

Mystery, chaos and anxiety in the era of COVID-19 pandemic virus in Nigeria

Enoch Olujide Gbadegesin

Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State 220005, Nigeria; egbadegesin@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 9 September 2023

Accepted: 17 October 2023

Available online: 12 December 2023

doi: 10.59400/ephr.v1i1.1526

Copyright © 2023 Author(s).

Environment and Public Health Research is published by Academic Research Services LLC (ARSL). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0).
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ABSTRACT: This paper argues that the modern world is living in a period of chaos, anxiety, and tremor, which could be regarded as an era of pandemonium tremendum, a term that fits appropriately to describe the deadly, omnipresent, and omnipotent virus that has continued to wreak havoc from the global north to the global south. This paper uses socio-ethical and content analytical methods of inquiry to identify the immediate cause and incidence of COVID-19 since its eruption in December 2019; examine the adverse effects of this deadly virus on the private and public, sacred and secular spheres; analyze all manners of both sacred and secular responses and efforts geared towards the containment of the deadly virus by the different nations of the world and Nigeria in particular since its upsurge; and evaluate the success rates so far recorded by the Nigerian government.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19; pandemonium tremendum; disease; omnipresent virus; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Since its upsurge in December 2019, the deadly pandemic coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19, has sent shivers and unleashed fear and terror on almost everybody in the world. This is due to the way it suddenly appeared and how it defied the usual immediate remedial response from medical scientists, especially in the highly technologized Western world. Its noxious and deleterious effects spread across the world have, in the main, led to the closure of all businesses and corporate organizations, leaving many people jobless, helpless, and indeed anxious. Even spiritual houses, which were once believed to serve as safe spaces or havens for healings and deliverances when every effort at getting a cure through science and technology has failed, were also forced to close physically because of the contagious nature of COVID-19. Its effect was felt by the religious traditions because “most world religions prescribe congregations of their adherents at the local, national, and international levels as part of their faiths^[1].” COVID-19 has succeeded in revealing how vulnerable we all are, signaling our constant exposure to death in a world riddled with anxieties and uncertainties. According to Anthony Pinn^[2], “the challenge with this virus is uncertainty—the lack of control over circumstances and the inability to clearly identify the threat or determine its duration.” The COVID-19 pandemic shattered the world order and sowed seeds of paranoia, anger, and mistrust.

This paper argues that the modern world is living in a period of chaos, anxiety, and tremor, which could be regarded as an era of pandemonium tremendum, a term that is borrowed from Huchingson^[3], and which also fits appropriately to describe the deadly, omnipresent, and omnipotent virus that has continued to wreak havoc from the global north to the global south. This paper uses socio-ethical and

content analytical methods of inquiry to identify the immediate cause and incidence of COVID-19 since its eruption in December 2019.

Engaging the Nigerian situation and scenario

Nigeria recorded its first case on the 27th of February, in an Italian patient who flew to Nigeria from Italy on February 25, 2020. Since this discovery, a lot of other cases have emerged^[4]. In the Nigerian context, even before the upsurge of COVID-19, there was homelessness, joblessness for the young graduates, poor health facilities, and palpable extreme poverty because of the reckless spending of the political elites. The sudden outburst of COVID-19 has added more to the extant sufferings being undergone by the majority of the of the poor in Nigeria. The COVID-19 episode clearly exposed the wickedness and apathetic nature of the ruling political elites in Nigeria, where they have rendered health institutions ineffective, such that simple ailments hardly have effective cures because of the lip service that the government is paying to the health sector year in and year out. Bernard Kalu^[5] observes that “Nigeria’s health system before the pandemic was nearly non-existent. In most of the cities’, health systems are completely dilapidated as they have not received adequate attention, and some government officials have contributed to health system collapse by encouraging medical tourism”.

In spite of the politicization and trivialization of COVID-19 in the media as a mere biological weapon of mass destruction that was invented in Wuhan, China, to prove its (China's) superiority over other nations, the mystery behind the eruption of COVID-19 is yet to be known. There have been insinuations back and forth that superpowers were really responsible for the incidence of COVID-19, a contest of might between China and America, as we are all left in the midst of confusion, uncertainties, and anxieties. Richard Haass^[6] has carefully observed:

In the months since the appearance of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, analysts have differed over the type of world the pandemic will leave in its wake. But most argue that the world we are entering will be fundamentally different from what existed before. Some predict the pandemic will bring about a new world order led by China; others believe it will trigger the demise of China’s leadership.

The eschatologists, especially of Christian’s type, have also begun to suggest that the beginning of the Christian end-time events predicted in the Bible has already started. Worse still, the introduction of 5G wireless network technology by Microsoft, which inadvertently coincided with the COVID-19 outbreak, has further heightened our individual and collective anxieties. Religious bigots even claimed that the introduction of 5G wireless network technology was a ploy by the owner of Microsoft, Bill Gates, to introduce the long biblical prediction of the number 666, which signifies the mark of the beast and the coming of the Antichrist Egbunike^[7]. In this connection, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome of Loveworld Incorporated (also known as Christ Embassy) in Lagos, Nigeria, made some wild comments and unfounded claims since the pandemic began in the country. He was counteracted, though, by Pastor Sam Adeyemi and Reverend Matthews Ashimolowo by contending that the 5G wireless network has nothing to do with COVID-19 and the coming of the Antichrist. Of course, Oyakhilome’s unfounded claim had already been expressed in the United Kingdom and some parts of the world, linking COVID-19 to the 5G wireless network. These claims have been debunked by scientists^[8].

2. Period of uncertainty and anxiety

We lived, it seemed, according to Tillich^[9] (whose insight is as relevant now as it was then), in the episodic period of ontic (from the word being), moral and spiritual anxieties characterized by fate and

death. Ontic anxiety because we no longer can specifically predict what will happen to the body (our being) in this moment of uncertainty or the next as the world continues to experience one mysterious calamity after the other; moral anxiety because many religious people in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world have assumed that the coronavirus erupted as a result of our individual and collective sins. Even in America, the same assumption was made, as noticed by researcher^[10], who says, “Others see the virus as pointing to an existing moral failure not simply of Christian communities but of the nation as a whole that resulted in God’s wrath. In a word, it is a consequence of sin”; and spiritual anxiety because there were lots of theological musings that the end of the world has come. It is a period when science, morality, and spirituality have been called into question. It is a time when we are strangers to ourselves in the land of strangers, caused by the maxim “maintain social distancing” or “physical distancing” as some academia at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, has begun to debate which phrase is most appropriate. The initial imposition of restrictions on interstate and intrastate movement has hugely contributed to further social distancing from one person to another, a practice that is very strange to human social existence. Indeed, the African social world.

The novel COVID-19 has introduced a harsher condition to our already fragile and compromised collective association because of the lack of the moral and spiritual will to sympathize or empathize (as the case may be) with ourselves because we were hindered from engaging in the collective mourning of our dead in the public spheres. The African social world is a place where immediate and extended family relations and friends see their existence as co-extensive with other people. They see their intrinsic relation to others and the interdependent existence of their lives with others. There is therefore a feeling of social solidarity among the members. This is how we can see the problem created by the enforcement of social distancing. In actual fact, and in spite of the warnings about the contagious and deadly effects of COVID-19, many Nigerians have refused to use face masks and indeed disobeyed social distancing because such an order was alien to their communal life.

The recent event of the death of one of the strong political associates and “right hand” man of President Buhari, Abba Kyari, could be cited as a good example^[11], when the majority of Nigerians reacted to the presence of hundreds of people at his burial to pay him last respect. The undue emotions exhibited by the people in high places in Abuja during Abba Kyari’s burial were criticized by many Nigerians on social media as unwarranted since the avenue and possibility of spreading the infection further and further have been created by the majority who attended the burial. And true to their claims, a lot of people contacted the coronavirus in the northern states and elsewhere in Nigeria, and many died as a result in Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, even in Abuja and other places. Unfortunate and worrisome still was the apathetic and lackadaisical attitudes with which the majority of the people in Nigeria have shown to the coronavirus; daily clustering together in public spaces and the unwillingness to use face masks have further made the spread of the virus on a large scale, leading to high records of more deaths. Another good example was the episode of four eminent professors who died in rapid succession within a week because they contacted COVID-19 during a societal wedding ceremony they attended in Lagos^[12].

In responding to one of the questions raised during an interview granted by Judith Butler^[13], she says, “how to mourn mass death? Under conditions of pandemic, losses are, for the most part, borne in private. We are returned to the household as the site for mourning, deprived of the public gathering in which such losses are marked and registered and shared.” The matter does not stop at that; Butler seems to see something more horrendously lurking around the corner for the majority of the people still living and whose lives have not been consumed by the COVID-19 virus. She believes that “many are anxious because they do not yet know who or what they have yet to lose or what parts of the world will be

irrecoverably lost or reanimated in a new and truncated form. Those grieving now may well be bracing for more grief, not knowing from which direction it will arrive.” Pinn says, “Anxiety reigns as the ability to bracket and control death is shattered. The dominant ideology is weakened as the body count rises. We hunker down and try to think and act a ‘new’ normal.” Tillich could also be read to have said with respect to the present uncertain moment that “we are threatened not only with losing our individual selves but also with losing participation in our world.”

It was also the case that the intrepid pandemic COVID-19 exacerbated the fragile cooperation between nation-states and their citizens, as well as its likelihood to continue the eruption of the imagined “international community” which is still waiting to be manifested in reality after it (COVID-19) has disappeared. Haass has aptly predicted the aftereffects of the pandemic COVID-19 virus by saying that:

The resistance across much of the developed world to accepting large numbers of immigrants and refugees, a trend that had been visible for at least the past half-decade, will also be intensified by the pandemic. This will be in part out of concern over the risk of importing infectious disease and in part because high unemployment will make societies wary of accepting outsiders. This opposition will grow even as the number of displaced persons and refugees—already at historic levels—will continue to increase significantly as economies can no longer support their populations.

If what Haass said holds true, the world will have to be living in a time of crisis of loss of meaning and hopelessness leading to “nonbeing” (Collins online dictionary), as Tillich has correctly coined it. This is a time when we are all becoming vulnerable, not only to the already harsh economic and social conditions of life but also because “the pandemic exposes the heightened vulnerability to illness of all those for whom health care is neither accessible nor affordable” here in Nigeria or even in the highly developed economies like Europe and America.

In this time of loss of meaning and experience of nonbeing^[14], one could ask, how true is the human-centered theory that has been paraded since the beginning of the seventeenth century? What hope is left in the midst of the existential anxiety that the world is currently experiencing? How relevant and potent is modern medicine, which claims it could cure psychosomatic and psychological anxiety in the era of global COVID-19 viral disease that has left tens of thousands of people dead and the majority of others still living in hopelessness? One explosive question remains: Why did a virus that was once so rare suddenly burst into a global pandemic? What answer does religion have to provide in the midst of the present mystery, terror, and confusion occasioned by the COVID-19 virus? The answers to these questions and a few others will be attempted in this paper.

3. Era of scientific revolution

From the human center or humanist perspective, the universe understood by science provides little evidence of cosmically sanctioned values. Humans must, in their choices, create the conditions that enhance the fulfilment of human potential and make a good life possible. For the humanist, the human being is the primary value; institutions and practices must be judged by whether they liberate or enslave, nurture or repress, enhance or endanger the fulfilment of human life, individually and collectively, according to Schmidt^[15]. The bold proclamation by Fredrick Nietzsche that God is dead was to set humans free from transcendental and trans-empirical entities. From this point of view, the human being is the primary value. Rabbi Sherwin Wine was quoted as saying that “whether there is or isn’t God makes no difference since He can’t affect human lives. Therefore, we turn to available powers to solve our problems, and the only powers we know are human powers”.

Indeed, human powers have gone a long way toward doing the unimaginable. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries has made the impossible possible. Through human genius, travels in the air, in the sea, and over land were made possible. Life has indeed been made a lot more comfortable with all the scientific and technological inventions. Man's productivity moves from potentiality to actuality in such a way that everything actualized has potential for further actualization. Even in the age of computers, it is brilliantly observed that "the very foundations of the economy and material society have come to rest as much on the infrastructure of information technology as on the roads and expressways upon which we drive our automobiles." One needs no doubt about the relevance of information technology to health care delivery systems in the modern age; a lot of reforms have taken place. According to Natasha Quinonez^[16], "Most medical offices can now send and receive digital medical information from doctors you've had in the past. Changes like this allow costs to be lowered and increase the amount of time doctors can spend on patients compared to paperwork." While these observations look very fanciful, we are still to get the whole human freedom being promised by the human-centered paradigm.

We are continuing to be confronted with the horror of despair and nothingness as a result of violence, murder, hunger, and poverty that are being witnessed in our world on a daily basis. All these negative experiences bring about fear, which is at the heart of nonbeing. The word nonbeing itself implies 'the idea that unconsciously we all long for death, for non-being'. As a philosophical concept, it refers to "the philosophical problem arising from the fact that the ability to refer appears to presuppose the existence of whatever is referred to, and yet we can talk intelligibly about nonexistent objects." Paradoxically, as Harvey Cox's^[17] *Secular City* continues to make scientific and technological waves, the world, however, continues to constantly experience despair. Despair is a result of the failure of science and technology to provide full answers to everything that humans need. As things are, we are yet to see a world that will bend to our desires and wants, according to Pinn.

We are in a world where "the entire information system, so fully integrated and immensely complex that knowledge of the intricate details of its operations is beyond anyone, is vulnerable to disabling accidents and terrorist acts of sabotage." Túnjí Oláòpá^[18] puts it this way:

Since the Industrial Revolution, humans have been in a race to overreach our own capacity for scientific and technological development. We are paradoxically and inexorably bent on self-extinction through our civilizing and technological missions. And when we wittingly or unwittingly let loose the new virus, we were ironically not ready for its terrible imprint upon our lives—the very lives we wanted to better by culturing the virus in the laboratories in the first place.

Globally, COVID-19 has further revealed the limitedness and vulnerability of modern "technological" medicine as medical doctors, hospital personnel, and laboratory scientists have continued to grope in the dark looking for a cure or, at best, a vaccine that could forever tame the insidious effect of the virus. But isn't the effort worth applauding? At least, steps were already being taken, especially in many western countries and a few in Africa, to find a lasting solution to the problem of COVID-19.

This type of virus is neither like the Ebola virus nor the Lassa fever; even though they are also contagious diseases, they are limited to certain geographical areas. They were quickly arrested by the Nigerian medical team, and they should be praised for that. COVID-19 wreaked havoc in almost all the nations of the world. What has changed, and why is medical science failing to quickly respond to the deadly viral disease that has continued to rage like fire and claim lives in the thousands every day? At the

time the COVID-19 virus got to Nigeria, it was only through one person from Italy. As of November 2020, the disease has infected more than sixty thousand people (64,884), and over a thousand (1163) people have died as a result of its spread. Even if medical services were working elsewhere, the Nigerian case would be different. The reason for this has been rightly pointed out by Campbell^[19], who says, “Up to now, it hardly mattered to them (the political elites) that there were only rudimentary medical services available; they went to London, Dubai, and Johannesburg for medical care.” He even states further that “the leadership of the moment cannot overcome the generations of poor leadership and corruption that have left underdeveloped public health services, social safety nets, and trust in government (Campbell, 2020)”.

4. Anxiety and fear of eschatological predictions

At the spiritual level, the majority of the religious people in Nigeria are living in fear, and their minds are being constantly agitated by anxiety. If there is one thing that the coronavirus has succeeded in achieving in all people, it is to make them live in fear, anxiety, and depression. It is doubtful that its deleterious effects on the human soul will not continue to have negative impacts; the overcoming of the coronavirus anytime soon will likely leave an indelible mark of fear and agitation in the minds of many. As mentioned earlier, the eschatologists, through their apparent prophetic contradictions, have not helped matter either; they have made the present social or may be cosmic world a place due to be folded up, and this has continued to create spiritual and moral fear and anxiety in the minds of the religious people. Recently, there was in circulation through social media, and WhatsApp, in particular, has played a medium for disseminating a lot of fearful and anxious messages back and forth of the reason why 5G network telecommunication technology should be voted against and prayed against by especially Christians throughout Nigeria, if not throughout the world.

As already mentioned, the reason for this, according to the eschatologists, is the direct connection of the 5G communication technology to the prediction, or in any case, the fulfilment of that prophecy of the coming of the Antichrist, who would force people to take the mark 666 until they could buy, sell, or, in short, transact business, by citing the book of Revelation chapter 13 in the Bible^[19]. Beyond this thinking, however, is the way “many Pentecostal Christians, in Africa as well as other continents, portray the coronavirus as a “spiritual force of evil” rather than as a biomedical disease. Through this lens, the world is presented as a battleground between God and the agents of Satan. For those who enlist to “fight for Jesus”, the most effective weapon is prayer^[20]. The authors state further that, “In truth, spiritual warfare idioms have been diversely invoked and unevenly received across the continent. They have prompted lively “religion and science” debates. Moreover, the plausibility of spiritual warfare idioms should not be exclusively attributed to people’s religious sensibilities. After all, “warfare” is the signature trope with which global political figures, health experts, and media commentators have framed COVID-19.”

Some pastors even wrongly believed that the untamed desires for sin and worldliness and rejection of God arouse God’s anger and, hence, his sending disease to the world to correct the moral failure and depravity of human beings. Citing Deuteronomy 28: 58-62, many Christian eschatologists are willing to say that COVID-19 is a punishment from God for disobeying him and for refusing to accept his son Jesus Christ.

It seems our collective ontic, moral, and, in particular, spiritual neuroses have continued to make us more anxious than anything else in this age of uncertainty. In the midst of already pathological anxiety, there was morbid fear created by the COVID-19 virus, and still brooding on that, there was the newly

created dimension of panic created by the “last days prophets” who have come out to tell people that the end of the world has come. There was paradox in the era of COVID-19: the outside was no longer safe because of the fear of contacting the virus; the homestead has become another source of individual and collective anxiety and fear due to the threat of constant menaces of kidnapping and banditry. In this modern age, life has not been so uncertain; every country all over the world seems uncertain about the next plague that may invade the world any moment from now. This is despite the fact that many of these countries have already been dealing with diverse kinds of problems before the arrival of this life-threatening COVID-19 virus disease. This insight provides an auspicious segue for delving into the impact of the mass media vis-à-vis the deadly pandemic in Nigeria and globally.

5. Problems with eschatological predictions

Problems connected with eschatological (from the Greek word *Eschaton*-End Time) predictions are that some of these predictions are so far removed from reality that people tend to wonder which ones are to be believed. There are many religious prophets, especially of the Christian type, whose messages are centered on end-time predictions. A lot of these end-time predictions end up causing more fear and anxiety and have even left many people to either ignore their eschatological predictions or end up refusing to believe anything anymore. Eschatological prediction is not new in world history; it has been a recurrent pattern. A lot of Christian faithfuls either in the past or in the present have been disappointed as a result of the failed predictions with specific “the time of the Lord’s return or the Messiah’s advent.” Some have even predicted that the Lord’s return would first witness the prevalence of evil and disorderliness.

By citing both the Old and New Testaments’ verses that refer to end-time events, the predictors often believed that diseases and diverse kinds of disasters would burst into the world scene to put an end to this present age, regarded as the world of sin. Some eschatologists, albeit false, were and are still even more willing to predict the accurate time of the end. For example, “the Anabaptists were said to have anticipated the Parousia (the return of Christ) during the Peasants’ War of 1525, while William Miller, an influential figure in the American Adventist movement, proclaimed on scriptural grounds that the Parousia would take place between 21 March 1843 and 21 March 1844. All were failed predictions because “hundreds of Adventists sold or disposed of their property and otherwise settled their affairs in expectation of the end.” In Nigeria, many self-styled prophets have also predicted the end time to be in a certain year, but such predictions have continuously failed to materialize. For example, Pastor Prophetess Bola Taiwo (a.k.a. Iya Tolu Sako Igbala), who founded the Last Days Deliverance Ministry International Iloo, Ilesha had predicted on many occasions that the world would come to an end in specific years, but all of them failed. Her church was destroyed by the families of the members who, as a result of Prophetess Bola Taiwo’s prediction of the end of time in 2006, sold all their properties and continued to live in a kind of ramshackle camp outside the city. In the present Nigerian religious situation, many Christian prophets have continued to carry on their predictions that are linked to the end of time.

6. The impact of mass media

The mass media is not spared from contributing to our individual and collective fear, anxiety, depression, and uncertainty due to their ways of reporting. This seems to be the case all over the world; even highly technologized nations like America, the UK, and the rest of them are never exempt. Since the upsurge, COVID-19 issues have continued to shape media reports in Nigeria. Most of these reports are not usually critically examined before they are brought out for public consumption, thus adding to the fear of the already panic-stricken Nigerian populace. According to Daniel Obi^[21], who is a reporter

for Business Day Online on 21 April 2020, “Nigerian media has been urged by analysts to focus on the origin of COVID-19 and provide more details about the masks and vaccines used for recovered patients. This is as much of Nigerian media report on COVID-19 has concentrated on rising cases and deaths resulting from the pandemic with less information about the origin, vaccines used for recovered patients, the efficacy of masks for protection, and the behaviour of people living around recovered or death patients.”

With respect to America, Christina Pazzanese^[22] writes in her article in Harvard Medical Magazine online:

When a disease outbreak grabs the public’s attention, formal recommendations from medical experts are often muffled by a barrage of half-baked advice, sketchy remedies, and misguided theories that circulate as anxious people rush to understand a new health risk. The current crisis is no exception. The sudden onset of a new, highly contagious coronavirus has unleashed what U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres last week called a “pandemic of misinformation”, a phenomenon that has not gone unnoticed, as nearly two-thirds of Americans said they have seen news and information about the disease that seemed completely made up, according to a recent Pew Research Center study.

Social media in its various varieties—Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Messenger, Telegram, and a host of others—have been spaces where information enters and exits the mass audience, intended or not. This is not new, though; before the pandemic, social media was known for peddling rumors and misinformation. Some may not really be intended, but the majority are. Imagine a lot of information being made about what people could use to effect the cure of or prevent the infection with COVID-19, such as the use of garlic, ginger, lemon, certain bark of trees, and so on, to be compounded together and boiled. Or when Donald Trump said that chloroquine used for the treatment of malaria could easily bring about a sudden miracle of healing for the COVID-19 virus. Even with regular media in America, it is reliably gathered that:

Then there is the problem of political bias. This has been especially true at right-leaning media outlets, which have largely repeated news angles and viewpoints promoted by the White House and the president on the progress of the pandemic and the efficacy of the administration’s response, boosting unproven COVID-19 treatments and exaggerating the availability of testing and safety equipment and prospects for speedy vaccine development^[22].

The problem faced with eliminating social media or media misinformation is that the majority of people who are eager to get information ready-to-be spread take no pain in carefully reading through what they have received. Suciu^[23] reported, “..., the social media platforms benefit from misleading information because these stories and posts are often ‘too good to be true’ that readers and viewers will reply, like, forward, and retweet them.” According to Professor James R. Bailey, whom Peter Suciu quoted, “Today, we have an open platform that allows amateur journalists and opinionators to express themselves through half-truths, innuendo, rumor, and hearsay” Bailey added. “Just as the implications of coronavirus are the new normal, so is the disinformation of reporting it. Distortion runs rife. And there’s no way of checking it.”

Luckily enough, the Nigerian media has been commended for coming closer to reporting accurate information about COVID-19 virus cases in Nigeria. Daniel Obi says, “Among all the media news channels which have gained in usage, traditional nationwide broadcast and newspapers are the most trusted sources of information, the Kantar report said.” The public media outlet should be commended for this, if what Obi reported was indeed true, but they (the media) should keep it up by making sure that

the public is not further misled into taking rash decisions or making avoidable mistakes in doing what will impair their health and cause more damage to their already wounded emotions.

7. Religion and science: A seamless engagement

Contrary to the ancient nuance that science and religion, or reason and faith, are incompatible, it has now been discovered that science and religion, or reason and faith, can actually work together for the benefit of humanity. The Nigerian situation makes the synergy between science and religion imperative. There is a need for the two at this time of the world's great challenge to work together. If we can't face it, we can't fix it. There is tenacity in the human spirit in the midst of pain, anguish, and suffering. The verses of Psalm 91 must be backed up by real and authentic science. Prayer, testing, and contact tracing should come together to create a sustainable environment in order for every living being to flourish. Talking about the cooperation of science (medicine or technology) and religion, Tillich had advised many years ago about its inevitability. According to him, "the medical profession has the purpose of helping man in some of his existential problems, those which usually are called diseases. But it cannot help man without the permanent cooperation of all other professions whose purpose is to help man as man. Both the doctrines about man and the help given to man are a matter of cooperation from many points of view." He stated further, "Today the theological as well as the medical faculty is aware of this situation and its theoretical and practical implications. Theologians and ministers eagerly seek collaboration with medical men, and many forms of occasional or institutionalized cooperation result."

The need for this cooperation has been stressed by some well-meaning Nigerians. For example, Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu^[24] at a weekend urged religious leaders to sensitise residents on measures to curb the spread of coronavirus and stay safe. He said their role is very vital because many of the residents in the state worship under them, either as Muslims or Christians, and they could help contain community transmission of COVID-19. The governor made the appeal in the first ever virtual meeting he held with religious leaders in the state. He briefed the leaders on the efforts of his administration since the coronavirus pandemic landed in Nigeria on 29 February 2020, making Lagos State the epicentre of the coronavirus. More of the need to collaborate is also expected from all governors in other states. Religious leaders and their organizations could assist the medical team by purchasing medical materials such as face masks, hand gloves, hand sanitizers, and infrared thermometers, and if they could afford them, by also providing conducive spaces where diagnosed COVID-19 virus patients could be treated in order to complement the efforts of the government. Beyond these material supplies, there is a need for religious leaders to continue to sensitize their various members to constantly maintain healthy hygiene through hand washing, the use of face masks, and the and the maintenance of social/physical distancing.

8. COVID-19 virus on Nigeria economy

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 virus has dealt a severe blow to the world economy. The most vulnerable and worst-hit are the African countries. Nigeria has not gotten out of the effect of the virus, economically speaking. It has become so bad that Nigeria's currency has been terribly devalued so that the price of most basic needs has skyrocketed, making it difficult for an average Nigerian to afford to purchase those basic needs. Food prices are high; unfortunately, the purchasing power of the naira has been lowered. In respect to Africa generally, it has been observed that.

The initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic was all about clinical and epidemiological aspects; however, the shift is now changing towards the global economy. The focus of the effect of COVID-19

pandemics needs to shift to developing nations, particularly African countries, which rely mostly on developed countries. Economists had estimated Africa's growth in 2020 at 3.9%, which can now drop to 0.4% (in the best case) to -3.9% (in the severely hit case)^[25]. These experts also believe that growth in Sub-Saharan Africa may fall to between -2 and -5% in comparison to 2.4% in 2019, with a risk of the first recession in the last 25 years.

The authors rightly noted that one of the major factors that has affected the African economy badly is a reduction in oil demand. This is as a result of the ban and restrictions on travel in and out of Africa. As one of the major oil exporters in the world, Nigeria was badly hit, and she has continued to struggle to redress this economic challenge since the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic virus.

Following the same argument, Ozili^[26] identified five major effects of COVID-19 on the Nigerian economy. Two of them should suffice to be mentioned here. Ozili rightly identified that Nigeria was severely affected economically because Nigeria is an import-dependent country, and as a result, Nigeria witnessed shortages of crucial supplies like pharmaceutical supplies, spare parts, and finished goods from China. And the national budget was also affected. The budget was initially planned with an oil price of US\$57 per barrel. The fall in oil prices to US\$30 per barrel during the pandemic meant that the budget became obsolete and a new budget had to be formed, which had to be repriced at a low oil price. As of now, Nigeria is still groping in the dark, looking for a way out of the current economic quagmire. One can only hope that things will soon get better.

9. The beautiful ones are slowly emerging

Ayei Kwei Armah's novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, was an indictment of the rampant political docility and corruption in post-colonial Africa. The title of this literary work offers a metaphor for where we are as a nation and where we ought to be collectively. The narrative portrayed a context saddled with monumental challenges and crippled by insensitivity and inertia. Religious organizations can provide the compass for navigating the pathway for this crucial process and ultimate realization. Serendipitously enough, certain individuals [and religious bodies] have begun to contribute to the government's efforts in donating money, materials, and foods, which are expected to cushion the effects of the COVID-19 virus.

As on 18 April 2020 the sum of N25.8 billion has so far been donated by 107 Nigerian companies and notable individuals as a relief fund to combat the coronavirus in the country. This is according to information obtained from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). Among the biggest donors so far are the CBN and Alhaji Aliko Dangote, both of whom have contributed N2 billion each. Other notable companies and prominent billionaires also donated N1 billion each, including Tony Elumelu, Modupe and Folorunsho Alakija, Abdulsamad Rabi'u, Segun Agbaje, Herbert Wigwe, Oba Otedeko, Femi Otedola, Mike Adenuga, Jim Ovia, Raj Gupta, John Coumantatous, MTN Nigeria, and the Nigerian Deposit Insurance Corporation, NDIC. Pastor W.F. Kumuyi, on behalf of Deeper Christian Life Ministries, also donated N500 million^[27].

The Redeemed Christian Church of God, through its General Overseer Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye, has also contributed to assist Lagos State, which was initially badly hit with hospital materials and then food materials for thousands of the members of the church. According to the This Day newspaper report of 9 April 2020, "The General Overseer (GO) of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Pastor Enoch Adeboye, has donated 8000 hand sanitizers, 8000 surgical face masks, and

200,000 hand gloves to support the efforts of the Lagos State government in equipping medical staff with the necessary protective gear needed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. While presenting the donations at Mainland Hospital, Lagos, the Assistant General Officer, Admin/Personnel, RCCG Pastor Johnson Funsho Odesola, representing the GO, said, “we commend the sacrifices of medical personnel at this time.” The church will continue to pray for them as they give their sacrifice of love even as the RCCG as a church agrees that combating COVID-19 is a work for all^[28].” Other Christian leaders have followed suit.

For example, the Guardian Newspaper reports that both Bishop David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church International and Dunamis International Gospel Church, founded by Paul Enenche, have also made their own contributions to both the federal and state governments, respectively. In reporting the efforts of the Living Faith Church International, the reporter said that “the Presiding Bishop of the Living Faith Church International, popularly known as Winners’ Chapel, Bishop David Oyedepo, yesterday expressed optimism that the coronavirus would soon become a thing of the past in Nigeria. Oyedepo stated this while donating an ambulance and Personal Protective Gears (PPE) to the Ogun State government to help in the fight against the spread of coronavirus in the state. Presenting the items to the state government at the Governor’s Office, Oke-Mosan, Abeokuta, the state capital, Oyedepo, who was represented by his son, who is also a senior pastor in the church, Pastor David Oyedepo (Junior), said the gesture was part of the church’s commitment towards ending the scourge of coronavirus in the state^[29].”

On the Muslim side, the report of 30 March 2020 shows that “the Nigerian Muslim community is mobilizing extensively to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the country and provide relief for the victims^[30]. Under the aegis of Muslim Coalition against COVID-19, 26 Islamic organizations have pulled resources together to make impactful contributions to the nation’s efforts in the fight against the pandemic. The Executive Chairman of Muslim Public Affairs Centre, MPAC, Disu Kamor said MPAC initiated the idea of a nationwide coalition as a common front for Nigerian Muslims to organize and focus their efforts in a coordinated and integrated form^[31].” By 5 April 2020, five hundred (500) millions of naira had been mobilized by the Muslim coalition to provide relief against COVID-19 in Nigeria, and by 20 April 2020 relief materials had been provided in the Federal Capital Territory and four states in Nigeria^[32]. More religious bodies that have contributed one thing or another that might not have been reported on the daily news could not be denied. If the collaboration between the Nigerian government and religious bodies could continue, a lot of progress and advancement would occur, and indeed, undue religious rivalry that could further lead to many deaths from the coronavirus would be radically reduced or totally eradicated altogether.

It could not be denied that many religious organizations, both in Christianity and Islam, would see no reason why relief materials such as money and medical equipment should be given to both the state and federal governments. The reason might stem from non-accountability on the part of government officials or people saddled with the responsibility of collecting materials from religious and non-governmental organizations who, in their magnanimity, have donated to the cause of relieving those who were infected or badly affected by the virus. It could also be that the reckless way the government at the state or federal levels has been spending money may be responsible for some Christian and Islamic organizations not being willing to donate. More importantly, the doubt that was already cast by many people on the reality of COVID-19, just like many denied the Ebola virus, could also be responsible for people not responding to assist the government in dealing with COVID-19. And true to the predictions of some people that government both at state and federal levels is unreliable and untrustworthy as far as

accountability is concerned, the end-SARS protest, especially in the southwestern region of the nation, actually revealed the greed of the Nigerian political elites. A lot of senators, representatives, and even governors hoarded the relief materials, claiming that “they were waiting for more relief materials before they would begin to distribute them to the Nigerian citizens.” Part of the report says that “Amid the ongoing protests in Nigeria over police brutality, mobs of citizens have overrun several government-owned warehouses and looted food meant to be distributed during this year’s coronavirus lockdowns^[33].”

10. Conclusion

This paper has noted that there is no such period in the modern world’s history that is more characteristic of scientific, spiritual, and moral uncertainty, chaos, anxiety, and tremor than the moment of sudden burst into the world’s scene of the deadly Coronavirus 2019 disease, also known as COVID-19. In its wake, there were and are still agitations and questionings as to the source of and reason for the sudden upsurge of this dreadful disease that has successfully paralyzed the world’s businesses and economies. It has also succeeded in making impossible the religious associational gathering, thus preventing a mass of people from worshipping their gods/goddesses in a communitarian fashion.

In his apt observation, Akintunde E. Akinade^[34] notes that “the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently ravaging the entire global landscape in 2020 provides a unique opportunity to evaluate our common humanity. The virus that has hit the cosmos like a raging tsunami is a telling testimony to the fact that at a time of global crisis, human beings irrespective of race, class, gender are susceptible to grave danger.” There is no doubt that Akinade has touched on an important aspect of COVID-19 disease and the damage it has caused on the global stage. It is no longer a gainsaying to note that the virus has weakened the power of the so-called “powerful” in the world. What we are witnessing is beyond the control of any mortal. Akinade^[34] further puts it like this:

The crisis has deflated the arrogance of powerful elites and left self-conceited purveyors of empires scrabbling for succor and safety. A bewildering “wilderness experience” unfolds before our very eyes, and naturally, many people have taken cover under the monumental sacred canopy. For all intents and purposes, the global pandemic has made 2020 an *annus horribilis* on many accounts. It has wreaked havoc on the global economic architecture, shut down commercial travel, paralyzed all global sporting events, suffocated the healthcare industry, left developing countries yearning to breathe free, and totally shut down educational institutions.

Andrew Cuomo, the intrepid Governor of New York, summarily almost described COVID-19 as ‘death’, when he says, “It’s more powerful, it’s more dangerous than we expected^[35].” The menacing fangs of the monster of death clawed at everyone. The globe has been put on a ventilator, grasping for breath and air. As the strange virus bites harder, communities all over the world scurry for palliatives and a dynamic *deus ex machina*. In a surreal and sublime sense, the virus underscores the vicissitudes of life. The poet William Blake^[36] writes:

“It is right it should be so;
Man was made for joy and woe;
And when this we rightly know,
Thro’ the world we safely go.
Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine.

Under every grief and pine

Runs a joy with silken twine.”

Akinade rightly observes that, “In spite of its melancholic manifestations, the pandemic has provided a great opportunity to deeply reflect on the precious nature of life and the future prospects of the world.” It has given a new sense of awakening and awareness for the political class in developing countries to ponder creative ways to improve their country’s medical infrastructural facilities that have become redundant and moribund. It provided a much-needed wake-up call for many countries to put their houses in order. Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked: “Crises and deadlocks when they occur have at least this advantage; they force us to think.” The global plague spelled out with brutal clarity the need for societies to re-assess and re-position themselves in terms of educational, scientific, and financial transformation. In theological parlance, an opportune time is known as a “Kairos” moment. This illustrious time provides the unique opportunity to redesign our thought processes and programs for “a stitch in time saves nine” and “tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.” It is a time to close the debilitating “say-do” chasm and concentrate on positive paradigms and constellations that can transform communities.

In the era of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, much concerted effort is needed by African leaders to work out their own plan for overcoming the deleterious effects of this virus and those before it. The US-China fight over the provenance and response to the virus weakens a trade deal that could help the world get back on its feet. An imbroglio over the distribution of an eventual vaccine is tearing allies apart. Notwithstanding his own contribution to the mess that Nigeria has found itself, Olabode George^[37], one of the veteran politicians in Nigeria, cautioned, “Our people are hungry and afraid. Our society like the rest of the world is on panic mode. We need to be seen to engage this pandemic with a comprehensive, well thought out, believable strategy. That should be our complementary goal.” He pointed out that “Leaders across the globe who appreciate the gravity that humanity is confronted with are managing the situation with proper consultations and designing appropriate strategies that will ameliorate the sufferings of their people”.

It is appropriate to affirm that, in light of the negative ruptures and fractures that have been caused by the pandemic within societies and communities of faith, it is imperative for religious organizations to engender new paradigms that can foster solidarity, ubuntu. Thankfully, this concept is not new to Africa’s socio-cultural settings. Ubuntu is an African word that has a universal ramification. It is a Zulu word that captures the spirit and ethos of the philosophical foundation of African societies as a collective whole. It exemplifies a unifying ethos enshrined in the Zulu dictum *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, that is, “a person is a person through other persons.” This African aphorism posits that we are all contingent beings. This notion challenges the enlightenment philosophical paradigm that celebrated whiteness as the universal standard for humanity. The African model of *Ubuntu* celebrates humanness and connectedness. John Mbiti interpreted this communitarian vision in terms of “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.” The Venda people of South Africa say that “*muthu u bebelwa munwe*—A person is born for the other.” The COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged the entire global landscape in 2020 provides a unique opportunity for evaluating our common humanity. The virus that hit the cosmos like a raging tsunami was a telling testimony to the fact that, at a time of global crisis, human beings, irrespective of race, class, or gender status, are susceptible to danger. In a tacit reference to the spirit of ubuntu, Martin Luther King Jr. said, “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly^[38].”

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Quadri SA. COVID-19 and Religious Congregations: Implications for Spread of Novel Pathogens. *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*. 2020; 96: 219-221.
2. Pinn AB. You can't theologize a virus. In: *Sacred Matters: Religious Currents in Culture Magazine*. Rice University; 2020.
3. Huchingson JE. *Pandemonium Tremendum: Chaos and Mystery in the Life of God*. The Pilgrim Press; 2001.
4. Ehanire O. First case of corona virus confirmed in Nigeria. <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/first-case-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
5. Kalu B. COVID-19 in Nigeria: A disease of hunger. Available online: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30220-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30220-4/fulltext) (accessed on 2 December 2023).
6. Haass R. The Pandemic will Accelerate History Rather than Reshape It: Not Every Crisis is a Turning Point. Available online: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-04-07/pandemic-will-accelerate-history-rather-reshape-it?> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
7. Egbunike N. Nigerian Pastor Spreads COVID-19 Conspiracies and Disinformation. Available online: <https://globalvoices.org/2020/05/15/nigerian-pastor-spreads-covid-19-conspiracies-and-disinformation> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
8. Goodman J, Carmichael F. Coronavirus: 5G and microchip conspiracies around the world. Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/53191523> published June 27, 2020, downloaded 4/5/2021 (accessed on 2 December 2023).
9. Tillich P. *The Courage to Be*, with an introduction by Peter J. Gomes. Yale University Press; 1952.
10. Maclean R. Abba Kyari: The Nigerian President Right-hand man dies. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/23/obituaries/abba-kyari-dead-coronavirus.html> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
11. Alabi M. Ex-Unilag VC, Oye Ibidapo-Obe is dead. Available online: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/434724-just-in-ex-unilag-vc-oye-ibidapo-obe-is-dead.html?tztc=1> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
12. Butler J. Mourning Is a Political Act amid the Pandemic and Its Disparities, in an interview granted George Yancy by Judith Butler. Available online: <https://truthout.org/articles/judith-butler-mourning-is-a-political-act-amid-the-pandemic-and-its-disparities/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
13. Schmidt R. *Exploring Religion*. Belmont. Wadsworth, Inc; 1980.
14. Nonbeing. Available online: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/nonbeing> (accessed on 2 December, 2023)
15. Huchingson J. *Pandemonium Tremendum: Chaos and Mystery in the Life of God*. The Pilgrim Press; 2001.
16. Quinonez N. The Importance of Information Technology and Its Disadvantages. Available online: <https://blog.udemy.com/importance-of-information-technology/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
17. Cox H. *The Secular City*. Macmillan Company; 1968.
18. Oláopá T. Philosophy in the Time of the COVID-19, reported by Akinwande Soji-Ojo. Available online: <https://newspeakonline.com/philosophy-in-the-time-of-the-covid-19-by-tunji-olaopa/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
19. Campbell J. *Good Leadership at the Top Belies Facts on the Ground in Nigeria*. Council on Foreign Relations New York; 2020.
20. Kossoff J. People across the UK are apparently burning cellphone masts and abusing engineers in the street over baseless conspiracy theories linking the coronavirus to 5G networks. Available online: <https://www.businessinsider.com> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
21. Kirby B, Taru J, Chimbidzikai T. Pentecostals are in a “spiritual war” against coronavirus in Africa—as are some political leaders. Available online: <https://qz.com/africa/1849315/pentecostal-churches-are-in-spiritual-war-vs-coronavirus-covid19/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
22. Obi D. COVID-19: Nigerian media urged to focus on origin, vaccines, masks. Available online: <https://businessday.ng/brands-advertising/article/covid-19-nigerian-media-urged-to-focus-on-origin-vaccines-masks/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
23. Pazzanese C. Battling the ‘pandemic of misinformation’. Available online: <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/05/social-media-used-to-spread-create-covid-19->

- falsehoods/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily%2520Gazette%252020200511%2520%281%29 (accessed on 2 December 2023).
24. Suciu P. COVID-19 Misinformation Remains Difficult to Stop on Social Media. Available online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuciu/2020/04/17/covid-19-misinformation-remains-difficult-to-stop-on-social-media/#688e93944819> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 25. Lone SA, Ahmad A. COVID-19 Pandemic: An African Perspective. *Emerging Microbes & Infections*. 2020; 9.
 26. Ozili PK. COVID-19 Pandemic and Economic Crisis: The Nigerian Experience and Structural Causes. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. 2020. doi: 10.2139/ssrn.3567419
 27. Okoeki O. Sanwo-Olu to religious leaders: Sensitise adherents to obey safety measures. Available online: <https://thenationonlineng.net/sanwo-olu-to-religious-leaders-sensitise-adherents-to-obey-safety-measures/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 28. Benson EA. List of all companies and billionaires that have contributed to COVID-19 relief fund. Available online: <https://nairametrics.com/2020/04/18/list-of-all-companies-and-billionaires-that-have-contributed-to-covid-19-relief-fund/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 29. Nnah M. Nigeria: COVID-19–Adeboye Donates Medical Supplies to Lagos. Available online: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/04/09/covid-19-adeboye-donates-medical-supplies-to-lagos/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 30. Irekamba C, Olatunji K, Coffie-Gyamfi C. Oyedepo predicts end of virus, gives ambulance, protective gears to Ogun. Available online: <https://guardian.ng/news/oyedepo-predicts-end-of-virus-gives-ambulance-protective-gears-to-ogun/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 31. COVID-19: Nigerian Muslim community mobilizes to mitigate impact. <https://mpac-ng.org/muslims-mobilize-on-covid-19-2/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 32. COVID-19: Muslim Coalition begins relief operations in FCT, 4 states. Available online: <https://dailytimesng.com/muslim-coalition-against-covid-19-begins-relief-operations-in-fct-4-states-with-700-health-workers/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 33. Obiezu T. COVID-19 Pandemic: Nigerians Justify Massive Looting of COVID-19 Supplies. Available online: <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/nigerians-justify-massive-looting-covid-19-supplies> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 34. Akinade AE. Things Fall Apart: COVID-19 and Religious Assemblies in Qatar. Available online: <https://cirs.georgetown.edu/news-analysis/things-fall-apart-covid-19-and-religious-assemblies-qatar> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 35. Baldwin SL, McNamara A. New York Governor Cuomo Says Coronavirus is “more dangerous than we expected. Available online: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/andrew-cuomo-coronavirus-new-york-more-dangerous-covid-19-1500-death-toll/> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 36. Blake W. *Auguries of Innocence*. In: *Poets of the English Language*. Viking Press; 1950.
 37. Olabode G. Pumping Billions in School Feeding When Schools Are Closed Absurd. Available online: <https://www.nairaland.com/5865220/bode-george-pumping-billions-school> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
 38. King ML Jr. Letter from Birmingham Jail: Martin Luther King Jr.’s Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle That Changed a Nation. Available online: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=16.+Martin+Luther+King+Jr.+Letter+from+Birmingham+Jail> (accessed on 2 December 2023).