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

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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 global north to the global south. This paper uses socio-ethical and content analytical methods of enquiry 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 the medical scientists in especially the Western highly technologized world. Its noxious and deleterious effects spread across the world have in the main led to the closure of all businesses, corporate organizations leaving many people jobless, helpless and indeed anxious. Even spiritual houses, which were once believed, could serve as safe spaces or havens for healings and deliverances when every effort at getting 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 identify clearly the threat or determine duration”. 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 global north to the global south. This paper uses socio-ethical and content analytical

methods of enquiry 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 27th of February, in an Italian patient who flew to Nigeria from Italy on 25 February 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 poor in Nigeria. 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 sectors year in and 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 to be a mere biological weapon of mass destruction to have been invented in Wuhan in China to prove its (China) 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 confusions, 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 by the Microsoft, the 5G wireless network technology, 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 is 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 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 also in the United Kingdom and some parts of the world, linking the COVID-19 to the 5G wireless network. These claims have been debunked by the 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 in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife have begun to debate about which phrase is the most appropriate. The initial imposition of restriction of movement of interstate and intrastate had 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 maybe) with ourselves because we were hindered from engaging in the collective mourning of our deads in the public spheres. African social world is a place where the immediate and the extended family relations and friends see their existence to be co-extensive with other people. They see their intrinsic relation to others and see 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.

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 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 the 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 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 to be on the large scale and 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 at the corner for the majority of the people still living and whose lives have not been consumed by COVID-19 virus. She believes that “many are anxious because they do not yet know who or what they have yet to lose, what parts of the world will be irrecoverably lost or reanimated in 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-state and its citizens and also 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 aftereffect 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, 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 the 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 we are all becoming vulnerable not only to already harsh economic and social condition of life but because “the pandemic exposes the heightened vulnerability to the illness of all those for whom health care is neither accessible nor affordable” here in Nigeria or even in

the highly developed economy like Euro-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 existential anxiety that the world is currently experiencing? How relevant and potent is the modern medicine, which claims 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 majority 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 few others would 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 the 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 the transcendental and trans-empirical entities. From this point of view, human being is the primary value. Rabbi Sherwin Wine was quoted to have said 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 in doing the unimaginable. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries have made the impossible possible. Through human genius, travels in the air, in the sea and over the 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 potentialities 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 the relevance of information technology to the 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 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 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 the Harvey Cox’s [17] *Secular City* continues to make scientific and technological waves, the world, however, continues to constantly experience despair. Despair as a result of failure of science and technology to be able 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 Oládopá [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 inexorably bent on self-extinction through our civilizing and technologizing mission. 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 few in Africa to find 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 but they are limited to certain geographical areas, but 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 claiming lives in their thousands every day? As at the time the COVID-19 virus got to Nigeria, it was only through one person from Italy, as at 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, 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, 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 Coronavirus has succeeded in achieving in all the people 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 impact; the overcoming of Coronavirus anytime soon will likely live the 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 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, WhatsApp in particular has played a medium host to disseminating a lot of fearful and anxious messages back and forth of the reason why 5G network telecommunication technology should be voted and prayed against by the 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 as 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 sinful and worldly 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 COVID-19 virus, and still brooding on that, there added the newly 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 the 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 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 the 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 even have predicted that the Lord’s return would first witness prevalence of evil and disorderliness.

By citing both 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 at certain year but such has 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 Ilo, Ilesha had predicted on many occasions that the world would come to an end on specific years but all of them failed. Her church was destroyed by the families of the members who have 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 the 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 the highly technologized nations like the America, the UK and the rest of them are never exempted. Since the upsurge, COVID-19 issues have continued to shape the media reports in Nigeria. Most of these reports are not usually critically examined before they were brought out for public consumption, thus adding to the fear of already panic-stricken Nigerian populace. According to Daniel Obi [21] who is a reporter in 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] in her article in Harvard Medical Magazine online writes:

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 their varieties, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Messenger, Telegram and a host of others have been spaces where information enter through in and out to the mass audience, intended or not. This is not new though, before the pandemic, the social media have been known for peddling rumors and misinformation. Some may not really be intended but majority are. Imagine a lot of information making round 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 tress and so on to be compounded together and boiled. Or when Donald Trump was said that chloroquine used for the treatment of malaria could easily bring about sudden miracle of healing of 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 because majority of people who are eager to get information ready-to-be spread take no pain in carefully reading through what they have received. Suciú [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 Suciú 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, 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 decision or make 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 benefits of humanity. The Nigerian situation makes the synergy between science and religion imperative. There is need for the two at this time of world’s great challenge to work together. If we can’t face it, we can’t fix it. There is tenacity of 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 creating 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, The 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 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, infrared thermometers, and if they could afford them, also provide conducive spaces where diagnosed COVID-19 virus patients could be treated in order to complement the efforts of the government. Beyond this material supplies, there is need for religious leaders to continue to sensitize their various members to constantly maintain healthy hygiene of hand washing, use of face masks, maintenance of social/physical distancing.

8. COVID-19 virus on Nigeria economy

There is no doubt that COVID-19 virus has dealt a severe blow to the world economy, 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 have 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 effect of COVID-19 pandemics needs to shift to the developing nations, and particularly to 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 among major factors which have affected African economy badly is reduction on oil demand. This is as a result of ban and restrictions on travels 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 COVID-19 pandemic virus.

Following the same argument, Ozili [26] identified five major effects of COVID-19 on Nigeria 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 shortage of crucial supplies like pharmaceutical supplies, spare parts, and finished goods from China. And that the national budget was also affected. The budget was initially planned with an oil price of US\$57 per barrel. The fall in oil price 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 with at low oil price. As of now, Nigeria is still groping in the dark looking for a way out of the current economic quagmire she finds herself. One can only hope that things would 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, there emerge certain individuals [and religious bodies] who have begun to contribute to the government efforts in donating monies, materials and foods, which are expected to cushion the effects of COVID-19 virus.

As at 18 April 2020 the sum of N25.8 billion has so far been donated by 107 Nigerian companies and notable individuals, as relief fund to combat 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 contributed N2 billion each. Other notable companies and prominent billionaires also donated N1 billion each, including Tony Elumelu, Modupe and Folorunsho Alakija, Abdulsamad Rabiou, 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 millions [27].

The Redeemed Christian Church of God through its General Overseer Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo has also contributed to assist the Lagos state, which was initially badly hit with hospital materials and then food materials to 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 Adebayo 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 necessary protective gears 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 Eneche 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 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 has been mobilized by Muslim coalition to provide relief against COVID-19 in Nigeria and by 20 April 2020 relief materials have been provided in Federal Capital Territory and four states in Nigeria [32]. More religious bodies who have contributed one thing or another who might not have been reported on daily news could not be denied. If the collaboration between the Nigeria government and religious bodies could continue, a lot of progress and advancement will occur and indeed undue religious rivalry that could further lead to many deaths from 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 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 the government officials or people saddled with the responsibility of collecting the materials from the 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 to be willing to donate. More importantly, the doubt that was already cast by many people on the reality of COVID-19 just like many denied Ebola Virus could be responsible also for people not to respond 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, End-SARS protest especially at the Southwestern region of the nation actually revealed the greed of the Nigerian political elites. A lot of Senators, Representative members 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 has it 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, the deadly Coronavirus 2019 disease also known as COVID-19. In its wake, there were and still agitations and questionings as to what were the source of and the 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 mass of people from worshipping their gods/goddesses in a communitarian fashion.

In his apt observation, Akintunde Akinade (2020) 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 important aspect of COVID-19 disease and the damage it has caused in the global stage. It is no more 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 travels, 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 the much-needed wake-up call for many countries to put their house 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 deadly pandemic COVID-19, much concerted efforts are needed by the African leaders to work out their own plan of overcoming the deleterious effects of this virus and those ones before it. 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 that, “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 apposite 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 of 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, 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].”

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