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## Clocktower, Cholera and Covid19: Script for Television Program Broadcast as "With You in Spirit: Short Messages of Hope and Encouragement From People of Many Faiths and None.

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## **Clocktower, Cholera and Covid 19 tv script**

Good night, My name is Alan Hilliard. I Coordinate the Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy Service at the *Technical University Dublin* and I'm a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin.

Walking through the campus of TU Dublin in Grangegorman these last few weeks has been a rather strange experience. I was processing all the various updates on the status of the Covid-19 virus and the University's response to the virus threat. There was speculation and rumour until we were asked to close class-room contact on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2020.

While processing all this information I was drawn into the past. The Clocktower building in TU Dublin, Grangegorman, was built in 1816. It housed the Dublin Cholera Hospital when the epidemic was at its height in 1832. The large wooden doors of the building bore the most recent names of Cholera victims who died during the night. Relatives called by to see if the names of their loved ones' were among those on that same door that stands there today. I suppose those doors then were the equivalent of today's RIP.IE

Until quite recently we looked from afar thinking that the Covid-19 epidemic would remain in China. Now we are silenced by the speed of its presence in every corner of our efficient, globalised world. Like Covid-19, cholera came from the East. Back then the growth of colonialism expanded Europe's hold on the world. Though Cholera was described as 'a disease of the poor' it was people in search of wealth and power who brought it to European shores. Just as colonialism brought disease, so globalisation and the accompanying speed and frequency of international travel, has brought Covid-19 to most, if not all countries, across the globe.

There were very interesting stages in the containment of the cholera epidemic in the Dublin of 1832. We can learn a lot from this history. Initially many thought that the Cholera Virus was airborne. It took research and time to be certain that it was passed on in contaminated water.

People were understandably scared of the disease and were afraid of contracting it which meant that those who lay in the Clocktower Building in Grangegorman were neglected and forlorn. Following a request from the Archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, a group of women known as the 'Walking Nuns' entered the hospital to care for those who were sick and dying. Taking a

huge risk the women undertook their task with love. They washed, cleaned, fed, and offered emotional and spiritual support to those who were sick or dying. When they left the hospital every day they washed both themselves and their clothes in builders lime and water thus reducing, even eliminating the risk of contagion. Only one of the ladies contracted the disease, from which she recovered, and no one of them died. The 'Walking Nuns' were some of the original sisters who followed the vision of Mary Aikenhead and who are now known as the Irish Sisters of Charity. Members of the order work in the area to this day.

The novelist Milan Kundera wrote in his book *The Art of the Novel*,

*'The spirit of our times...stares into what is now, into a present so all-conquering and so expansive that it pushes the past out of our range of vision, and brings time into one ever present moment'.*

The present is consumed with Covid-19 yet the past has much to teach us. The virus is presently occupying 'one ever present moment'. However, finding how and where an infectious disease comes from and how it is transmitted is critical to remediating it. The development of habitual, clean, and regular practices based on knowledge and common sense saves lives and restores dignity as shown by the 'Walking Nuns' as they tended the infirm in Grangegorman's Clocktower. Such practices and simple methodologies called Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions, are as important today in the face of Covid-19 as they were in the face of Cholera. They are of primary importance until the appropriate vaccinations are found. Each and every person has to take responsibility for these practices 'leaving it to some-one else' is not an option.

Finally, the dignity and respect that society and its institutions must show to those who battle on the front line to care for our own relatives, friends and neighbours requires constant re-evaluation. Ironically enough, in the days of the Cholera epidemic nursing was seen as a profession for the poor and unskilled. It was treated with little respect which contributed to the spread of disease and accompanying hardship among the people.

ENDS 760 WORDS/

Let us pause to pray

Let us bring into our souls those who are sick...may they have the strength of God's healing Spirit.

Let us bring into our souls those who have died...may they be welcomed to God's presence...the place of final healing.

Let us bring into our souls those who are bereaved, who have lost loved ones...may we hold dear to the hope that one day we will support, hug, pray and cry together again.

Let us think of those on the front line... may we find ways to acknowledge their dignity and value in our society.

Heavenly Father, may we unite ourselves to your only Son who underwent death and lay buried in the tomb; that we may rise again in newness of life with him. Amen