Christians' and Muslims' Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Christians' and Muslims' Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria:

Battling the Unknown

Edited by

Afis Ayinde Oladosu, Abdulrazaq Kilani and Samuel Okanlawon

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PREFACE

The idea that informed the publication of this book was birthed late in the year 2020, when the whole world was still grappling with the fatalities and disruptions that resulted from the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic. We then discovered that, while governments across the world were battling with how to curtail the spread of the disease, adherents of Christianity and Islam (the clergy and the laity) exhibited extremely discordant postures and positions on government policies and regulations in this regard. One of such policies that led to disquiet in religious circles was the closure of places of worship (churches and mosques) across the country. The policy was seen by a large section of Christian and Muslim worshippers as a subtle declaration of war by the State (the secular) against God (the Sacred).

But beyond the rituals and the necessity to worship the divine during the pandemic, Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, as was the case globally, equally confronted other challenges, most of which exposed the gap between government and the governed. COVID-19 equally and, ironically too, unleashed the citizen's ability and potential to devise new strategies of survival in extremely grim and difficult circumstances. Close to thirty papers were submitted for consideration consequent upon the call for papers, out of which only fourteen have been included in this book. To ensure readability, the entries have been arranged thematically.

The different scholars who contributed to this volume come from different tertiary institutions in Nigeria and are of different areas of specialisation within the broad discipline of the Arts and Humanities. In addition, the contributors are not only teachers of Islam and Christianity, but they are also practising Muslims and Christians. Thus, they understand the intersection of religion with public life and its implications on issues of good governance. This book will therefore be a good addition to existing bibliography in the field. And the papers are well researched to show the responses of religious persons to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 negatively affected worship of the divine by adherents of Christianity and Islam across the world. In Nigeria, there was a near-total cessation of religious activities even as the socio-economic life of the citizenry witnessed a huge downturn. A few Christian and Muslim academics later came together to appraise the responses of Christians and Muslims in the country to the pandemic. Using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, they explored the impacts of the pandemic on sacred spaces and rituals even as they re-contextualized the dialectics and trajectories in Christians and Muslims' practices during the period. The authors' systematic engagement with the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic also reveals the various coping and survival strategies that Christians and Muslims deployed in order to survive the pandemic without losing or compromising their sense of the religious.

In the first section, contributors to this volume attempted the eclectic theorisation and historicisation of the problematic of pandemics from a perspective that goes beyond Christianity and Islam. Beginning with Beyond COVID-19: Centering and Decentring Religion and Faith in the Sacred in Africa by Afis Ayinde Oladosu, other perspectives in this section include COVID-19 and Africa's Indigenous Knowledge System by Ademola Lukman Lawal, Pandemics in the Bible and Church History by Vincent A. Olusakin, Reason and Revelation; Christianity and Science by John Clerk Koko, and The Idea of Pandemic in Islamic Thought by Suberu Ibrahim. In section two, the book engaged the arguments and the contestations, both theoretical and practical, that followed the closure of churches and mosques during the lockdown. While the paper titled Worshipping God in the Virtual: Digital Piety among African Christians during the COVID-19 Pandemic by Samuel Okanlawon explored the strategies deployed by Christians to maintain and sustain the worship of God during the lockdown. AbdulHameed Badmas Yusuf provided insights into how Muslims negotiated the "Divine" during the outbreak of the global pandemic. The third paper in this section by Taiwo Mashood Salisu and Uthman Okanlawon Siddiq provided data, both theoretical and practical, on how, for the first time in the past century, Muslims observed the al-Fitr and al-Adha festivals under lockdown. Themed COVID-19

Pandemic – Gendering a Global Crisis, section three explored the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and gender in Nigeria. The essays by Olúségun Peter Ọ̀ḳẹ́, titled, This Should Not Happen in the Church!- Rape and Social Insecurity During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria, Muslim Women and Psycho-Spiritual Health during the Global Pandemic by Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman, and Muslim Women and Survival Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Southwest Nigeria by Habibat Oladosu-Uthman provided insight into socio-cultural, psycho-spiritual and economic issues that confronted women consequent upon the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Section four is themed The Clergy, COVID-19 and the Phenomenon of the New Normal. Papers in this section cast a fresh look at the past as a premise for their contemplation of the future through a review of how the clergy performed their roles during the pandemic, the youths and the matters arising from the challenges confronting humanity today, which is often referred to as the age of the new normal. It is to the exploration of these issues that Abdulrazaq Kilani's Imamship in Theory and Practice, Abdul-Fatah Kola Makinde's Muslim Youth, Global Pandemic and Burden of Faith, and Rafiu Adebayo's On the New Normal in Islamic Thought are dedicated. Whereas entries in this volume may not be exhaustive of the panoply of issues that branched out of the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the perspectives that they provided are without doubt some of the most critical in humanity's effort to make sense of the present preparatory to the future. In other words, since the COVID-19 pandemic was not the first to be witnessed by humankind, hardly can it be controverted that it would not likely be the last. Insights offered by contributors to this volume would likely be useful now and in the foreseeable future. It is exactly from this perspective that the contributions that this book has made to scholarship could be indexed. The book is a collection of religious-ideological responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. It also mirrors the dichotomy between the secular and sacred.

The book will be a good read for the practitioners and adherents of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria and globally. For those who desire to understand the symbiotic interactions between religion and society particularly within context of global pandemics, this is the book to read.

SECTION ONE:

THEORISING AND HISTORICISING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

CHAPTER 1

BEYOND COVID-19:
CENTRING AND DECENTRING RELIGION AND FAITH IN THE SACRED IN AFRICA

AFIS AYINDE OLADOSU

**Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria.**

From a perspective that is both hermeneutic and doctrinal, this paper explores the problematics that attended the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria, particularly as it relates to arguments over the necessity or otherwise of faith in the sacred. With an introduction that rereads contemporary discourses on the *raison d'être* of religion and how the outbreak of COVID-19 complicates the practice of faith in the age of modernity. The paper further situates its discourse in-between that binary in which, on the one hand, the Sacred is negated, and on the other, it is "centred". The paper identifies three main trajectories with reference to the whole idea of the Sacred during the pandemic: the faithful, the faithless and the subject-in-between.

Introduction

Contrary to the popular notion that the more modern the world becomes, the more irreligious or faithless it is, trends in the greater part of the 20th century up to the beginning of the 21st century have shown that r7eligion has continued to enjoy a very important position in the affairs of the world and mainly for the most egregious reasons. That the problematic of religion exemplified by belief in God and its various equivalences, registers such as faith, worship, death, divinity and eschatology is central to contemporary life became particularly evident at the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020. In the midst of the dysfunctionality, the fatalities and the large-scale disruptions caused by the disease to

human life across the world,[1] belief in the sacred became a redoubtable factor pleaded by some adherents of Christianity and Islam for their rejection of efforts by governments in parts of Africa to combat the disease. Ironically, however, belief in the Sacred was also invoked by others as evidence in support of global initiatives that targeted the curtailment of the disease. Thus, while infectious disease experts busied themselves during the period with the application of COVID-19 protocols recommended by the World Health Organization[2], imams and pastors in parts of the continent became "epidemiologists-at-large" whose task consisted of counselling their followers not only on how best to stop the spread of the disease but, perhaps more importantly, on how to prevent the "death" and the "disappearance" of the sacred from the Africa milieu. Imams and pastors consequently devised new ways by which religious rituals and practices may be carried out even while most cities and villages across the continent were under lockdown.[3]

In other words, the outbreak of COVID-19 global pandemic in Africa in the year 2020 figured the sacred within a binary, in-between two oppositional discourses. The first belonged to those who held the notion that their world remained firmly under the control of the sacred; that the African continent essayed a landscape where religion, as had been the case in the pre-COVID-19 era, remained the founding illusion, the grundnorm, the doxa and the reality for Africans. The second figured the continent in a new phase in its experience of faith where sacerdotal powers hitherto

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[1]As at 3 December 2021, the total number of people that were infected by the COVID-19 virus stood at 263, 563,622 out of which there have been 5, 232, 562 fatalities across the world. For more on country estimates globally see: WHO-WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19 Dashboard) accessed from: https://covid19.who.int/, 6 December, 2021. For an analysis of the impacts of the pandemic on the world, see: Philani Mthembu: "The Global COVID-19 Pandemic: The Black Swan of 2020" in *Spotlight On Africa: Mapping geopolitical Trends* for Quarter One 2020 in *Institute of Global Dialogue* 2020

[2] WHO COVID-19 preparedness and response progress report 1 FEBRUARY TO 30 JUNE 2020, World Health Organization (Jan. 1, 2020) accessed today 30 July 2020

[3] For more on this, see: Ayoob Sharif and Amir Reza Khavarian-Garmsir: "The COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on cities and major lessons for urban planning, design, and management" in *Science of the Environment*Vol. 749 (December 2020) 14291

wielded by those who "speak in the name of God"[4] became ceded to
authorities in control of, in line with Dustin Byrd, the "post-secular
societies"[5] of the 21st century. What this paper does, therefore, is map
these discussions on to the dominant notions of and about religion and
religiosities in large parts of the continent, particularly during the COVID-
19 pandemic. The purpose is to discover how discourses around and about
the COVID-19 global pandemic functioned either in subverting the
slippery category of faith or in strengthening same by bringing religion
"back" to the present. The paper begins with a review of discourses whose
politics consists of decentring religion, exposing its slippages and
mirroring its privations. It proceeds from there to account for the
counterfoil, the continued popularity of religion in large parts of the
continent. Using this as premise, the paper problematises notions of faith
relative to the global pandemic along two axes – the faithful and the
faithless.

Religion – Negating the Sacred

Long before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, arguments that
seek to negate the sacred, view religion with disfavour and work towards
the deconstruction of the logocentric basis of popular beliefs, the
dismantling of the perceived iconoclasm of Judae-Muslim hermeneutics
and the exposure of the perceived slippages in the orality-aurality of
religions, cultures and belief systems are as antipodean and complimentary
as they can possibly be. Here, Jurgen Habermas' perspectives are
extremely relevant. In his analyses of the parameters, the fundamentals
and the theories that undergird the whole idea of secularism and what had
been projected as the inevitable hegemony of global secularity,

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[4] This is paraphrasing Khaled Abou El-Fadl's usage. For the dialectics that this
entails in Islamic world see: Khaled Abou El-Fadl: *Speaking in God's Name:
Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (England, Oneworld Publications, 2001)
[5] Dustin J. Byrd: "Professing Islam in a Post-Secular Society" in *Islam in a Post-
Secular Society Religion, Secularity and the Antagonism of Recalcitrant Faith*
(Netherlands: E. J Brill, 2016) p. 6: On the origin of secularism and the dialectics
in its philosophies, see: Nikki R. Keddie: "Secularism & Its Discontents" in
Daedalus, Vol. 132, No. 3, (Summer, 2003), pp. 14-30; for its acceptance and/or
rejection in the Muslim world, see: Vali Nasr: 'Lessons from the Muslim World' in
Daedalus, Vol. 132, No. 3, (Summer, 2003), pp. 67-72

Habermas[6], following the path trodden by a coterie of 20th century Euro-American philosophers and thinkers such as Karl Marx, Fredrick Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Max Weber[7], argued that religion had reached its end; that notions of the sacred is, in line with Erkan Toğuşlu, "passé"[8], especially in the "thoroughly secularized world"[9] in which humans live today. The suzerainty of faith had come to an end, he argued, due to religion's inability to sustain its theological claims and traditional roles within the conditions of secular modernity.[10]

The "conditions" of secular modernity hinted at by Habermas feature three basic arguments. The first relates to the incompatibility of the religious tradition, rooted as it is in a theocentric view of the world, with the pillars of secularism that are anchored around freedom of belief, scientific and technological advancement, logical positivism and anthropocentrism. Since secularism features in the binary (relative to spiritualism), not as an inferior but a superior, the ultimate negation of the religion, it is thought, would occur as an effect the cause of which nests in the latter. In other words, religion or faith in the sacred is believed to be enfeebled by its own vulnerability; it is destined to self-destruct in response to those elements that are generic to it.

Habermas' second argument in favour of the ultimate end of religion is premised upon the bifurcation by the Church of the spheres of social interactions into two – the private and the public. This argument hacks back to the classical Christian era during which followers of Jesus Christ came face to face with the necessity to define the relationship between religion and governance on the one hand and between the former and the society on the other. Followers of Jesus Christ wanted to know the extent to which they could recognise and ultimately submit to earthly authorities. Cognizant of their spiritual treachery and frailties, Jesus responded by saying, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's".[11] This eventually became the theological basis for

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[6] I depended, for my discussions of Jürgen Habermas and the whole problematic of post-secularity, on the insightful work cited above by Dustin Byrd. See, Byrd *Islam in a Post-Secular* p. 6

[7] On the perspectives of these thinkers and philosophers to religion etc see ibid

[8] EErkanToğuşlu and Johan Leman: Modern Islamic Thinking and Activism: Dynamics in the West and in the Middle East (Leuven University Press,2014), p. 91-100

[9] Byrd *Islam in a Post-Secular* p. 3

[10] Ibid p. 6

[11] 110 New Testament, Luke,

the separation between the Church and the State[12] and the consequent placement of governance, economy, and national institutions under the jurisdiction of the laity. The abdication of the public sphere by Christianity to secular authorities, Habermas and other secularists argued,[13] therefore meant divinity became inferior to secularity; belief came under the sovereignty of disbelief; the fortress of religion and faith had given way to impiety.

Habermas' major argument in favour of secularity, however, relates to the prosperity and advancement that have resulted from industrialisation of Western societies. This is evidenced in the availability of consumer goods, improved healthcare services, reduction in diseases and increase in lifespan and healthy living. In other words, the contraction of existential and material angst and the general improvement in the life patterns and welfare of humankind have all made religion trite and "superfluous to the average individual".[14] Thus,

> where God once provided for the people, the markets provide; where once Christians prayed for their "daily bread," now the bread factories see to it that it's available. The scarcity of necessities and the uncertainty of life, which was the precondition for such religious faith, no longer exist for most people living in advanced industrial societies. Man (now) provides where God once did, and thus religion is unnecessary.[15]

While the above discussions relate in large parts to the supposed failure of religion to "fulfil its promises" of engendering terrestrial and celestial prosperity for humanity as a whole, anti-religious fervours had gained traction before the outbreak of coronavirus due, in part, to what is thought to be the culpability of religion in the incidences of violence and deaths being perpetrated by "religious" extremists all around the world. From Nigeria to Somalia and from Uganda to Afghanistan, religious zealots have sought to impose their notions of truth and faith onto the

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[12] On the separation between Church and State, see, among many others: *Hamburger, Philip.Separation of Church and State. (Harvard, Harvard University Press.2009); for a critical perspective, see:* Kevin Shilbrack "what isn't religion?" in *The Journal of Religion* Vol. 93, No. 3 (July 2013), pp. 291-318

[13] Byrd *Islam in a Post-Secular* p. 6

[14] ibid

[15] Jürgen Habermas, Europe: The Faltering Project (Malden, ma: Polity Press, 2009), 60, cited by Byrd, ibid

world by whatever violent means possible. [16] This has led to the representation of religion as anarchic, the perpetration of acts of aggression against the peace-loving majority who identify with this religion and has incentivised the production of extremely negative texts and materials such as that of Sam Harris[17] that portray both the sacred and all religions as abhorrent, obnoxious and highly unfit for contemporary life.

In presenting an extremely uncharitable view of religion, Sam used the unfortunate event of September 11, 2001, as a basis. He says:

> There seems… to be a problem with some of our most cherished beliefs about the world: they are leading us, inexorably, to kill one another. A glance at history, or at the pages of any newspaper, reveals that ideas which divide one group of human beings from another, only to unite them in slaughter, generally have their roots in religion. It seems that if our species ever eradicates itself through war, it will not be because it was written in the stars but because it was written in our books; it is what we do with words like "God" and "paradise" and "sin" in the present that will determine our future… There is no doubt that these developments mark the terminal phase of our credulity. Words like "God" and "Allah" must go the way of "Apollo" and "Baal," or they will unmake our world".[18]

Sam's work, written in a patently querulous and tempestuous tone that is reminiscent of the provocative discourses of the medieval Arab-Muslim philosopher and thinker, Abul Alaa al-Maʿarī[19] (d. 1065), is partly a lamentation of the loss of reason in the age of terror; an age where supremacist and exclusivist proclamations and posturing of the overly-religious now threaten peace and harmony. His book appeared to have anticipated Charles Dawkins, whose text also questions the necessity for religion in the contemporary period. He goes further to argue that all notions of and about the existence of God are false and that to hold a contrary opinion is to suffer delusion.[20]

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[16] On these and their impacts of statehood particularly in Africa, see, Oladosu A. A: "The Loyal, the Disloyal and the Subject In-Between" in *Plural Loyalties in a Modernizing State* (ed.) F.A Adesanoye (Ibadan, NAL, 2019)

[17] Sam Harris: *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004)

[18] Harris, 2004, 13-14

[19] For ambiguities and incredulities in Al-Maari's philosophy, see: Sharrarah, Abdul Latif: *Abul Alaa al-Maari* – DirasahMukhtarah (Bayrut, Dar al-Kitab al-Alami, 1990)

[20] Richard Dawkins: (2006): *The God of Delusion* (London: Bantam House), p.317

Religion: Re-Centring the Decentred

Despite the above discourses that portray religion as abhorrent, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the notion that belief in God and the worship of the sacred remain unarguably the most dominant force across the world today, particularly in Africa. Thus, the questions remain urgent – exactly what power lies behind the quest for and belief in the sacred and how might we explain this unceasing desire among humans to be religious, to be seen as religious? What force impels humans to search for or lust after the ethereal and the celestial even as they appear sublunary and fated to the temporal, the terrestrial? These questions – so ancient and yet current in these difficult times – have continued to haunt almost all inquiries into the slippery terrain where all religions, particularly the Abrahamic faiths, have found large adherents.

Efforts to provide adequate responses to the above questions and, through that, offer appropriate explanations for the facticity of religious experience by pre- and early modern philosophers and thinkers across disciplines and specialisations have featured the cosmological, the ontological and the teleological arguments[21] which take cognisance of the welter of complexities and intricacies in the organisation, structure and function of entities in the cosmos in support of the necessity for religion and the presence of a divine power that superintends events in the cosmos. Like a stanchion, Pike's phenomenological argument that constructs religion and faith in God as categorical imperatives are extremely relevant. He says:

> …God is located in that place within the body where one normally experiences oneself to be. …the spiritual sensations involved are akin to ordinary auditory and olfactory perceptions as well as to ordinary perceptions of heat. They do not include sensations akin to those associated with inside or outside touch or to those connected with taste.[22]

In other words, faith in God that circumscribes almost all belief systems and religion gestures towards the asomatous and the supernal. Often beyond description, religious experience lends itself not to scientific enquiries though, when properly understood, it abuts and encourages rational inquiry; it promotes the exploration of the physical world while it

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[21] For more on the teleological argument, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/teleological-arguments/ accessed today, 25th of September, 2020.

[22] On Pike, see: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology-religion/ accessed today, 25 September, 2020

stands at a remove from same. In a report in *Madārik al-Sālikīn* by DhūNūn, cited by Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jawzī, the medieval Muslim polymath once encountered an interlocutor who asked as follows: "By what did you come to know your Lord?"[23] DhūNūn responded thus: "I know Him, my Lord, by my Lord, the Almighty; were it not for my Lord, I would not and would never have known Him, my Lord."[24] Here, DhūNūn strove to communicate the ordinarily incommunicable, the mystical, using words that raise the bar through the repetitive, as if in a litany, and rhythmical conjuration of the word "Lord". Read against Pike cited above, the question "How do you know your Lord?" posed to DhūNūn could very well have been answered had the latter posted a riposte such as this "where and how else could I find my Lord?"

Taken together, for what they are, as a spiritual-theological discourse, it becomes axiomatic that the drive or desire to be religious is usually located in and partakes of the Self. It is in the latterthat space *qua* place where the "*id*, the ego and the super-ego"[25] are located, that the sacred resides. The Self is thus the actor and the acted upon. It is resultant of its connection with the Other, the Almighty, that it derives existence and validity. Without that connection, it becomes invalid; it lacks agency and identity. The awareness and affirmation of the existence of God as the Ultimate Reality and humanity's preparedness to do His bidding, that have made religion an inimitable phenomenon across times and climes.

Thus, while humans, the "religious", may commit atrocities and in fact engage in acts that call their faith to question, hardly are such events valid and universal enough as evidence by which religion may be dismissed in its entirety. Put differently, despite its inadequacies, including aspects of its history that are vicious and abhorrent, "religion as a human phenomenon contains within themselves the accumulation of human wisdom, experiences, protests, and thoughts which cannot be easily discarded without vacating much of human knowledge and abandoning the cause of those who, in their suffering, took refuge in the comforting arms

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[23] For more on this See: Ibn Qayyim: MadarikSalikin in https://www.ahlalhdeeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=34314 accessed 22nd September, 2020.

[24] ibid

[25]*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIX (1923–26) The Ego and the Id and Other Works Strachey, James., Freud, Anna, 1895–1982, Rothgeb, Carrie Lee, Richards, Angela., (Scientific Literature Corporation. London: (1978, Hogarth Press). p. 19.*

of its absolutes".[26] In other words, that religion circumscribes human life today as it has always done across times and climes is a pointer to the fact that "there is either (1) some persistent longing for something other than what-is-the-case (the world as it is) and (2) that religion still provides something to mankind that the secular world has yet to discover.[27]

The attraction that Africans find in religion, however, appears deeper than ordinarily imagined. This has been hinted at by Steven Reiss in his recent report on why people across cultures and civilisations become religious and more. According to him, the religious instinct in humankind is driven by their desire to assuage sixteen different stimuli. These, among others, include "curiosity, acceptance, family, honour, idealism, independence, power, romance, social contact, status, tranquillity and vengeance". [28] Earthy and extremely mundane as some of these stimuli appear, Reiss' propositions play into the general notion in parts of the continent that, unlike the industrialised world where good governance guarantees the poor access to daily bread, affiliation to particular religious groups usually creates pathways to scarce socio-economic opportunities particularly in states experiencing economic challenges. The popular notion among the poor in Africa is that it is only in the altar of the sacred that the self, in line with Michel Foucault,[29] may be "cared" for; it is only in the churches and the mosques that their "daily bread" could be guaranteed.

One other factor that innervates religiosities in large parts of Africa concerns the ways by which religion functions as a tool in identity formation. To be "religious" strengthens Africans' notion of the self and other; to be Christian in Nigeria is to belong to the body of Christ; to be Muslim is to "identify with the community",[30] to belong to "the universal *Umma*, the indefectible and charismatic community of Prophet

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[26]*The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1978), 54.

[27] See Habermas' discussion of Max Frisch's funeral in St. Peter's Church in Zürich. Jürgen Habermas, An Awareness of What's Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age (Mal-den, ma: Polity Press, 2011), 15–16.

[28] Steven Reiss: *The 16 Strivings for God: The New Psychology of Religious Experiences* (Mercer University Press, 2015)

[29] Michel Foucault. This is paraphrasing Foucault's work titled: History of Sexuality

[30] Oladosu Afis "Islam and Political Renaissance in Contemporary Africa" in *Palmgrave Handbook of Islam in Africa* (ed) F. Ngom et all (Palmgrave, 2020) p. 599-618

Muhammad". [31] But affiliation to a religious community in Africa is usually not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means toward nobler and higher ends; it is a weapon with which "certain social and political (sometimes overtly political) agendas"[32] can be achieved. In predominantly religious (Christian and Muslim) parts of continental Africa, "political aspirations are articulated in religious terms…"[33] Islam and Christianity are usually deployed, in line with the distinguished French scholar, Maxime Rodinson, as "ideologiemobilisatrice" [34] – an ideology that facilitates social and political mobilisation. This has led to the "Shariatization" and the Christianisation of public life. In fact, hardly is there an aspect of African life, including such extremely mundane issues as the provision of electricity for African neighbourhoods,[35] that is free of the sacred or the spiritual. The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic brought the above discussions into sharper focus across the continent.

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[31] H. K. Detlev, "The Problem of Defining Islam and Modern Accentuations" *Islamic Studies*, 16, 3 (1977), 217-281.

[32] Amit Pandya: "Faith, Justice, and Violence: Islam in Political Context" in FROM THE REPORT *Islam and Politics: Renewal and Resistance in the Muslim World* p.5-6

[33] ibid

[34] Cited by Bassam Tibi in: Bassam Tibi, 'The Return of the Sacred to Politics as a Constitutional Law: The Case of the Shari'atization of Politics in Islamic Civilization',*Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 115 (2008), 107.

[35] Relevant here is an event that happened on the 14th of August, 2020, in the ever-bustling city of Lagos, Nigeria. A group of worshippers gathered together in order to seek divine intervention on an existential problem confronting their neighbourhood. Long before that day, residents of Ikota suburb in the city had endured constant lack of electricity supply due to incessant fault in the transformer that supplied the community with power. Thus, a churchly group led by a pastor therefore decided to seek recourse to the sacred based on the belief that certain principalities and agents of Beelzebub were responsible for constant faults those transformers had suffered before then. The fortification of an apparatus that reduces and increases the voltage of alternating current with prayers became, for those men of faith, an opportunity for the affirmation of belief in the sacred..On this event see: https://www.pulse.ng/news/metro/residents-pray-against-faulty-transformers/4bpykn1 dated 14th August 2020.

Being Faithful During the Pandemic

Two major responses relative to the curtailment measures put in place by African states against the spread of the virus were discernible across the continent. Reminiscent of the American experience, [36] the responses featured rejection and cooperation. Africans who rejected lockdown measures put in place by African states during the pandemic were of the opinion that the decision constituted an infraction of their fundamental human rights, particularly freedom of movement and worship. In fact, some even went further to say that shutting churches and mosques down were tantamount to shutting hospitals down.[37]Another popular pastor in Nigeria, Pastor Enoch Adeboye, was said to have declared in front of thousands of his congregation during the COVID-19 outbreak saying: "As long as you are in the secret place of the Most-High no virus will come near you".[38] Thus, to be "religious" during the pandemic in parts of Africa

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[36] Americans suffered the highest number of infections and fatalities from the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020. This resulted largely from the refusal of the population to observe the protocols put in place during the period to curtail the diseases include wearing of masks, avoidance of large congregations and social distancing. The trend was led by the American President, Donald Trump who refused to wear mask until late September of the year when he became infected with the virus. Torn between liberty and safety, followers of the conservative spectrum opted for the latter. For critical engagement with Americans' response to COVID-19 See" Elizabeth Cobbs: "Americans Want to be free to be Stupid" in *Financial Times* 9 July 2020 accessed from https://www.ft.com/content/95b9ee10-11be-4530-beb3-42b3ea7b5db0 today 27 July 2020.

[37]This was particularly true of Pastor David Oyedepo, the founder of the Winners Chapel, a very popular Church in Southwestern Nigeria. He was quoted as follows: "We must keep declaring that the siege is over. Psalm 81:10-14. It is enough, stay now thy hand. The siege of Coronavirus is over. We must know that as believers, our case is different. None of the plagues that came upon Egypt came upon any of God's people in the land. Not one believer shall be ravaged by any form of killer disease. Exodus 8:22-23. This plague is sure to become history shortly". Taken from https://web.facebook.com/Churchgist.org/posts/shutting-the-church-down-is-like-shutting-the-hospitals-bishop-david-oyedepo-we-/1989332301210631/?_rdc=1&_rdr.Accessed today 20 January, 2021.

[38]The full text of Pastor Adeboye's speech in a video on the 18th of March, 2020 is as follows: "I want to assure you that there is no virus that can come near you at all because it is written that those that dwell in the secret place of the most high, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I believe that this is a time for God to show you clearly that there is a difference between those who serve him

was to partake of that uncanny divine grace whose potency could grant immunity to the believer against all diseases.

One immediate after-effect of the above, however, was the exponential increase in the spread of and fatalities from the COVID-19 infections across the continent.[39] The necessity for Africans to cooperate with the protocols put in place by governments in the continent, therefore, became a categorical imperative.

Viewed from the perspective of Islamic law, cooperation with and acquiescence to regulations and measures put in place by States across the continent in order to bring COVID-19 pandemic under control conduced to the Islamic notion of statehood as an entity that must be obeyed by citizens as an extension of citizens' obedience to God. In other words, obedience to legally constituted authorities is, for the faithful, a cardinal principle in Islamic law and jurisprudence.[40] It is a religious duty that has been emphasised and exemplified by the Prophet of Islam in many traditions.[41] Lack of compliance with the laws and regulations that provided for the closure of places of worship during the pandemic, therefore, constituted an infraction of these divine provisions.

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wholeheartedly and those who do not". By "Coronavirus: RCCG's Pastor Adeboye identifies those who won't be infected [VIDEO] accessed from Daily post https://dailypost.ng/2020/03/18/coronavirus-rccgs-pastor-adeboye-identifies-those-who-wont-be-infected-video/dated 03 September, 2020; for more on the dynamics in the interplay between religiosity and what I have referred to as COVIDICITY in Nigeria, see: *Xavier Moyet* "Pentecostalism, Public Health, and COVID-19 in Nigeria" in Religion in Public accessed from https://religioninpublic.com/2020/04/03/pentecostalism-public-health-and-covid-19-in-nigeria/today 17th September, 2020

[39] Data on COVID-19 fatalities across Africa were as varied as were those on Africans that were infected by the disease. In South Africa, the number of deaths from the pandemic stoodat 19,230 out of 723,682 cases according to World Health Organizations (WHO) report accessed from https://www.who.int/countries/zaf/ today, 1, November, 2020. In Nigeria, total number of deaths stood at 3,034 out of 62,853 infections as at 1November, 2020. Da

ta was obtained from NCDC https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/ today, 1 November, 2020.

[40] Quran 4: 59

[41]Traditions of the Prophet on this abound in Islamic legal works. Such inclue: "Whoever dies while he is free of allegiance to the rulers" so says a tradition of the Prophet, dies a death of the age of ignorance. (Muslim, No: 1851). AbūDharr narrates that the Prophet (sws) said: "The one who separates himself from the collective an inch indeed takes off the yoke of Islam from his neck." (AbūDā'ūd, No: 4758)).

Moving within the Islamic legal spectrum, one discovers that the necessity for the individual believer to take charge of the duty of preserving and protecting the self and others during the outbreak of pandemics and diseases has also enjoyed ample patronage in Islamic legal works.[42] The Muslim faithful is, thus, under strict instruction to show fidelity to all matters that would guarantee his security, insure his honour and safeguard his dignity.[43] It is in furtherance of this ideal that protection of life is placed second only to the preservation of the right to belief and worship in what is referred to as "necessities" (Ḍarūrāt) in Islamic law.[44]

Thus, contrary to the notion that the lockdown of churches and mosques during the coronavirus pandemic meant the "fall" of faith and perhaps the end of worship as we know it, the outbreak of the disease actually functioned in exposing Africans to new possibilities, particularly in the way they could deploy social media to the service of the sacred. In fact, the latter emerged as redoubtable alternatives to totems and symbols such as pulpits and shrines and furnished new spaces where the sacred and the profane, the divine and the human could interact. Thus, the pandemic provided an uncanny opportunity for Africans to affirm their humanity and to become more aware of the inimitable and unknowable ways of the Almighty in creation. COVID-19 pandemic also did one other thing in Africa, it complicated notions of belief and unbelief and the categories of faithfulness and faithlessness.

Of Faith, the Faithful and COVID-19

Across cultures and civilisations, all references to faith, Sarah Pugh posits, are usually to "a complete trust and firm belief in something that cannot be proven by reason".[45] To be faithful, Sarah seemed to have argued, is to be unreasonable since normativity of religiosity consists of indulgence in casuistry and stupidity. But this reading of faith and the faithful actually side-steps evidences that figure reason as the companion

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[42] For example, a tradition of the Prophet forbids travel out of or into places suffering from the outbreak of plaques and pandemic.

[43] Quran 4.

[44] On maqasid shariah.

[45] Sarah A. Pugh Examining the Interface between HIV/AIDS, Religion and Gender in Sub-Saharan Africa" in Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines, 2010, Vol. 44, No. 3, Gender, HIV/AIDS, and Human Security in Africa / Les sexes, le VIH/ SIDA, et la securitehumaineen Afrique (2010), pp. 624-643

of faith and rationality as an aide to revelation, particularly in Islam. In the Islamic framework, the connection between faith/belief and rationality in the Islamic episteme is similar to the nexus between the soul and the body. The Quran provides a plethora of *Ayāt* (signs) as indicia in this direction.[46] These signs and symbols are meant to negate notions such as the one reified by Sarah that constructs faith and the faithful as categories that are anathema to logic or rationality. On the contrary, and as far as the Quran is concerned, faith, particularly in the unseen, is an effect/the signified, while the signifier, the cause, are located in the physical world. To be faithful, therefore, is to exercise the intellect since "those who know and those who do not know are not equal";[47] to be faithful in Islamic epistemology is to abhor unreason and casuistry.

But Sarah Pugh's proposition is useful for another purpose entirely. It makes the re-contemplation of God – the object of belief, veneration and adulation by the faithful – a categorical imperative. Thus, the faithful in Islamic *weltanschauung* becomes faithful not only simply because he recognises the existence of the sacred – an entity that is ontologically beyond negation and repudiation – as the focus of belief but more importantly because His existence renders the recognition of any other entity as sacred nugatory. Faith for the faithful equally signposts the luminous experience of the presence of the supernatural, of the firm conviction in the existence of immaterial beings – entities that unobtrusively superintend affairs in the physical world – and of the transcendentality of life here on earth to eternity. These constitute for the faithful the touchstones of reality; it is a reality that, according to William Lynch, "cannot be conflictual".[48]

In other words, COVID-19 provided an uncanny abutment to the faithful for his belief in the inimitable powers of the Almighty, whose control of and authority over the cosmos is beyond description and comprehension. Face to face with the fatalities that resulted from the

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[46] Such examples include – "in that are signs for those who believe (8: 99); "neither signs nor warning profit those who believe not (10: 101); "in that are signs for those who believe" (29: 24). The strong patronage of rational enquiry as a subset of faith is particularly *suigeneris* in Islam. It is hinted at in the Quran's usage of such terms '*Aql*', *Qalb* and *Fuad* among others. These terms index the necessity for mental exercise in the pursuit of the sacred; that

[47] Quran

[48] See Joseph A. Appleyard, S.J., "Imagination's Arc: The Spiritual Development of Readers," in Seeing into the Life of Things: Essays on Religion and Literature, ed. John L. Mahoney (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 51.

pandemic and the global, negative impacts of all aspects of human life, the pandemic becomes a metaphor or a signifier; the signified being the extremely inconsequential nature of terrestrial life in relation to the inimitability of His celestial powers; or rather a divine awakening to humanity to seek recourse to the Creator from its iniquitous habitude and practices here on earth.[49]

But one way the COVID-19 pandemic mirrored the above discussions relates to how it ensured that all references to faith in the sacred became nugatory unless and until it became functional. By functionality of faith, attention is called to the uncanny ways by and through which the faithful across Africa reinvented religious practices across the continent during the pandemic such that faith in the sacred became a platform for social mobilisation and a catalyst for philanthropic movements that targeted the provision of relief and succour to the afflicted.[50] The consensus appeared to be that faiths serve no purpose if the faithful do not stand beside those in distress and give hope to the hopeless.

Whereas COVID-19 functioned as a connector between the sacred and the faithful and widened its functionality, it also performed, though ironically, yet another role–it "produced" its own antithesis. In other words, in addition to increasing the capacity of the faithful to cope with the spiritual, mental, psychological and social dislocations occasioned by the pandemic, the uncanny "nexus" among faith, the faithful, COVID-19 and the faithful also served in framing the faithless.

Of "Faith", the Faithless and COVID-19

Reference to the "faithless" here could rather be to Africans who believe in, in line with John D. Caputo, "religion without religion".[51] These are Africans who felt that the inability of religions in the continent

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[49] Reference here is to the Quranic insight which reads: Do they not see that they are afflicted (with calamities) every year once or twice… Yet they neither repent nor take heed" Quran 9: 126.

[50] For insights into philanthropic efforts embarked upon by Christians and Muslims during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, see, for example, "Nigerian Christian and Muslim communities unite to combat COVID-19" in National Catholic Reporter accessed from:
https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/nigerian-christian-and-muslim-communities-unite-combat-covid-19 accessed today, 30 September, 2020.

[51] John D. Caputo: *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997)

to rein in the fatalities that followed the outbreak of COVID-19 or prevent their occurrence shows that faith in the sacred has become anachronistic and that the less the faithful Africans become, the better for the continent. In an article titled "African Atheism Rising", Kevin Murithi, a self-proclaimed Kenyan atheist, argues further when he says that "we need more scientific research institutions and laboratories and maybe more equipped health care facilities and less churches, mosques and temples, or whatever you call that place you go to meet with your imaginary friends."[52]

COVID-19, therefore, widened the circle of Africans who, in line with Crockett's reading of Jacques Derrida and Lacan's duality of faiths, believe in God "because he does not exist".[53] Thus, for the faithless, whose politics actually features an overarching desire to rupture religious faith, the outbreak of coronavirus in Africa led to the fall of faith. This was evident, they probably would have argued, in the closure of places of worship during the pandemic and the apparent loss of power previously wielded by religious institutions over their follower.

Viewed critically, it is evident that the above arguments are patently unsustainable partly because they are hinged on an acute lack of knowledge of normativity of worship in Islamic *weltanschauung* from which congregation in mosques for rituals represent only a facet. In other words, worship, technically known as "Ibādat"[54] in Islamic jurisprudence, appropriates the totality of the believer's life, the spiritual and the secular. It is neither limited to a particular season or occasion nor is it an exercise from which the faithful could take leave.

The suspension of congregational worship in mosques and churches in the open during the pandemic, therefore, meant that believers across Africa could actually continue their worship of, devotion to and veneration of God in the hidden, in the inner comforts of their homes and thereby protect and preserve their lives in line with the commandment of God. The

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[52] Kevin Muriithi "African Atheism Rising African Apologetics" in TGC African Edition dated 3 April, 2020 accessed from https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/african-atheism-rising/ today 20 September, 2020

[53] Clayton Crockett: Derrida, Lacan, and Object-Oriented Ontology: Philosophy of Religion at the End of the World Book Title: Derrida after the End of Writing Book Subtitle: Political Theology and New Materialism Book p. 78

[54] On Ibaadat for more on this, see: *Tariq al-Jamil "Ibadah" in John L. Esposito (ed.). The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World. (Oxford: Oxford University Press.* 2009)

reduction in the spread of the disease and incidences of fatalities from coronavirus infections, the gradual return of life to normalcy and the opening up of places of worship during the latter part of the year 2020 also showed that neither have religious leaders lost their authority nor have the state upended worship of the sacred in Africa in line with the assumptions of faithless subjects in the continent.

It could, therefore, be proposed that the discourse of the faithless that sought credence from the lockdown imposed by states in Africa in order to curtail the spread of COVID-19 pandemic would enjoy aplomb only in circles where transactions in what Ian Edwards refers to as "(Ir)religion"[55] find moment. In the latter, discourses of and about faith consist of deconstructing notions of faith in order to not have faith. This became possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic granted the faithless the opportunity to contemplate the possibility of fracturing pillars of faith for the faithful and forever too, so that it becomes bare and denuded of all features and characteristics that grant it awe and veneration.

Neither Faithful nor Faithless: The In-Betweens

But Ian Edwards' construct of (Ir)religion hinted at above is useful for another reason: it calls attention to subjects who neither believe in the Sacred nor were prepared, at least by expression, to negate Him. Here, the reference is to Africans who self-identified as irreligious or non-believers. They occupied that interstitial space – the space of liminality – where, in their estimation, belief and disbelief in the Sacred, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when there was that palpable sense of foreboding, of tragedy, granted no extra advantage. In other words, "since the world was inexorably destined for destruction", they contended, "it was better for humans to put belief and disbelief in abeyance".[56] The Quran captured this "discourse of irreligion" as follows: "And they say: there is nothing but our worldly life" they would argue, "we die and live, and nothing destroys us except time."[57] This discourse of 'différance'[58] – a discourse "that

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[55] Ian Edwards "(Ir)religion and the Theology of Différance" in *Janus Head* 6(1) 2003 p.142-153

[56] Response from a colleague in the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, to the question about the necessity or otherwise of the Sacred given the fatalities from the COVID-19 pandemic and the hardships that humankind went through during the greater part of 2020 when most nations came under lockdown as a result of the pandemic. Response dated: 30, June, 2020.

[57] Quran 45: 20.

operates at the middle…; that sets up opposition between passivity and activity",[59] that positions the Sacred as an ambiguous entity finds no space in Islamic *weltanschauung*.

Conclusion: Imagining the Future of Faith

It is axiomatic from the above discussions that religion is probably the only category in Africa whose normativity in African life remains incontrovertible. This became evident at the outbreak of COVID-19 in the year 2020 and later circumscribed discourses that took place, on the one hand, between adherents of religion and experts in infectious diseases across the continent during the period and, on the other, between religious practitioners and the purveyors of secularity whose politics consists in exposing the inner contradictions of religion and in presenting it as utterly unfitting for the contemporary world.

Without prejudice to other perspectives, it is arguable to say that the greatest challenge ahead of religion in the post-COVID-19 era in Africa might actually not be that of secularity or modernity; nor would it likely be that of materialism or utilitarianism. Rather, the question that would continue to confront men and women of faith in the continent would most probably be that of how belief in the Sacred could be insulated against the cult of religious zealots and enthusiasts within –those whose sole desire is to build empires of the celestial in the terrestrial; whose preachments are anchored on the vapidity of prosperity of faith without works and the securities of eternal salvation in utter abandonment of temporal obligations. The practice of faith in the continent in the post-COVID-19 era shall have to grapple with what Michel de Certeau refers to as the lineaments of a postmodern prophetic faith. In the latter, truth is held hostage by those who speak on behalf of God, religious practices are vexatious and faith "becomes an opening to the utopian space within the polemological space of everyday power relations".[60]

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[58] Jacques Derrida *Speech and Phenomena* (Evanston: North-western University, 1973), p. 130; cited by Edwards, Ir(religion) p. 142cited by Edwards: "(Ir)religion and the Theology of Différance" p. 142.

[59] Ibid. p. 142.

[60] Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

COVID-19 AND AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

ADEMOLA LUKMAN LAWAL

Department of Philosophy,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
Email: demolalawal2000@yahoo.com

Introduction

African indigenous knowledge systems encompass several traditional, religious, cultural, social, political, economic and scientific practices by which the indigenous African people are able to investigate, explain, interpret, understand and predict the phenomena in their immediate natural environment (physical and spiritual). For instance, in health maintenance, indigenous African people lived and survived through several concoctions and herbs that are efficacious in treating different types of deceases and illnesses (physical and mental) before their encounter with the Europeans. While Africans in the 21st century face several challenges in terms of poverty, unemployment, corruption and myriad social and economic problems, the outbreak of coronavirus in 2019 in Wuhan, China, surfaced to test our endurance and forbearance. For men and women of faith, it constitutes a test of religious faith. It is a test, too, in the strength of those ideas humans choose to help them form moral judgements and guide personal and social behaviour. It also involves a test on the medical capacity and socio-political will of the people around the world. In short, the coronavirus pandemic has equally forced everyone to confront deep questions of human existence and these questions are so profound that they have previously been answered, in many different ways, by the greatest philosophers and theologians. It is a test of where all humans stand. In short, the coronavirus pandemic came to shake the whole world.

In view of the search for possible solutions to the above problems, African indigenous knowledge systems have been erroneously dismissed