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May 5, 2020: The National Day of Prayer for the Coronavirus

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Title: The National Day of Prayer for the Coronavirus

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5/5/2020—Three weeks ago, there was a national day of prayer for victims of the virus. The Proclamation was issued on Saturday, March 14, right after President Trump's issuance of an national emergency declaration. You could say that it was at that moment that the President finally realized how serious the virus was. Was there ever a proclamation taken less seriously? It was a busy time. Friday was the last time I would meet my classes in person. That Monday I began to teach to an empty classroom with my stuffed animals. The world has changed quite a lot for everyone in these past three weeks. As of this morning, there have been over 300,000 cases and over 8000 deaths attributed to COVID-19. So, maybe I overlooked the national day of prayer because I was so distracted. But, until yesterday, I did not know such a thing had happened. I only found out because of a snarky tweet by Richard Dawkins, pointing out that deaths only began to climb right after the Day of Prayer. Here we have the real proof that God is Dead. This invocation was a perfect example of what is called in law, ceremonial deism. This is a reference to God that no one takes seriously as a theological expression. No one expected anything from God. No one thought God had anything to do with the virus. My column this week is about the virus's meaning. And I suggest three possibilities. One is materialism—the virus doesn't mean anything because there is no such thing as ultimately meaning anything. The universe is random forces and matter. The second is a new view of nature as alive. The virus is part of nature's story. Maybe the virus is a natural feedback loop preventing temperature rises. The third is the traditional monotheistic view. But what would that be? Something this stupendous would have to be the work of God. Jonathan Rosenblum points out that this viruses that jump from animals to humans could be a divine "hint" that we are losing our humanity. That kind of thinking is a still-functioning monotheism. But, mostly, we invoke God just to say we will be OK. This is not nothing, but it is close.