

## **The Burden of the COVID -19 Crisis is Unfairly divided – So is our Ability for Redemption,**

**By Volker Benkert**

As a historian of ordinary life in dictatorship and war, the current COVID -19 crisis reminds me that the burden of such disasters is always unfairly divided. There are pockets of normalcy – my own life is a good example – next to utter despair due to loss of economic stability, exposure to enormous risk, or illness. What the current crisis exposes is not only an utter lack of preparedness on the national and global levels, but also the need to develop new forms of solidarity between those who are by sheer luck or economic situation better prepared to weather this crisis and those who are not. Such new forms of solidarity, hopefully, might also bring about new forms or redemption.

People who see their jobs eliminated, their businesses falter as costumers stay away, or who are working for much reduced pay quickly see their savings dwindle and their futures melt away. Healthcare professionals, paramedics, police, fire – they all take enormous risks every day while often being not supplied with the necessary safety gear. Not only them, but also their family members are exposed to a higher risk. Lastly, those who fall ill without access to testing or without access to health insurance, those who care for sick family members or see their quarantined family members suffer – they all see their lives change in ways unimaginable to me.

These lives stand in stark contrast to those, whose lives largely continue as before though of course everyone is boxed up at home. Those with stable jobs who can easily be transferred online and those with large financial cushions will withstand the economic shock. Those who can just stay at home and reduce contact to immediate family members, those with some space at home to keep children entertained can at least minimize the risk of exposure. Finally, those who do not have to worry about being sick or caring for vulnerable family members can confront the daily death toll differently than those who are sick, at risk, or worried about loved ones who are.

In a time of social distancing, solidarity between those unaffected and those in need seems difficult. On both the national and individual levels, we have initially failed to provide this kind of solidarity. It pains me to see for example that the European Union utterly failed to live up to its most important task of solidarity between its members. Countries less impacted such as Germany at least initially failed to provide meaningful aid to European partners such as Italy while closing the border preventing shipments of much needed medical equipment to Italy. Individually too, I am not sure how to live up to the goal of solidarity in times of anonymous suffering distant to my own life.

Given my own shortcomings, let me praise others, for example the Phoenix Boys Choir of which my middle son is a member. Having had to cancel all of its performances and thus losing a significant part of its revenue, the choir had to let go a lot of its staff and others accepted an enormous pay cut. Still, the director, Herbert Washington, keeps practicing with the boys via zoom thus continuing to provide important educational and cultural opportunities to the boys and their future audiences. Parents with stronger financial means are also called to help others with the tuition, so that all boys can stay in the choir.

Acts of solidarity and resilience such as this are important now, but I am not sure that the crisis will necessarily have a longer lasting cathartic effect as [David Brooks](#) or [Manfred Luetz](#) suggested. Both expressed hope that as nations and individuals this will be a moment of introspection and solidarity.

Maybe it just needs some time for such forms of solidarity to emerge. Yet, just as the burden of this crisis is unfairly divided, so seems our ability to redeem ourselves. The example of some seem contrasts with apathy of others.