

Correspondence

To stop or not to stop ‘culture’: determining the essential behavior of the government, church and public in fighting against COVID-19

ABSTRACT

Culture is a way of life. A recent correspondence emphasizes that it is a contributory factor in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, and this must be considered by each government around the world. However, I argue that various elements in culture do not need to stop or else it will create public outrage. I therefore propose a win–win solution for both parties with the inclusion of the church that can serve as a framework for the sake of public health. It is primarily based on a kind of behavior that is needed to be embodied by the involved groups—‘supportive’ government, ‘creative’ church and an ‘adaptive’ public. These essential behaviors of all groups are possible to embody for a successful implementation of public health.

To the editor

Can culture be stopped temporarily to give way for government policies to achieve a successful implementation of public health? In a recent correspondence published in this journal, it highlighted the role of culture as a contributory factor in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, and this must be considered by each government around the world. It also reiterated that to effectively flatten the curve, the implementation of policies should consider relevant cultural beliefs and values.¹ On the other hand, government policies such as limited mobility, social distancing, mandatory wearing of face masks/shields and many others must be enforced, regardless of what elements in culture are negatively affected. The relevant question is: which one is reasonable to follow for the good of everyone? With this, I propose a win–win solution for both parties with the inclusion of the church that can serve as a framework for the sake of public health. It is primarily based on a kind of behavior that is needed to be embodied by the involved groups—‘supportive’ government, ‘creative’ church and an ‘adaptive’ public.

It is indeed a mandate for the government to ensure public health that is why various policies are needed to be implemented. However, this does not mean that ‘culture’ that includes the values, beliefs and practices of the people should stop if ever these policies contradict them. Culture is a way of life, and stopping it is tantamount to preventing the people

to achieve a fruitful life as well. In the Philippine context, a halt of cultural practices will just create public outrage given the fact that Filipinos are known to be very religious and culture lovers. This is where the government’s support plays a major role in the implementation of its policies. In order for the public to accept the policies without reservations, a supportive government should present a clear, fair and reasonable explanation why such policies are needed to be prioritized at this time of crisis. The optimum use of digital technology and social media is a great platform to actualize such information dissemination. After this, a follow-up strategy can be done like the giving of incentives or rewards for those who are able to observe the policies with consistency. Many of the beliefs and practices of Filipinos emanated from their faith as Christians. This is now the turn of the church to be creative. Creativity is the generation of ideas or solutions that are simultaneously novel, unusual and original, as well as appropriate, practical and useful for the problem.² Since all mass gatherings such as liturgical celebrations and festivals require limited participation as of the moment, an alternative way of doing such events can also be done virtually. Catholic congregations have taken steps to provide the public with online-based Church masses, community prayers, spiritual recollections and retreats and Eucharistic adoration and processions.³ In addition, another creative and alternative form of doing celebration is bringing it to the local parish instead

of the big gathering in one place. This was actually done just last 9 January 2021 during the feast of the Black Nazarene. Instead of the usual millions of devotees participating in the procession going to the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene or Quiapo Church, the priests in-charge planned to localize the celebration by bringing the sacred statue to various churches particularly in Manila and nearby cities. Lastly, on the part of the public, being adaptive sums up the success of this endeavor. Having a supportive government and a creative church will be useless without the adaptive attitude of the people. Being adaptive exhibits a behavior that enables one to get along with change in the society. They are flexible and can keep themselves in control despite the abrupt changes. Let us take for example the policy on social distancing. It is proven that effective social distancing policy could reduce the risk of severe clinical outcomes among SARS-CoV-2-infected people.⁴ The public needs to adapt to this situation even if it affects their participation in such traditional practices. What they can do is to find alternative ways of spending their time fruitfully. These essential behaviors of all groups are possible to embody if we are determined to succeed. Culture does not have to stop. It is just a matter of adjusting one's behavior to

retain it and have a strong fight against the pandemic at the same time.

References

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