

*New normal in Nigeria: reincarnation of fletcher's situational  
ethics in response to the emerging Covid-19*



# **NEW NORMAL IN NIGERIA: REINCARNATION OF FLETCHER’S SITUATIONAL ETHICS IN RESPONSE TO THE EMERGING COVID-19**

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## **Introduction**

Undoubtedly, the Coronavirus sickness (COVID-19), which is believed to have started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, has caused much confusion and led to the loss of many lives throughout the world<sup>1</sup>. As a result, from a scholarly perspective, the study of the pandemic has caught the interest of academics from a variety of disciplines, but mostly from the realms of medicine and pharmacognosy. About the many initiatives, modules, templates, and processes implemented to combat the disease, the ethical implications and socio-cognitive repercussions have been disregarded. One of these is the development of a novel code of conduct or behaviour in places of worship. The paradigm used in this study, which highlights the sociocognitive behaviour of religious authorities like pastors and imams in churches and mosques, respectively, is Fletcher’s situational ethics.

## **Pre-Normal Socio- Settings in Nigeria**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.who.int/health-topic](http://www.who.int/health-topic), Accessed May 9, 2020

Nigerian society is dualistic—secular and spiritual—and this is well-known. The importance given to the two main religions in Nigeria as deciding factors in many political decisions is a manifestation of the spiritual side of the culture. Nonetheless, it's noteworthy to note that what is regarded as spiritual often refers to a socio-cognitive experience. This confirms the proverbial assertion made by Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu<sup>2</sup> that Africans are infamous for giving religious significance to every part of their existence.

In terms of Nigerian society's secular nature, it is sociologically oriented because it consists of people who are both male and female (in terms of gender), old and young (in terms of age), tall and short (in terms of height), dark and fair (in terms of the complexion), high and low (in terms of economic status), ruled and rulers (in terms of political affiliation), literate and illiterate (in terms of educational status), religious and atheist (religious affiliation). Because no one can survive alone without the help of others, every one of them is socially bound to relate to others. This helps to better understand how and why each person is connected to the others as well as how much of this translates to societal cohabitation<sup>3</sup>. This social context also contributes to the ethical foundation of consanguinity (*àjòbí*), which refers to cohabitation (*àjògbé*) amongst those who are related by blood or have a common ancestor. To understand how, and why they should relate to

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<sup>2</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1969): 1. Bolaji E. Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yorubá Belief*. (London: Longman, 1962): 5

<sup>3</sup> Joseph I. Omoregbe, *Ethics: A systematic and historical study*, (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 1993): 62-63).

one another, it is important to understand the ideas of àjòbí and àjògbé (lived together or of the same ancestor). Social morality and values are created with this understanding in mind to encourage their friendly interactions with one another. So, by defining social standards such as morality and vices, society can judge the behaviour and acts of its members. Winter claims that as a result:

The social world is a world of values, norms, patterns of behaviour, social rules and corresponding sanctions which are already there before our birth and persist with gradual modification during the span of our life<sup>4</sup>.

The moral guidelines and expectations that should guide a person's behaviour are the social ideals that Winter is alluding to. They offer guidelines for behaviour and distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour based on their respective positive and negative consequences on society. There are two categories of ethical standards in an African society: positive and negative. Positive values, such as justice, appreciation, honesty, loyalty, truthfulness, tolerance, responsibility, diligence, teamwork, compassion, kindness, and loyalty to one's obligations serve as examples of positive principles. Society demands that its members uphold these principles in all interpersonal interactions. Negative values, on the other hand, are just the exact opposite of positive values; they include behaviour and acts that are wrong and that individuals should avoid. Inactivity, selfishness, greed, avarice,

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<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Winter *Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society* (London: Harper and Row Publisher, 1968): 21

intolerance, exploitation, oppression, hatred, deception, dishonesty, irresponsibility, and several moral vices among them<sup>5</sup>.

Each member of society is required to behave by the scope of accepted social/ethical norms in social, political, economic, gender, and educational contexts as well as about his or her standing and assigned roles in society. Gestures, a kind of communication, are one of the ways people can connect in a social situation. The gesture entails movement of the hand or head to express or represent a thought, emotion, etc. To put it another way, head bowing, handshakes, hand waves, hand clapping, hand fists, hand knitting, kneeling, sitting, standing, etc. are all examples of gestures. Every gesture in Nigerian culture carries an ethical meaning and studies many of the ethical values of African society<sup>6</sup>.

### **Basic Christian and Islamic practices**

We believe that it's crucial to quickly address the fundamental Christian and Islamic religious practices relevant to this study to comprehend the consequences of the new normal for the pastor and imam<sup>7</sup>. Christian fundamental practices, for instance, include baptism, partaking in the Eucharist (also

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<sup>5</sup> Ayantayo J. Kehinde, "Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: A Redefinition of Religious Values toward a New Social Order in Nigeria, *LUMINA: An Interdisciplinary Research and Scholarly Journal, Holy Name University, Tagbilaran City, Bohol, Philippines* Vol. 20. No.1, 2009, 1-8

<sup>6</sup> Ayantayo J. Kehinde. "The Ethical Dimension of African Indigenous Communication System: An Analysis." in *Topical Issues in Communication Arts and Sciences*, Volume 1. Folarin, B. Ed, (Ibadan: Bakfol Publications, 2001):27 – 45.

<sup>7</sup> Katerega, B.D. and Sherik, D.W. *Islam and Christianity* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1985)

known as Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper), confessing one's sins to religious authorities, as in the case of the Catholic Church, performing funeral rites, performing wedding ceremonies, and educating children in their designated grade levels. Many customs include collective prayer, vigil, chorus singing, food sharing, reading from religious texts including the Bible and hymnal books, visitation, counselling, caring, interaction, and social relationships at various points. The performance of rituals, memorial services, sacrifices, festivals, feasting, initiations, meditation, dancing, music, community service, etc. is also included in this category. The theology of fellowship, as outlined in the Greek New Testament, presupposes sharing, participation, and contribution as they appear 19 times in the Bible. This theology underlies the congregational form of many Christian practices. Similar to this, Islam has fundamental practices that are based on its principles, such as five times a day of prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and participation in pilgrimage activities. Some of the customs are associated with particular festivals as well.

For instance, Muslims commemorate holidays like Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi or Mawlid, when they come together to celebrate the birth of Prophet Mohammad; tales about his conception, childhood, character, manhood, and mission are told at this time among other things. Muslims also observe festivals like Id ul-Fitr, which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan - Id ul-Adha, and Eid-ul-Fitr. Most often, congregations carry out these rituals and related processes. Islam views group activities as having greater social and spiritual significance than solitary prayer. When he states that

Solat (prayer) in congregation is 27 times more gratifying than a *Salat* conducted alone, Sahih Al Bukhari is alluding to this<sup>8</sup>.

### **Conceptualising the New Normal**

History claims that the COVID-19 pandemic gave birth to the idea of the “new normal” out of necessity. It denotes an alternative behavioural approach that is at odds with the accepted pattern of behaviour in terms of managing or preventing the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, before the pandemic, handshakes, hugs, living in groups, dining and drinking together, kissing one another, and plundering body with the body were characteristics of common conventional social interactions in the Nigerian social milieu. But, as the deadly sickness spread, new social standards emerged, some of which are blatantly at odds with the aforementioned established societal norms. Members of religious institutions were expected to abide by the new guidelines, which were created by the World Health Organization, through their leaders and designated authorities. When making physical contact with others, including friends and acquaintances, religious centre members are expected to regularly and thoroughly clean their hands with an alcohol-based hand rub. They are also expected to wash their hands with soap and water to kill any viruses that might be on their hands ( this leads to avoidance of handshake which has earlier demonstrated to have ethical connotation), keep at least one meter (3 feet) between you and the person next to you.

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<sup>8</sup> Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Syaraf An-Nawawy, *The Book of Virtues, Hadith, 1064* in [www.muslim.sg/articles/](http://www.muslim.sg/articles/) Accessed September 16, 2020

This is because when someone sneezes, coughs or speaks, tiny liquid droplets come out of their mouth or nose that could potentially contain the virus. One gets the notion that if one gets too close, they can breathe in the droplets and contract COVID because 19 of the people coughing had the virus. Also, the rule prohibits travelling to congested areas on the ground where people congregate since it increases the likelihood of coming into close contact with someone who has COVID-19. The new regulations also forbade contact of the eyes, nose, and mouth due to the perception that one can contract the virus by touching hard surfaces with their hands and that their contaminated hands can spread the virus to their eyes, nose, or mouth. Others include using a mask that covers both the mouth and the nose while speaking to two or more members of the congregation verbally. In addition, there was a directive to stay inside and practice self-isolation for anyone experiencing even the mildest COVID-19 symptoms, such as a cough, headache, and mild fever, until they were well enough to leave the house.

In our discussion, it is important to emphasize the “Stay at Home Order,” which was characterized by the lockdown. This involves limiting people’s ability to travel from their homes to their places of employment or other destinations that they have largely enjoyed throughout their lives. Also, it coincides with the closure of commercial buildings, businesses, warehouses, and places of worship like churches and mosques. On matters of religion, all religious practices were prohibited, including collective prayers, vigil, Friday Jumat services several undertaking pilgrimages, Sabbath services for Seventh Day Adventist churches, Sunday services for other Christians, conventions, camp meetings, and numerous other liturgical

services. Many religious institutions published several letters and bulletins that were accessible to the general public in support of the government to encourage some time at home.

The guidelines also required that a minimum amount of time is set aside for outdoor activities, that non-essential business tasks be completed outside of regular office hours, and that a curfew be imposed for some time, such as from 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. as is the case in Oyo State, Nigeria. Social and religious gatherings that require more than 20 people to attend are prohibited, as are commercial activities unless they are necessary for COVID-19 management and survival, such as the sale and distribution of food. Non-essential travel is also restricted but described as essential travel is allowed.

These activities include going grocery shopping, going to work, getting medical care, and exercising for up to an hour within a one-kilometre radius of the home. The stay-at-home directive also required the suspension of parliamentary sessions and the closing of all schools. While it was normally forbidden to hold gatherings with more than 10 people, authorization was granted to establishments that offered basic services like pharmacies, grocery stores, and gas stations. At the beginning of the curfew, there was also a formal and informal bar closure, the prohibition of the sale of alcohol, the cancellation of sporting events as well as non-essential services like pools, bars, cafes, restaurants, and playgrounds, and the closing of permitted business activities during certain hours of the day. Security officers were sent to major roadways, interstates, and some hotspots in the major cities and villages to enforce this order by blocking unlawful travel. Roadblocks and police or security checkpoints were common as a result.

## **COVID-19 Code for Pastors**

The government of Oyo State put established standards of operation for the pastors, which we refer to as COVID - 19 code for pastors, using the ease of lockdown in May 2020 in Oyo State as a case study. These are the abbreviations:

1. **Prayer time:** Only the Friday and the five daily prayers are permitted in public worship.
2. **Prayer times:** Friday speeches and prayers are only an hour long.
3. **Sanitation:** All worship spaces must be cleaned, including faucets, doorknobs, and light switches.
4. **Facial features:** All worshipers are required to wear face masks.
5. **Entry permit:** Providing temperature monitoring equipment and sanitizers to be used to measure worshipers' body temperatures.
6. Show a non-contact tag to remind worshipers not to make physical contact with one another before or after the ceremony. Shaking hands is an indication of brotherhood/sisterhood caring and filial ties.
7. **Offering box:** Instead of physically collecting the offering, a Sadaqat box must be put at the mosque's entrance.
8. **Ablution water:** Flowing tap water rather than drum water was to be given.
9. **Prayer floor:** To improve physical separation, prayer floors must be designated with at least a 1-inch space between worshipers.
10. **Prayer materials:** It was forbidden to share prayer supplies like the Qur'an, a kettle, and mats.

11. Social gatherings were proton before and after prayers.
12. **Bathroom use:** Repeated uses of the restrooms were to be avoided, and they were managed such that only one person could use them at once.
13. Shops in the vicinity of mosques were shut down to prevent crowds and inappropriate social or business connections. These businesses sold food and prayer materials.
14. **Restrictions on the Elderly and Vulnerable:** The Elderly and Vulnerable individuals were restricted to private worship at home, with all cleanliness regulations strictly observed.
15. **Ventilation:** Mosques must have enough ventilation.
16. **School closure:** All Islamiyah schools were shut down.

### **Code for Covid-19 Pastors**

1. The first prayer time was limited to Sunday services.
2. **Service times:** Only Sunday services were permitted.
3. **Many services:** Several services may be provided during the allotted period, but each service may only be provided for a total of one hour.
4. **Sanitation:** All worship spaces must be cleaned, including faucets, doorknobs, microphones, and light switches.
5. **Facial features:** All worshipers are required to wear face masks.
6. **Entry permit:** Providing thermometers and sanitizers to be used to measure worshipers' body temperatures while the sanitiser should be in use

7. **Contact norm:** Show a non-touch tag to remind worshipers not to make physical contact with one another. Instead, they should shake hands with one another before or after the service, which shows that they are related to one another on a brotherly or sisterly level and care about them.
8. **Offering box:** Instead of the church ushers or warden physically collecting the offering, offering boxes should be placed at the entrance of the church.
9. Church chairs must be marked with at least a 1-inch space between worshipers to increase physical separation.
10. **Prayer materials:** It was forbidden to exchange things like the Holy Bible, hymnals, holy water, or liquids used at Holy Communion.
11. Social gatherings were prohibited both before and after prayers.
12. **Bathroom use:** Repeated usage of the restrooms was to be discouraged, and they were to be managed so that only one person used them at a time.
13. Shops in the church districts were shut down to prevent gatherings and inappropriate social or business connections. These businesses dealt with food and prayer materials.
14. **Restrictions on Elders and the Vulnerable:** The Elderly and the Vulnerable were prohibited from attending public worship and were only permitted to practice their religion at home, subject to strict sanitary regulations.

15. **Ventilation:** The mosque should have excellent ventilation.
16. Children's classes were all cancelled: All children's classes were cancelled.

### **The Situational Ethics of Fletcher**

To comprehend Fletcher's Situational Ethics, we need to know some background knowledge first. As a prologue to situational ethics, the material is about what ethics is. Without going into great detail and for practical purposes, ethics can be defined as the systematic study of human actions and intentions to determine their goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, correctness and incorrectness, while also paying attention to how these actions and intentions affect the person who took the action or displayed the intention in question, the person it is directed at, and the society or environment where the action took place<sup>9</sup>. Considering the aforementioned context, situationism ethics maintains that the morality of a course of action relies on the circumstance in which it is taken.

It presumes that a person's actions are mostly determined by his environment rather than by his character traits. In this scenario, outside forces are seen as influencing one's behaviour rather than internal reasons. For instance, a man might tell a falsehood to save someone's life. To prevent starvation, a hungry person might even steal a meat pie from the grocery store. The defence claims that the man in question isn't a thief; rather, hunger, or another external cause, drives him to steal.

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<sup>9</sup> Smith Ebbie *Syllabus for the Study of Biblical Ethics* (6th edition) (Texas: Published by South Western Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991): 7.

Situational ethics was historically created by Joseph F. Fletcher as a response to both moral relativism and moral absolutism<sup>10</sup> (which maintains that the rightness of an action is always absolute regardless of what a language or a culture of a people or group of people mandates) (that the rightness of an action is always relative to what a language or a culture dictate). Fletcher believes that because each circumstance is different, the same course of conduct cannot always be ethically acceptable<sup>11</sup>.

Fletcher's argument precedes the universal Christian standard of brotherly love, which is manifested differently in various contexts and is not permitted by moral absolutism. Fletcher defines moral principles as "tools or instruments that are employed because they operate in resolving the conflicts within complex situations in the most harmonious way for all involved." He was influenced by John Dewey's instrumentalism thesis, which is rooted in pragmatism theory. Fletcher developed four "working principles" and six "basic principles" based on this foundation to determine the form and framework of his situation ethics. The following are the principles condensed:

1. **Pragmatism:** This implies that rather than focusing solely on the action itself, one should evaluate someone's actions in light of the love they embody. Some Christians refer to the love that motivates an action as the "spirit behind the action," which can be demonstrated by donating a gift or providing assistance

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph F. Fletcher, *Moral Responsibility: Situation Ethics at Work* (Westminster Press, 1, 1967): 117-126

<sup>11</sup> Joseph I Omoregbe, *Ethics: A Systematic and Historical Study* (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 2008): 254

to those in need. For instance, a person who gives someone \$1,000 as a birthday gift whereas others receive millions of Naira should advise the recipient not to worry about the gift itself but rather the spirit of love that went into it. This is where the earlier-discussed question of intention resurfaces. Given Fletcher's Christian upbringing, his actions should always be motivated by what is most loving.

2. **Relativism:** This is used to contrast legalistic methods, which claim that ethics entails a standard of good and wrong relative to what is required by law, and to approach every circumstance with a relative attitude. While evaluating an action within this umbrella, certain judgmental words like "never," "complete," and "perfect" should be avoided.
3. **Positivism:** It advocates for acting positively in every situation so that 1 John 4:7–12—"let us love one another because love comes from God"—is expressed.
4. **Personalism:** It implies doing what is in a person's best interest rather than focusing on what the law says.

Following up on the first four principles, Fletcher created a further six fundamental principles, which are expressed as the following propositions:

1. There is only one genuinely excellent thing, and that is to love nothing else at all. Fletcher suggests that an activity is only desirable since it results in love, others' words.
2. Love is the guiding principle in Christian decision-making, as demonstrated by the two commandments that the Bible views as being the most important: loving God and loving one's neighbour.

3. Love and justice are synonymous because, and only this, justice is the distribution of love.
4. That justice is Christian love utilizing its intellect to weigh its responsibilities, opportunities, resources, and other factors. Justice is how Fletcher deals with situations where distribution is necessary.
5. Only the end, and nothing else, justifies the methods. Only with a goal in mind do actions get moral status. The outcome must be the most loving one possible for Fletcher. While evaluating a scenario, one must take into account the intended outcome, the methods at hand, the driving force for acting, and the likely outcomes. This principle, according to Fletcher, suggests that one must acknowledge that anything is possible if doing so results in the most loving conclusion.
6. That Love does not follow a prescriptive philosophy in making decisions. As a result, nothing is fundamentally good or bad, in Fletcher's view, and everything should be handled in the most loving way possible given the circumstances.

### **Implications of Fletcher Situational Ethics for Pastor and Imam**

At this stage of our discussion, we want to investigate how Fletcher's Situation Ethics may help pastors and imams understand the new norm. Fletcher's situation ethics emphasizes that a decision to choose a certain course of action depends on the circumstances that warrant it. Connecting this to the new normal means that the restriction on hours of prayers and religious worship occasioned is a consequence of the situation on the ground or better expressed, it is situational.

This foundation allows us to claim that the new normal was not intended to go against Christian and Islamic religious traditions and customs. Yet, it is important to view Christianity and Islam's adaptation to the new order positively. It is an open admission that none of the two religions is fundamentally inflexible but rather flexible and dynamic. So, this paper stands to disprove a school of thought that holds that Islamic prayers offered at home are ineffective since the Prophet Muhammad is ambiguous regarding whether or not prayers offered at home are less effective than those offered at the mosque. The home is viewed as God's temple<sup>12</sup> if, on the other hand, praying at home is the most secure way to establish a relationship with Him.

Because one of Islam's requirements for prayer is that it must be said in a place that is not usurped or ritually impure, this implies that Islam is flexible and adaptable to the environment. In some instances, situational ethical concepts have been used in Christianity, such as when Abraham in Genesis 20 lied to Abimelech, king of Gerar, by claiming that Sarah, his wife, was his sister. When God visited Abimelech and threatened to have him killed for stealing Sarah, His prophet's wife, his deception was exposed. Because of her love for Sarah, Abraham lied to save her life, thinking that if he hadn't, the King may kill him and then kidnap Sarah. This goes against the concept of honesty and sincerity stressed by the Bible. Abraham's deception is excused because he acted

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<sup>12</sup> Is it forbidden for Muslim men to offer prayers at home  
[www.quora.com/is-it-forb](http://www.quora.com/is-it-forb) Accessed September 21, 2020

pragmatically, which in a sense adheres to Fletcher's definition of pragmatism.

There is also the tale of Rahab, who misled the King of Jericho in Joshua 2 on the whereabouts of the spies who were covertly sent to spy on the territory of Jericho. Rahab kept the spies in her room and told the King a lie when he asked if she had seen them. Her actions typically aren't patriotic and are crimes against her father's land. Rahab's actions, however, are justified by the situational school of thinking based on her foresight that the God of the Hebrews is superior to the god of Jericho. This deception was seen as an admirable demonstration of faith in the God of Israel. The New Testament made mention of this story in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25, where Rahab's behaviour was seen as an act of faith and work, respectively. Even though the order to stay at home prevented them from fulfilling their religious duty to travel on pilgrimage, the period of restriction gave them plenty of time to interact with the less fortunate members of their community and provide them with food and other welfare aids, as the Qur'an commands in Surah 16:90 and Surah 17:23. Muslims are not unfamiliar with washing their hands as a means of preventing the spread of the coronavirus because, since the beginning of time, Muslims have believed in the importance of cleanliness. This belief is demonstrated by the practice of ablution, which calls for washing one's feet, hands, and genitalia with water after using the restroom.

According to Surah 33:33, Surah 74:5, and Surah 74:4, the regulations are meant to purify them fully, including their clothing and hearts. As is emphasized in Surah 2:222, which

declares particularly that “God likes people who are clean,” fulfilling the cleanness responsibility brings rewards. The Bible is also rife with references to cleanliness and the necessity of Believers upholding these principles. Cleaning oneself physically and spiritually leads to cleanliness. Isaiah 1:16; 2 Corinthians 7:1. In other words, following the norms as they are set forth by the current circumstances is sacred, and the new typical prescription for frequently washing hands is not foreign to Christianity or Islam. It is equivalent to fulfilling one’s legal and religious responsibilities to do so. The fact that mosques were not open for daily prayers other than on Fridays was a benefit since it gave many Muslims the chance to participate in family and private religious activities, which were previously difficult to perform due to the demands of people’s jobs.

We also pointed out that the Qur’an itself recommends staying at home during emergencies like the current Coronavirus outbreak, which is equivalent to modern quarantine. For instance, according to the Prophet Muhammad, if you hear that a plague outbreak is occurring in a country, avoid going there; if the plague breaks out while you are already there, and stay put<sup>13</sup>. The act of self-isolation is also not foreign to Islam, as the Prophet Mohammed states in a narration: “Do not put a sick patient with a healthy person.” It continues, “Wash your hands frequently, stay away from infectious places, and avoid going there. All that we are stating is that there are some

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<sup>13</sup> Murat Sofuoglu, “What Islam tells us about responding to deadly pandemic” in [www.trtworld.com](http://www.trtworld.com), Accessed September 23, 2020

exceptions to the general rules of behaviour in Christianity and Islam.

### **Implications of the New Normal for Christians and Muslims**

The Covid-19 Epidemic and its accompanying orders, which created a new normal for Christians and Muslims on the one hand and the general public of the entire world on the other, have various effects that are both detrimental and positive. By implications, we refer to how the new normal has affected Muslims' and Christians' religious practices. For the sake of choice and convenience, we'll start with the consequences. The first is realizing how the new normal interfered with the established religious calendars of Islam and Christianity, particularly about the times set aside for prayer, fellowship, and worship. The time restrictions imposed on the scheduling of prayer, fellowship, and worship sessions conflict with biblical commands that Christians should pray without sessions and those that make fellowship mandatory—Psalm 94:20, Acts 2:42, 1 John 1:3, and 1 John 1:7—as well as with other biblical injunctions.

Those limitations, however, also prohibited Holy Communion, one of Christianity's most significant ceremonies. It is concerning that certain denominations, like the Roman Catholic Church and the Christ Apostolic Church, which typically participate in daily and monthly Holy Communion, were unable to do so due to the pandemic. These are the religious practices that are off-limits to online and proxy use. In addition, it goes against Islam's emphasis on congregational

prayers to limit the time of prayer sessions in the mosque. Islam permits Muslims to pray in their homes, but the reality is that congregational prayers still have social and spiritual significance. The Islamic practice of standing in rows during prayers with shoulders touching one another, which typically serves the purpose of instilling a sense of being in the presence of the sacred and a sense of being among believers in the same faith, is also at odds with the social distance expected to be observed in religious institutions.

Similar rules regarding social distance prohibit gathering, kissing, hugging, and shaking hands before and after prayers. They also forbid Mosque and Church members from sharing Bibles, hymnals, holy water, Holy Communion drinks, or water for Christians, and the Quran, kettles, and prayer mats for Muslims and Christians, respectively. The same laws prohibited Muslims from performing Hajj, which is one of Islam's five pillars and a religious requirement. The performance of religious worship was not fully completed by the prohibition of economic activities, the closing of children's schools and classes in the Church, for instance, or the prohibition of elders visiting places of worship.

Our deduction, every rule that caused people to distance themselves from one another is opposed to the cooperative spirit that binds Brethren and Ulama in Islam and Christianity, respectively. In both Islam and Christianity, the spirit of collaboration entails coworkers, co-partnership, and tie-up ties. Fraternity, solidarity, fellow feeling, voluntary association, coalition, federation, united fronts, common front, mutual help, and reciprocity are always on the rise where there is a

cooperative attitude. Moreover, it encourages cooperation, compromise, and camaraderie (see Rom. 12:5, I Cor. 1:10, I Cor. 10:17, 2 Cor. 13:11, Gal. 3:28, Eph. 4:3–13, Phil. 1:27, and Qur'an 5:3). There are evident beneficial consequences that merit examination, notwithstanding the new normal orders obvious and salient negative effects on Christian and Islamic religious practices. One of them is the improvement in sanitation among religious leaders and followers at places of worship, which indirectly and unknowingly affects their private lives. The use of face masks by all worshipers, the provision of temperature checks and sanitizers to be used to gauge the temperature of the worshippers, the provision of potable water as opposed to drum water for ablution, discouraging multiple uses of restrooms and constant cleaning of it after usage, and making sure the Mosque and Churches are well ventilated are a few examples of things that could help. In a manner, this is a religious approach to promoting healthy living as an addition to other plans implemented by the Nigerian health sector.

The new normal also creates opportunities for innovation, creativity, and skill development for both Christians and Muslims, as well as for the institutions of the church and mosque. For instance, the prohibition of religious institutions encouraged numerous Churches and Mosques to investigate available internet access and technological facilities so they could address the social and spiritual demands of their adherents and leaders. There is ample proof that a variety of online platforms for worship, including Facebook, WhatsApp,

LinkedIn, YouTube, snapshot TikTok, Instagram, WeChat, QQ, Twitter, Pinterest, Agencies, Tumblr, Periscope, social networking, Microblogging, Photo sharing, Video sharing, and Vimeo, were thoroughly investigated for use in conducting online services. The result of the circumstance was the requirement for other methods of satisfying the demands of the followers of the Church and Mosque.

As a result, numerous individuals, especially young people, received urgent training and online tools for the delivery of religious services online. While some Christians and Muslims had the option of participating in their private religious worship at home, the channels were also used to collect tithe, Zakat, offerings, and religious taxes. The wonderful thing about this phenomenon is that even after the COVID-19 outbreak, Churches and Mosques will probably still use the channels. This is a brand-new angle and innovation for the church that amply demonstrates that, from a sociological perspective, there is a friendly contact between religion and technology.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We sincerely believe that the COVID-19 new rule for Nigerian pastors and imams is a stroke of good fortune. Its ability to accommodate religious customs is not an anomaly but rather a behaviour that is disregarded. The Iman and Pastor's acceptance of the new normal is a clear admission of Fletcher's predicament, a pragmatic thesis claiming that only the end justifies the means, which argues that every circumstance has its unique qualities and that such should govern the path of action. This indicates, as was previously said, that when

evaluating a situation, one must take into account the desired outcome, the methods at hand, the reason for action, and the likely consequences.

In other words, everything should be done following a particular circumstance; nothing is necessarily right or bad. Interestingly, certain Christian and Islamic traditions do not find much unusual in the new normal. This suggests that religious leaders and followers of both Christianity and Islam should have a thorough understanding of the content of their respective scriptures and traditions and determine how much of it may apply to dealing with emergencies like the new normal brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.