

Call for Papers

COVID-19, Natural Evil and the Question of God

by

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One of the strongest principles that have shaped humanity is the belief or disbelief in God. A large population of world believe in God while some do not. Out of the current world population of 7.8 billion, about 500 million people of the world identify themselves as atheists- those who don't believe in God. This population can be found in over 98 countries of the world. A study on atheism states that "40-49% of China's population says that they're atheists"(<https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/most-atheist-countries/>Accessed March 2020). Other countries with a large population of atheists among their citizens include Japan, Czech Republic, Australia, etc. Many people with atheistic convictions would not wish to be known as atheists or agnostics but as non-believers, secularists, skeptics or free-thinkers, etc

From the belief in God arises the phenomenon of religion and, to a large extent, the broader realm of spirituality. From the disbelief stems atheism, agnosticism and secularism—the belief that God or the supernatural should not dictate or define human thought. But the Question of God is often not a simple one, especially when one considers the many challenges that arise from the belief—the ethical codes, the diversities in the interpretation of God, and the different cultures that have interpreted God differently, and the ungodly acts of believers. From theology, to psychology, sociology and theodicy, which tries to defend the belief in God from rational perspectives, the Question of God is an engaging topic for the human race.

Between the believer in God and the unbeliever, there is often the natural world where God is expected to intervene and direct the world and the idea of God is validated. The believers and unbelievers often resort to this natural world to substantiate their claims about the existence or non-existence of God. Many times, the expectations of the intervention from God might be different from what obtains, such that the expectation from God might be not be realised, or at least as desired. At other times, the intervention might be swift, true and thorough, and it is sure and strong to hold unto the belief in God. From the African point of view, it seems that the Question of God is settled because every material entity has its spiritual side and once an appeal is made of the spiritual, the mind is directed to God who is the Supreme Spirit. But in other world cultures and traditions, this is not necessarily the case. A large bulk of mankind would rather consider God not as a given but from what the mind can conceive about God.

The instance of COVID-19 once more provides the space to stimulate human thoughts on the Question of God. Although this is not the first time a devastating pandemic has befallen the human race, COVID-19 has more futures and characters because of its global spread and what has been, until now, presumed to be the state of advancement of modernity. It is coming when secularism is competing with religion and belief in God. Thus, the pandemic raises at least two questions, especially in relation to the Question of God. The first is whether and how God can allow a huge bulk of mankind to suffer from what they have no proximate connection to and how just it is for God to allow this to obtain. The second is to locate whether this form of suffering can and should lead to a positive direction in favour of the idea of God by way of locating the limitations of human power,

knowledge, wisdom, science (defined as science invented by man), etc., and whether human ignorance and finitude provide a strong path towards belief in God.

This book proposes a third option, which is whether and how the occurrence of COVID-19 could lead to a human community that can consider the question of God more seriously than it does at the moment and the possible implications of this for the Question of God. Should the human race be humbled by horror and wait for problems such as this to embrace and nurture a strong belief in God? How long can such belief last and be sustained? What deeper and wider wisdom about God can be obtained through COVID-19 and by who ?

A call is hereby made for an article of a minimum of 2000 words and a maximum of 5,000 words on any of the following themes:

- (i) COVID-19—The Cause, The Consequence
- (ii) COVID-19—Narratives of COVID Through an Appeal to the WHO and Other International Bodies
- (iii) United by Human Biology and Nature Divided by Reason and Belief: Humanity, COVID-19 and the Question of God
- (iv) COVID-19: Humanism, Humanitarianism and the Justification for a Common Humanity
- (v) COVID-19: Towards a History of Pandemics in the World
- (vi) COVID-19: Natural Evil, Human Evil or Both?
- (vii) Should Natural Evil Serve to Answer or Deepen the Question of God?
- (viii) Lessons from COVID-19: What Knowledge and Wisdom Should Direct Man's Belief in God?
- (ix) Should Man Be involved in Widening and Deepening the Idea of God?
- (x) What are the Demands of Creative Intelligence and Intuition on the Question of God?
- (xi) What idea of God can be abstracted from COVID-19 ?
- (xii) Is the World still unfolding and COVID-19 part of the disclosure of the world? What is the place of the Question of God in this project?
- (xiii) What possible and desirable notion of the human community could/should emanate from the idea of God, and how does COVID-19 lead human thoughts in this direction?
- (xiv) Theism, atheism, agnosticism and the future of the world.
- (xv) Belief, knowledge and wisdom—what does COVID-19 suggest?
- (xvi) COVID-19, Social Media and the Question of God.

The aim of the book is to provide an engaging discourse on God that can appeal to different diversities of beliefs and faith and as many people as possible. Contributors could go beyond these prompts to discuss other issues that border on the Question of God in an intellectually stimulating way that enables people to reason beyond parochial sentiments in addressing the need for a worthier understanding of God and the world.

Contributors should send an abstract of not more than 200 words to lawrence.ugwuanyi@uniabuja.edu.ng and/or ootconference@gmail.com on or before April 20, 2020. Contributions to the book are expected not later than May 30, 2020.

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