

## Rejoinder to Gleyds Silva Domingues and Jose & Rosana Liste regarding Mission in a Post-Covid 19 World

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### Abstract

This article concludes the four-part series on the impact of Covid-19 on the advance of the Great Commission. In this rejoinder to the responses of Domingues and the Listes, Cochrane affirms the respondents' points and argues that creative strategies and adaptations that arise in this next season of global history in mission need to be imagined from a foundation of hope - a hope that is not lived in isolation but in the richness of community.

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The two responses to my article on post-covid implications for mission not only brought good further discussion but also enriching applications to global contexts. One response came from a Brazilian theologian, reflecting on her nation and its responses to the pandemic, yet also raised intriguing questions related to the future of a 'survivalist' or 'missional' Church more generally. The other response was from an Argentine couple who leads a ministry in urban London, England. Their personal context as well as their ministry setting provides good reflection on issues of community in society moving forward post-covid.

I will respond to both below, but wanted to emphasize that my purpose in the article was not to spell out in detail possible 'strategic adaptations' or 'creative re-imaginings', but rather to present the framework of Dr. Martin Luther King's four questions. These questions or similar ones should be asked by every church or ministry moving forward. There are of course local implications as well as global ones for how mission will be carried out in the next decades. I pointed out in the article some of the demographic changes coming globally as well as in the United States by way of example for need of strategic adaptation.

Each nation affected deeply by the pandemic, like Brazil, Argentina, India, England and the United States, will experience their own consequences and opportunities in the next season. Will there be a post-pandemic new wave of missionaries from these and other countries carrying a Gospel of renewed hope? How will the closing of national borders for so long, or continued reluctance to open fully, present fresh challenges to mission engagement? There have been very real political battles in each of the above nations that continue to the present on issues like wearing masks, societal closures, vaccine hesitancy or mandates, and more. How will those battles affect the unity of Christian witness nationally and globally?

These implications for global mission, and there are others I mentioned in the article, will be quite different nation to nation but need to arise from strategic question asking. As Jose and Rosana Liste from London write in their response: 'In a post-Covid world, solutions will need to be contextualized to the different realities around the world.' The creative adaptation I argue for in my article needs to be looking for solutions that are not 'business as usual' for missions and churches, but arise from a 're-imagining' of the future.

With those words of introductory response, I will now more specifically engage with the two respondents.

### **Gleyds Silva Domingues**

Writing in Portuguese as a Brazilian, with a translation to English published in this issue, Ms. Domingues brings valuable input from how Brazil handled the pandemic. Her comments on how the struggle in the ‘immediacy of the moment resulted in disjointed and poorly planned actions’ could really be written about every nation responding. In my article, I quote Scott Gottlieb as saying that the USA ‘prepared for the wrong pathogen’. The speed of the virus spreading resulted in overwhelming circumstances for every government.

She also writes of the ‘extreme division’ of Brazil and the need for the Church to deal with these ground realities without ‘abandoning mission’. Again, this could have been written about the United States, India or many other nations as the pandemic began in 2020. In engaging with the four questions from Dr. Martin Luther King I use as a framework for my article, Ms. Domingues brings two very important further questions. First, ‘Will the pandemic cause an inward or outward response from the Church?’ This of course is a relevant question not only within the Brazil context but globally as well.

The second question she raises is similar but very intriguing in possibilities for discussion: ‘Is it more appropriate to speak of the Church as a ‘surviving’ Church or a ‘missional’ Church?’ Again, Ms. Domingues is writing particularly of the Brazil context, but her question and comments certainly have global applications. Her definition of a ‘survivalist’ Church is one that ‘doesn’t commit itself as a living witness’ or ‘offers worship’. Presumably it is already before the pandemic paralyzed in mission and comfortable in status or identity. As in many contexts, the pandemic exposed problems already in churches, at times giving people the space to leave situations they may have wanted to already but lacked opportunity.

A ‘missional’ Church for Ms. Domingues is one ‘connected to hope’, that is ‘not passive to evil’ and indeed has a ‘prophetic voice’. For a ‘missional’ Church, the pandemic and its aftermath should create new opportunities for growth and witness both within its local community and nation as well as globally. It will be a Church that continues to be ‘compelled by compassion, justice and love.’ Expanding on her thought, this kind of Church would be open to the creative adaptation I write about in my article, whether in the kind of hybrid communication of the future with Zoom and other platforms mixed with face to face opportunities for evangelism and discipling. It is a Church of outward life and breadth, but inward depth.

A final point Ms. Domingues makes that I will comment on relates to her conviction, which I share, that we need to ‘understand God’s sovereignty and authority’ even after all the world has gone through these past almost two years. This not only applies to the past season, but also as we look to the future. As I write in the article, there could likely be more pandemics ahead, as well as worsening climate change. So the need for the Church on ‘*Missio Dei*’ is to ‘re-imagine’ the future as I argue, but not without the foundation of knowing that God is still in ultimate authority with Divine purposes.

### **Jose and Rosana Liste**

This missionary couple from Argentina have spent many years serving the urban context of London, England, while also engaged more generally in issues of justice and mission in Europe. I appreciated their response to my article from a strong emphasis on the importance of community, both local and global. One of their central points is that the pandemic has ‘exposed a lack of

community in the West'. Covid-19 has also 'exposed the fact that our strategies and programs are insufficient to respond to such a surge of fear, isolation, grief, and all the social and mental health issues'. They are specifically writing about the context in Europe, but this could be easily said of the United States as well.

The Listes are writing out of their own experiences directly in the urban context of London, and agree that in a post-covid world, 'solutions will need to be contextualized to the different realities around the world'. Their perspective adds more texture to one of the points in my article related to diversity in the creative adaptations needed in mission globally. They also agree with me that 'future calamities' are coming, but add a needed emphasis that we will all 'need to rely on community, both local and global'. Perhaps for me their most important statement of response is that 'community should not be an after-thought' coming out of the pandemic, but central to any strategy in mission adopted.

This emphasis on community and meeting each other's needs, or 'one-anothering' as they call it, rings true to me from my own ministry context of the past almost forty years, India. Though my wife and I have spent the season of the covid pandemic in the United States, unable to return to India, we have stayed in almost daily Zoom contact with our many friends and colleagues there. Several of our close friends and ministry colleagues have even died, especially in the second wave that hit India in April/May.

Many of our friends in India have relied on community, both with local churches and mission teams, to face the challenges of isolation resulting from the shutdowns. They have served the poor and needy of every level with distinction, being the Church at its best as I write about in the article also from a historical perspective. This serving has involved not only meeting physical needs with the purchase of an ambulance and vans to deliver food, but the starting of hundreds of new church fellowships via Zoom and similar technologies. The creative strategies and adaptations in mission that may result in a post-covid world already began to emerge in the past eighteen-plus months in India and many other nations.

Jose and Rosana Liste challenge the West to a deeper level of community emerging from this pandemic. It is perhaps hard to imagine, considering how deeply isolating this period has been. As Ms. Domingues writes from Brazil, 'extreme divisions' have been exposed in society. But as she also writes of a 'missional' Church, there must be a 'connection to hope'. Any creative strategies and adaptations that arise in this next season of global history in mission need to be imagined from a foundation of hope. And a hope not lived in isolation but in the richness of community. These adaptations based in hope will look very different in a multitude of contexts globally. But if lived out, we will next time not have 'prepared for the wrong pathogen', but prepared for what is ahead with hope and community-based love.

**Steve Cochrane**

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