

In Others' Words

Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, websites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase.

When the World's on Lockdown, What Happens to the Poorest of the Poor?

Urban slums

Over one sixth of the world lives in an urban slum; a third of the world is now classified as urban poor; and 56% of the world's people now live in cities. (See ["Status of Global Christianity in 2020"](#) from the [Center for the Study of Global Christianity](#).) One long-term question that has gone unanswered is: how have these massive demographic changes affected social constructs such as identity, ethnicity, and religion? More research is needed. For a deep dive into how migrants are impacting cities and vice versa, check out the World Economic Forum's report on [Migration and Its Impact on Cities](#).

But a short-term question staring us all in the face is: how have the urban and rural poor been impacted by covid-19? Some mitigation efforts, such as social distancing, have turned out to be ones that only wealthy nations can adopt effectively.

Health spending per head in Pakistan is one two-hundredth the level in America. Uganda has more government ministers than intensive-care beds. Throughout history, the poor have been hardest-hit by pandemics. Most people who die of AIDS are African. The Spanish flu wiped out 6% of India's entire population. (["The Coronavirus Could Devastate Poor Countries,"](#) March 26, 2020, *The Economist*)

Don't miss the eight practical yet urgent recommendations for mitigating covid-19 in urban slums in the April 24th article, ["Slum Health: Arresting COVID-19 and Improving Wellbeing in Informal Urban Settlements,"](#) in the *Journal of Urban Health*.

"The financial engine for half the world's jobs is about to seize up . . ."

Unemployment has skyrocketed globally. But what about small businesses and even the micro businesses of the very poor in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia? *The Economist* reports:

The microfinance arm of BRAC, a vast Bangladeshi NGO, says that in all seven countries in Africa and Asia where it works, it has suspended lending, collections and charging interest. "The financial engine for half the world's jobs is about to seize up," argues Michael Schlein of Accion, a Massachusetts-based financial-inclusion non-profit group, in a blog post. The World Bank estimates that small concerns (or "MSMEs"—micro, small and medium-sized enterprises) represent about

90% of businesses and more than 50% of employment worldwide. (["For Microfinance Lenders, Covid-19 is an Existential Threat,"](#) *The Economist*, May 5, 2020)

See also, ["Millions Had Risen Out of Poverty, Coronavirus is Pulling Them Back,"](#) the *New York Times*, April 30, 2020.

From the cities to the villages: the largest mass migrations in India in generations

No one anticipated India's lockdown (the ["harsheset lockdown in the world"](#)) would spark [the largest movement of people since the Partition in 1947](#). Pictures and [videos](#) began pouring out of India (*BBC's* ["Coronavirus: India's Pandemic Lockdown Turns into a Human Tragedy,"](#) March 30, 2020). Some authorities estimate there are up to 140 million internal migrant workers in India for whom

the epidemic is much more than a threat to their health—it endangers their very economic survival... They predominantly earn daily wages, with no prospect of job security, and live in dirty, densely populated slums, saving money to send back home. (["Special Report: India's Migrant Workers Fall through Cracks in Coronavirus Crackdown,"](#) *The Guardian*, April 25, 2020)

Take a look also at the article entitled, ["I Will Never Come Back: Many Indian Migrant Workers Refuse to Return to Cities Post Lockdown,"](#) (Scroll.in, May 30, 2020). Also read ["Over 10 Agonizing Days this Migrant Worker Walked or Hitched 1250 Miles Home. The Lockdown Gave Him No Choice,"](#) *CNN*, May 31, 2020.

Plight of migrants spurs Indians to extravagant acts of kindness

Dismayed by the videos of millions walking home with no food or water, people, NGOs, and charities have sprung into action all over India. Lawyers chartered plane flights; a rickshaw driver used his wedding savings to give out food. See ["India's lockdown caused untold hardship. It also inspired extraordinary generosity,"](#) *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2020. Two young men in Bengaluru set up a WhatsApp group called Loving the Migrant Worker.

Hundreds of migrant workers were fed, provided transport and given dry ration kits in just three weeks since it was set up... Most people in this group... don't know each other but what they have in common is that they are all Christians attached to different churches and denominations across India who have come together to help migrant workers in whatever way they can... In just one week after the *Loving the Migrant Worker* group was formed, Christians from over 50 different cities in India joined the group. ([Firstpost, June 9, 2020](#))

Global remittances evaporate

The number of remittances sent home all around the globe [has plummeted](#), causing food insecurity to rise sharply.

One in nine people globally—some 800 million—benefitted from international remittances in 2019, according to IFAD. In addition, a similar number of people send remittances within countries,

said the World Bank's Ratha. ("[Emergency for Millions as Coronavirus Severs Remittance Lifeline](#)," *Reuters*, April 30, 2020)

In East Africa, for example, "almost half of all households in Somalia rely on remittances to cover basic needs such as food, water, health care and education" ("[African Migrant Workers are Unable to Send Money Home](#)," *CNBC*, May 29, 2020).

How Will the Virus Affect Food Insecurity and Supply Globally?

Some good news statistics

But the unsung star of 21st-century logistics is the global food system (see [article](#)). From field to fork, it accounts for 10% of world gdp and employs perhaps 1.5bn people. The global supply of food has nearly tripled since 1970, as the population has doubled to 7.7bn. At the same time, the number of people who have too little to eat has fallen from 36% of the population to 11%, and a bushel of maize or cut of beef costs less today than 50 years ago in real terms. Food exports have grown sixfold over the past 30 years; four-fifths of people live in part on calories produced in another country. (*The Economist*, "[The Global Food Supply Chain is Passing a Severe Test](#)," May 9, 2020)

And a triple whammy

COVID-19, combined with the effects of ongoing civil conflicts, hotter and drier weather in many areas, and an unfolding locust invasion in Africa and the Middle East, could cut off access to food for tens of millions of people. The world is "on the brink of a hunger pandemic," according to World Food Program (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley, who warned the United Nations Security Council recently of the urgent need for action to avert "multiple famines of biblical proportions." ("[COVID-19 Could Exacerbate Food Insecurity Around the World, Stanford Expert Warns](#)," *Stanford News*, May 5, 2020)

Enormous swarms of desert locusts are stripping everything bare as they advance relentlessly across East Africa, Iran, [Pakistan and India](#). (See the horrifying images in "[Gigantic New Locust Swarms Hit East Africa](#)," *National Geographic*, May 15, 2020.)

A swarm containing an [estimated 200 billion locusts](#) was recorded in Kenya, and each insect can eat its own weight in food. That equates to about as much food as 84 million people a day, according to a [UN briefing](#). (*Business Insider*, "[Swarms of locusts forced Somalia to declare a national emergency](#)," February 28, 2020)

Religion and Pandemics

A global evaluation

In an excellent article in the *World Politics Review*, May 26, 2020, the authors look at global expressions of religion and how they have interfaced with pandemics in "[What Religion Can Offer in Response to Covid-19](#)." They comment:

During previous outbreaks of HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and around the world, and of Ebola in Central and West Africa, the strengths of religious communities were rarely incorporated into public policy. The successes and failures of these pandemic responses offer five pertinent lessons on why [barriers between religion](#)

[and government](#) can detract from effective public policy, as well as [positive paths toward constructive engagement](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A church movement responds to Ebola: a 2014 West African case study

Missiologist Warrick Farah in his blog *Circumpolar*, reminds us how a group of church fellowships in West Africa voluntarily responded to the 2014 Ebola epidemic:

One relevant case study is a West African movement that was featured in [Miraculous Movements](#). When the Ebola epidemic began in 2014, they were planting 2,000 churches per year. It decreased to 200 per year during the 18-month crisis. But the movement met needs that the government was unable to . . . These volunteers built such goodwill with those communities that many churches were planted after the epidemic ended in 2016, and the movement continued. We could draw similar examples from the early church's growth during the plagues in the Roman Empire. Such a loving response requires a robust theology of suffering. We will need to learn to pray. The marginalized and the invisible in our communities will be the most vulnerable. ("[A Missiology of Social Distancing: Ministry Innovation in the Midst of Biosecurity Events](#)," *Circumpolar*, March 20, 2020)

Implications of the virus for global mission

Jason Mandryk's 53-page free e-book: [Global Transmission, Global Mission: The Impact and Transmission of the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) is excellent: objective, full of helpful links, resources, and forward thinking.

In compiling this analysis, the Operation World team interacted with ministry and mission leaders in every region of the world, getting input on how to pray for different nations afflicted by covid-19 as well as strategic considerations from a wide array of missiological contexts. ([operationworld.org](#))

China's religious groups offer covid-19 assistance to Wuhan

Ian Johnson, Canadian Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who lives in Beijing, noticed that religious groups of all kinds were offering assistance to the desperate people of Wuhan—to the tune of \$30 million.

In temples, mosques and churches, China's religious believers have jumped into the national battle against the coronavirus. They have offered prophecies and prayers, ceremonies and services, as well as donations totaling more than \$30 million. Their efforts reflect the country's decades-long religious revival, and the feeling among many Chinese that faith-based groups provide an alternative to the corruption that has plagued the government. ("[Religious Groups in China Step into the Coronavirus Crisis](#)," *New York Times*, February 26, 2020)

Covid-19 and religious volunteerism around the world

For some of the possible effects of covid-19 on volunteer religious activity around the world, see *Christianity Today's* "[Canceled Mission Trips Expected to Have Longterm Fallout](#),"

March 22, 2020. What might tourism look like in this brave new world post coronavirus? See [“Coronavirus: What Global Travel Might Look Like Ahead of a Vaccine,”](#) *BBC*, May 3, 2020. See also [“When Will We Start Traveling Again?”](#) *CNBC*, May 5, 2020. And lastly, for a look at some startling graphs predicting changes in travel, check out [“Covid-19: Outlook for Air Travel in the Next Five Years,”](#) *IATA*, May 13, 2020.

Taliban and thermometers

Many terrorist groups have reinvented themselves as social service organizations. Witness [Hamas](#) in Gaza and [Hezbollah](#) in Lebanon. But the Taliban?

Social-media accounts that usually crow about killing government soldiers instead showed the militants handing out masks and advice on public health. One video purported to show Taliban health-workers kitted out in white suits, taking people's temperatures and squirting disinfectant about... The most helpful thing the Taliban could do, however, is the one idea they have rejected outright. The militants have spurned calls for a ceasefire to allow the government and aid agencies to fight the virus unhindered. Instead, while offering Afghans advice on how to keep themselves safe, they have also been killing lots of them. Taliban attacks rose by more than 70% year-on-year in the six weeks after they signed a peace deal with America in Qatar at the end of February. ([“The Taliban are Joining Afghanistan's Fight Against Covid-19,”](#) *The Economist*, May 9, 2020)

Muslim revival movement a superspreader

What have been the biggest venues for the spread of the virus? A [football stadium in Northern Italy](#), a [church service in South Korea](#), and in Asia, extremely [large gatherings of a Muslim movement](#) known as the [Tablighi Jamaat, some 80 million strong](#), all appear to have been super-spreaders.

Thousands of [Tablighi Jamaat] members had traveled from across India and abroad to the event at the Nizamuddin Markaz mosque—the group's global headquarters—in central Delhi. After the event, delegates—who had dispersed—began to fall sick with Covid-19 and Indian officials embarked on a widespread effort to trace, identify and test attendees and their families. As of Saturday, 4,291 cases had been linked to the gathering, across 23 states and union territories, according to health authorities. That amounted, as of April 20, to nearly a quarter of all Covid-19 cases reported so far in India. ([“India's Muslims Feel Targeted by Rumors They're Spreading Covid-19”](#) in *CNN*, April 23, 2020)

“A Muslim person's blood plasma can save a Hindu person's life”

Going on the offensive, hundreds of recovered Tablighi Jamaat covid-19 patients in New Delhi began donating plasma to help others. However, many Hindus were repelled at the thought of being given “Muslim blood.” From a *BBC* article the end of April:

Meanwhile there have been apprehensions that Hindus would reject the plasma donated by the Tablighis, prompting Delhi Chief Minister Aravind Kejriwal to emphasise that “when god created

earth, he just created human beings. Every human has two eyes, one body, their blood is red...” ([“India Coronavirus: Tablighi Jamaat Gives Blood for Plasma Therapy,”](#) *BBC*, April 28, 2020)

The *Hindustan Times* went on to quote the Delhi Chief Minister as saying,

God did not differentiate between individuals. It is us who have started to differentiate between humans based on faith. Coronavirus disease can happen to anyone irrespective of one's faith... A Hindu person's blood plasma can save a Muslim person's life and a Muslim person's blood plasma can save a Hindu person's life. But, why have we created walls? At least, the virus has taught us that if we stand united, nothing can defeat us. And if we are divided among ourselves, we shall lose the battle. While donating plasma, one should not think on such (religious) lines. ([“200 Tablighi Jamaat members, who have recovered, pledge to donate plasma,”](#) *Hindustan Times*, April 28, 2020)

Religion and Violence

They came to kill the mothers . . .

Mid May, 2020, the world was rocked by [the scenes of a deliberate massacre of mothers](#) and babies in a maternity hospital in West Kabul. By the end of the massacre, twenty-four mothers, babies, and nurses were dead.

“What I saw in the maternity demonstrates it was a systematic shooting of the mothers,” Bonnot, Head of Programmes for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Afghanistan, said. “They went through the rooms in the maternity, shooting women in their beds. It was methodical. They came to kill the mothers.” ([“Afghan Maternity Ward Attackers 'Came to Kill the Mothers',”](#) *BBC*, May 15, 2020)

Read the powerful response by a group of professional Afghan women in *NPR's Opinion* [“We Shouldn't Have to Ask that Women and Babies Not Be Killed, Yet We Must,”](#) May 16, 2020.

Identity in India amid polarization and religious violence

Religious violence was already at record levels in India before covid-19 hit. Back late February, fifty-three people were killed in New Delhi in religious riots with Hindus attacking peacefully protesting Muslims. See the article entitled [“Delhi death toll climbs amid worst religious violence for decades,”](#) February 26, 2020 in *The Guardian*, that details the reasons for the countrywide marches protesting the unconstitutional citizenship bill enacted December 2019.

Don't miss Indian journalist Aatish Taseer's eloquent article in the May 2020 issue of *The Atlantic*, [“India is No Longer India: Exile in the Time of Modi.”](#) In this very personal essay, Taseer looks at the reasons for his own blacklisting and then exile from India, his homeland. It's an insightful article about identity and free speech, in the midst of religious/political polarization. This same gifted author has also written a [beautiful account of his trip from Tashkent to Khiva](#) in Uzbekistan as part of a broader [New York Times' Style series on the Silk Road.](#)

China Slaps New Security Law on Hong Kong

The People's Republic of China handed down a new "national security law" for Hong Kong, May 21st. "The sweeping proposal . . . bans secession, subversion of state power, terrorism, foreign intervention and allows mainland China's state security agencies to operate in Hong Kong" (*CNN*, "[UK Considers Opening Citizenship 'Path' for 300,000+ Hong Kong Residents . . .](#)," May 28, 2020). This decision appears to be a direct violation of the terms of the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 between the UK and China with regard to Hong Kong. (Don't miss: "[How Hong Kong's Complex History Explains Its Current Crisis with China](#)," *National Geographic*, August 2019.) See also the very perceptive article called "[Hong Kong and the Price of Freedom](#)" (*The National Review*, May 29, 2020), that links the drop in Hong Kong's percentage of the Chinese GDP (20% in 1989 down to less than 3% in 2020) to the Chinese Communist Party's willingness to crush Hong Kong's semi-autonomy for political control.

"Rule by fear is about to begin."

In an article May 28th in *The Economist* entitled, "[China Has Launched Rule by Fear in Hong Kong](#)," the editors argue that this new law bodes ill not only for the region but for the world.

The people of Hong Kong want two things: to choose how they are governed, and to be subject to the rule of law. The Chinese Communist Party finds both ideas so frightening that many expected it to send troops to crush last year's vast protests in Hong Kong. Instead, it bided its time. Now, with the world distracted by covid-19 and mass protests difficult because of social distancing, it has chosen a quieter way to show who's boss. That threatens a broader reckoning with the world—and not just over Hong Kong, but also over the South China Sea and Taiwan.

On May 21st China declared, in effect, that Hong Kongers deemed to pose a threat to the party will become subject to the party's wrath. A new security law, written in Beijing, will create still-to-be defined crimes of subversion and secession, terms used elsewhere in China to lock up dissidents, including Uighurs and Tibetans. Hong Kong will have no say in drafting the law, which will let China station its secret police there. The message is clear. Rule by fear is about to begin.

We are all dissidents

What does this new law portend for Hong Kong's Christians, especially given some of their involvement with the protests? See "[As protests continue in Hong Kong, Beijing's criticisms of churches grows louder](#)," *America: The Jesuit Review*, January 2, 2020. See also an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 2020: "[Without justice, there is no peace: Tiannanmen memories spark resistance in Hong Kong](#)."

But for Uighurs, "locking up dissidents" has meant the detention of millions. A third new cache of leaked documents arrived in the West, February 2020. These written directives

detail both the extreme surveillance of all 11 million Uighur Chinese citizens as well as the systematic detention and torture of close to two million. See "[Watched, Judged, Detained](#)," *CNN*, February 2020.

Many Protests Became Riots: Why?

In the aftermath of the tragic murder by a police officer of [George Floyd](#), an unarmed African-American in Minneapolis, hundreds of cities across the country and [around the world](#) have been roiled by protests against police brutality and racism. Most of the [protests were peaceful](#) but hundreds of small businesses (many owned by immigrants or minorities) were destroyed by looting and riots no longer connected to the call for justice. (See "[Looting Devastates Businesses Already Shaken by Virus](#)," *AP News*, June 2, 2020.) For an article that looks at whether political causes always trend towards violence, see the [Winter 2019 issue of Comment magazine](#). Scroll down to the second one listed which examines ideologies that demand justice and why they can become violent and repressive. See "[Habits for Ideological Times](#)." Also check out the first article which is an eloquent essay on American fractured identity, called "[The Tribes that Bind](#)." Christians across the world are examining their own hearts and grieving the senseless murders and violence. For an excellent historical perspective, see "[A Call to Conversion](#)," in *First Things*, June 1, 2020.

China claims America has double standard on protests

Chinese officials are taking advantage of what they are claiming is [the hypocrisy of US](#) support of Hong Kong protesters for democracy and human rights.

The Chinese government, in its first official statement on Mr. Trump's move against Beijing's national security rules, directly called out the United States for hypocrisy. A spokesman for China's foreign ministry, Zhao Lijian, noted on Monday how American officials have portrayed protesters in their own country as "thugs" but glorified Hong Kong protesters as "heroes." (See "[As Protests Engulf the US, China Revels in the Unrest](#)," in the *New York Times*, June 2, 2020)

Are Followers of Jesus in Muslim Contexts Hiding the Light?

Also published on Warrick Farah's *Circumpolar* blog March 17, 2020, is a guest post by Kevin Higgins called "[Hills and Hiding: A Response to Travis Myers](#)." Written last year but never published until this March, his short article carefully takes up and replies to Travis Myers' five charges leveled against what some have called Insider Movements. Travis Myers' article was posted at Desiring God and entitled "[A City Under a Hill: Five Problems with Insider Movements](#)." Higgins, currently General Director of Frontier Ventures, lived for 17 years in South Asia and has been personally involved with four different movements to Christ in Muslim peoples. **IJFM**