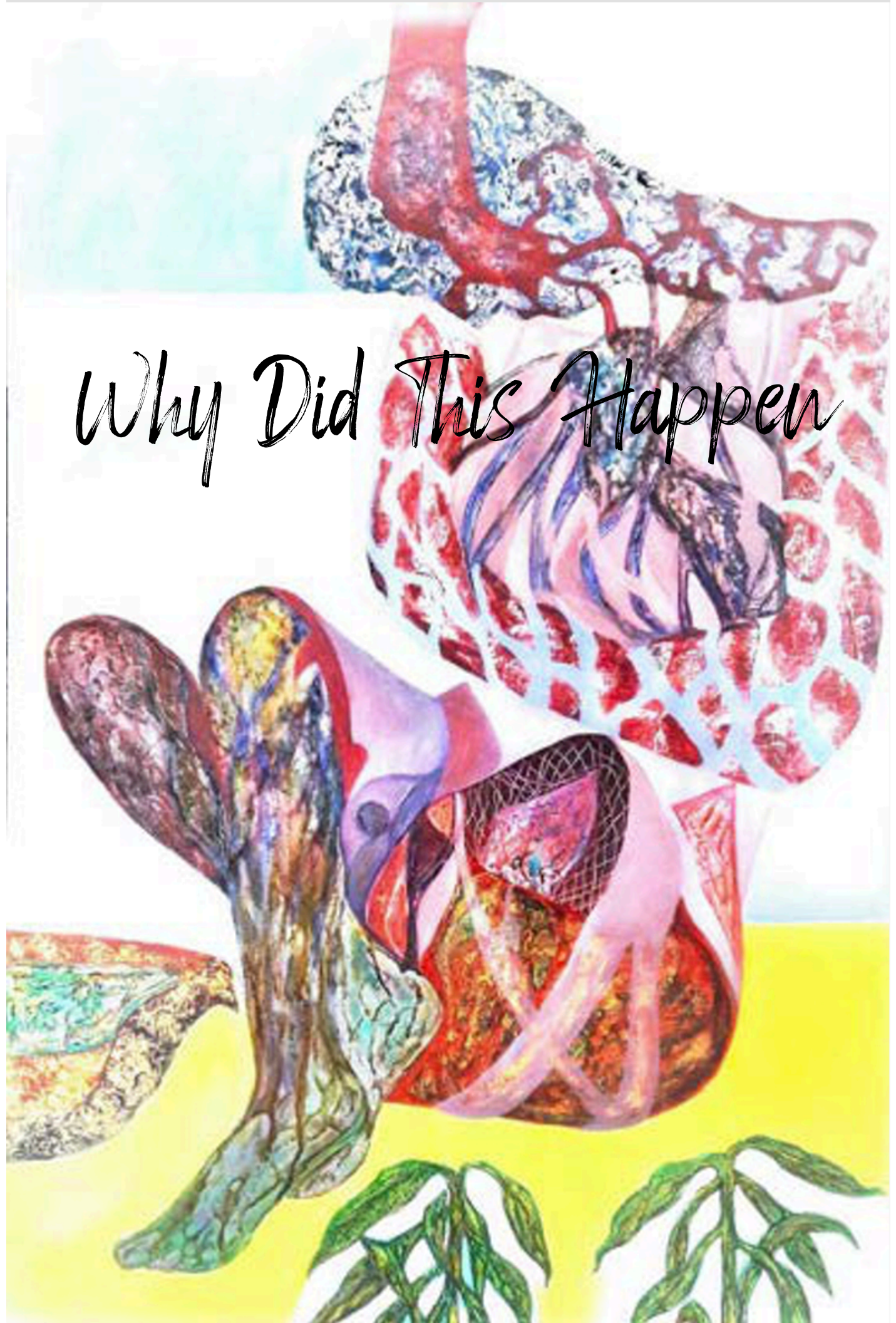


Why Did This Happen



“Why Did this Happen?”
Fr. Benjamin P. Bradshaw, STL

Nobel laureate, Elie Wiesel, never minced words. As the man who coined the term “holocaust” to describe the Shoah, or the Final Solution inflicted upon the Jews by Adolf Hitler, he often acknowledged that he found it virtually impossible to find forgiveness or any “divine meaning” in the deaths of 7 million Jews at the hands of the Third Reich. Adolf Eichmann, Reinhard Hydrich, and the Reich intelligentsia conceived of the plan at the Wannsee Conference (Berlin) in 1942, though the systematic killing of the innocents had been perpetuated by the Nazis long since prior. Wiesel (d.2016), a Jew, lost his entire family at Auschwitz, though he alone survived. In his work *Night*, Wiesel noted: “They [Nazis] are committing the greatest indignity that human beings can inflict on one another: telling people who have suffered excruciating pain and loss that their pain and loss were illusions.” Wiesel admits that for years he simply could not bring himself to concede that a “loving God” could have permitted an event as horrific as the Holocaust, having spent the better part of his life as a college professor (Boston University), writing and speaking on it, in an often frustrated attempt to make sense of this time in his own life and in human history.

Wiesel’s brutal honesty is to be commended. We have all been there. We have all experienced times in our lives wherein we asked, “Where are you God?” or “Why did you permit this tragedy?” As a pastor, I have been with thousands of families in the emotional tar of these questions: the sudden death of a teenager, surviving online bullying, a painful divorce, suicide of a spouse, a false accusation or lawsuit, handling a child addict, or the intensity of loneliness of the elderly or single person. Elie Wiesel’s efforts to inject meaning into tragedy is something we have all found ourselves needing to do, that is, find a narrative to explain the “why” in *why* bad things happen to good people. One thinks of the line of the Salve Regina prayer: “Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.” This COVID19 world seems, at times, vacant of hope to some degree, and even for those who somehow find hope, they are often afraid to keep hoping for fear that tomorrow will bring a new archipelago of horrors and bad news. Add to this our financial and familial stress, and it becomes a perfect storm of woes and foes.

How, then, do we find meaning in the current “virus crisis” in which we find ourselves as a world community? For one thing, we don’t need to borrow trouble by assuming this is all somehow an apocalyptic sign of the end times. Whenever these things occur in human history there are usually no shortage of wing-nuts, often relying more on emotion and less on facts, who attribute things like the Coronavirus to Divine retribution for the sins of humanity. This was seen, for instance, in the words of mayor Ray Nagin (New Orleans) in the post-Katrina days of 2005, who told the city that, “God was clearly mad at the city for not taking care of itself.” Point being, we need to keep this whole thing in a healthy perspective and avoid making an unfortunate situation worse by fear-mongering or yielding to highly emotive speculation. Doing so would only mean we ‘jump from the frying pan into the fire.’ *Este no es bueno.*

We will come through this just fine and exponentially stronger emotionally, financially, and spiritually. The Navy Seals often say, “The only easy day was yesterday!” Boy is that ever true in our current COVID19 malaise. Where is the meaning in this whole mess? It has to come from within, from inside each of us. We have to fight this thing from the inside out. Yes, we

take precautions. Yes, we do social-distancing when needed. But it may well be at the end of the day that loneliness takes a bigger head-count in this crisis than the virus itself. We do well to recall the Marine Corps motto: *Semper Fidelis* (Always Faithful). Nothing good comes from discouragement, and discouragement is never from God. Our hope is, therefore, not that this crisis will one day end, it will. Our hope is that this crisis will one day have meaning.