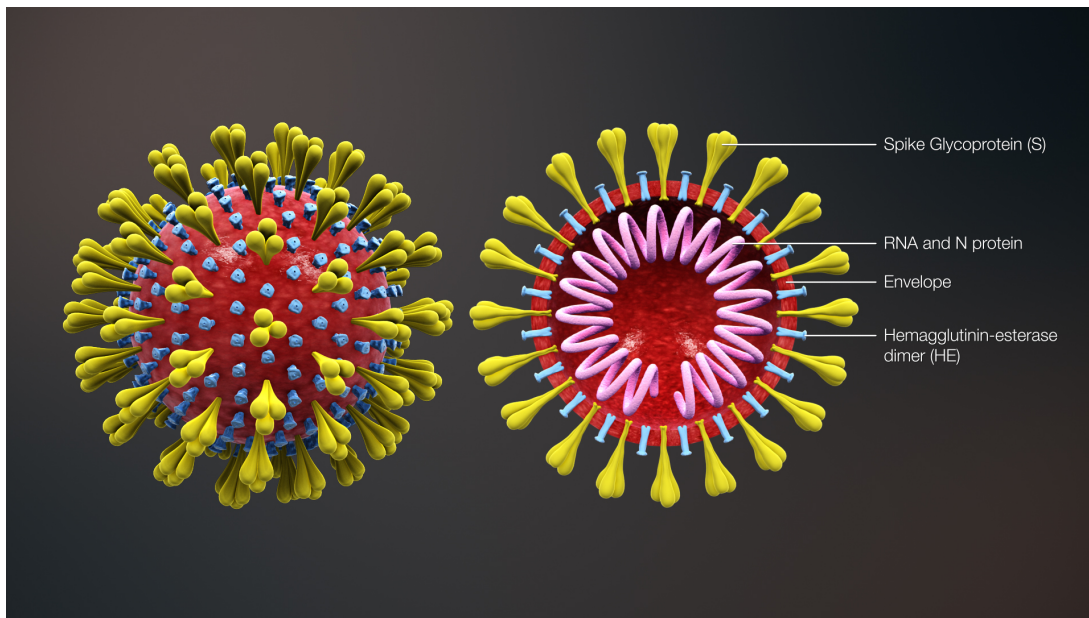


# By God's Grace we will win the COVID-19 race

by **MICHAEL SEVERANCE** • March 17, 2020



**“B**y God's Grace we will win the race.” I love this optimistic expression used by some of my African priest friends in Rome. It is true that only by way of our teamwork with God and earning His Grace that we can triumph over great evil.

In this global crisis, mankind will find medical weapons to slay the COVID-19 dragon and stave off a massive loss of lives and economic collapse. However, this means allowing enough operating space for God, through His Grace, by remaining diligently prayerful while also zealous and creative in our scientific research. We must demonstrate total confidence in reason and total confidence in faith, as argued in Sam Gregg's inspiring book *Reason, Faith and the Struggle for Western Civilization*. Through our faith, we must allow God to do

some of the heavy lifting while developing brilliant biomedical engineering or ask Him to lead our reason to recognize some very ordinary simple solution sitting right in front of us.

While a vaccine is very unlikely to be found in the near future, preventative and therapeutic drugs are easier to develop and might be just around the corner. I actually believe such discoveries will happen in a short time or may be already here. Humanity, after all, is on its knees not begging to be quickly put to death by a killer virus, but that God may lead someone to a breakthrough. We have a massive will to live, as is fundamental to the natural law. Hence a brawny fight and race to the finish began in February. We will find a way.

Am I overly optimistic? Maybe. Spiritually prideful? I certainly hope, I repeat *hope*, that I am not.

I write with both deep theological hope in God's Will and Love. I am also have profound natural hope in human reason, goodness and ingenuity that has been trained so well in free and enterprising markets. The two virtues tango well together. How else can we work toward emergency solutions with serenity, total confidence and joy? We cannot persevere long hours paralyzed in the face of terror. When we freeze up, we are blinded by fear and, worse still, leave no "space for Grace." To be terrorized is as dangerous psychologically as it is spiritually sinful. As my upbeat grandmother would say: "Despair is the devil's snare."

I am also confident because human history has taught us to remain optimistic. The fact is every time our shared humanity has had its back against the wall, good, creative and believing persons lead us to triumph. Polio? *Beat*. Leprosy? *Virtually non-existent*. AIDs? *No longer necessarily terminal*. The coronavirus? *We will smash its crown to pieces*.

In sum, believers in God are also the best hoppers and, in the end, the best discoverers. When meek and humble, persons of faith often find solutions sitting right in front of them.

Let's look at one of one of the greatest medical discoveries of all time, the antibiotic penicillin. Penicillin is a classic example of an "accidental discovery", that is, seen by God's Grace. This happened in 1929 when a young Scottish medical scientist and practicing Christian, **Alexander Fleming**, left for his family vacation. Fleming was a meek, hardworking, and extraordinarily intelligent man of faith. His defect – his untidiness and absentmindedness in the laboratory – turned out to be the Grace through which God acted to save millions of lives.

While experimenting with staph bacteria cultures, he left on holiday. Providentially, Fleming forgot his Petri dishes piled up in a damp corner of the lab. On his return to work, Fleming observed a mold had penetrated an unsealed dish. It produced an odd liquid. In that bacteria culture, no *streptococcus* grew because a natural property excreted by the *Penicillium notatum* mold inhibited it. *Et voilà*, by the Grace of God, an almighty antibiotic with very little, even sloppy human effort was created. Penicillin would be further studied and made into an injectable solution which would eventually dispel some of the most deadly diseases of prior centuries: scarlet fever, pneumonia, meningitis, and syphilis. This "wonder drug" became the most important pharmacological discovery to date. Later, Fleming was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Medicine, was knighted in Buckingham Palace, and entombed at St. Paul's cathedral among the great heroes of the United Kingdom.

Fleming was said to be a trusting man of God, who loved his family didn't worry too much about his career. He was modest and, therefore, primed to receive God's Grace.

Today, there is another simple and meek researcher from France who might be the next Alexander Fleming. His name is **Prof. Didier Raoult**, a biologist specializing in infectious diseases at the

University of Aix-Marseille.

With two other French scientists, early this month Raoult signed off on most humble findings about the effects of a very ordinary and already widely used pharmacological substance called “chloroquine phosphate” to prevent and treat the corona virus. His team’s research was presented in the **International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents**, not exactly the *Time Magazine* of scientific journals, and with a very brief text. Outside of France, it has received little or no media attention.

What Raoult claims is that some colleagues in his research community will not accept his proposition because chloroquine phosphate already exists on the mass market and is even extremely economical. But because of their vanity and pride, **according to Raoult**, they do not see what God’s Grace surely has put right in front of their eyes but cannot see. While not striving to be the next genial Nobel Prize winner, Raoult says all we have to is “reposition” this already existing drug that has shared therapeutic and preventative benefits to novel coronavirus infections.

With his team, Raoult reports:

*A movement to reposition drugs has been initiated in recent years. In this strategy, it is important to use drugs that have been proven to be harmless and whose pharmacokinetics and optimal dosage are well known. In the current episode of novel coronavirus...we find a spectacular example of possible repositioning of drugs, particularly chloroquine....found to be effective in preventing replication of this virus.*

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An interesting correlation that the French researcher has made is those who have been already taking chloroquine phosphate drugs for malaria prevention and treatment in Africa are highly resistant to developing deadly COVID-19 symptoms. This is surely why a nation like Ghana, where malaria is commonly medicated with cheap chloroquine phosphate tablets, is not even among the 50 most contagious countries in the world.

What will become of Raoult's studies? We will soon find out.

Meanwhile, in Rome a military medical officer and friend of mine confirmed Italian hospitals are already experimenting with chloroquine phosphate since last week yet "not always with optimal results." Even so, he said we must pray and be patient, since some results are skewed by patients who are well beyond health recovering points. The good news is that some humble Italian medical professionals are open to God's Grace and have inspired Paris's most prestigious hospital to **do the same**, despite Raoult's detractors.

*Image: [Wikicommons](#)*



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