

*Feature Article*

**The Covid-19 Pandemic: Poverty, Public Health, the  
Religious Sector, and Global Justice in the  
Philippines**

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## **Abstract**

This paper addresses the question pertaining to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on human life and the problem of poverty. The study is aware of the difficulty that governments face in terms of finding a balance between reviving the economy and protecting public health interests, and it provides an analysis with regard to how the Pandemic affected the socio-economic situation of people in the Philippines. Also, the study notes the alleged corruption committed by some government officials and provides insights on how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the religious sector. Philosophically, it attempts to explain the relationship between the Pandemic, inequality, and the question of global justice. We suggest that the Pandemic makes apparent the hegemonic order in the world and reveals the unequal distribution of resources in society, even under the conditions of a global, highly communicable disease. The clear denial of at least a public-commons of immunity allowed the rich to amass even more wealth, while millions have lost their jobs, fallen into destitution, were maimed by the virus or died from it. The religious sector felt the global effects working against its efforts to provide assistance to the poor and basic human solidarity was largely the effort of the people themselves. Finally, the study argues that an ethical balance between public health and economic recovery is needed where we suggest that the pandemic has seriously worsened the situations of the majority of people worldwide.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Global Justice, Religious Sector, Corruption, Poverty, Biopolitics

## Introduction

Public health analysis of pandemics considers infectiousness, movement, mortality rates, and demographic considerations.<sup>1</sup> With large scale considerations, when it comes to policy, political leaders and technocrats may disregard the vulnerability of individuals. In other instances, such disregard can be intentional such as in corruption or other forms of inhumanity such as structurally in the global system. In particular, race, economic status, and social standing all contributed to the risk of Covid-19 infection and outcome, for example, the National Urban League released a statement based on data from Johns Hopkins University that indicates that Covid-19 infections in the United States were higher for African-Americans.<sup>2</sup> In some developing countries, the state focused its efforts on protecting the welfare of the general public, where public health leadership was crucial.<sup>3</sup> ASEAN, and particularly, the Philippines had taken a strong approach in its initial response to Covid-19 but one of the issues during the height of the pandemic was a congressional investigation on corruption that led to the recent indictment of national budget officials. While the Philippines may have emerged out of the dire situation due to the fact that public health measures were enacted and eventually vaccinations were implemented, the bigger picture presents the challenge of finding the strategic balance between a return to a normal socio-economic life and protecting the population from foreseeable dangers and systemic risks and injustice. We consider the matter of the global order and ethics of a new biopolitics based on an analysis of the Philippines through arguments based in global justice.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Qiu, S. Rutherford, A. Mao, and C. Chu. "The Pandemic and its Impact." *Health, Culture and Society*, Volume 9 and 10 (2016 & 2017): 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> S. Soucheray. "US blacks 3 times more likely than whites to get Covid-19." *Center for Infectious Diseases Research and Policy*. August 14, 2020. <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/08/us-blacks-3-times-more-likely-whites-get-covid-19>.

<sup>3</sup> G. Gotinga. "Peace process Chief Galvez is chief implementer of government policy versus coronavirus." In *Rappler*. March 26, 2020. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/carlito-galvez-chief-implementer-policy-coronavirus>.

## The State of Human Poverty during Covid-19

A philosophical investigation of the Pandemic should be centered on the life of the human being, specifically, How did the pandemic affect the individual human? Self-isolation and restrictions on the movement of people can be unhealthy, individually, and can turn into authoritarian control, generally. The outcome of tough restrictions usually takes its toll on people. For instance, reports on suicide cases indicate psychological vulnerability while in isolation, especially for women (and children by extension).<sup>4</sup> In addition, life has become worse for the poorest sectors of society who were stripped of their basic freedoms and the ability to provide for their daily needs due to work stoppages and layoffs at the height of the pandemic. The urban poor in the Philippines were badly hit by the economic downturn.<sup>5</sup> Mental health issues emerged due to the lack of activities of students who have felt anxious due to uncertainties. Approximately 25% of people surveyed by a study in the Philippines reported to have experienced moderate to severe anxiety,<sup>6</sup> and also others in other countries suggest the same.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> M. Hoffmann. "Rising Suicide figures reflect many women's despair during a pandemic." In *Japan Times*. December 12, 2020.  
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/12/12/national/media-national/women-suicide-pandemic/>

<sup>5</sup> B. De Vera. "Urban Poor more badly hit by Coronavirus crisis – NEDA chief." In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. August 7, 2020.  
<https://business.inquirer.net/304696/urban-poor-more-badly-hit-by-coronavirus-crisis-neda-chief>.

<sup>6</sup> M. Tee, C. Tee, I. Ancalan, K. Aligam, P. Reyes, V. Kuruchittham, & R. Ho. "Psychological impact of Covid-19 pandemic in the Philippines." In *Journal of Affective Disorders* Volume 277 (2020): 380.

<sup>7</sup> R. Harding. "Japan Suffers Rise in Female Suicides during Covid-19 Pandemic," *Financial Times*, February 10, 2021,  
<https://www.ft.com/content/e7f1d6a7-d56e-423f-a7c8-0803af9a6f02>; Y. Osaki, et al., "Suicide Rates during Social Crises: Changes in the Suicide Rate in Japan after the Great East Japan Earthquake and during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 140 (August 1, 2021): 39–44.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2021.05.035>; H. Sakamoto, et al., "Assessment of Suicide in Japan During the COVID-19 Pandemic vs Previous Years," *JAMA Network Open* 4, no. 2 (February 2, 2021): e2037378,  
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.37378>.

The general cause for the distress mentioned above was the prolonged lockdowns that have kept people away from their normal day-to-day life.<sup>8</sup> Children were affected by not being able to see their friends and engage in their own social activities that are healthy for development.<sup>9</sup> For many adults, the Pandemic became an existential question that provoked individuals to ask about the meaning of human life and that of their family's future.<sup>10</sup> The global crisis exacerbated mental health issues regardless of economic or social status.<sup>11</sup> In the Philippines, the poor usually found it difficult to seek medical treatment for other types of diseases due to the strict health care protocols put into place to slow the Pandemic and then also because of chronic lack of money. However, the same may not be the case for the privileged members of Philippine society. With some rare exceptions, the main approach to governance in the Philippines has been more radical in terms of addressing its problems and responding to the pandemic,<sup>12</sup> where the same has been considered by critics as a new biopolitics.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> WHO, "World Health Assembly Recommends Reinforcement of Measures to Protect Mental Health during Public Health Emergencies," WHO, May 31, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/31-05-2021-world-health-assembly-recommends-reinforcement-of-measures-to-protect-mental-health-during-public-health-emergencies>.

<sup>9</sup> WHO, "My Hero Is You: One Year on, Planning for a Sequel Gets Underway," WHO, June 1, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/01-06-2021-my-hero-is-you-one-year-on-planning-for-a-sequel-gets-underway>.

<sup>10</sup> Christian Jasper Nicomedes et al., *AN EVALUATION ON EXISTENTIAL CRISIS OF FILIPINOS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24958.61768>; Pema Wangchuk, "Humankind's Existential Crisis Amid COVID-19 Pandemic: A Theoretical Perspective," *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies* 20, no. 1 (August 9, 2021): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2021/v20i130474>.

<sup>11</sup> Alison Abbott, "COVID's Mental-Health Toll: How Scientists Are Tracking a Surge in Depression," *Nature* 590, no. 7845 (February 11, 2021): 194–95, <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-00175-z>.

<sup>12</sup> C.R. Maboloc. "President Rodrigo Duterte and the Birth of Radical Democracy in the Philippines." In *International Journal of Politics and Security*, Volume 2, Number 3 (2020): 117-118.

<sup>13</sup> C.R. Maboloc. "President Rodrigo Duterte and Biopolitics in the Philippines." In *International Journal of Politics and Security*, Volume 3, Number 3 (2021): 50-54. Layne Hartsell, Alexander Krabbe, and Emanuel Pastreich, "Covid-19, Global Justice, and a New Biopolitics," *Social Ethics Society J of Applied Phil*, no. Special Issue (July 2020): 1–31.

Government planning and policy-making in many poor countries follow the top-down approach, and since implementation of programs is centralized, this situation clearly precludes individual participation at the grassroots level and thus there can be little collective sense of knowledge and responsibility on the part of the public. Most are unaware of how to participate in an epidemic or pandemic when the commons of human immunity, a subtle part, is threatened. This idea includes confronting the threat from any disease as a matter of judgment on the part of the individual seeking treatment and advice from a medical expert. Our premise is that without the clarity of rules, preparation, and information, the individual becomes confused, as does the healthcare provider, when epidemic or pandemic arises. It may be that natural understanding of human solidarity arises and people do what they can to help each other as we report later in rural communities, but without education, people are exposed to a great deal of threat and unnecessarily. Some authorities rely on punitive measures such as stiff fines and police enforcement, including public humiliation. Instead, we argue that the government and society must focus on preparation, prevention, and mitigation of any crisis, and provide a substantial response when it comes to subsequent economic and social effects as a matter of institutional duty. If not, then the government has created the conditions for which it punishes; and indeed, the global order is largely integral to the injustice. The above institutional duty means in a direct way that the role of the government is to promote the basic health and welfare of the people and provide for the commons of public health and immunity. It is the primary duty of government authorities to see to it that people have access to support during public health emergencies. This duty also requires transparency on the part of government officials in order to protect public health funding, considering that corruption worsens the situation and creates even more poverty making people's lives increasingly difficult. What appears to have been neglected in the Philippines is the important aspect of *comprehensive* good governance. For example, reports show corruption in the purchase of large amounts of protective equipment such as facemasks, which had been found to be overpriced.<sup>14</sup> Other

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<sup>14</sup> C. Ramos. Pharmally, supplier made a profit of nearly 5 million on first facemask deal. In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. September 21, 2021.

countries experienced similar issues. In cases such as this, the Pandemic did not change the attitude of certain corrupt government officials who have taken advantage of the situation in the country; and in this particular case, the Office of the Ombudsman acted to suspend 33 government officials involved in the anomalous deal.<sup>15</sup> The pandemic showcased the power of the state, but in what direction? Also, we ask how is business or corporate influence in government addressed with a new biopolitics? And how are we to deal with misinformation and collective hysteria?

Lockdowns had the apparent attempted effect of reducing many into malleable, nearly helpless beings, and there has been part-real concern and part-hysteria concerning some form of a panoptic gaze that is found in the surveillance of citizens to ensure that people will obey the orders. A global phenomenon of conspiracy speculations emerged as political views became detached from reality, all enhanced by social media, such as mistrust in public health sectors in society, thinking that the government is making up the figures on cases of infection, or even that the government created the virus for population control. In some instances, when someone died from Covid-19, many became suspicious that the diagnosis has been made up by doctors to collect higher payments from the national health insurer in the Philippines. While these alleged cases are certainly frightful, these particular fears are not the first that would come to mind for analytical investigation. In fact, the misinformation and fear became an actual threat, in and of itself, regardless of the actual fact of whether something was true. Such fear was part of the mental health crisis creating more strain on society.

While the science is clear as to the risks and dangers from infection, and while it is true that numbers of cases and the Pandemic overall became politicized, what is also a problem is the inability of the government to prepare and rally the people to pursue the common good with public health in mind, to create appropriate infrastructure

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<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1491037/receipts-show-pharmally-supplier-profited-nearly-p5m-in-1st-face-mask-deal>.

<sup>15</sup> L. Panti. Ombudsman suspends 33 government officials over Pharmally deal mess. *GMA News Network*. March 23, 2023.

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/864796/ombudsman-suspends-33-gov-t-officials-over-pharmally-mess/story/>

for society, and to have economic instruments in place to manage crises. These problems are the greater threat and where there was dereliction of duty, it was a crime against humanity based on poor industrial design, lack of preparation, lack of response, and then all consequently heightening various misunderstandings among the populace; and all easily foreseeable. For developing countries, the global order can be preventive of government action on social needs. On the other hand, a core, realistic example of serious concern, is the popular distrust and fear of large pharmaceutical companies as they rushed out new technology and also limited access to the new vaccines claiming market forces.<sup>16</sup> In this case, the market signals were clear to produce more vaccines but the decision to not produce was made centrally – companies and governments did not act. In a pandemic concerning the neoliberal patent regime and no new market entrants the mix of political economy can be deadly, as it was and still is. This is a central example of the state-corporate nexus that must be considered with a new biopolitics and particularly as climate change increases with risk of epidemic and pandemics becoming more frequent and more severe.<sup>17</sup>

The situation of farmers during the pandemic is also important to note as farming families in rural settings have been strongly affected by pandemic and economic forces. Poverty and social isolation increased in most rural areas in the Philippines. For these people, the Pandemic gives different insight when it comes to the situation of farmers in the countryside compared to urban areas. The problem consists of the lack of income because of the disruption in terms of the supply of agricultural implements and physical distance from services.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, there were improvements in terms of the development of community pantries that depend on agricultural supply. Some farmers have also taken the initiative to donate their

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<sup>16</sup> We use *market* in the contemporary sense of market capitalism that occurs with an ideology of virtual laissez-faire, and in practice a state-corporate business nexus or real-world neoliberalism.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas Broom, “This Is How We Prevent Future Pandemics, Say 22 Leading Scientists,” World Economic Forum, November 27, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/covid-19-pandemics-nature-scientists/>.

<sup>18</sup> B. Brull. “The continuing toll of the Covid-19 pandemic on farmers in the Philippines.” In *Grameen Foundation*. June 19, 2021. <https://grameenfoundation.org/stories/blog/the-continuing-toll-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-farmers-in-the-philippines>.



crops to people who are in dire need, but the broader challenge includes how to help poor farmers after the pandemic is over; after their communities have given what they could to each other. While the country experienced an economic contraction of 9.5% in 2020, the formulation of the post-pandemic recovery plan must address the situation of the poor in rural settings by crafting good, applicable, robust policies that will drastically improve the well-being of people in rural areas who suffered due to the Pandemic and that can help them to replenish their communities.

Globally, the coronavirus has exacerbated the situation of people in the poorest regions of the world, while also, given that globalization was put to a near sudden halt, physically such as supply chains, 100s of millions of workers in rich countries and also in developing economies have lost their jobs temporarily; some permanently. Supply chains and manufacturing were disrupted and many will continue to be disrupted for the long-term, if they recover at all.<sup>19</sup> For the Philippines, the first casualty was tourism. As restrictions upon any entry have been enforced, planes had been grounded as tens of thousands of flights were cancelled. In the Philippines, for instance, Philippine Airlines, had to retrench 2,700 employees in March 2000.<sup>20</sup> AirAsia, the largest budget carrier in Asia, had sought loan restructuring as it was saddled with billions of dollars of debts that it could not repay due to global travel bans.<sup>21</sup> In most countries where tourism is a key economic indicator, thousands of workers have since languished due to a lack of income which in turn has impacted their families that depend on them. Today, the status of tourism as a sector has improved since restrictions have been lifted and ease of travel has

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<sup>19</sup> World Bank. "The Global Economic Outlook during the Covid 19 Pandemic." June 8, 2020.  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world>.

<sup>20</sup> M. Camus. "PAL to let go of 2,700 employees as Covid pandemic beats airline." In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. October 1, 2020.  
<https://business.inquirer.net/308600/pal-to-let-go-of-2700-employees-as-pandemic-beats-up-airline>.

<sup>21</sup> T. Nakano. "Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia once contrasting now face the same Crisis." In *Nikkei Asia*. November 3, 2020.  
<https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Transportation/Malaysia-Airlines-and-AirAsia-once-contrasting-now-face-same-crisis>.

followed, although the number of tourist arrivals is still not near pre-pandemic levels.

What seemed to become clear during the height of the Pandemic was that affluent countries prioritized their citizens over others, however, this is a practice that does not work during pandemics. Nothing had been more obvious when it comes to such policy than in acquiring the Covid-19 vaccines and maintaining nationalist protectionism. At the start of the rollout of vaccines worldwide, Oxfam reported that three billion dosages were ordered from pharmaceutical firms such as Astra-Seneca, Moderna, and Pfizer but about 90% of such orders were actually for the citizens of rich countries.<sup>22</sup> This simply manifests how the hegemonic relations of countries in the world are set into motion in terms of the governance of the purchase and distribution of the vaccines. Billions of dollars were needed to ensure that hundreds of millions of people (now billions) get their shots. This involved not only politics, but logistics – the Pfizer vaccine needs cold freezers that can maintain temperature below 80 degrees Celsius. The situation began to change after the US and EU achieved progress in terms of the vaccinations, although vaccine hesitancy and the reopening of economies resulted in surges of infection in the US and the UK. The supply of vaccines to developing countries such as the Philippines began to improve in mid-2021, which was a combination of donations and purchases by the Philippine government, whereas on the village level, the public and private sector worked hard to achieve the vaccination targets set by the government.

From a perspective of global justice Thomas Pogge explains that poverty in the world is a result of unfair structures and policies that favor the First World,<sup>23</sup> particularly for health. The basis for the argument on globalized vaccines resides in such structural injustice, where in a pandemic, to prevent disease proximally without consideration distally will create the conditions for the pandemic to return over and over again. Manytimes affluent nations, either in policy or through inattention, show that their moral duty to other societies is limited to a duty of voluntary assistance rather than the

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<sup>22</sup> R. Weintraub, A. Bitton, M. Rosenberg. "The Danger of Vaccine Nationalism." In *Harvard Business Review*. May 22, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/05/the-danger-of-vaccine-nationalism>.

<sup>23</sup> See T. Pogge. "Severe poverty as a human rights violation." In T. Pogge (Ed.), *Freedom from poverty as a human right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

negative duty of not creating or participating in structural injustice. However, for a pandemic the situation of injustice becomes clear; and absurd if a rich country is concerned about the health of its citizens. If only profit is considered, such as in a free-market, then limiting production of vaccines to make a maximum profit off of rich countries, since they can pay for it, creates the conditions where the pandemic returns and greater profits can be made; even moreso with boosters due to the nature of SARS-CoV-2.<sup>24</sup> If so, then profits are central, and domestic and foreign patients are largely irrelevant unless people can pay. With the case of profit-centrism, the matter of duty becomes a moot point as “decisions” are left to “mechanics”. Therefore, rather than vaccine nationalism the case would be vaccine marketism or a near total focus on business. Beyond the Rawlsian difference principle, where if enacted would see that everyone got what they needed of necessary new technologies, Pogge thinks that a rectification of unjust systems that undermine the situation of the people in powerless states is needed, but the additional problem at the moment is that millions of people even in the US have been struggling in all aspects of their lives.<sup>25</sup> The overall system is now directly affecting rich countries. The U.S. Government approved a stimulus bill that cost perhaps \$7 trillion dollars overall, but nothing was mentioned in the bill or elsewhere in terms of helping the global poor, thus global hegemony among nations is dictating the reality of the times during the Pandemic.<sup>26</sup> Without the multilateralism of a U.N. global system, we do not think the conditions will change greatly, while at the same time there is an emerging counter due to BRICS as many other countries seek to join. What we can expect is that the new abnormal, post-Covid-19, will mean that societies shall continue to have the same set of problems. The poorest of the poor of the global populace of an unjust global political order will continue to suffer from structural injustices that have undermined the intrinsic value, dignity, and integrity of people.

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<sup>24</sup> Glyn Moody, “Bayer’s CEO: We Develop Drugs For Rich Westerners, Not Poor Indians,” *Techdirt*, 2014, <https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20140124/09481025978/big-pharma-ceo-we-develop-drugs-rich-westerners-not-poor.shtml>.

<sup>25</sup> “American Rescue Plan,” *The White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/american-rescue-plan/>. Accessed April 10, 2023.

<sup>26</sup> G. Thrush. “Here Is a Guide to Biden’s Three Big Spending Plans — Worth about \$6 Trillion,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/28/us/politics/biden-spending-plans.html>.

## World Poverty and Cosmopolitan Justice: Covid-19 Pandemic

According to our co-author Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “the Covid-19 pandemic has not changed the world” in the sense of our previous considerations.<sup>27</sup> He argues that this fact is due to the persistence of a neo-liberal global order after countries have opened their economies.<sup>28</sup> We offer an explanation based on the perspective of global justice. In the attempt to extend the liberal principles of justice to the global arena, Pogge proposed a version of the theory of cosmopolitan justice.<sup>29</sup> It is an idea of justice that presupposes that the affluent countries from the north actually owe the global poor and must address their claims to justice (and reparations) since it is the rich countries that set up and benefit from the global order. If global structures are unjust, the rich and powerful must rectify them as a social duty. According to this view, the affluent countries and past colonial powers that have actively participated in the design of unjust global trade rules and agreements have irreversibly harmed and worsened the state of the global poor. The insistence of a positive duty (assistance) is insufficient to give justice to the troubles that powerful states and corporations have caused the global poor to suffer. The primary duty is to not cause and/or benefit from suffering and ecological destruction. The neoliberal global order extended the Covid-19 pandemic, and other risks, to the entire globe making the virus endemic and killing millions beyond what the virus would naturally do. This global level crisis came with crimes against humanity due to structural injustice. The neoliberal model does not work for serious human need. Furthermore, the neo-liberal global order was made absurd by the Pandemic, along with the worst global economic crisis to have hit since since 2008, where the pandemic was the worst in 100 years and will claim perhaps 20 million lives. Such a model risks global health and human well-being. Global justice insists that the developed world must embrace the more stringent duty not to continue to harm the global poor, either directly or systemically, and

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<sup>27</sup> C.R. Maboloc. “On Why the Covid-19 Pandemic has not changed the world.” In *Journal of Public Health*. January 6, 2023.

<https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/advance-article/doi/10.1093/pubmed/fdac168/6972921?searchresult=1>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> T. Pogge. “Real world justice.” In *The Journal of Ethics* 9 (2005): 29–30.

the first world must make clear and effective policies to ease the adverse effects the affluent states' past actions have proliferated. (intermediate duties).

The Pandemic has added on to the already heavy burden of duties revealing the conditions of the neoliberal order, duties that are imposed on the poor, not accepted by perpetrators as their own. Where resources have been made available in affluent societies but not in developing countries when it comes to income subsidies, the Covid-19 pandemic seriously reduced globalization, particularly with the supply chains.<sup>30</sup> The neoliberal system which inaugurated contemporary globalism also led to its demise due to the structure of the system itself. Further, the necessity of extending the liberal principles of justice to the international realm, as brought about by the continued existence of global poverty and inequality, has only increased. Despite the significant rise of affluence globally, the rapid advancement of technologies worldwide, and the “enlightened” specifications of values and norms, billions of people remain in dire poverty and the planet is under assault.<sup>31</sup> Such misery is a consequence of the limited capacity in underdeveloped societies to respond to the pandemic. We argue that vast global inequality and human poverty will persist as long as the affluent nations do not find the eradication of pandemic producing diseases morally compelling and worthy of serious moral reflection that leads to pragmatic policies.<sup>32</sup> The problem is not a matter of science, technology, or empirical evidence, neither is it a matter of economics.

However, rich countries, in justifying their indifference toward helping the developing countries, have provided sophisticated defenses of their causal role, acquiescence, and complicity in world poverty. Concerning the poverty itself, the Covid-19 pandemic may be an awakening since one justification given is based on the idea that preventing poverty is counter-productive and not technically innovative. Pogge argues that such a justification given by rich countries is not based on facts. He says that the rise of the world

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<sup>30</sup> CR Maboloc, "Globalization and Consumer Culture: Social and Political Costs of the Covid-19 Pandemic." In *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics*, Volume 30, Number 3 (2020): 80.

<sup>31</sup> Derrick Jensen, *Endgame, Volume 1: The Problem of Civilization* (New York, NY, USA: Seven Stories Press, 2006). p.331

<sup>32</sup> Pogge, "Real world justice," 29–32.

population has caused a significant increase in the production of goods and commodities. Moreover, there is a drastic decline in birthrate whenever poverty is alleviated and moreso when people are educated.<sup>33</sup> Combining these facts show the economic and social feasibility of global justice. Also, poignantly there were more deaths in affluent societies than in the Third World when it comes to the Pandemic, with the U.S. far out in front from the beginning.<sup>34</sup> At the outset of Covid-19, Brazil and India ranked second and third to the US in terms of Covid-19 deaths but the distance between statistics of the countries was remarkable considering populations sizes. The claim that poverty alleviation measures will inevitably multiply human suffering and deaths lacks logical and factual grounds.<sup>35</sup> The issue is a matter of systemic injustice and how the rules are made regardless of the country. In the case of India, the wrong approach of the government seems to have impacted the rise in cases at more than 300,000 daily at the time of the surge, though by December 2021 this abated because of the massive vaccination efforts in that country. India has become the pharmacy of the world and it might lead in a BRICS system within the U.N. global system.

Global poverty is not a simple problem; however, the foundational problem is that affluent societies refuse to invest in developing countries to overcome human poverty, while at the same time exploiting them. The aggregate shortfall of the poor, or most of the planet, from the two dollars a day poverty line amounts to some 300 billion dollars annually or a mere 1.2 percent of the annual gross national incomes of the high-income economies.<sup>36</sup> The claim that poverty eradication measures will impoverish a rich country's resources is baseless, since 1.2 percent of the annual gross income is little to the rich but is enough to alleviate the poor from their

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<sup>33</sup> D. Bricker. "Bye, bye baby: Birthrates are declining globally and here's why it matters." *World Economic Forum*. June 15, 2021.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/birthrates-declining-globally-why-matters/>

<sup>34</sup> P. Schellekens. "Covid 19 Mortality in Rich and Poor Countries: A Tale of Two Pandemics?" *Working Paper Open Knowledge Repository*. World Bank Group. May 2020.

<sup>35</sup> T. Pogge. "World Poverty and Human Rights." *Ethics and International Affairs* Volume 19, Number 1 (2006): 1-7.

<sup>36</sup> T. Pogge. "Can the Capability Approach be justified?" *Philosophical Topics* 30 (2007): 167-168.

miserable state and will lead to positive decreases in population. Furthermore, assistance and investment would create the conditions for productivity and innovation such as micro and SMEs that would only help advanced countries in a win-win solution. It is for this reason that rich countries should have sent their medical experts and equipment to poor regions, before, during, and after the Pandemic, to help alleviate the plight of the global poor creating public health that would lead to better social and economic participation.

An important component of global justice is the equality of mobility since it is not only the lack of access to resources that gives undue burden to the global poor, the lack of ability to physically move entrenches poverty.<sup>37</sup> The economy of developing countries such as the Philippines is dependent on overseas contract workers for remittances; however, people were able to depend on government dole-outs at the height of the Pandemic. It can be said that the money given to millions of Filipinos during the time helped address the problem, albeit temporarily, but importantly by keeping them alive. It would thus be unacceptable to say that all attempts of eradicating poverty by doling out money to the poor are failing. The fear that such can only create a culture of dependency on the part of the developing countries to the affluent West is without evidence; in fact, we are in favor of a right to a basic cash living wage derived from the government at all times, not just in times of crisis, as a right of members of society, the same as the right to the vote.<sup>38</sup> For the Philippines, the presumption, however, comes from the failure of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds to eradicate human poverty. Pogge argues that although the ODA has indeed done little to serve its purpose of eradicating world poverty, such failure cannot be made as a sound basis for the conclusion that allocating funds to the poor societies to eradicate poverty is doomed to fail,<sup>39</sup> because most of the ODA funds were given to developing countries and the political elites who are willing to reciprocate and so that only 19 percent of all

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<sup>37</sup> C.R. Maboloc. "The Moral Argument for Migration." In *Philosophical Quarterly of Israel*, Volume 48, Number 4 (2020): 1513.

<sup>38</sup> "Living Wage | UN Global Compact," accessed April 26, 2023, <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/livingwages/>.

<sup>39</sup> Pogge, "Can the Capability Approach be Justified?" 168.

ODA is allocated to 43 poorest societies, and 8.3 percent is aimed at meeting their basic needs.<sup>40</sup>

To avoid a culture of dependency, we argue that such possibility can be avoided if instead of giving the money directly to poor governments, the budget could be redirected towards funding relief and housing programs, educational projects, health care programs, modern infrastructure, and the like at the grassroots level. Pogge asserts that little is known whether affluent countries are fulfilling their share. This is clear in the area of healthcare. If rich countries like the US cannot protect the vulnerable sectors of society such as African-Americans and Latinos when it comes to how the coronavirus affects them, how much more if and when we truly speak of distant countries such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa or in Asia? In fact, the issues are converging as more people are driven into poverty in rich countries. Poverty is already a fixed global structure, and the Pandemic exacerbated the situation such as for those who lost their livelihoods due to the economic impact of the lockdowns and then subsequent psychological effects.<sup>41</sup> There is a presumption that the present global order will be a huge burden to some governments where people lack democratic power because of the presence of populist leaders and business control in government, which continues to exert imposition on the population. The state of deprivation of poor countries may be attributed to parochial reasons, but those problems can be virtually ended through education and interaction with others from other places, other countries. On the other hand, poverty is worsened by the prevailing neoliberal trade rules, where unfair schemes enrich affluent countries and are causal of, and indifferent to, the adverse effects they inevitably impose on poor countries. Without the help from legitimate global institutions, poor and vulnerable people in impoverished societies would have found it hard if not impossible to get the vaccines necessary for their society to return to some form of normal functioning. In this way, it can be argued that the Covax Facility initiated by the World Health Organization was critical in putting a social and medical ending to the Covid-19 Pandemic going

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> J. Tanabe, "Exploring a Post-Covid 19 Sustainable Peace Model," 76-78.



by the motto of “no one is safe until everyone is safe” a near biological law in the case of pandemics and a law lost on neoliberalism.<sup>42</sup>

### **Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Religious Sector**

While the world has started the slow process of reopening, we also examine the kind of challenges that gripped the Catholic Church during the pandemic. The Catholic Church in the Philippines is aware of the many difficulties of the people and the reality of contested politics. In particular, some of the leaders of the Catholic Church had to confront the radical approach to governance of the Duterte administration. The Church, however, is not new to such forms of institutional clashes. As an institution, the Church has played a crucial role in restoring democracy during the EDSA People Power revolt and it continues to be a strong voice for social justice and human rights.<sup>43</sup> The poor see the Catholic Church as a defender of the public good where the current leadership of the Catholic Church in the Philippines is faced with a difficult task as it focuses its efforts of charitable work on the most vulnerable. It draws strength from its commitment to help the poor overcome their plight and these roots in a profound historical past were important as it navigated the Covid-19 pandemic. The Church was anchored with people’s solidarity.

The Catholic Church during the pandemic was hard-pressed since the faithful have been prevented from attending religious activities, but responding to a crisis is nothing new to its mandate to serve and it has been an active witness to injustice in history for two millennia, and even more so in ancient times and since Vatican II. Specifically, to care for the sick is a work of mercy towards humanity, and once again this impetus, core to the Christian identity was put to the test with the Pandemic. Whether the Church was ready or not, it could not but respond with compassion and assistance. Hence, we can find the Church where people are established as a community of believers in whatever situation they find themselves in. The Church in this respect is both a symbol and an instrument toward global justice.

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<sup>42</sup> “COVAX,” accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>.

<sup>43</sup> C.R. Maboloc. “Rawls and Habermas on Religion and Politics: Reflections on Philippine Political Culture.” In *Prajna Vihara: Journal of Philosophy and Religion*, Volume 9, 1 (2008): 130-131.

The present experience of the Pandemic was a test to its identity and position as to whether it is still faithful to its call to serve the people in this difficult time.

Indeed, integral to the Church are the celebrations and gatherings in places of worship; its rituals. The dynamics of Church life and work are all integrated to its identity, providing for the corporal, spiritual, moral and psychological well-being of the community. As the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the usual flow of Church life, for safety purposes, authorities and governments had to impose the closure of social gatherings to mitigate spread of infection. The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), in this respect, then proposed some protocols on masses under the general community quarantine so that people could maintain their connection to each other and their faith.<sup>44</sup> More than anything else, the Conference showed the cooperation of the Church with government authorities when it comes to public health. It was a difficult situation given the conflicting philosophies of the Church in the Philippines and the secular approach of the state.

Now, after the functioning of society is returning slowly to some form of normal activity, and after mask mandates including protocols for large crowd gatherings have been lifted, the Church has seen an increase in the number of people attending masses and other religious rituals, including social action activities. The religious sector is back in terms of its religious work and its task of promoting the faith. The observance of the Lenten Season also shows that things are now in order and the unfolding of events suggest that its leaders and the faithful have benefitted from their solidarity.

## **The Perspective of Global Justice**

The Pandemic deserves an ethical assessment to answer the social conditions in the midst of the global crisis. Interestingly, we expect that poor countries, after Covid-19, will remain in a critical state due to neoliberal and development paradigms – mechanistic, individualistic, and utilitarian, all of which favor affluent nations. The latter frameworks consider vulnerable people in the Third World as means for ulterior economic interests of the rich, if the poor are

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<sup>44</sup> F. Patinio. "CBCP proposes rules on masses under MGCQ, GCQ." *Philippine News Agency*. May 18, 2020. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1103211>

considered at all. There is little attention to a sense of solidarity beyond borders as societies struggle to return to normal. Also, the reemerging nationalistic perspective treats people in other places in the world with no real sense of respect for the value of life. The pandemic and its effects show how a self-centered approach, such as both nationalism and market, are ethically and morally deficient. It is imperative that this problem should be seen from the perspective of global justice:

“Global justice is integral in that it creates a wider and more accurate perspective on how the larger structures affect the actual human being, their lived experience, their physical and mental health, their families and immediate surroundings; and now technology, ecology and the geophysical system of the Earth. While there is much work to be done, this is a tremendous development in human life for organized, technical societies and in how we interrelate with each other and live within nature as a basis of life.”<sup>45</sup>

Global justice is about the recognition of the humanity of each person and although we have differences in terms of culture or belief, we are one and the same in terms of our pursuit of the common good. The meaning of the common good (and common health) leads us to an appreciation of our basic dignity as human persons. Recognizing such can be the basis for a greater solidarity for countries to overcome the ill effects of the pandemic. And where apparently the imbalance in the socio-political structure of a country makes it impossible to realize an immediate bounce back from the effects of the pandemic, action must be taken to meet the challenges. The Pandemic has allowed humanity to reflect on the relationship between nature and humans, creating a new biopolitics. Fundamentally, it is the civilizational structure that has put the planet into a quandary and will destroy much of what has been built, including creating the conditions for pandemic. This realization calls for a moral evaluation of the way the world is run by big corporations and capitalist states, calling into question advanced,

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<sup>45</sup> L. Hartsell, A. Krabbe, & E. Pastreich. “Covid-19, Global Justice, and the New Biopolitics of the Anthropocene.” In *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*. Special Issue on Covid-19 (2020): 3.

technical civilization itself. Globalization has since been the "tool" that ironically led to the spread of the virus, and unlikely but true, the impact on rich countries in terms of deaths and economic devastation has been enormous while poor societies are struggling to cope up with the difficult circumstances that they face post-Covid-19. Unless countries embrace a sense of global solidarity, there will be greater problems in a post-pandemic world. Pandemics, like climate change, affect all of us and a new biopolitics should be welcomed.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic has made apparent the socio-economic divide in the world. It has revealed the vast inequalities between countries. Within societies, the gap is also apparent and the effects on individual human beings is known better today than in the past. The socio-historical perspectives from which globalization had emerged, strengthened both market and colonialist agendas. In contrast, the idea and praxis of global justice pushes societies toward attaining the ideal of the societal good and the condition of the individual human being, which should be the aim of every society or government. In this way, the thrust to internationalize development must be first and foremost the duty and technical initiative of the First World not only because they have the resources but more importantly, it is their moral obligation given that the power structure of the world comes from unjust policies perpetrated by powerful states. If human societies must find a new balance between a return to economic normalcy and the protection of public health, the apparatus of government must be made to secure the beneficial interests of the people by empowering them through democratic participation while sustaining businesses and jobs creation.<sup>47</sup> At the grassroots level, there is plenty of innovation and talent, and with enough resources much can be accomplished. At the same time, the situation is made workable if there is a

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<sup>46</sup> L. Hartsell, J. Weckert, and T. Pogge. "Nanoscience, Ethics and Progress: The Poor and Advanced Technologies," in *2011 International Conference on Nanoscience, Technology and Societal Implications (NSTSI)* (Bhubaneswar, India: IEEE, 2011), 1-7, <https://doi.org/10.1109/NSTSI.2011.6111991>.

<sup>47</sup> Leonardo Avritzer, "Democracy beyond Aggregation: The Participatory Dimension of Public Deliberation," *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 8, no. 2 (December 29, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.140>.

positive interaction with government in order to lighten the burden and open the way for improvements and healing. We also reported that the religious sector felt the impact of the pandemic, just like other parts of society, as religious people had to go through the same difficulties of protocols and rules pertaining to public health, along with the risks of infection and illness. The Philippine Catholic Church has endured and recovered, as suggested by the return of the faithful to Church events.

Globally, we can reiterate the conclusion that the Covid-19 pandemic has not changed the world when it comes to global structure, nor has it created positivity in the form of rational hope based on concrete policies and efforts. Due to the global system, the Pandemic has worsened the situation of people and will reduce their ability to recover where the concern for excessive profits, even during the time of the pandemic, has put us into a difficult predicament. This fact affirms that globalization leads to near unimpeded growth in terms of income and money on the part of big conglomerates and industrialists, and now big tech firms and their moguls. Meanwhile, as large corporations and investors continue to amass wealth, the poor are struggling to get food and other resources in the wake of the Pandemic. The Pandemic Market, a world of big pharmaceutical companies and mRNA vaccines is expected to produce billions of profits due to the high demand and artificially low production of the vaccines. Low production is in the interest of the companies, not of a biological commons of immunity. This fact is disturbing about a system in which companies highly influence the rules. Meaningful action is needed in order to overcome this current crisis, and to be ready for the next epidemics and pandemics, as globalization declines and national protectionism returns with an advancing market system.

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