

'The choice is in our hands' - Irish environmentalist warns of more pandemics unless action taken

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An Irish environmentalist and priest has warned that humankind needs to 'drastically' change its treatment of the natural world or face more regular pandemics.

Columban priest, Fr Sean McDonagh, said he believes Covid-19 and other recent pandemics are linked to the destruction of the natural world and **biodiversity** loss which is forcing animals together that would normally never come across each other in the wild. The Meath-based Missionary, who is currently in lockdown in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary says that unless things change both in the wild and in our farming practices, the world will be hit by many more pandemics

"In little more than two decades, we have had Covid-19, SARS, MERS, Ebola, HIV, Zika and H1N1 and no-one seems to have made any connection between them and the destruction of the natural world," he said.

*"No-one has mentioned the fact that large-scale **deforestation, habitat degradation, intensive agriculture, trade in species** and climate change all contribute to biodiversity loss and, in the process, facilitate the rise of new pandemics. "For a long time, we have known that viruses and pathogens have leaped from other species to the human population. However, the destruction of biodiversity means that these events are happening much more frequently now than in the past."* He went on: *"Worse still, more deadly pandemics will continue to happen at an even greater rate in the future unless we change our practices and stop colonising every **ecosystem**."*

"Many people believe that the Coronavirus first jumped across to humans who were working at a wet market in Wuhan in China. In these markets animals who would seldom encounter each other in the wild such as civets, live wolf pups and pangolins are crammed together into small cages, often in filthy conditions." "This is an ideal environment in which to incubate diseases that will spill over into the human population. But it's not only in China. Every year, Americans pay to capture, box-up and import hundreds of millions of live animals for agriculture and pet and aquarium uses."

Fr McDonagh also believes we need to look at farming practices which he says can increase the risk of epidemics. "Animals are crammed into living spaces which can become breeding grounds for viral and bacterial **pathogens**. So, we lace their feed with antibiotics which creates the perfect conditions for antibiotic resistant pathogens to develop and thrive.

"We then pay the price in the form of drug-resistant infections. This kind of farming also increases the risk of deadly viral epidemics such as the 2009 H1N1 outbreak that infected 59 million people. The ways humans destroy much of the natural world and engage in factory farming is based on the fallacy that what we do to the natural world will not have a negative impact on human health and well-being.

"Covid-19 tells us this is untrue. Either we need to drastically change our ways of relating to the natural world, or get ready for the next pandemic.

"The choice is in our hands."

In your own notes, list and give brief definitions of the words highlights in **Bold**. Each is commonly associated with McDonagh and his view as an Eco-Theologian.

Questions

1. Briefly investigate the source of this article (both the journalist, Louise Walsh, and the editorial line of the paper)
2. Outline in your own words how Fr McDonagh links the events leading to the outbreak of recent pandemics with how human activities (and food production in particular).
3. Does McDonagh place the blame on individual countries, or on humanity in general? Justify your response with specific quotation from the article.

General Question:

Based on your prior knowledge of the ideas of McDonagh and Vandana Shiva, and on your broader reading in the areas of Politics and Society, do you think that the argument being put forward by McDonagh is justified. In your answer consider the following perspectives:

Economic Growth – The Green Revolution – *Laudato Si* – SDG 12 & 15 – Cycles of Consumption