




# Interrogating Christian and Muslim responses to COVID-19 in Nigeria



## Authors:

Emmanuel J. Ibuot<sup>1</sup>   
 Chisom Uchendu<sup>2</sup>   
 Peter M. Kertyo<sup>3</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Humanities Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Fine and Industrial Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup>Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

## Corresponding author:

Emmanuel Ibuot,  
 emmanuel.ibuot@unn.edu.ng

## Dates:

Received: 23 Mar. 2024  
 Accepted: 06 Aug. 2024  
 Published: 30 Sept. 2024

## How to cite this article:

Ibuot, E.J., Uchendu, C. & Kertyo, P.M., 2024, 'Interrogating Christian and Muslim responses to COVID-19 in Nigeria', *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(1), a9813. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9813>

## Copyright:

© 2024. The Authors.  
 Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

## Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the far-reaching significance of religion in shaping human interaction within social crises. Efforts to slow down the spread of coronavirus prompted different national governments, including the Federal Government of Nigeria to restrict large density gatherings, enforce lockdowns and promote social distancing, which were largely resisted initially. Organised religion may have influenced citizens' compliance with government directives for curbing the pandemic. Focussing largely on providing economic assistance to people in need, it may have missed out on the reason for recourse to faith. One outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic was the need to understand the application of religious faith in explaining epidemics and health crises. This work predominantly relies on data from secondary sources (library research and internet materials). Just as it critically investigates Christian-Muslim responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, it seeks also to justify reliance on religion during a health emergency. By the evaluative method of philosophy, we show that although the pandemic triggered dread of annihilation, it brought in its wake a search for ontological meaningfulness. This study therefore argues that Nigerians turned to religion to meet the deep-seated, individual need for meaningfulness ('survivability') that is primary to the need of soul and body, which includes material donations by organised religious entities. The primacy of fulfilling this need precedes sociality both ontologically and epistemologically because meaningfulness is an inalienable property of individuality.

**Contribution:** This work presents religion as a rationally defensible need that is fundamentally rooted in individual human nature, even in a pandemic; religion pertains to meaningfulness, which counters human fear of annihilation and meaninglessness.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; religious faith; health emergencies; needs; meaningfulness; Islam; Christianity; spirit.

## Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (Sars-CoV-2) being its causal agent, was first identified in Wuhan (China) in December 2019 (Ludwig & Zarbock 2020). In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a global pandemic. Nigeria's COVID-19 index case was recorded on 27 February 2020 according to Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC n.d.); it was followed by a second case arising from contact with the index case (Amzat et al. 2020; Nseyen 2020). On 30 March 2020, the federal government announced various containment strategies such as closing of the country's land borders and airspace, schools, worship centres and other public places; these measures were preceded by a nationwide lockdown across the 36 states of Nigeria and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. Restrictions were placed on mass gatherings, including gatherings for religious worship. Particularly significant for Nigerians were restrictions on religious gatherings and events such as open-air crusades, house churches and the closure of worship centres. Thus, church buildings and mosques were closed for several months. The restriction, as described by Asadu (2022), impacted on human lives and on religious faith negatively. Perceiving COVID-19 as deleterious, signalling uncertainty, hopelessness and vulnerability (Lennox 2020), many Nigerians sought help in religion. But this resort to religion was challenged by other Nigerians, who disbelieved in the relevance of religion to a health emergency.

On the relationship between the COVID-19 experience and organised religion, Ezechimere, Jacob and Deborah (2021) explored the effect of COVID-19 on local churches in Nigeria. Their work explored the negative effects on the church's life and operations, especially church revenue reduction, welfare packages' increment and preferred churches for palliatives' distribution. The study by Okoye and Obulor (2021) described the efforts of organised faith (Christianity and Islam) at suspending large services to stem the COVID-19 pandemic as generally efficient. It proposed

partnership between the government and organised religion for effective social control and management. In Kitause and Odugbo's (2021) article where the consequences of COVID-19 on churches in Nigeria took centre stage, the positives and negatives on church institutions were highlighted; remedies for the negatives were suggested. Asadu's (2022) study, as an ambivalent record about the impact of COVID-19 on churches in Nigeria, specified church revenue decrement, charity services increment and toll on the psyche of members arising from the ban on corporate religious services and rituals. These studies, suffused with interests in the preservation of organised religion and social services provision, show little or no significant interest in the rationale behind people's vehement recourse to religion.

Apart from this introduction, the second section presents the hierarchy of the needs theory. This theory lays a foundation for understanding the recourse to religion as something rooted in individuality and in meaningfulness. Section 3 is a report on responses of Christians and Muslims to the government ban on crowded religious events. By philosophy's evaluative method, the actions of Nigerians relative to the pandemic undergo critical examination. Meaningfulness as a superlative human need is expanded in Section 4. We conclude by highlighting meaningfulness as ground for recourse to religion, not social welfare.

## Hierarchy of needs theory and meaningfulness

Maslow grounds human life in needs. He argues that crises in human life are explainable by unfulfilled needs. Knowing that human beings have assortment of needs, we must understand that their actions are more or less driven by the fulfilment or not of these 'human needs' (Maslow 1943, 1970a:3, 38). These needs, consisting of two broad groups – with their peculiar sub-categories – deficiency and growth needs (McLeod 2023), define human life. Maslow's deficiency needs are physiological, safety, social, belonging or love and esteem needs. His growth needs include cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, self-actualisation needs and transcendence needs (Maslow 1943, 1970a, 1970b). Food, air, water, sleep, warmth and sex make up the physiological needs. Order, security, law, sound health and a sense of fearlessness constitute safety needs just as social, belonging or love needs comprise trust, intimacy, friendship, acceptance and group membership. While the esteem needs are self-esteem and respect from others, the cognitive needs are wonder or curiosity, meaning, knowledge and predictability. Passion and appreciation for beauty, form, balance and creativity make up aesthetic needs. Self-fulfilment, personal growth and peak experiences define self-actualisation needs while transcendence needs, otherwise known as non-self oriented value systems, are represented by science, aesthetics, charity, sexual and mystical experiences (Maslow 1943, 1970a, 1970b). While deficiency needs pertain to human lack, growth needs focus on the satisfaction of the lack (Maslow 1970a:134–135,159,198). Even though these needs are hierarchically organised, they may not follow its pyramidal order rigidly

(Maslow 1943:38, 51, 53–55). The fundamental ethos of Maslow's needs theory is that humans are beings of needs that progress from simple to complex needs; these needs are predicated upon survival, not upon simple biological self-preservation (Maslow 1968:129, 1970a:190–191, 284, 1971:344; Thomas & Restas 1999). He modified his theory, moving from multiple needs to one principal need that encapsulates all other needs. Abraham Maslow considered this one need, 'meaningfulness' (Maslow 1969a:174–184, 1970b), as a human being's 'primary' and 'highest concern' (Maslow 1969b:127–128). This concern is not just singular, irreducible and unanalysable, but primary to human life (Maslow 1969b; in Frankl 2000:86). For Maslow (1969a), the absence of meaningfulness is indicated by 'despair', 'meaninglessness', 'anomie' and 'senselessness' (174), even as they are operations of the soul. But to ground meaningfulness in the soul seems problematic. We shall return to this matter shortly.

## Responses of Christians and Muslims to ban on religious gatherings

Nigerian Christians responded with criticisms and initial resistance. The government of Ondo State shut down at least five churches on Easter Sunday 2020 for non-compliance with COVID-19 regulations (Johnson 2020). Some church leaders like David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church and Pastor Paul Eneche of the Dunamis International Gospel Centre held Sunday services after the federal government banned physical contact. They reasoned it was important to enlighten members unaware of the order and how future services would be conducted. Oyedepo criticised the state government for shutting down churches but he was rebutted by the public (Eyoboka 2021; Okoye & Obulor 2021). Non-mainline (Pentecostal and Evangelical) groups were not indifferent. Mainline church organisations, particularly the Roman Catholic Church shut their doors and resorted to other channels for Sunday worship and for meeting the religious needs of their congregants (Adichie 2021). Compliance varied among other mainline church groups like Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) and Methodist Church Nigeria. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) encouraged personal and private prayers, and the arrest and prosecution of defaulters.

The diversity of responses amongst Christians, individually or at a corporate level, was driven by convictions such as Sars-CoV-2 was: (1) an eschatological sign and (2) God's punishment for human sinfulness and corruption (Owolabi 2020). Indeed, many church leaders in Nigeria considered COVID-19 primarily as a spiritual problem and as a scientific only secondarily (Atoi 2022; Nche, Agbo & Okwueze 2024; Ojebode 2024). Following from the conviction of religious leadership, we can appreciate the stance of generality of Christians on COVID-19 as a pretext for demonstrating trust in God. Trust in God facilitated government efforts at containing the crisis because it was eventually used by Church leadership to justify obedience to government orders for closure of religious centres despite initial criticisms from some religious quarters. These religious leaders argued that

it was divinely required to obey government authorities and to be reasonable. Again, a class dimension in the responses of religious groups was observed at University of Nigeria Nsukka in southern Nigeria. Less-educated church members across Christian groups 'grumbled' and partially complied with the prescribed protocol because of disbelief in the reality of COVID-19; more educated members were more compliant (I. Ejike pers. comm., 15 April 2020; S. Dimelu pers. comm., 10 June 2020; J. Okeke pers. comm., 05 July 2020). This was also noted in other parts of Nigeria where less educated church members across Christian groups 'grumbled' against prescribed protocol and partially complied with them because of disbelief in the reality of COVID-19 (Falako & Sirajudeen 2022; Shuaib 2022); more educated members were more compliant.

As state governments across the 36 states of Nigeria imposed restrictions on worship centres, Muslims rose in protests and resentment. The first of such responses was witnessed in Kusada town, Katsina State (Nigeria) where angry youths burned down a police station because officers attached to the station stopped them from observing their Friday, 27 March 2020, Juma'at prayers following the state government's ban on social gatherings (Usman 2020). In April 2020, in Zaria, an imam was sacked by the management council of his mosque for complying with the government's ban on religious gatherings (Odunsi 2020). That same April 2020, the governor of Niger State, Abubakar Sani Bello, announced that he would lock down the state to curb the spread of Sars-CoV-2. The state allowed its Muslim citizens to observe the Friday Juma'at prayers but under strict precautionary measures whereby they had to conclude their prayers within 30 min, after which the lockdown was to resume (Ahmad 2020).

Muslims' displeasure and disregard for authorised COVID-19 protocols were demonstrated during the burial of the late Chief of Staff to the President of Nigeria, Abba Kyari, who died from COVID-19 complications on 17 April 2020. Kyari was buried at the Gudu cemetery in Abuja and pictorial evidence from the event shows that those in attendance did not attend to required safety protocols seriously. Participants observed no social distancing. While some attendees at the entombment wore facemasks, some did not. Some face coverings used during the event did not meet the safety rules (Ogundipe 2020). A similar scenario occurred at Buruji Kashamu's funeral (Raheem 2020).

Different myths and superstitions gained currency over the health crises (Habib et al. 2021; Okorie 2024). Muslims resisted the protocols because they saw COVID-19 as Allah's punishment upon Muslims' persecutors – China being an instance (Golden 2020). The pandemic was to some Muslims a calculated attempt by the West to depopulate Muslims (Shehu & Rao 2020), and to others a 'western conspiracy' to prevent Muslims from practicing their faith (Atoi 2022:13; Ojebode 2023:58–59). Coronavirus was also viewed as God testing his children's faith and punishing them for disobedience (Ojebode 2023). For those so convinced, fighting the pandemic was futile; it sufficed to rely on God to protect the righteous (Atoi 2022).

As violence and non-compliance persisted in majority Muslim states, Islamic religious and traditional leaders intervened. Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III, the Sultan of Sokoto, appealed against in-person Ramadan lectures and congregational prayers to contain the spread of COVID-19, recommending virtual sessions instead (Okoye & Obulor 2021). He advised Muslims to value their lives, stay safe and pray with their families at home despite the inevitability of death (Oguntola 2020). The coordinator, Presidential Taskforce (PTF) on COVID-19, Sani Aliyu, advised Muslims to abide by COVID-19 restriction orders during the Ramadan month and avoid crowded social and religious gatherings and physically distance (Adepegba 2020). These protests and resistance by Christians and Muslims were largely driven by basic economics and survival.

The concern and value for human life drove churches and mosques to provide social welfare. The harsh situation in the country and the government's unpreparedness and inadequate provisions for the citizens forced people to violate the order to survive. As federal and state governments extended the lockdown beyond the first 6 weeks, the unemployed, the self-employed and other economically distressed groups rebelled against the protocols to cushion the hardship that came with prolonged lockdown. As the season corresponded with heightened deaths across the nation, people were unsure if the deaths were occasioned by COVID-19 infections or hunger and lack of basic needs. Most people blamed it on the latter. Other reasons for abandoning the lockdown and social distancing rules included tiredness and boredom remaining at home, lack of provisions and increment in active cases notwithstanding movement restriction (Osahon 2020; Shuaib 2022).

The government at different levels failed to meet the basic needs of her citizens whose businesses had been shut down for weeks. Unemployed and self-employed persons like the daily wage earners were the most vulnerable citizens. Interestingly, religious organisations filled this gap during the lockdown to a great extent. David Oyedepo's Living Faith Church, Paul Enenche's Dunamis International Gospel Centre, David Ibiyeomie's Salvation Ministries, Enoch Adeboye's Redeemed Christian Church of God and a host of others, including mainline churches such as Church of Nigeria and the Catholic Church gave out food and clothing items to needy members and non-members to help ameliorate suffering. These services were besides their donations to the government (Adighibe & Ireoba 2020). Jeremiah Omoto Fufeyin donated items estimated at N300 million, and an additional N800 million worth of material support and cash towards combating COVID-19 (Nwachukwu 2020). Within the Islamic circle, different groups donated food items worth millions of naira to the Federal Government of Nigeria to support the hungry and distressed during the lockdown, even as zakat gifts were shared amongst vulnerable Muslim families across the country during the April–May 2020 Ramadan (Okoye & Obulor 2021).



The public's lack of belief in the existence of COVID-19 would appear to have been derived from poor management of news. Information about the virus, continuously discussed and examined by government-owned media houses and private-owned media organisations tolerant of government opinion, gendered suspicion in the citizenry because the media houses are governed and regulated by the federal government, and, with a history of mistrust by the citizenry, majority suspected a hoax that government officials were exploiting to further divert public funds into private accounts (Hoechner & Salisu 2022; Shuaib 2022, 129, 131–133). Nigerians received weekly reports of increasing numbers of infected persons in different states which did not correlate with local observations about their communities. This sense of holding government reportage suspect was captured by likening NCDC's weekly updates of infection cases with 'match fixing'. This sense of doubt was not necessarily about a lack of belief in the existence of COVID-19 but of government claims about the degree and spread of the infection across the country (Shuaib 2022). The communal experiences of the citizens could not match with the claims of government. People had difficulty believing the numbers announced by NCDC because in their communities – Nigeria is still highly organised and connected in terms of family, clan and village linkages – they heard almost nothing of anyone who had COVID-19 in the sense of matching the prescriptions of WHO and NCDC. In a society organised along the lines of families and households or paterfamilias, and whose welfare system is organically local and home-based, it is impossible for community members to exhibit the symptoms of COVID-19 without close relatives knowing and calling on neighbours for help. Ben Ayade, Governor of Cross River State, in an interview on 21 May 2020, asserted zero COVID-19 cases in Cross River State. He stated that it was impossible for people to have COVID-19 in a state without one finding evidence of it in the hospitals, the only logical first port of call; that in his state, there was no report on such cases in any hospitals even though he had set up isolation centres designated for the management of COVID-19 (Idowu 2020).

Internet-savvy Nigerians, especially the youths, attended to alternative expert medical and scientific reports online; thus, they independently evaluated government claims and recommendations, disregarding much of it. In other words, people reacted to the virus differently; the older generation was more fearful than the younger generation. This should be properly situated as not informed by the later discovery of the less virulent nature of the virus amongst young people. In Nigeria, the insight functioned to cement suspicion of approved COVID-19 management protocols, not a beacon of hope for outliving the pandemic.

Citizen's responses to government orders concerning COVID-19 were impacted by the peoples' perception of the disease as signalling utter loss of meaning (meaninglessness), a sense or consciousness of no guarantee or basis to hope to live and to persist in being. Because of the expectation to find meaning in the religious sphere and neither in the government nor her medical directives, Christians and Muslims in Nigeria

were generally opposed to the ban on religious assembling and the subsequent compliance of their religious leaders to the ban. They believed that prayers were necessary in a pandemic, complying partially and reluctantly to government protocols (Okoye & Obulor 2021:70–71,75–76; Oladosu 2024).

## Responses and need for meaningfulness

The COVID-19 pandemic and its management in Nigeria show that human life may not be consistently treated as stand-alone items as the political and the religious, for instance, were invariably involved in attempts at managing the pandemic. The borders of medical and health sciences and the particularity of their natures were intruded upon – whether for wholesome or unwholesome reasons – by politics, economics and religion. The intrusions into the management of the pandemic attest to the extended and interwoven nature of reality as against the narrowness and particularity of empirical sciences, seemingly nudged towards unity. Seeking unity in the face of a pandemic is not altogether unscientific because science often functions in inductive generalisation (Popper 1972, 1980). In principle, constructing generalised statements from particular statements – despite its illogicality and/or 'insightful generalizations' (Wildman et al. 2020:116) – points at human desire for unity. But what is this unity in the face of multiple desires such as self-preservation, safety and security? The peculiar unity we seek in this work pertains to 'why' recourse to or trust in religious faith instead of government and its medical and health extensions.

Responding to and managing the challenges attendant on the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to fall under the purview of health and medical practitioners. Widespread criticism followed the constitution of the nation's COVID-19 management team by the politicians; the team had more political colouration than health and medicals. This boosted a general doubt on the government's sincerity in effective handling of the pandemic and in preserving citizens' lives. In Akwa Ibom State, the former state chief epidemiologist, Dr Aniekeme Uwah, renowned for his contributions to the successful management of Ebola outbreak in Liberia was removed from that office for failing to follow the demand of the State's Commissioner of Health, Dr Dominic Inyang Ukpong, to manage the pandemic in terms inconsistent with the principles of public health management and NCDC that required a full and unambiguous report (Bassey 2020). Behaviours such as of this kind by politicians involved with COVID-19 management did not only serve to cement mistrust but disposed the populace to risk furthering the cases of COVID-19 infections and deaths (Abbasi 2020). This mistrust was extended towards the health and medical practitioners; they generally evinced political responsiveness than faithfulness to their expertise. Doubt of health and medical class may have reinforced other explorations.

It has been suggested that people took recourse to religion because of economic insecurity, and disbelief in politicians and health experts. But the argument of taking recourse to

religion is inconsistent with available records; some of the persons (in political and religious circles), who supported resistance to government protocols were not poor. Evidences from Kyari's and Kashamu's funerals showed wealthy and middle-class Nigerians in attendance at those crowded funerals, contravening government prescriptions. Argument of taking recourse to religion as a result of economic indigence is difficult to sustain. If religious centres were not known as economic hubs in normal times, how could they be so known during health emergencies? The involvements of organised religion in material donations were merely supplemental exercises; such actions were not justifications for recourse to faith in a pandemic. It is twisted logic to hinge widespread resistance to the government's ban on religious gatherings and disbelief in the aesculapian on economic insufficiencies.

We posit that meaningfulness was the reason for recourse to faith and that it is transcendent in character. Yet it is not transcendent in the Maslowian sense of standing above the human body; for Maslow's meaningfulness is an operation originating from and rooted in the human soul – generally understood as the seat of consciousness – and its powers of particularisation such as mind, will, imagination and emotion. In other words, the soul is incapable of sufficiently grounding the human sense of meaningfulness, which is a phenomenon at once intuitively simple in origination and unanalysable. Meaningfulness as the deepest human concern could only rise from what Ibuot (2020:152–153) calls spirit. Spirit, as used here, does not mean immateriality even though it is immaterial just as the soul. Spirit does not signify something standing in opposition to materiality (Maslow 1970b); and it certainly does not refer to consciousness uniquely human as against that shared between humans, animals and plants (Lanza & Berman 2009; Maslow 1970b). Rather, it is that human dimension responsible for the origination of intuition, of that knowledge a human being suddenly finds in his or her possession that is traceable neither to soul or mind nor body and its senses (Ibuot 2020). Meaningfulness is therefore transcendent in the sense of originating from the spirit, including its singular power of intuition. This intuitive character of meaningfulness makes for the impossibility of its reduction to or its encapsulation within the framework of duality: the soul (mind and its faculty of reason), the body (senses) or the interactionism of the soul and the body; it causes meaningfulness to stand over the operations of soul and body. Meaningfulness is intuitional in structure because no part of the human soul (mind and its reason, will, imagination, emotions) or the body shares in its origination. But does the intuitive character of meaningfulness suggest irrationality (opposition to reason)?

Meaningfulness is a subtle consciousness; its speciality is persistence in being. It stands out in one's consciousness when a sense of ontological dread or meaninglessness looms and tries to dominate one's consciousness. In other words, we discern meaninglessness by the absence of meaningfulness or when one notes that his or her experiences may be appropriately expressed by 'nothingness' or Mezirow's (1995) 'disorienting dilemma' (Kruger 2021:4). Meaninglessness is a conscious

need that cannot be addressed by fulfilment of any single or combined (particular) human need(s) because it is the opposite of meaningfulness, which like it is unanalysable, non-particularistic and irreducible to reason. Meaninglessness pertains to the dread of not being, of absence of being. Both meaningfulness and meaninglessness are operations inexplicable by the soul and its powers; for, they are consciousness rooted in the human spirit, whose speciality lies not in multiplicity of needs but simplicity (not sum of needs of soul and body; sum speaks to particularities, not simplicity or ontological primitives). An analysis of Maslow's classic hierarchy of needs and their operations relative to the soul and body implies shades of consciousness susceptible to analyses; resolving human needs pertaining to those levels may be a successful therat. But meaningfulness is unanalysable; it lies outside the soul and body. To state that meaningfulness is unanalysable is to invoke nonrationality (Miller & Jensen 2009:12), encapsulating religion and human spirit.

As a phenomenon, meaningfulness is nonrational in that it is not a function of reason or mind. It is not irrational but nonrational either because the mind can appreciate its existence intuitively despite not originating from it or because the mind notes it as not mutually exclusive. Of course, it could be argued that it is rational because it is appreciable by reason: 'an object that can thus be thought conceptually may be termed rational' (Otto 1936:1). We hope to pursue this argument in a different work. 'Nonrational' references something different from, and irreducible to, reason or mind (Miller & Jensen 2009:12–13, 176, 297). By lying outside the mind in its origin, meaningfulness is both nonrational and axiomatic because it is independent and preceding of reason(ing). It undergirds living and thinking because its absence makes living and thinking towards fulfilling human needs and concerns relative to soul and body impossible. Being axiomatic, it is preconditioning like the three laws of thought (Russell 1912), which are not properties of thought per se but of anything that can have existence ascribed to it or can be rationally discriminated as a particular entity ('this' or 'that' subject or object). Meaningfulness as an inward guarantee or trust that one's being will not be annihilated by a pandemic, is simple (both ontologically and epistemologically), intuitive, unitive and coordinative. It is to the spirit what the higher and lower needs are to soul and body.

We posit therefore that Christians and Muslims took recourse to religion because of the inner need for meaningfulness. This need is not social – though it could be indirectly useful to society – but individual and private. Affirming the primacy of its indirect social value is fallacious in the sense of misplaced concreteness; this fallacy positions the general (social, public) above the individual, it posits the former as primary and concrete whereas the particular (individual) is considered abstract (Whitehead 1948:52, 54, 59). Because the individual is the sole epistemic accessor and authority of this pre-epistemic consciousness called meaningfulness, we argue that it is individual and private; the individual alone has a direct, unmediated, first-level, 'raw feel' experience of

this ontological meaning. The latter is incorrigible because its presence is only experienced (as present) but never modified; the mind knows it intuitively and unanalytically – to modify requires discriminatory analyses.

## Conclusion

Meaningfulness as individuality has unique epistemological implications for the two religions in focus, even as regards to responding to future health emergencies in society. Its intuitional character is a shared epistemological quality within both faiths' frameworks. At the level of stress, they are different (Agbakoba 2004, 2005): in Christianity, reason oversees faith in received data (ratio-conative intuitionism); in Islam, faith rules above reason's disposition to received data (conative-ratio intuitionism). These epistemic biases (of individuals) could influence future responses to health emergencies beneficently or non-beneficently. Until an academic article examines this lacuna, we may not know what quality of influence these unique epistemic biases may deliver.

## Acknowledgements

We thank Professor Egodi Uchendu for her guidance, particularly for reading the original manuscript and making suggestions for improvements. We are grateful to Rev. Fr. Alexander Ezechukwu, STL; his pecuniary resource saw to the publishing of this work.

## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

All authors, E.J.I., C.U. and P.M.K., were diligent and contributed immensely to the initial visualisation, conceptualisation of this work and writing the original drafts. E.J.I. harmonised the different drafts into one unit, defined the theoretical framings and formally analysed the work; he defined the lead direction for the work. C.U. proofread the work, making suggestions for improvement.

## Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by any of the authors.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

## References

- Abbasi, K., 2020, 'COVID-19: Politicisation, "corruption", and suppression of science', *The BMJ* 371(m4425), 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m4425>
- Adepegba, A., 2020, 'COVID-19: Pray at home during Ramadan, Saudi tells Muslims', *The Punch*, 19 April, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://punchng.com/covid-19-pray-at-home-during-ramadan-saudi-tells-muslims/>.
- Adichie, G.A., 2021, 'Examining the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Roman Catholic Church in Southeastern Nigeria', *Journal of Multidimensional Research and Review*, 1(4), 65–80.
- Adighibe, N. & Ireoba, P., 2020, 'Church of Nigeria donates medical consumables to FG, food items to rural churches', *The Guardian*, 26 April, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/church-of-nigeria-donates-medical-consumables-to-fg-food-items-to-rural-churches/>.
- Agbakoba, J.C.A., 2004, 'An evaluation of knowledge in traditional African thought and its impact on contemporary times', *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* XXI(4), 129–146.
- Agbakoba, J.C.A., 2005, 'Ideology, empirical sciences, and modern philosophical systems', *Journal for the Study of Religion and Ideologies* 10, 116–125.
- Ahmad, R.W., 2020, 'Niger suspends lockdown for Juma'at prayer', *Daily Trust*, 18 April, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://dailytrust.com/niger-suspends-lockdown-for-jumaat-prayer/>.
- Amzat, J., Aminu, K., Kolo, V.I., Akinyele, A.A., Ogunairo, J.A. & Danjibo, M.C., 2020, 'Coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and socio-medical response during the first 100 days', *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* 98, 218–224. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijid.2020.06.067>
- Asadu, G.C., 2022, 'The ambivalent impact of COVID-19 on churches: The case of Nigeria', *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 78(3), a7763. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i3.7763>
- Atoi, E.N., 2022, 'The scourge of Coronavirus (COVID-19) and religious beliefs in Nigeria: Matters arising', *Unizik Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 14(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jrhr.v14i1.1>
- Bassey, A., 2020, 'Deconstructing the malicious falsehood against Dr. Aniekeme Uwah', *Vanguard*, 06 May, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/05/deconstructing-the-malicious-falsehood-against-dr-aniekeme-uwah/>.
- Eyoboka, S., 2021, 'COVID-19: Why we gathered on Sunday contrary to government directive', *Vanguard*, 23 March, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/03/covid-19-why-we-gathered-on-sunday-contrary-to-govt-directive-winners-chapel/>.
- Ezechimere, I.S.E., Jacob, O.N. & Deborah, J., 2021, 'The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on local churches in Nigeria', *Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy and Culture* 2(03), 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.21608/dusj.2021.205892>
- Falako, F.O. & Sirajudeen, A.A., 2022, 'Religious responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: A comparative analysis of the spiritual methods of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria', in M.C. Green, F. Kabata & F. Sibanda (eds.), *Law, religion, health and healing in Africa*, pp. 111–125, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch.
- Frankl, V.E., 2000, *Man's search for ultimate search for ultimate meaning*, Barnes & Noble Books, New York, NY.
- Golden, C.D., 2020, 'Islamic scholar who said coronavirus was punishment from Allah catches the virus', *The Western Journal*, 15 March, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://www.westernjournal.com/islamic-scholar-said-coronavirus-punishment-allah-catches-virus/>.
- Habib, M.A., Dayyab, F.M., Iiyasu, G. & Habib, A.G., 2021, 'Knowledge, attitude and practice survey of COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Nigeria', *Plos One* 16(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245176>
- Hoechner, H. & Salisu, S.I., 2022, 'Scapegoating the usual suspects? Pandemic control and the securitization of Qur'anic education in Northern Nigeria', *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 8(3), 108–135. <https://doi.org/10.33682/05zw-8mm1>
- Ibuot, E.J., 2020, 'Disharmony in Nigeria: Towards a deconstruction of its ideological foundations', in E. Uchendu (ed.), *Nigeria's resource wars*, pp. 135–157, Vernon Press, Wilmington, Delaware.
- Idowu, R.S., 2020, 'Why Cross River is COVI-19 free–Ayade', *Channels Television*, 21 May, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://www.channelstv.com/2020/05/21/why-cross-river-is-covid-19-free-ayade/>.
- Johnson, D., 2020, 'COVID-19 lockdown: Ondo pastor jumps fence to evade arrest during Easter service', *Vanguard*, 13 April, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/04/ondo-pastor-jumps-fence-to-evade-arrest-during-easter-service/>.
- Kitause, R.H. & Odugbo, P., 2021, 'The impacts of COVID-19 on churches in Nigeria', *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 4(5), 191–202.



- Kruger, F.P., 2021, 'Practical theological perspectives on preaching to listeners experiencing angst or nothingness within the present reality of a post-pandemic world', *In die Skriflig* 55(1), a2736. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v55i1.2736>
- Lanza, R. & Berman, B., 2009, *Biocentrism: How life and consciousness are the keys to understanding the true nature of the universe*, BenBella Books, Dallas, TX.
- Lennox, J.C., 2020, *Where is God in a coronavirus world?*, The Goodbook, Epsom.
- Ludwig, S. & Zarbock, A., 2020, 'Coronaviruses and Sars-CoV-2: A brief overview', *Anesthesia & Analgesia* 131(1), 93–96. <https://doi.org/10.1213/ANE.0000000000004845>
- Maslow, A.H., 1943, 'A theory of human motivation', *Psychological Review* 50(4), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- Maslow, A.H., 1968, *Toward a psychology of being*, 2nd edn., Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, NY.
- Maslow, A.H., 1969a, 'A theory of metamotivation: The biological rooting of the value-life', in A.J. Sutich and M.A. Vich (eds.), *Readings in humanistic psychology*, pp. 153–199, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Maslow, A.H., 1969b, 'Comments on Dr. Frankl's paper', in A.J. Sutich & M.A. Vich (eds.), *Readings in humanistic psychology*, pp. 126–133, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Maslow, A.H., 1970a, *Motivation and personality*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Maslow, A.H., 1970b, *Religions, values, and peak experiences*, Penguin, New York, NY.
- Maslow, A.H., 1971, *The farther reaches of human nature*, The Viking Press, New York, NY.
- McLeod, S., 2023, 'Maslow's hierarchy of needs', *Simply Psychology*, viewed 29 October 2023, from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.
- Mezirow, J., 1995, 'Transformation theory of adult learning', in M.R. Welton (ed.), *In defense of the lifeworld*, pp. 13–15, SUNY Press, New York, NY.
- Miller, Ed.L. & Jensen, J., 2009, *Questions that matter: An invitation to philosophy*, 6th edn., McGraw-Hill Higher Education, Boston, MA.
- Nche, G.C., Agbo, U.M. & Okwueze, M.I., 2024, 'Church leader's interpretation of COVID-19 in Nigeria: Science, conspiracies, and spiritualization', *Journal of Religious Health* 63, 741–764. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-023-01947-9>
- Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), n.d., *Covid-19 Nigeria*, viewed 27 November 2021, from <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/report/>.
- Nseyen, N., 2020, 'Coronavirus – Nigerian government confirms second case', *Daily Post*, 09 March, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://dailypost.ng/2020/03/09/breaking-coronavirus-nigerian-government-confirms-second-case/>.
- Nwachukwu, J.O., 2020, 'Give as good as you have gotten – Billionaire prophet, Fufeyin, challenges African pastors on COVID-19', *Daily Post*, 17 April, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://dailypost.ng/2020/04/17/give-as-good-as-you-have-gotten-billionaire-prophet-fufeyin-challenges-african-pastors-on-covid-19/>.
- Odunsi, W., 2020, 'Kaduna: JIBWIS sacks Imam for complying with ban on mass congregation', *Daily Post*, 17 April, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://dailypost.ng/2020/04/17/kaduna-jibwis-sacks-imam-for-complying-with-ban-on-mass-congregation/>.
- Ogundipe, S., 2020, 'Coronavirus: Anger over disregard for social distancing at Abba Kyari's burial', *Premium Times*, April 18, viewed 19 June 2022, from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/388583-coronavirus-anger-over-disregard-for-social-distancing-at-abba-kyaris-burial.html>.
- Oguntola, S., 2020, 'No Ramadan lectures, congregational prayers this year, Sultan declares', *The Nation*, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://thenationonline.net/no-ramadan-lectures-congregational-prayers-this-year-sultan-declares/>.
- Okorie, M.M., 2024, 'Religion and coronavirus response in Kano State, Nigeria', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 1–21. published online ahead of print 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340304>
- Okoye, A.C. & Obulor, I., 2021, 'Religious organisations and fight against the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria', *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 23(1), 65–78.
- Ojebode, A.O., Solanke, S.O. & Okunloye, O.S., 2023, 'Wrathful gods: Ethnography of religion, myths and interpretations of coronavirus in Nigeria', in S. Arndt, B. Yacouba, T. Lawanson, E. Msindo & P. Simatei (eds.), *COVID-19 in Africa: Societal and economic implications*, pp. 55–80, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Oladosu, A.A., 2024, 'Beyond COVID-19: Centring and decentering religion and faith in the Sacred in Africa', in A.A. Oladosu, A. Kilani & S. Okanlawon (eds.), *Christians' and Muslims' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria: Battling the unknown*, pp. 2–19, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.
- Osahon, J., 2020, 'Bayelsa extends stay-at-home order by one week', *The Guardian*, 05 May, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://guardian.ng/news/bayelsa-extends-stay-at-home-order-by-one-week/>.
- Otto, R., 1936, *The idea of the holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, transl. J.W. Harvey, rev. edn., Oxford University Press, London.
- Owolabi, F., 2020, 'Coronavirus is punishment from God, Says Keyamo', *The Cable*, 26 March, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://www.thecable.ng/coronavirus-is-punishment-from-god-says-keyamo>.
- Popper, K.R., 1972, *Conjectures and refutations: The growth of scientific knowledge*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Popper, K.R., 1980, *The logic of scientific discovery*, Routledge, London.
- Raheem, L., 2020, 'Kashamu laid to rest amidst tears in Ijebu Igbo', *The Sun*, August 10, viewed 28 October 2023, from <https://sunnewsonline.com/kashamu-laid-to-rest-amidst-tears-in-ijebu-igbo-2/>.
- Russell, B., 1912, *The problems of philosophy*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Shehu, H. & Rao, P.D., 2020, 'Sociology of COVID-19: People perceptions regarding the outbreak of the pandemic among people of Northern Nigeria', *Sustainable Humanosphere* 16(1), 2078–2089.
- Shuaib, H.A., 2022, 'Government responses, religious authorities and justice innovations in the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria', in M.C. Green, F. Kabata & F. Sibanda (eds.), *Law, religion, health and healing in Africa*, pp. 111–125, African Sun Media, Stellenbosch.
- Thomas, J. & Restas, A., 1999, 'Transacting self-preservation: A grounded theory of the spiritual dimensions of people with terminal cancer', *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 36(3), 191–201. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7489\(99\)00012-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7489(99)00012-7)
- Whitehead, A.N., 1948, *Science and the modern world: Lowell lectures*, Pelican Mentor Books, New York, NY.
- Wildman, W.J., Bulbulia, J., Sosis, R. & Schjoedt, U., 2020, 'Religion and the COVID-19 pandemic', *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 10(2), 115–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/153599X.2020.1749339>