



CIPRIANI COLLEGE OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

Collapsing Under the Weight of COVID

Recently we've seen on Democrat friendly news depictions of President Joe Biden as the 'Consoler in Chief'. It's a role he seems inordinately good at. Without attempting to delve into the science of communication, he seems able to take large scale trauma and humanize it. He brings it down to the individual experience without diminishing the scale. He reaches out through the universality of grief and establishes that, as grief is shared, both action and healing are enabled. Standing in stark contrast to his predecessor he shows the importance of emotional needs as well as material ones. He shows, as all good leaders have, that people need to know that they are not alone in moments of crisis and doubt. There are times when a hand on the shoulder, a consoling word, an unexpected hug, an authentic expression of personal loss or an unscripted break into emotional song is what a people need to be able to take the next step to recovery.

We have for two years been facing the defining crisis of a generation. It has been huge and scary. Coming on the back of already difficult times, many of us were unprepared because any crisis, personal, national or global, would have been devastating. People have died. Families have been decimated in days. People have lost jobs, income and businesses without any sign of a coming recovery. Response to the pandemic has been heroic in many quarters, requiring huge sacrifice from many. But it has also been, as it was elsewhere, disorganized, confusing, unclear, acrimonious and disheartening. Maybe it's a sign of the times, but every fracture and fissure in the social fabric has been exposed, exploited and qualitatively worsened. Distrust and conspiracy abound. Dialogue and compromise appear nearly impossible. And as the war of words, or lack thereof, continues to intensify, lost is the sheer scale and daily human impact of the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the death rates were alarming for a small nation, but as time has progressed, and more people vaccinated, those rates have fallen. I guess out of a population of 1.4 odd million the falling figures may not appear too bad. But that's small concern to the mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, family and friends, colleagues and workplaces affected. And in this morass of death, a murder of crows flying above our heads, we have to restart the economy, to call people into the public space to, by necessity, risk infection. Fear and uncertainty are the order of the day. We fear the lack of safety and security. We feel distrust for persons in authority. We have little confidence in people's willingness to act responsibly. We have been torn from the symbols and practices within which our collective identities are rooted.

We are adrift in so many ways, in grief, aggrieved, angry, distrusting and disconnected. And as more and more of us buckle under the weight of crisis fatigue and trauma exhaustion, under the responsibility for the lives and livelihoods of ourselves and others and the simultaneous loss and fear of social contact, who will comfort us? Who will console the nation, the people? Who will say that our fears are real, our losses significant and the grief deep and abiding, but still, we will prevail together? Who will help us heal?

We bear so many historical wounds still only partially healed, if at all; slavery, reparations, indentureship, 1970, the lost decade of the 80s, 1990, Caroin 1975, Petrotrin... Can we afford to keep adding on more wounds or will our statesmen and women finally emerge?

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