



Features: GENERAL JUDGMENT AND COVID 19

May 09, 2020

ABUJA, NIGERIA -

In the interactive session on the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) with the public in the program anchored by the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC); Abrahamic Mission and NTA on Wednesday 8th of April 2020, we could not answer all the numerous questions that were coming from the public. This shows the level of fear and fury COVID 19 has planted in the hearts of numerous human beings. So many people are wondering if COVID 19 is a punishment from God or judgement of the world by God to end human existence on earth. In theological discourse, there are two types of eschatological judgements. These are particular judgement and general judgement. The particular judgment is a situation where each human being is judged as an individual person.

In the Old Testament, the sinner gets punishment before death and if he does not repent, he is eternally punished in hell. The righteous gets his or her reward on earth and eternal happiness in heaven. Conditions of life later proved that sometimes, even the just can suffer on earth as presented in the book of Job. The New Testament presented Jesus as the innocent victim who sacrificed his life to redeem the world. Jesus is "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" that was prophesied in the Old Testament. The implication of these is that death no matter the way and manner it comes shows that this world is not a permanent home for human beings. Every human being is

destined to die and give account of his or her life to God. The day of death is the last day of each person on earth. The date of the universal end of the world is God's divine secret.

The particular judgement according to Thomas Aquinas is how each soul is judged the moment it leaves the body. In other words, each person is judged immediately after death. The multitude of people who have died in the global pandemic of COVID 19 could not be facing a general judgement. Each of them in a particular judgement may tell God how the greed of a few people have led to different types of genocide of which they are victims. The heedlessness of some people to conquer the world have led to climate change, environmental pollution, water pollution, nuclear and biological weapons. The effect of these is the risk the earth planet has been subjected to. Animal life, Human life and vegetative life are being eliminated by death from the earth. All these do not indicate a total collapse of life and extinction of the world at a particular time where all will face the judgement of God in a general fashion. A particular natural disaster may not affect every part of the world at a particular given time except God wills it. The general judgment of the last day will not reverse or change any sentence passed in the particular judgment; the purpose of the general judgment is to manifest to all rational creatures the justice of God, his goodness and mercy.

It is likely that the general judgment will take place without words. For all may be judged at once; each may know his own sins and the sins of all others. This implies the possibility of a general judgment that is possible without word-of-mouth discussions. In the words of Aquinas, it is most probable that the whole judgment will be enacted and received mentally, not audibly (P.J. Glenn, *A Tour of the Summa*, (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978), Page 44). The prophet Joel says: "I will gather together all nations into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will plead with them there" (Joel 3:2). The valley of Jehoshaphat is near Jerusalem, and is overlooked by Mount Olivet from where

our Lord ascended into heaven. In the general judgment, the individual person will be judged as a member of the human society, before the whole of humanity. The punishment or reward will be completed by its extension to the re-awakened bodies. The Church teaches that Christ, on His second coming, will judge all men and women. In the Apostles' Creeds, Christ will come again at the end of the world "to judge the living and the dead,"

The teaching of the Old Testament concerning the coming judgment shows a gradual development. The general judgment of the just and the unjust at the end of the world was not found in the Old Testament with any precision until the composition of the Book of Wisdom (cf. Wisdom 4:20 -5: 24). Jesus frequently refers to the "Day of judgment" or to the "Judgment" (Matthew 11:22). All nations shall be gathered together before the Son of Man, sitting on the judgment Seat. The good shall be finally separated from the bad, and immediately after the Judgment retribution shall follow. The wicked shall go into everlasting punishment; but the just into life everlasting (Matthew 25:31-33). The General Judgment serves the glorification of God (2 Thessalonians 1:5-12). The wisdom of God attests to his justice in the government of the world hence God gives time to the sinner to repent. As Christ in His human capacity exercises the office of judge in the order and by the authority and power of God, it is God who judges the world through Christ (Romans 2:16). Jesus said, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 5:30). Paul told the Athenians that "while God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30- 31).

In the general judgment, the angels also co-operate with God as his servants and ambassadors of Christ: "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evil doers, and they will

throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen (Matthew 13:41- 43:49)! Jesus said: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31).

Concerning the instrumentality of COVID 19 either as punishment or judgment on the world, I do not have a dogmatic answer. I can only think that the world has deviated from the divine mission and vision for the divine creation. Perhaps, some human beings are trying to overthrow God with technology and scientific research to produce only weapons of mass destruction instead of enhancing human life and common wellbeing of humanity. The invention of Chemical, atomic, nuclear, drones and biological weapons negates human life. COVID 19 could be a repercussion or judgement brought upon humanity by anti-human science. COVID 19 may not be a general judgement by God to close down the world. Each human being who dies is facing a particular judgement because every person will give account of his or her life to God. The different conspiracy theories, stories, conflicting reports about COVID 19 could be compared to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) where God confused the human language. What if COVID 19 is one of the ways God what to remind humanity that He alone is Omnipotent and Omniscience. The Scientists, Prophets and Political leaders appear to be confused. They seem to lack the capacity to prophesy or predict scientifically when this pandemic will end. We could answer the question under review by postulating that COVID 19 could be a particular and general judgement some people have brought upon the world before the end of individual and universal dusk of life on earth.

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