situation to the American one can also be found in Italy despite the profound differences between the two countries.

Among Western countries, Italy was the first and among the most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In Italy with the demand for health care, the demand for spiritual services has also increased. Since 10 March 2020, when the Italians were forced to experience a rigid lockdown to curb the level of contagion, parishes have tried to guarantee the faithful their pastoral commitment, but in compliance with government regulations on the fight against the health emergency. Special parish services, such as meetings with disabled children or families in panic, were held by telephone or online. Streaming plans were activated in particular for the period of Lent, for Easter Sunday (12 April) and for the feast of the Virgin Mary (1st May). Virtual masses were broadcast daily on Facebook, Youtube, Whatsapp and on the diocesan radio and TV stations, as well as on TV2000. For Palm Sunday the Mass celebrated by the Pope was broadcast on RaiUno in live streaming from San Pietro. The images of the Pope praying alone, in a completely empty St. Peter's Square on 27 March last, made a tour of the real and digital world (Viviano, 2020).

It remains, however, to be understood how the faithful reacted to this forced transition from spiritual activities in public to online activities, including the cancellation of events such as baptisms, first communions, confirmations, weddings and funerals. A national survey on these issues was conducted by the Piedmontese Association of Sociology of Religions (Apsor) and the Ipsos Demoscopic Institute, which interviewed a representative sample of the Italian population aged 18 to 75. The study indicates that as a consequence of the lockdown the population show more

signs of faith than of religious indifference, more closeness to rather than distance from God.

Compared to before the outbreak of the current health emergency, a quarter of Italians today feel the need for a more intense spiritual life and, at the same time, they feel that God is closer to their living conditions (Garelli, 2020; Ipsos, 2020). In this scenario there is also an increase in prayer, declared by 16% of the sample. There is an increase in the number of people who declare themselves to be more sensitive to the spiritual side of existence and the relationship with God compared to those who are pushed, also by this pandemic, to deny a transcendent reference or not to emphasize the values of the spirit.

This growth of religious and spiritual need involves practicing Catholics much more than the vast array of believers / Catholics living on the margins of a life of faith and Church. No change of opinion emerges among non-believers. In others terms, people who were pushed to pray more during the pandemic, and in general to intensify the spiritual life, are the ones for which prayer was an established practice even before the pandemic. In all cases, the majority of the Italian population has declared to be informed and to judge positively the new online services offered by the Church.

The majority of the population also express a positive opinion on other initiatives promoted by the Church to deal with this health emergency. These initiatives include the cancellation of religious services in person, which receives the consent of 68% of Italians; the cancellation of funeral ceremonies, authorising only the blessing of the deceased's body, which receives 61% of positive opinions (Garelli, 2020; Ipsos, 2020). Similar proportions of the population also positively evaluate the action of Catholic volunteerism in support of the most vulnerable in society; or the psychological and moral support offered by religious personnel and ecclesial groups to the people affected by Covid-19.

Italian public opinion is, on the other hand, divided and polarised on the behaviour assumed during the pandemic by the parish priests. For 44% of the sample, priests should have assisted the sick and the most vulnerable people; while for the remaining 56%, priests should have remained in isolation like all other citizens, avoiding the risk of becoming infected and infecting others.

The great majority of Italians (70%), finally, do not equate the coronavirus with a divine punishment that falls on a world now considered pagan and secularised. The idea of the punitive God does not seem to find any more credit in Italian contemporary society, even if it continues to have proselytes in some religious minorities. In any case, the pandemic has

produced existential fears and reflections even among Italians. Many Italians (80%) are convinced that this is a good time to return to being more human and supportive, to live our personal and collective life in a healthier, fairer and more fraternal way. More than 50% of Italians also believe that the pandemic will give greater importance to the great values of human existence and no longer to futile and material values.

4. Conclusion

International religious communities have responded to the challenges of the pandemic in two distinct and contrasting ways. The case of the Brazilian and the Korean religious communities represents a classic form of resistance to the great phenomena of modernisation, such as the current pandemic. These religious communities denied the existence of the virus; refused to adapt to the enormous changes imposed by the pandemic; and put the health of their faithful at risk. Their behaviour has created internal geopolitical conflicts between religion, science and politics. The Korean government has fought this form of religious denialism. In Brazil there has been an alliance between political and religious denialism.

On a global scale, there have been many religious communities that have rejected the changes imposed by the pandemic, but they do not represent the majority of the faithful in the world. The case of some religious communities in the United States and Italy is different. These religious communities have responded to the challenges of the pandemic with greater openness and an ability to respond to the epochal changes accelerated by the global health emergency. They have understood that the pandemic has accelerated trends that had been going on for years.

In the lives of many Christians, for example, the digital environment had already acquired an important position. More and more people are praying while listening to podcasts such as *Pray as you go* on their smartphones or preparing for Christmas and Easter through digital retreats. This development is welcomed with enthusiasm, but at the same time raises objections and resistance (Sintobin, 2020).

These are religious communities who have understood that today religious time and religious space must also be conceptualized as digital and virtual. Today the paradigm of digital information has brought a new culture, in which locations are replaced by the space of flows, and time is cancelled out by a timeless dimension of time (Mercatanti, Sabato, 2018). This is what has begun to be called the culture of real virtuality (Castells,

2004). Sometimes people label everything "digital" as "virtual", or contrast the real world with the digital environment. But in people's lives what is digital is real, even in terms of religious experience (Martinez, 2020). Benedict XVI made this clear by saying that the digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but part of the daily reality of many people (Spadaro, 2012).

Web surfers can take advantage of the digital faith offering, so to speak, wherever and whenever they wish. In addition, this offer is usually free of charge. The combination of these factors contributes to the fact that many people are deeply touched by it: faithful practitioners, but also people who do not have a defined religious affiliation.

In the religious space, as in the political, economic and social one, the digital environment will not take the place of the physical environment. In the digital offering it is necessary to build bridges with the physical environment and to take care of building local communities. But, at the same time, the ecclesiastical community is called to fully grasp the place that the digital environment occupies today in our societies and cultures. More specifically, we should consider the digital environment above all as an opportunity that encourages us to think and experience traditional practices in a different way. Digital platforms have become liturgical spaces that transmit all kinds of celebrations. The digital religious space hosts home liturgies; nursing homes offer online activities, spiritual assistance through a computer screen and so on. These online services are increasingly important for the more fragile categories of the faithful: women and men who are alone, sick, elderly or simply the faithful who have had a temporary health problem, such as a fractured limb. Then there is the special phenomenon of monastic communities that, reduced in number and in old age, can no longer find a pastor, and for this reason they use digital audio and video material for their retreats. These are services that can also help to enlarge the pool of the faithful, especially among the young in Western Europe who are no longer interested in meeting in a public setting.

The digital revolution accelerated by the pandemic also affected the religious space. The current scenario suggests that the reorganisation of liturgical activities between physical and digital space could create conflicts within religious communities. Many see digital tools as an obligatory parenthesis of the pandemic. Others argue that digital instruments will be an additional service to those traditionally offered by religious communities. For example, the document *The Church and the Internet* argued in 2002 that virtual reality cannot replace the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and the worship that takes place

within a flesh-and-blood human community (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002). There are no sacraments on the Internet. But he also stated that religious experiences on the internet are possible by the grace of God. These are conflicts and contradictions that historically the great processes of modernisation, such as the pandemic, produce. As Sophocles claimed, nothing vast enters the life of mortals without a curse.

References

Castells, M., 2004, *L'età dell'informazione: economia, società e cultura*, Università Bocconi Editore, Milano.

Conde, M., 2020, "Brazil in the time of coronavirus", *Geopolítica(s). Revista de estudios sobre espacio y poder*, 11, pp. 239-249.

Domingues, F., 2020, "Head of Brazils bishops' conference urges leadership and solidarity to confront Covid-19", *America-The Jesuit Review*, 6, pp. 1-5.

Galliano, G., 2002, "Per l'analisi del rapporto geografia-religione. La letteratura geografica", *Geotema*, 18, pp. 3-31.

Garelli, F., 2020, *Gente di poca fede: il sentimento religioso nell'Italia incerta di Dio*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

Hancock, M., Srinivas, S., 2008, "Space and modernity: religion and the urban in Asia and Africa", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32, pp. 617-630.

Havlíček, T., Klingorová, K., 2017, "City with or without God? Features of post-secularism in religious landscape of post-communist Prague", *Social & Cultural Geography*, 19, pp. 789-811.

Kong, L., 2010, "Global shifts, theoretical shifts: changing geographies of religions", *Progress in Human Geography*, 34, pp. 755-776.

Martinez, J.L., "Rivisitare il bene comune nell'era digitale", *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 4078, II, 328-341.

Mercatanti, L., Sabato, G. (Eds.), 2018, *Geografie digitali. Spazi e socialità*, Streetlib, Milano.

Ortega, F., Orsini, M., 2020, "Governing Covid-19 without government in Brazil: ignorance, neoliberal authoritarianism, and collapse of the public health leadership", *Global Public Health*, 15, pp. 1257-1277.

Pagnini, M.P., Terranova, G., 2020, *Un mondo disordinario. Tra Medioevo e Nuovo Rinascimento. Un virus sconvolge la geopolitica e oltre*, Aracne, Roma.

Papotti, D., 2007, *Geografia del sacro: riflessioni sul ruolo di spazio*,

territorio, paesaggio nella dimensione religiosa, Società Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze.

Park, S.N., 2020, "Cults and conservative spread. Coronavirus in South Korea", *Foreign Policy*, n. 2, pp. 29-37.

Riotto, M., 2020, "La Corea e gli altri davanti alla peste", *Mondo Nuovo*, n. 1, pp. 395-407.

Sintobin, N., 2020, "Celebrazioni digitali? Una domanda dall'esperienza", *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 4078, II, pp. 396-398.

Spadaro, A., 2012, *Cyberteologia. Pensare il cristianesimo al tempo della fede*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.

Spadaro, A., 2020, "Pandemia e libertà di culto", *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 4078, II, 362-364.

Walter, S., Scott, M., 2018, "The life and the work of Rudolph Virchow 1821-1902: cell theory, thrombosis and sausage duel", *Journal of Intensive Care Society*, 3, pp.234-235.

Web References

Affatato, A.P., 2020, *Fedeli a Dio e alla Nazione*, Retrieved: 19 November, From: <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/it/news/2020-03/fedeli-a-dio-e-allanazione.html>.

Carta, G., 2011, *Rappresentare la società post-secolare: temi e orientamenti della geografia delle religioni*, Retrieved: 6 April, From: https://storicamente.org/quaderr1/carta_sidebar.pdf.

Cingia, S., 2020, *L'America Latina appartiene a (qualche) Dio*, Retrieved: 5 October, From: <https://www.radiobullets.com/rubriche/lamerica-latina-appartienea-qualche-dio-brasile/>.

Gecewitz C., 2020, *Few americans say their house of worship is open, but a quarter say their faith has grown amid pandemic*, Retrieved: 28 september, From: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/30/fewamericans-say-their-house-of-worship-is-open-but-a-quarter-saytheir-religious-faith-has-grown-amid-andemic/>.

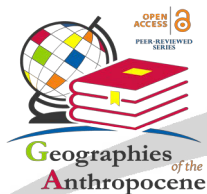
IPSOS, 2020, *L'evoluzione dei comportamenti degli italiani durante il coronavirus*, Retrieved: 21 November, From: <https://www.ipsos.com/it-it/levoluzione-deicomportamenti-degli-italiani-durante-il-coronavirus>.

Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002, *La Chiesa e Internet*, Retrieved: 24 November, From: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_it.html.

The COVID-19 pandemic offers food for thought and an opportunity for humanities and science scholars who research our global condition to collaborate. The 21st century society is facing an unprecedented challenge right now: what can we learn from this challenge? Will everything really return to what we used to define as 'normal' at the end of the emergency? Probably not. Structural changes from political, economic, social, and environmental perspectives are already occurring, and impacting the fields of health, education, commerce, governance and travel. Concepts of social space are being redefined and rethought at various scales. Our society, unprepared for a global health emergency of this scale, has been engaged only partially in practices of mitigation and sustainability and we now realize the fragility of our planetary existence. This volume collects 14 original chapters which analyse the new scenarios that could lie ahead in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis in an interdisciplinary context.

Leonardo Mercatanti teaches Geography of Cultural Heritage at the Department of Cultures and Society of the University of Palermo (Italy). Author of over 100 scientific publications, he is the Editor-in-Chief of "Geography, Culture and Society" book series (Nuova Trauben publisher, Turin). He is a member of several editorial and scientific committees of various scientific journals and series. He deals with environmental risk, the enlargement of the European Union, trade and American cultural geography. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the Association of Italian Geographers (A.Ge.I.).

Stefano Montes teaches Anthropology of language, Anthropology of migration and Anthropology of food at the University of Palermo in Italy. In the past, he taught in Catania, Tartu, Tallinn e and at Ciph (Collège International de Philosophie de Paris). He was the main investigator and director of a French-Estonian team in Tartu and, afterwards, in Tallinn. He publishes in several national and international journals. His work explores relationships between languages and cultures as well as between literary and ethnographic forms. Recently, his research has come to focus on migration and on daily life in a perspective linking together cognitive and agentive practices. More generally, strongly influenced by both semiotics and anthropological postmodernism, he investigates possible interconnections between these fields and disciplines. He is editor of the book series "Spaction" for the publishing house Aracne.



ISBN 979-12-80064-18-9

IL Sileno
Edizioni