



## In this pandemic – Is God good?

A few hundred years ago leading scientists and mathematicians were often philosophers too. One who was known for his optimism (which we are sore in need of, right now) was Gottfried Leibnitz (or Leibniz). He lived in Germany, from 1646-1716 at the same time as Isaac Newton. Leibnitz independently dreamed up calculus and even invented a primitive calculator. A few of his ideas appear strange today however, especially in the field of metaphysics.

But in his philosophy, he is perhaps best remembered for his conjecture that this is ‘the best of all possible worlds;’. He got rather lampooned for that, but it is a question which, in lockdown, we might be quietly thinking. Is this ‘the best there is’? It does not feel like it with Covid-19. Surely, we could do away with it and the over a quarter of a million lives it has taken?

One aspect little revealed is that of mutation. As the virus spreads it changes slightly as it reproduces. For example, every year the winter ‘flu virus vaccine jab is slightly different because this happens. This should make us a little wary of a ‘magic bullet’ vaccine. The target keeps moving. Indeed, a recent Los Alamos scientific paper suggested that a reason the mortality in the USA and Europe is worse is that a more potent strain of virus has taken over from what originated in Wuhan.

These changes produce novelty on an alarming scale and at a frightening rate. But then, and this is the point, this is exactly how we came to be, albeit much more slowly – it was this dynamic change in structure, complexity and interaction with the environment that produced the life on earth in all its complexity we see today. Take one element out, and life on Earth fails, as it has probably done in the other planets in our Solar System.

Recently, a certain Archbishop on a Christian radio station was reported to have called the virus evil. This is a misunderstanding. The virus does what it must, just as a hungry lion does. Just don’t be near to either! They exist as we do in this fruitful environment that produces the differences and the beauty we see and enjoy.

Where does this leave God then? Can we declare him to be unrighteous because of one element of Creation? They all come as a package we call life. Did he not allow our brains to evolve so that we think about combatting the virus? We can work with each other or be combative, to support or destroy. God gives us the freedom to think and to do either. It’s up to us.

Rev Andrew Barton