

Coronavirus and Religiosity: Explained on the Basis of the Statements of Religious Muslim

Korona Hastalığı ve Dindarlık: Konuya Türkiye'nin Erzurum İlinde Hastalığı Atlamış Dindar Müslüman Hastaların İfadeleri Bağlamında Bir Yaklaşım

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ABSTRACT

The main question of this paper can be formulated as follows: What faith-related feelings and thoughts did Corona disease evoke in the affected people who claimed to be believers? In this qualitative study, the 14 people infected with Coronavirus served as a working group (sample). All these individuals who described themselves as believers were from the eastern Anatolian province of Erzurum. The inhabitants of this province are considered more religious than the inhabitants of the regions on the Marmara, Ege and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey. Twelve individuals from the subjects are male and two are female; they are 17-60 years old. We took semi-determined individual interviews by telephone as data collection tool in this scientific research. The last 3-year period has been a turning point in which the coronavirus pandemic has had a comprehensive impact on individual and community life. Under pandemic conditions, the digitalization of life has gained momentum and this situation has established itself as a new dimension of social life. The values of solidarity, compassion, family, friendship and security gained new intensity and importance during the pandemic. Health security moved to the highest place in the hierarchy of values. In particular, social isolation and fear of getting sick and dying hit the elderly and chronically ill even harder. In this emergency situation, people affected by the illness thought about life and faith in a new consciousness and tried to perceive and understand suffering, life and death again in the light of their faith. Moreover, one observes a kind of reflexive introspection and self-examination among the believers who experienced and survived this illness. Without exception, all interview partners indicated that they exhausted resilience from their faith and acts of worship.

Keywords: Religiosity, Corona Pandemic, Religious Resilience, Social Solidarity.

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın hedefini ifade eden ana araştırma sorusu şudur: "Korona hastalığı, bu hastalığa yakalanan ve dindar olduklarını iddia eden kişilerde inançla ilgili hangi duygu ve düşünceleri uyandırmıştır?" Bu nitel çalışmada, Corona hastalığını atlatan 14 kişi araştırma grubunu (örneklemi) oluşturmuştur. Kendilerini inançlı olarak tanımlayan bu kişilerin tamamı Doğu Anadolu'daki Erzurum ilindedir. Bu ilin nüfusunun Türkiye'nin Marmara, Ege ve Akdeniz kıyı şeridindeki illere göre daha dindar olduğu düşünülmektedir. Araştırmaya örneklem olarak katılanların 12'si erkek ve 2'si kadın olup, kendileri 17-60 yaş arasındadırlar. Maalesef kadın hastalar görüşmeyi kabul hususunda oldukça çekingen davranmış, bu durum ise en çok erkek hastalar ile görüşme durumunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu bilimsel çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak telefonla yapılandırılmış görüşme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Korona pandemisinin bireysel ve toplumsal yaşam üzerinde kapsamlı bir etkiye sahip olduğu son 3 yıllık dönem bir dönüm noktası niteliği kazanmıştır. Pandemi koşulları altında yaşamın dijitalleşmesi ivme kazanmış ve bu durum kendini sosyal yaşamın yeni bir boyutu olarak iyiden iyiye kabul ettirmiştir. Dayanışma, merhamet, aile, arkadaşlık ve güvenlik değerleri pandemi döneminde yeni bir yoğunluk ve önem kazanmıştır. Sağlık güvenliği, değerler hiyerarşisinde en üst sıraya yükselmiştir. Özellikle sosyal izolasyon, hastalanma ve ölüm korkusu yaşlıları ve kronik hastaları daha da fazla etkilemiştir. Pandeminin getirdiği olağanüstü durum, hastalıktan etkilenen insanları yaşam ve inanç hakkında yeni bir bilinçle düşünmeye; acı, yaşam ve ölüm gibi olguları inançlarının ışığında yeniden algılamaya ve anlamaya yönlendirmiştir. Dahası, bu hastalığı yaşayan ve atlatan inananlar arasında yoğun olarak kendini gözlemleme ve muhakeme etme durumu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu araştırma çerçevesinde mülakata katılan şahısların tümü hastalıkları süresince inançlarından ve ibadetlerinden güç aldıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dindarlık, Corona Pandemisi, Dini Başa Çıkma, Sosyal Dayanışma

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INTRODUCTION

The current short report of the World Health Organization "WHO" about the consequences of Coronavirus Sars-CoV-2 (hereafter Corona) is as follows ("WHO", 2023):

"Globally, as of 4:00pm CET, 6 February 2023, there have been 754,367,807 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6,825,461 deaths, reported to WHO. As of 30 January 2023, a total of 13,168,935,724 vaccine doses have been administered."

The above data show the worldwide medical consequences of the Corona pandemic. However, it also caused social rethinking and administrative-technical and communicative new orientation, but above a change in strategies in health care system. This Corona pandemic takes on a watershed character in the late modern era. It had a far-reaching impact on the economy and the life of society as a whole. The conditions of the pandemic led to the intensive application of digital systems in all areas of life, thus digitalization gained a broad dimension.

The values such as solidarity, compassion, family and friendship gained new intensity and meanings in this period. Health and social (insurance) systems and service-providing institutions were very overcapacity and showed themselves to be fragile. Freedom had to take a back seat to health, implying a shift in dominant values (Dorn, Loch, & Vitt, 2020). A conflict arose between many citizens and the state, with public health safety and civil liberty arguing against each other. In this sense, one can speak of a value collision.

In particular, social isolation and fear of becoming ill and dying hit the old and people with chronic illnesses even harder. Social bottlenecks and worries accompanied health fears and insecurities. People suffering from corona in hospitals experienced more social and psychological isolation. In this emergency situation, the affected people thought about life and faith in a new consciousness and tried to perceive and understand life, suffering, happiness and death again in the light of their faith. Moreover, one observes a kind of self-reflection and self-criticism among the believers who experienced and survived this disease.

The pandemic also led to restrictions on religious congregational life and communal worship services in the houses of worship of religions. For example, mosques were closed for months or open only under strict restrictions ("BBC", 2020). As a result, religious institutions could not properly maintain their ties with believers during this emergency.

Research Aim and Method

This research aims to understand the religion/belief-based thoughts and feelings of people who got COVID-19 regarding their illness experience.

This research is primarily concerned with illuminating the following question:

"What religious feelings and thoughts did the Corona illness experience cause or exacerbate in the people who identified themselves as believers?"

The 14 individuals infected with Corona virus served as the sample in this qualitative study. All these individuals identify themselves as believers and are from the eastern Anatolian province of Erzurum. This province's population is one of Turkey's most religious provinces. The research shows that the population of Central and Eastern Anatolia feel more religious than residents of South and West Anatolian provinces such as İzmir, Istanbul and Antalya.

The population of this province are considered more religious than the population of the provinces on the Marmara, Ege and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey (Nişancı, 2023). Twelve individuals from the group are male and two are female; their ages range from 20 to 60. The sample was selected using the snowball system. To a large extent, we successfully recruited interviewees from all educational levels. However, we could not meet the pre-planned quota of 50% women in selecting persons to be interviewed, because only two women were willing to act as interview partners (see Appendix 1). The main reason for the women's unwillingness regarding the interviews seems to be that the women in the tradition-oriented provinces like Erzurum are rather reluctant to share their feelings and thoughts with the "strangers". The Interviews were conducted in late 2020 or early 2021.

We used individual interviews by telephone as a data collection tool in this scientific study. Individual interviews capture different perspectives on a particular topic; therefore, this method seems relevant to our research. This qualitative empirical method is suitable for bringing up thoughts and feelings with their statements in a relatively detailed manner. The interviewees, who took semi-standardized questions, were found as samples by the snowball method. They were 14 people who experienced Coronavirus on their own body and soul. The length of the interviews was about 5 hours. They were recorded and transcribed manually. The transcriptions had a length of 20 pages. The elicitation criteria were that they were all from Erzurum province and should identify themselves as believers in Islam. Their illness experiences, religiously influenced feelings

and thoughts during and after the illness were interviewed and documented. Here, only those who identified themselves as religious were selected as interviewees because our research limited itself to patients who perceived themselves as religious.

Analytical Systematization of the Interview Contents

Based on the written documentation of the interviews, the basic thoughts, factors and motives that occurred in the interviews were determined. Regarding these findings, the key terms were defined. These key terms, as the points of concentration of the discussion in interviewees' statements, were used for the systematized analysis of the contents. The critical terms mentioned are as follows:

God's Test

A very large number of respondents (ten out of fourteen) referred to the disease as a test of God, where God tests patience, trust in God, obedience to God, and the faith ability of people.

In this regard, the following statements of the subjects can be taken as an example.¹

"As it is mentioned in the Quran, the peoples have been tested very often in the course of human history." (P 1).

Here, it is to be noted that the test hides a promise of salvation and reward for the tested if they can pass the test.

"The testing of people came about when people ignored and transgressed God's will, as was the case with the flood in the time of the prophet Noah." (P 2, similar wording also in P 8).

The pandemic is not only taken up as a consequence of turning away from God, but is defined as a natural conclusion of people's immoral and disrespectful treatment of each other and of nature.

"I think that this pandemic is a warning to humanity because people are brutal and disrespectful towards nature and the world." (P 1).

One interviewee (P 2) likewise sees the pandemic as a warning from God to contemporary people who are indifferent and insensitive to human suffering. This person quotes in passing a sentence he read on Facebook under the picture of the Kurdish refugee child Ayman. He drowned in the sea on his way to escape and his body was washed out to the shore (Frankfurter, 2015). The said sentence should read, "O you child, since you died, the world is no longer the same."

One can clearly see that the respondents (interviewees) tend to distance themselves from the term "God's punishment" and rather want to claim the terms "God's test" and "God's warning":

"(...) God does no evil to his servants. This disease is a test." (P 7, further P 1, P 2, P 4, P 5, P 6, P 7, P 8, P 9, P 10, P 13, P 14).

Furthermore, one interviewee (P 8) refers to the pandemic as a particularly theologically instructive message from God to humanity.

"Yes, the pandemic is truly a clear message from God. In the peak pandemic season, we couldn't leave our houses, had to stay away from our mosques, and couldn't even perform the Hajj (pilgrimage to Kaaba in Mecca)."

Resilience

All 14 interviewees practised supplications during the illness and believe that these prayers helped them heal. Not only supplications, but also offering daily prayer (Salah /Namaz), praising God, offering God blessings and peace (aṣ-Ṣalāh wa-s-Salām) for Prophet Muhammad, reciting Quran were mentioned as practices that gave strength, courage and hope for healing. The experience of illness sensitized the affected believers to the perception that their faith gave them healing power and comfort.

None of the interviewees formulated a theodicy question, a faith-critical statement or complaint.

Here I would like to quote the following statements of the interviewees as concise examples of religious resilience:

"When the illness makes itself strongly felt and hope for sanctification begins to fade and medications do not prove effective, you seek refuge in God, offer to him for help, and pray to him. I can testify that all these acts are like medicine." (P 7).

"I think supplication gave me healing power." (P 2).

"Supplication helped me a lot." (P 3).

Solidarity

Fear of death, helplessness and loneliness, as well as loss of confidence and hopelessness regarding medical treatment options and efficiency are observed in the statements of all patients. The following statements seem to exemplify such thoughts and feelings:

¹ In the following, the interviewees (respondents) are abbreviated as "P". For detailed data on the respondent cited in each case, see Annex 1.

"In the hospital, we were isolated, we thought about dying, we were on the threshold to the afterlife. We went to the hospital with fear and were not sure if we would ever be able to leave." (B 13).

"Hospitalization calls death to mind. Every day you hear from social media that people are dying from this disease. You say, 'When will it be my turn?'" (P 8).

However, all interviewees shared that the unpleasant and depressing feelings and thoughts during the illness were very often dispelled thanks to the attention of caring and compassionate fellow human beings, trust in God and faith in afterlife, among other things. It should also be noted that the prayers, care and sympathy shown to patients by relatives, friends and acquaintances had the effect of psychological and pastoral support and care. For example, one respondent (P 3) said:

"I shared a story on WhatsApp so that my acquaintances and friends know about my situation and include me in their prayers (...)."

Another interviewee said (P 12):

"In first two days I felt terrible, I thought about death. The words of my relatives calmed me down."

Religiosity Reinforcement

The experience of illness positively influenced the attitude of our respondents towards religiosity.

The following statements testify that the emergency situations reinforce the importance of faith and actions and attitudes (religiosity) born from it. The experience of severe and life-threatening illnesses makes us rethink and perceive the transience of life in the face of eternal life in the sense of Islam. In this context, the interviewees expressed themselves as follows:

"I am cured thank God; I want to hold on to religion more." (P 1).

"The illness strengthened my faith." (P 5; also P 9).

"The experience with the illness led me to the decision that I should be more serious and loyal towards faith." (P 13).

"Before the illness I was a bit frivolous towards religion, afterwards, I took it even more seriously." (P 11, further P 13).

The suffering situation very often causes believers to understand the meaning of life and the meaning of existence from a religious and spiritual point of view. Faith provides a sense of being helped in adversity, defines suffering as transitory and puts it into perspective.

Repentance and Self-Reflection

Without exception, all respondents were remorseful for their lack of acts of worship to a greater or lesser extent. Not only did their lack of religious performance (ibada) make them reflect, but their failure to fulfill their duties to family, neighbors, and other fellow human beings caused them to feel remorseful and derelict in their duties. For example:

"You think this night is the last night, I could and should have done more with my life." (P 1, further P 2- P 14).

"Generally, I repented because of my transgressions and rejoiced because of my good deeds which I should have done more of." (P 11, further P 7; further P 1, P 5, P 7, P 13, P 14).

"I neglected my religious [worship] duties; I should have pursued them more earnestly." (P 13, further P 11).

As can be seen from the above, the interviewees promise themselves to be more attentive to their fellow creatures, as well as to seriously strive to accomplish the good aunts and avoidance of the bad actions and attitudes.

New Knowledge and Consciousness

The following statements of the respondents can be understood in terms of gaining new insights and attaining new awareness. These cognitions and consciousness are also to be understood as experience-based and faith-based gaining of the answers to the questions of meaning. These answers have not only epistemological but also pastoral efficiency in suffering situations.

"In the rest of my life, I will strive to do what is good. Those who experienced this illness gained a new perception of life." (P 4).

"One sees that life is fleeting." (P 1).

"One learns that the world is impermanent; it doesn't matter if we own some things or not. The most important thing is health." (P 10).

"I understood the precious importance of time. I will enjoy my time more consciously." (P 8).

Further Interpretation and Discussion of the Interview Content

General View of the Corona Pandemic

Religious people who have been severely sickened by the Coronavirus, like most people, perceive this disease primarily from a medical scientific perspective. In addition to accepting the medical factual findings, they interpret the pandemic from a religious perspective, adding their theological explanations and conclusions to explain the causes of the pandemic. They hold accountable their personal and overall human lifestyles that would have moral and religious integrity and deficiencies. Hereby, it can be said that the intra-human actions evaluated on the basis of morality and religiosity qualify as cumulative

explanations for the cause of the suffering situation. To bring all that happened in relation to God and His intervention on the worldly life is to be understood as a naturally expected consequence of being a believer.

Here, the physical is related to the non-physical or metaphysical. This makes it clear that this pandemic is not only perceived as a virological and pathological phenomenon. Suppose the origin of the pandemic is due to the artificial creation of the virus in question in a laboratory in China. In that case, it raises the question of whether creating and breeding such pathogens can be used as a weapon. Ultimately, reports were published by the U.S. side that classify the Corona more as an artificially created virus. The FBI assumes that the origin of the Corona pandemic is very likely a possible laboratory incident in Chinese Wuhan. (Klaus, 2023). Thus, this pandemic remains not only a health-scientific question but increases with its social and legal consequences to a legal, ethical and, at the same time, religious question. Some Catholic cardinals as well as personalities of science published an appeal because of the pandemic restrictions under the motto: "Veritas liberabit vos!" In this appeal reads as follows (Veritas, 2020):

"The facts have shown that under the pretext of the Covid 19 epidemic, in many cases inalienable rights of citizens are violated and their fundamental freedoms are disproportionately and unjustifiably restricted, including the right to freedom of religion, freedom of expression and freedom of movement. Public health must not and cannot become an alibi to violate the rights of millions of people around the world, let alone to relieve civil authorities of their duty to act with wisdom for the common good. (...).

"In this way, they [state authorities] want to permanently impose forms of unacceptable restriction of freedom on society, controlling people and monitoring their movements. The imposition of these unfreedom measures is a disturbing prelude to the creation of a world government beyond all control [emphasis by the authors of the appeal]."

The above passages show that the high-ranking representatives of the Catholic Church, while not condemning the causes, legally and morally condemned the state's handling of the pandemic.

During the pandemic, there was no criticism of the religious authorities and agencies regarding the official restrictions in Turkey. The Presidency of Religious Affairs, as the highest authority for religious affairs in Turkey, is an official institution under state supervision, so it has implemented the government's decrees without criticism and worked in harmony and coordination with the Ministry of Health.

It is interesting that our interviewees did not express any cross-thinking opinions about Corona and did not talk about the "powers of darkness" behind this pandemic. However, it should be noted here that there were no interview questions aimed at the "lateral thinking" and "conspiracy theorist" attitudes.

Religions are social and rather experienced in community. This led to the community sites of religious practices and gatherings being considered as the flock of the pandemic and consequently community gatherings were banned. These prohibitions sometimes caused conflicts between believers and state authorities (Dorn, Loch, ve Vitt, 2020; Fritz, 2020). Thus, believers could not and were not allowed to enjoy religious conviviality and fellowship during the difficult times of the pandemic.

The effect of the pandemic on religious attitudes and orientation tends to stand out positively, especially among people who see themselves as religious anyway. Among our respondents, we heard that the quality of their religiosity (intellectual interpretation and practical performance) had increased. We did not ask a question related to faith strengthening or weakening. We asked our interviewees if anything changed in their religious life and thinking during and after Corona disease. All indicated that their religiosity improved and would improve in quality and quantity.

Hillenbrand's (n.d.) study in 2020 Germany asked how the Corona period affected faith. Fifty-six percent of respondents said their faith had remained unchanged. 32 percent said their faith had increased during the pandemic period. Only 11 percent said their faith had weakened. Except for the nondenominational, faith generally strengthened rather than weakened among all religious groups.

The adequate studies in Turkey also show that the Covid-19 changed people's religious, social and attitudes and led to the new perception of life as well as the digitalization of everyday life. The people who had Covid-19 show more sensitivity to religious practice and solidarity with other people. They very often ask questions about the meaning of life (Kalgi, 2021)

Theological Interpretation of the Pandemic and the Role of Religion in Coping with the Crises in the Pandemic Period

Trust in God and faith in him influence the inner/mental world of interpretation regarding the physically (sensually), intellectually and spiritually perceptible and strive to link and relate the sensual and the sensually imperceptible with and to each other. The sensually perceptible is the illness with all its consequences, the sensually imperceptible is anchored in the question "why I am affected with this suffering". The answer to this question forms the faith-oriented interpretation of the illness and shows the way to deal with this suffering. For a believer who is affected by the disease like Coronavirus, the question

is very important, why he as a believer was not protected and spared from this disease by God, in whom he firmly believes, who is also Almighty. This question is more than a theodicy question. Rather, with this question, the believer questions and reflects on her/his own actions and interprets as well as evaluates her/his relationship with God and fellow human beings. This self-reflection leads to the description of one's own relationship to God, fellow human beings and nature. This description is, at the same time, a spiritual locating of the self in the universe, an ontological and functional search for identification, and ultimately a process of finding identity in the face and dialogue of all that exists. The believer does not see illness as punishment, but rather as an opportunity for self-reflection and awakening. Suffering and deprivation can pave the way to closeness to God.

All of our 14 respondents indicated that faith and faith-based actions played a psychically uplifting role in coping with illness and other pandemic-related problems. In addition to defiance and drawing strength from faith, acts of worship such as Quran recitation, salah (the daily prayer), and supplication were invoked by respondents as contingency coping strategies.

Adequate studies commissioned by Bertelsmann Stiftung likewise confirm that during the multifaceted difficult times of the pandemic, people of faith, in particular, exhausted courage, confidence, defiance, and strength from their faith (Dorn, Loch, ve Vitt, 2020; Hillenbrand, Pollack, ve el-Menouar, 2023).

The study by Hillenbrand, Pollack, and el-Menouar, (Hillenbrand, Pollack, ve el-Menouar, 2023) shares the following observation:

"Similarly, religious people attribute greater importance to religion as a crisis coping system: for 83 percent of the highly religious and for 40 percent of the moderately religious, religion was helpful as a social crisis coping system. In contrast, for those with little or no religious commitment, religion was not a significant resource in coping with the corona pandemic - either at the individual or societal level."

Based on the statements of Islamic and Christian religious teachers, another study finds that they are convinced that their faith provides them with support and hope in the multifaceted, vulnerable living environment (Domsel, 2022).

Religiosity is how people of faith establish a relationship with God or something divine and, derived from this, cope with their lives (Oser ve Bucher, 2005). For Murken (1998, 40), religiosity represents *"the attitude of a person who relates the circumstances of his life to a transcendent reality. His religiosity is thereby integrated into the world of beliefs and forms of a particular religion and religious community, whose myths, rites and ideas he shares."*

Religious and moral integrity means getting to know and appreciate not only one's neighbours and others, but also oneself. This self-knowledge can help one to become master of oneself, to gain awareness of one's own deficient state and to become sensitive to one's own problems. In this sense, the individual and collective religiosity that respects the world and the environment has been understood as a way of staying healthy and becoming healthy.

In the course of spiritual self-awareness in the face of the fellow world, the view of man changes from an ego-centered, consumption-oriented and competitive attitude to a solidary, compassionate and universal one. That is, a view develops into an insight that enhances self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-confidence. This, in turn, means contingency coping in terms of religious coping and resilience. The health-making effect of spirituality, religiosity and morality, which is to be regarded as a kind of mental re-education, has been found, for example, in alcoholics who tried to cope with their addiction with the help of religiosity and spirituality (Murken, 1994). Also, thesis by Dilek Yildirim (Yildirim, 2016) documents through the empirically obtained data in Germany that religiosity had a positive effect in the stress management of Muslim migrants.

Self-Criticism, Repentance and Solidarity as Healing Power

Self-reflection qualifies as self-help when one meets oneself with a merciful self-criticism and says: "I have to change something with myself. I am not happy with my consumerism, self-centeredness, and indifference." In particular, the following skill developments (competencies) become visible here: awareness of oneself, attention to oneself without being egoistic, narcissistic, and pessimistic, and will to self-change as self-esteem. In this respect, self-criticism and subsequent repentance can be defined as enabling self-discovery and self-development thus as a competence in problem solving. Such a competence can also be considered socialization, because social responsibility and compassion (as social competencies) can emerge from it. Without exception, all interviewees made direct statements and indirect interpretations on remorse, self-criticism and self-reflection in a religious and moral sense.

The consternation with suffering animates to understand oneself in connection with the fellow creatures and the creator and forms the core of religiosity and religiously defined social ethics. Therefore, it results in an opening to the outside and a solidarity with others. Our interviewees, who endured the suffering of Corona disease, showed themselves to be sensitive to solidarity with fellow human beings. Unfortunately, experience generates compassion and empathy for sufferers.

Family, relatives, and friends were particularly important in solidarity during the pandemic. A study of crisis coping strategies in corona times (in 2020 Germany) noted the importance of family as follows (Dorn, Loch & Vitt, 2020):

“The awareness of vulnerability and mortality also refers to the close environment. In crisis and in times of existential threat, people reflect on their family, next of kin, and best friends and devote time and care to them.”

Digitalization actually promotes the processes of individualization and isolation in society. However, it proved helpful in the pandemic period and even sometimes remained as the only way to communicate with relatives, friends, acquaintances, co-believers, co-members, and sclerotic fellow human beings.

Our subjects said they experienced great emotional support from family and community during the coronavirus illness. Hillenbrand, Pollack, and el-Menouar (Hillenbrand, Pollack, ve el-Menouar, 2023) confirm this, writing as follows: *“Religious people are more embedded in networks of relationships and are more likely to be picked up in crisis situations than nonreligious people.”*

Gaining New Knowledge and Awareness

The interviewees express that with the experience of illness, they developed and still develop more awareness of healthy living, constructive and qualitative use of time, and appreciation of all that they possess (family, friendship, and material and non-material possibilities).

Another finding from the statements of the interviewed corona patients is that they appreciated renewed philosophical insights in the following points: Being, becoming, the vulnerability of human existence, life, death, the good, the bad, impermanence, suffering, and happiness. All these concepts are perceived in the light of faith and interpreted in relation to one's own experience of illness. For example, worldly suffering was put into perspective in the face of eternal life in the afterlife. In this respect, what was lived was seen as temporary and the trial concealed within itself.

One study shows that in Germany, too, about one-third of the respondents thought more about the meaning of life during the coronavirus pandemic (Hillenbrand, Pollack & el-Menouar, 2023).

Two other studies conducted in Germany that address, among other things, coronavirus and religion, find that religion played a contingency-coping role during the pandemic, especially for believers, by providing answers to questions of meaning that were legitimized by the respective faith (Dorn, Loch & Vitt, 2020; Domsel, 2022).

Conclusion

We would like to formulate our conclusions as follows: The pandemic is perceived by the interviewees in a scientifically factual way. But its social causes and consequences are also taken into consideration and the whole thing is interpreted in terms of religion and morality.

The experience of illness creates a certain sensitivity and awareness of self-location and self-reflection about God and creation.

Becoming aware of one's own transience and vulnerability as a human being and of the fragility of familiar securities and social relationships, and of a new view of time and life, are perceptions and thoughts that can be read out of the interviewees' expressions as philosophically definable.

Prayers of supplication, care and sympathy on the part of relatives, friends and acquaintances, expressed towards the patients, achieved the effect of psychological and pastoral support and care.

Situations of distress and unhappiness sensitize religious people to faith and to the actions that are religiously and morally required and encouraged. They promise themselves more attentiveness to fellow creatures and sensitivity to the aspirations of the good aunts and avoidance of the bad.

Being close to death prepares the ground for more attention to religious answers to questions of meaning.

Faith provides a sense of being helped in adversity and defines suffering as transitory, putting it into perspective about eternal life in the afterlife.

Religious people have high resources and abilities to show and experience support in the emergency in the family and community.

Annex 1: Brief Data of the Interviewees (the interviewee is abbreviated with “P”)

P 1: Male, 45 years old, religious staff, education: undergraduate.

P 2: Male, 42 years old, religious education teacher, education: Bachelor’s degree.

P 3: Male, 30 years old, university teacher, education: doctorate degree (Dr.).

P 4: Male, 24 years old, student.

P 5: Male, 48 years old, labourer, education: elementary school diploma.

P 6: Male, 20 years old, student.

P 7: Female, 43 years old, housewife, education: elementary school diploma

P 8: Female, 38 years old, housewife, education: Secondary school diploma

P 9: Male, 17 years old, student of the Koran course, education: high school diploma.

P 10: Male, 43 years old, shopkeeper, education: high school diploma.

P 11: Male, 60 years old, police officer, education: Bachelor’s degree.

P 12: Male, 37 years old, laborer, education: elementary school diploma.

P 13: Male, 45 years old, religious staff, education: undergraduate degree.

P 14: Male, 34 years old, teacher, education: Bachelor’s degree.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

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Polat, M.: Literatür Taraması – MP-AU; Yazma – MP-AU; Eleştirel İnceleme – MP-AU.

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