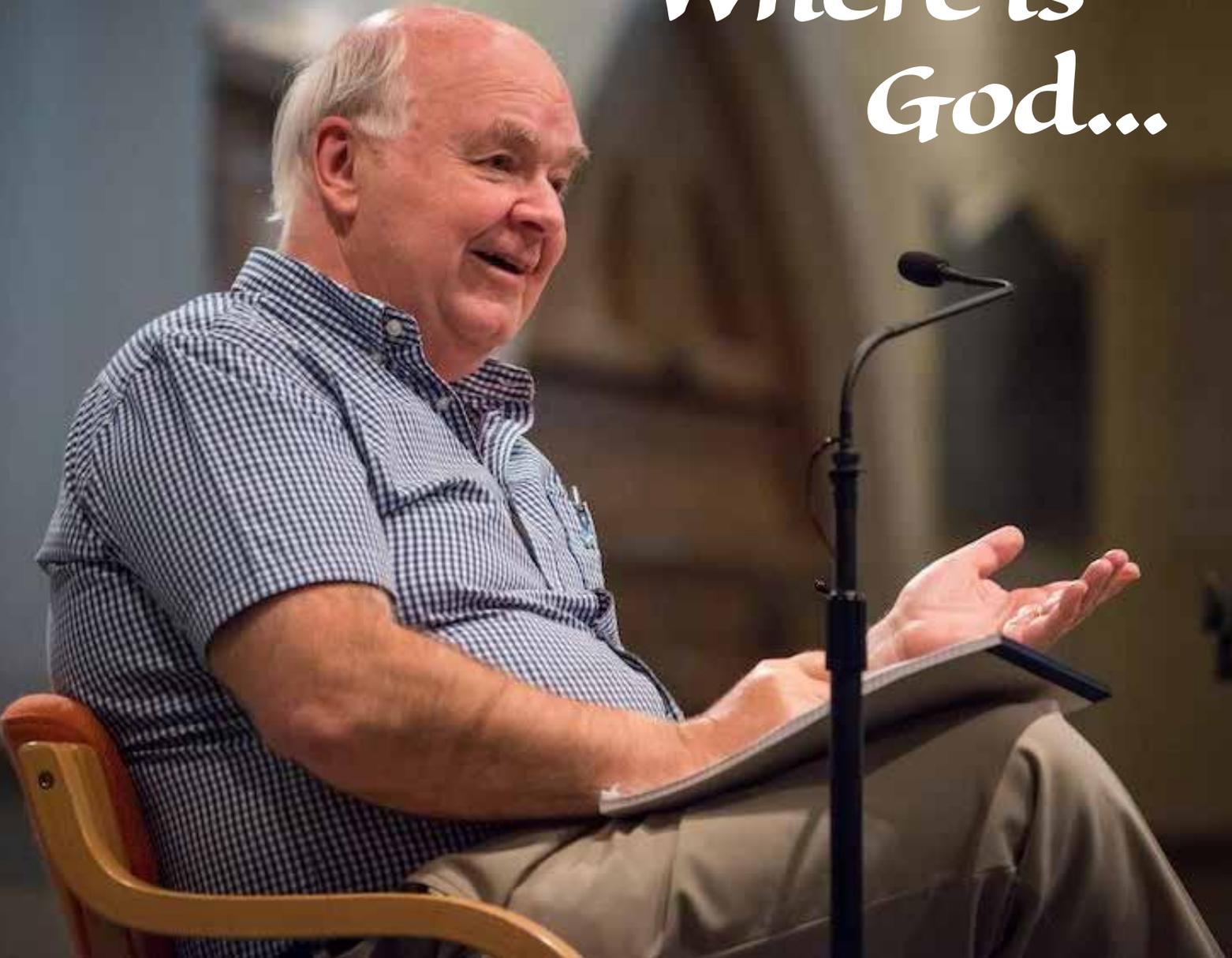


# Where is God...



## in a coronavirus world?

**J**ohn C Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University, internationally renowned speaker and author of several books on the interface of science, philosophy, and religion, discusses a topic being widely debated by today's Christian community. From his recently published book, *Where is God in a Coronavirus World?*, the following has been extracted, to give an overview of his thoughts on this important and timely subject.

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In the past, in times of national disaster in the West, people have flocked into churches and national leaders have made calls for prayer. Such occurrences are rare today.

Nowadays, fewer and fewer people have any God-dimension whatsoever in their lives. Since all over the world churches are being closed in order to limit the spread of the virus, many are asking where God is—that is, if he is there at all. Is he in inaccessible self-quarantine?

Where, or from whom, can we get real solace or hope?

Coronavirus confronts us all with the problem of pain and suffering. This, for most of us, is one of life's hardest problems. Experience rightly makes us suspicious of simplistic answers and facile attempts to come to terms with it.

We each need to make sense of coronavirus in three different ways: intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. All are important—and

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together they present a formidable challenge to anyone.

## A worldview

I have a worldview. I am a Christian, and I shall therefore try to make clear why I think that Christianity has something to say about the issue of natural disasters like coronavirus, something that is not to be found elsewhere.

Your worldview will make a difference to how you react to disasters like the coronavirus pandemic, and to earthquakes or tsunamis. For example, many theists responded to the earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand by affirming their faith in God in the words of Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear,  
though the earth give way and  
the mountains fall into the heart  
of the sea, though its waters roar  
and foam and the mountains  
quake with their surging.<sup>1</sup>

Other theists say that pandemics, earthquakes and tsunamis are a direct judgment of God—as indeed people of various religions suggested in the case of the earthquakes and tsunamis in Japan (in 2011) and

New Zealand (in 2016). This is a very crude response that causes a lot of unnecessary hurt.

According to the Bible, it is not true that if someone suffers some severe illness or accident, we should conclude that he or she has secretly been guilty of serious sins. Popular thought has often imagined that this must be the Bible's standpoint. But the whole book of Job in the Old Testament is a protest against that idea. Job's pain and suffering are caused by a mixture of natural and moral evil. Jesus, likewise, explicitly denied that suffering was necessarily connected with personal wrongdoing.<sup>2</sup>

All this said, it is clearly a part of Christian teaching that although not all disaster and disease is a judgment of God (as in the case of Job), nevertheless some is.

But God is not taken aback by the coronavirus; he can work for good even in the evil of it, and his plans will not be thwarted by it, although in situations like the present crisis it can be very hard for us to take this on board. At the same time, we are responsible for our own responses to the crisis and to each other—for he has given us that freedom.

We live in a world where things go wrong, and where humans are able to choose to do wrong (or right). A Christian, then, is not a person who has solved the problem of suffering, but one who has come to love and trust the God who has suffered for them.

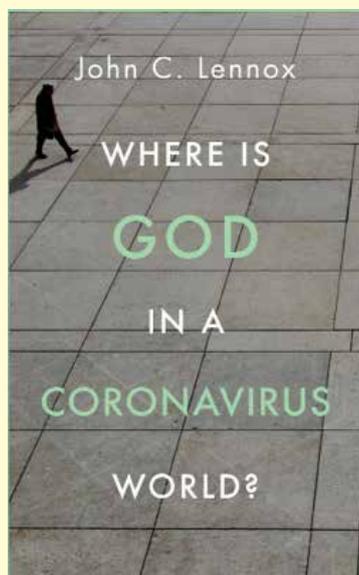
So how should Christians respond to the pandemic? There are several different levels on which to answer this question.

First, on the practical level, we would be wise to take heed of the best medical advice of the day. Interestingly, in ancient biblical times, the Israelites were also instructed about the need for quarantine to prevent the spread of infectious illnesses. The Old Testament book of Leviticus even prescribed seven days' isolation for some diseases, and an indefinite period for others. We also know something about how the Christian community responded to them.

In a recent article entitled "Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years", Lyman Stone, a research fellow at the Institute for Family Studies and an advisor at the consulting firm Demographic Intelligence, wrote this:

## WHERE IS GOD IN A CORONAVIRUS WORLD?

by John C. Lennox



**“No voice in the Western world is clearer and wiser than that of John Lennox. For all who want to pause to think, this is the book to read.”**

*Os Guinness, Author, Unspeakable and Fool's Talk*

**“A timely reminder of eternal truths. Writing with warmth, care, and insight, John Lennox addresses some of the questions and fears many of us are wrestling with right now.”**

*Michael Ramsden, President, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM)*

Published by The Good Book Company, April 2020, P/b 64pp,  
ISBN 9781784985691. Available from [www.thegoodbook.co.uk](http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk).  
Cover design, André Parker.

Historians have suggested that the terrible Antonine Plague of the 2nd century, which might have killed off a quarter of the Roman Empire, led to the spread of Christianity, as Christians cared for the sick and offered a spiritual model whereby plagues were not the work of angry and capricious deities but the product of a broken Creation in revolt against a loving God.

The coronavirus and all the plagues that have ravaged the world will be no more. The crown of righteousness that will be given to those who love the Lord Jesus will never perish or fade. Peace in a pandemic? Only Jesus can give that. The issue for all of us is this: will we trust him to do so?

Do I think I have answered all the questions that this crisis has raised? No, I don't. Far from it. I am personally left with many ragged edges and issues on which I would like to have more clarity. One day I shall have it: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known".<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, I shall follow the advice of the great 19th-century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon: "God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart".

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 46:1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 13:1-5.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12.

*The excerpts from the book Where is God in a Coronavirus World? have been made possible by the gracious permission of both the publisher and author. If you would like to read the book in its entirety, it can be purchased as either a printed copy or a digital download at: [www.thegoodbook.co.uk](http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk).*

# Shots

**S**ome say killing a person changes you. Here's how shooting a man dead changed this writer, who has withheld his name.

In films and on TV people die quickly, quietly, and immediately after being shot. In real life it is different. A heart shot or brain shot will kill quickly, but in the heat of battle, firing an accurate shot is very difficult.

It was summer 1964, in Borneo, at one of the forward bases. We heard gunshots at around 12:30am. The bullets hit the sandbags and whistled over the compound. The sentries returned fire, not knowing where to aim. In the jungle the darkness is thick and black. In the trenches you

can't even see the man next to you. The compound was on a hill with vegetation cut back to give a clear field of fire for 100 yards. But once the enemy had fired, they moved quickly to a new position, so not even the gun flash would show you where to aim.

By the time we were in the trenches the officer of the day had fired a flare, giving us a couple of minutes of light to look downhill at the thick, dark treeline. Nothing moved. But we knew they were there. We could only wait, peering into the blackness illuminated at random intervals by a flare. Between flares a shot or two would be fired but by 2am it had gone completely quiet. You strain eyes and ears to see and hear but...

