

CORONAVIRUS INSPIRES GOOD AND BAD

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the way people are responding to coronavirus:

Religion is playing a prominent role in our responses to the health crisis. Bible app downloads are spiking and the Bible on Google Play and App Store has been installed two million times; hardcover editions of the Bible have also skyrocketed.

A minister in England said, "I've never known a time in my life when people are more open to [God's word] than they are now. There are no other distractions. There's no football, there's no sport. There's no entertainment. People have time to hear the Gospel."

Unfortunately, while more people are turning to God, church coffers are taking a nose dive. The *Washington Post* reports that about "a third of all congregations have no savings," and that only 48 percent are able to accept donations online. Smaller churches are being hit the hardest.

With the good comes the bad. Bible sales may be increasing, but so is pornography. The New York *Daily News* finds that "the online porn industry is booming." However, porn stars are complaining that subscription services are too expensive for many. Not to worry, help is on the way. One porn queen said she's "enabled a retention offer so people who can't afford it anymore can stay on for a lesser amount."

Evidently, she didn't qualify for the Payroll Protection Program (if some Democrats learn of her plight, things could change). No matter, the Free Speech Coalition, an advocacy group for the porn industry, has come to the rescue. It has an emergency fund and is currently dishing out the cash.

Not all atheists are so generous. For example, the atheists who run the Chinese Communist government have taken advantage of coronavirus to further oppress religious groups. Uyghurs, an Asian ethnic group of Muslims, are suffering under horrible conditions: one million are living in detention camps. According to a news story posted by Real Clear Politics, "Beijing has also used the pandemic as an excuse to crack down on churches that aren't officially sanctioned by the government." That includes many Catholic churches.

If there is one atheist who has been set back on his heels at this time it is Ricky Gervais. The first season of his show, "After Life," depicted him (playing Tony) grieving the loss of his wife to cancer. The new season, according to CNN, finds him "wallowing in grief," unable to find "comfort from religion."

NME, the British journalism website, is less forgiving. It contends that "coronavirus has essentially squeezed the emotional impact out of *After Life*." In fact, it says, "Ricky Gervais has unwittingly made the worst-timed series in TV history." Indeed, his "fictionalised grief becomes almost trite."

In a time when many are reeling over the effects of the pandemic, Gervais' ordeal seems petty. But as CNN pointed out, the show is "very much in keeping with the writer-producer-star's outspoken atheism and darker, if not irredeemable view of life."

It is never a good time to be an atheist. But now is among the worst.