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15 BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: IS RETHINKING THE INTERFACE OF RELIGION AND SCIENCE POSSIBLE IN THE ZIMBABWEAN CONTEXT?

Abstract

The advent COVID-19 has not only changed the religious arena but has reawakened the age-old debate between religion and science. Previously science has regarded religion as non-verifiable and confessional whereas religion viewed science as atheistic and incompatible to religious beliefs and practices. Interestingly, COVID-19 has made humanity re-imagine and re-think the compatibility between religion and science. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the age-old debate between religion and science in the context of COVID-19 has been reignited. Data were collected using observations of what people did and still do in dealing with the pandemic and other related literature. The study revealed that when faced with a crisis, people straddle on the two: religion and science without any misgivings. The religion-science debate seems to be too scholarly for the ordinary Zimbabweans. They utilise whatever is within reach as long as it is for life sustenance and human flourishing. Religion and science were found to be the flip sides of the same coin. Therefore, basing on the findings and using cultural evolution theory and belief studies, this chapter argues that in Zimbabwe COVID-19 has made it evidently possible to re-imagine and re-think the interface between religion and science from now and beyond. We, therefore, argue that science and religion will continue to interface beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and humanity should continue to utilise them as need arises and circumstances evolve for human flourishing.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, religion, science, social capital, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The advent of the coronavirus in late 2019 “created exceptional circumstances that altered nearly all facets of society (Manyonganise 2022; Kofman & Garfin 2020). One of the exceptional circumstances is that people found themselves confronted by a pandemic that they had no idea of. Given the novelty of the pandemic, people in Zimbabwe were left with no option but to rely on two safety valves available to them. They had religion and science at their disposal. Religion and science were patronised as people sought a window out of the pandemic. This patronising was not without its challenges as the old age debate between religion and science did not only resurface, but posed questions about the future. That the pandemic knew and still knows no boundaries “...no religion, or ethnicity or nationality or skin pigmentation” (Ukah 2020:448) as it comes in different mutations, it becomes very difficult to predict the future. People are not quite sure whether the gains achieved so far in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe have got something to do with the adoption of religion, or science or both. Although this chapter does not intend to rekindle the debate, it is important to highlight some of the few salient features of the debate as this sets the tone of the chapter. The section below is an attempt to put the discussion at hand in context.

Religion and Science Debate: A Brief Review

It is important that before we give a brief review of the religion-science debate, we need to clearly state what we mean by religion and science in this context. We take religion and science in this chapter from a very broad perspective. The use of the term ‘religion’ follows an old-age debate on its elusiveness, culture specificity, flexibility, non-normative and non-universality (Smith 1964; Cox 1996; Chitando 1997). Sibanda et.al (2022:2) insinuate that the term religion is “fluid and at times associated with misleading connotations because it is binding and confessional”. Because of this, Smith (1964) suggests that we should jettison the term religion and replace it with two concepts, viz ‘personal faith’ and ‘cumulative traditions’. Arguing from the same perspective, Smart (1969) is of the view that we must not expend efforts and energy in defining religion but rather look at its dimensions from which he comes up with six or seven. Sharma (2011:44) cites Smart (1969) where Smart prefers the term ‘worldview’ over ‘religion’. His argument is that the term ‘worldview’ is inclusive and

beneficial. For him “the separation of religion and the secular is unnecessary because essentially what we deal with is the religious and the symbolic aspect of human life-rituals, ultimate beliefs, myths and so on” (Sibanda, et al. 2022:2). For this reason, this chapter adopts the term ‘worldview’ as the term gives a new and more relevant view of religion. Religion is, therefore, a collection of a people’s beliefs, values, norms and practices. The beliefs, values, norms and practices need not to be approved by anyone save the very people who partake of them. Religion is not static but dynamic as people reshape and redefine that which they believe in, value and practice as a people. Understood from this wider perspective religion encompasses that which provides people with assurance and resilience in the midst of anxiety, confusion and hopelessness as evidenced by the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Religion is that which cushions people in crisis by providing answers to hard questions about existentiality. It is a rallying point for the people as it offers solace in the midst of hopelessness, desperation and helplessness. Wibisono et al. (2021) are instructive when they argue that religion can be interpreted as knowledge and belief that is sacred, which functionally becomes or is used to guide human actions as social beings to fulfil biological, social and integrative needs. It is from this understanding that this chapter makes it clear from the outset that religion, inasmuch as it is about faith, it is equally a science *sui generis*. This argument was well explained in Muyambo, Sande and Tendere (2022) ‘*Wash and Pray: The nexus of African Christianity and Science in the context of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe*’, and therefore, we need not to belabour it again here save demonstrating how religion and science were and still are being used in mitigating COVID-19.

The next issue that we feel strongly need unpacking is the conceptualisation of science. By science do we mean hard sciences or what? Do we mean biology, chemistry and physics? The answer to these questions is ‘No’ and ‘Yes’. No in the sense that by science we mean that which people utilise and it improves the human condition. Phillips’s (2020) understanding of science informs this chapter. He conceptualises science as largely medical science or western biomedicine. It is that which promotes human flourishing by diminishing those factors that threaten health and well-being. Science is that which promotes wellness in a given community. This understanding has resulted in people talking of social sciences. These are sciences that ensure society is in harmony within itself. Yes, in the sense that the hard sciences not only verify facts, opinions and views but ‘validate’ (for lack of a better word) faith. Science actualises faith. Taking a cue

from Adeleke's foreword to the book, *New and Emerging perspectives on Science, Religion and Society*, edited by Adebayo et al. (2020), science is an intellectual discipline that is concerned with the natural world. He further argues that it is anchored on the rational approach to knowledge.

The debate on whether science is compatible with religion has been an issue of concern among the intellectual community from the 19th century (Adeleke 2020). According to Paul (2020) the science-religion debate has been a fascinating one for centuries with inconclusive results. The overreliance on the rationality of science questioned the authenticity of religion. As a result, the relationship between science and religion was seen as one of conflict and not interdependence. Adeleke (2020) further states that the debate exists at both the epistemological and utilitarian levels, raising questions as to whether religious beliefs are compatible with science and the extent to which these religious beliefs hinder or promote science. Such questions arose because most discussions on the relationship between science and religion focused on Western science and the Christian religion.

However, with the widening of the knowledge base, a growing number of people have begun to support both religion and science, arguing that the relationship between the two does not necessarily have to be that of conflict. The debate is now given a wider focus by "extending it to other frontiers of knowledge beyond the natural sciences as well as other religions that dot the landscape of different regions of the world including Islam and the various indigenous Eastern and African religions" (Adeleke 2020:iii). Today, as the dialogue grows, disciplinary boundaries are being broken down and a wider understanding of the nature of the relationship between science and religion is being created. This means that religion needs science and science needs religion, more so in times of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Having contextualised our use of the terms religion and science, the next question could be why religion and science/health? Religious institutions or communities were identified as spaces where misinformation about the COVID-19 infection proliferated which further cultivated mistrust towards science and health care directives among religious adherents of these communities (Lee, et al. 2021). This creates antagonism between religion and science, an antagonism that the COVID-19 pandemic has come not only to dispel but set the record straight that indeed, religion and science are the flip sides of the same coin. Without one, there is no coin. According to Einstein (1995) science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind.

COVID-19: The Context

When COVID-19 was reported in China's province of Wuhan in December 2019, people thought it was one of those diseases that would come and go without much ado. Due to its severity in the areas it had already affected and its fast spontaneous spread, the WHO had to declare it a global pandemic. In Zimbabwe, the pandemic was declared a health hazard on 30 March 2020 (Muyambo 2022). The government of Zimbabwe speedily instituted a raft of measures as a way to fight the pandemic. These included national lockdown, staying at home, face masking, social distancing, among others. In spite of these measures, the pandemic continued to affect and infect people. Due to the prolonged economic downturn that Zimbabwe has been witnessing, some measures were violated. People could not stay indoors when there was no food on the table. Zimbabwe's economy is largely informal where people eke a living through buying and selling. People had to clandestinely find their way into public places for purposes of eking a living. They had to face the full wrath of the police and soldiers who were mandated to ensure that COVID-19 containment measures were adhered to. While the police and soldiers were implementing presidential orders, people's rights were trampled upon. People were denied access to a variety of needs that include health, food, right and freedom of movement and many other rights. Another problem created out of the strictness of the police and the soldiers was the proliferation of corruption as people had to bribe their way to access some of their needs. The introduction of vaccines also saw false vaccinations where some Christians bribed health workers, paid them to get vaccination cards when regulations became coercive. This is problematic as it does not only jeopardise benefits that accrue from the deployment of science and religion in the fight against COVID-19 but denies science and religion their agencies in mitigating COVID-19.

In the midst of hopelessness, helplessness, desperation and shock induced by COVID-19, a ray of hope was witnessed on the faces of the people when talks of a vaccine for the pandemic were ensuing. It was at this juncture that this chapter intends to discuss how religion and science found their ways into the lives of the people. In other words, it was at this point that the collaboration (or lack) of religion and science was put into question. Here we repeat the same fundamental questions that Lumberras and Oviedo (2020) posed. These are: To what extent has the pandemic

experience contributed to our better distinguishing, distributing and assigning the territories and functions of science and religion? Has science lost its authority due to the limitations exposed during the pandemic and its management? Has religious faith gained more appreciation in this uncertain context? These questions lead us to further ask: Has the experience modified our perception of how religion and science interface in the context of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe? What is the future of religion and science beyond the COVID-19 pandemic?

Theoretical framing

Given the nature of the issues in this chapter, we borrow two frameworks of Lumbreras and Oviedo (2020) from their six theoretical toolbox that can be deployed in the study of the shifts related to the pandemic. The two frameworks are the cultural evolution theory and the beliefs studies. These theories assist in framing our understanding of the roles of religion and science as “sources of meaning and resources for coping with threat and loss” (Lumbreras & Oviedo, 2020:6).

Cultural evolution theory

According to Lumbreras and Oviedo (2020), cultural evolution theory is that which embraces several research programmes. It is a theory that borrows from biological evolution by Charles Darwin where the catchword is ‘evolve’, that is, moving gradually from one form to another, a movement that discards the less desirable and adopts the desirable. From Darwinism, that is a process where human beings transitioned from rudimentary to finer forms due to a number of factors, chief among them being environmental and climatic changes. Boyd & Richerson (2005); Mesoudi et al. (2006) and Laland (2017) are of the view that cultural evolution is where there is a demonstration of specific patterns in cultural change, drift, and adaptation to shifting contexts and conditions. What this means is that as conditions and contexts change, it cannot be business as usual. The advent of COVID-19 has not only ushered in new perspectives and practices but is a gamechanger in a people’s socio-economic, cultural and religious milieus. For example, cultural beliefs and practices in funeral rites have been adapted to suit the COVID-19 context. Body viewing, bathing and attending funerals have undergone metamorphosis. Although these funeral rites changes are hard to accept, they have become the ‘new normal’.

Culture in this sense is not static. The COVID-19 pandemic has made people reconfigure that which they were used to do. This reconfiguration means culture has to keep on evolving, thereby calling for the need “to adapt to changing times and stressful circumstances” (Lumbreras & Oviedo 2020:7). Cultural evolution theory, therefore, offers us, in this chapter, clues on how we can understand the changing times and what we need to do in the context of COVID-19 such as redefining and reconfiguring what we were used to doing if the war against COVID-19 is to be won. This redefining and reconfiguring means changing perceptions on the role of science and religion.

The Belief studies

The belief studies programme is aimed at better understanding how beliefs are formed, nourished, stabilized, and eventually decline and may even get lost or be replaced by other beliefs (Lumbreras & Oviedo 2020). The programme provides interesting tools to improve analysis of how beliefs about science and religion are formed and interact. It explores the extent to which science and religious beliefs are deeply influenced by contextual features, and are not mere cognitive issues that reflect mental structures and patterned ways to deal with reality (Lumbreras & Oviedo 2020). This chapter provides solid evidence to test how cognitive schemas interact with cultural models, and how both are played out in a broad field of big changes and historical shocks (Lumbreras & Oviedo 2020). The above also points to the idea that people’s beliefs are not projected in a vacuum but in a context. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought changing beliefs about the role of science and religion in crises. We, therefore, adopt these two frameworks in this chapter to assess if we can rethink the interface between science and religion in Zimbabwe in the context of COVID-19 and beyond.

Methods of data collection

This chapter undertakes research on how communities utilised both religion and science in the context of COVID-19. The research used the qualitative method of the observation of what people were and are still doing to fight the COVID-19 pandemic as well as reading available literature on the interface of religion and science on earlier pandemics. We used both overt and covert observations. We were not oblivious of the challenges of

this method in research ethics but we had to use it in order to capture people in their natural settings amidst the pandemic. Making our intentions clear in some places would mean we were not going to get what people were really doing. Once people learn that they are being observed there is a tendency to pretend, thereby jeopardising the outcome of the research. Where it was possible researchers would casually throw in discussion items for people to casually talk. Here we had to use our memories very well for we could not be seen to be taking notes. We would immediately record what we were still remembering as soon as we left the place where these discussions were taking place. This had the limitation that we had to solely rely on what we remembered but had the advantage that people would freely share what they were doing in fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic. Literature on how people dealt with earlier epidemics and pandemics such as measles, the Spanish Influenza of 1918/19, Ebola, HIV and AIDS was also utilised in this study. The idea was to assess the extent to which religion and science were deployed in the fight against such epidemics and pandemics.

Religion and Science: Lessons from previous pandemics

Globally, the interface between religion and science is not a recent one as witnessed in the context of COVID-19. It has been there from the past. Epidemics and pandemics that come to mind are the 1819 cholera outbreak, the Spanish Influenza (1918-19), the Ebola virus and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. In all these epidemics and pandemics different communities employed different measures to mitigate them. The measures ranged and still range from appealing to religion as well as science. For example, some pastors laid hands on Ebola victims in Africa to cure them of spiritual attacks (Falade 2020; Muyambo, et al. 2022). From a religious perspective the argument is that Ebola is caused by evil spirits. While religion views evil spirits as the causative agent of Ebola, science has its own scientific explanations of the Ebola virus. For instance, according to science, Ebola is caused by certain type of virus from chimpanzees in East Africa. Such different explanations do not only confirm that “everything has a cause’ (Wibisono, et al. 2021), but that people deploy both religion and science in trying to understand why natural disasters and some of these pandemics occur. What is evident here is that religion and science

are both avenues that communities utilise whenever the need arises. They are never in conflict. We cite, at length here Wilkinson (n.d.):

Lots of people believe that science and Christian faith are in conflict. But I think one of the real problems of the conflict model is it claims that science and theology say exactly the same things about the world. And therefore, if they say different things, one has to be right, and one has to be wrong...I think that's far too simplistic.

The excerpt above points to the incompatibility of religion and science in the provision of explanations and answers to existential questions and the occurrence of natural disasters such as epidemics and pandemics. When people allow pastors to lay hands on them when suffering from Ebola as referred above, it is a clear indication that for most of recorded history, fearful humans have turned to a version of theodicy in their search for an explanation for disaster in the actions of some powerful, supernatural force, whether divine, malevolent, or ancestral (Phillips 2020). They are quite aware of the agency of science but still believe there is need to consult the supernatural force. It is out of such beliefs that we often see Christians vacillating between religion and science whenever dealing with existential challenges that confront them. They consult pastors during the day and *sangomas*, medicine men and women during the night. Already we see a people who straddle both systems for health and wellbeing for one cannot really tell the history of medicine without the history of religion and vice versa.

The foregoing explains why people, over 200 years ago, resorted to both religion and science when the 1819 cholera outbreak hit humanity. When the cholera spread across the world, it demanded an explanation. It is not surprising that the Hindus of that time in India believed that it had been caused by the local deities who had been offended or displeased by people (Phillips 2020). When western biomedicine was introduced by the British, there was scepticism as Hindus believed that the introduction of biomedicine was a further provocation of the local deities. The same response was evident among Buddhists who equally believed that cholera was sent either by angry local demi-gods as punishment. The same also happened to Christians in the initial stages of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. HIV and AIDS was associated with a lot of stigma and discrimination in the church (Chitando 2007), the reason being that those who were affected by it were getting their due punishment for their sins. These scenarios explain that religion is the first port of call when a pandemic of the COVID-19 magnitude strikes. People seek explanations from religion but

will, with time, embrace biomedical measures. This is the very case with the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. It was apprehension at first as people sought explanations but with time, science was adopted, though, in some cases through coercion as shall be demonstrated later on.

Bringing Religion and Science together in the context of COVID-19

Through the observation method, we established that religious leaders combined faith and science in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. Muyambo, Sande and Tendere (2022) are instructive when they indicate that from their study, most pastors straddle religion and science in the ‘wash and pray’ theology that churches adopted in the context of COVID-19. Other observations not necessarily related to the COVID-19 pandemic *per se* are that Christians exercised to keep healthy. For example, researchers’ observations are that the founder and Archbishop of Zimbabwe Assembly of God Africa (ZAOGA), Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti, observes these health exercises and we gathered that he observes dietary restrictions. These scientific undertakings and his keeping of faith are believed to be the secrets behind his good health despite his advanced age. The deployment of science and religion in people’s lives happens consciously or unconsciously. What we observed is that people just utilise what is possible as long as it promotes human flourishing.

There is an argument that the advent of COVID-19 brought about an acid test of religious denominations’ faith. For instance, COVID-19 requires that all places of public gathering, including those used for worship be closed so as to minimise the social contact which medical science argued was a major mode of infection (Phillips 2020). Ukah (2020) praises African Pentecostalism for having listened to the prophetic voice when they took religion online through televised sermons well before the advent of COVID-19. When gathering restrictions were imposed, African Pentecostalism was not adversely affected like those denominations that had not practised religion online because it used online platforms for its activities. Although Ukah bemoans the failure by African Pentecostalism to effectively take its vantage position in dealing with COVID-19, African Pentecostalism was a step ahead insofar as the deployment of science in their religious activities were concerned. Even if this places science on an upper spectrum, observations have been that communities continue to straddle both spaces depending on what they perceive to be convenient

for them in particular contexts. We observed that although the government of Zimbabwe decreed no church gatherings during the peak period of the pandemic, certain church organisations violated the decree depending on their beliefs. Most of the white garment Apostolic movements believed that they were protected by prayers. The belief emanates from the understanding that both science and religion are God's weapons in performing his work. One member of Vadzidzi Apostolic Church was saying "We believe in God, and science is entirely subject to God's will" (Chingono 2021). Muyambo, et al. (2022) confirm this through the maxim 'Wash and Pray' meaning that after embracing science for mitigating COVID-19, prayers solidify and concretise science efforts. This is consistent with Phillips (2020) who argues that WHO director recently called on faith and science to 'work hand in hand'. The two do not contradict, they work together. Congruent to this argument is Wilkinson (n.d.) who poses a very fundamental question that call for deep reflection: What if science and religion were not opposites at all? Instead, what if they needed each other? Wilkinson (n.d.) argues that science is a gift from God but that too often Christian leaders lack the confidence and tools to engage with scientific questions. We observed that most Christian movements in Zimbabwe embraced both science and religion by putting into practice WHO COVID-19 containment measures and praying at the same time. Admittedly, not all denominations behaved the same in the deployment of science and religion in the context of COVID-19, but statistically the larger percentage complied with the use of science. For this reason, we argue that science and religion are the flip sides of the same coin.

From an Islamic perspective, Dube (2022) is instructive when it comes to Muslims' partaking of science and religion as measures to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Dube (2022) argues that the Muslim communities in Zimbabwe cancelled *umrah*, a minor pilgrimage to Mecca. *Hajj* was equally cancelled in 2020. On the Muslim calendar, Ramadan is a special occasion but due to COVID-19 lockdown, the Muslims cancelled the outdoor celebration of it despite it being the Muslim "annual season of worship, comradeship and relationship" (Shaban 2020:1). They opted to celebrate Ramadan in their individual households. The same can be said again regarding vaccination. Dube (forthcoming) admits that Muslims were and still continue to accept COVID-19 vaccines. This compliance with science measures as a possible outlet from the pandemic points to the idea that "...what is changing is not the way science and theology are produced or researched, but how public beliefs about these activities and

their meaning are affected by this severe crisis” (Lumbreras & Oviedo 2020). What is important here is to assess how much science is reliable in its capacity to fix human problems and to what extent religion still plays a role in such difficult circumstances, threats, uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

We observed that although science and religion could have been viewed as antagonists in previous encounters, COVID-19 has either elicited new perceptions or corrected previous views on how much science can be relied upon, and how effective it is (Lumbreras & Oviedo 2020). People’s beliefs are subjected to different evolutionary pressures, new adaptations, drifts and struggles, and the COVID-19 pandemic offers a unique case-study to test such influences and how beliefs evolve to adapt to the new conditions. Through the lenses of the cultural evolutionary theory and the belief studies, the antagonistic relationship between science and religion is slowly changing into one of interfacing as people’s cultures and beliefs evolve to suit the ever-changing circumstances like the one being posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The deployment of science and religion in African Traditional Religion(s)’ approach to COVID-19 has been ambivalent. While some communities embraced science as one of those measures that can be adopted in the fight against COVID-19, others were and still continue to be sceptical. This ambivalence is attributable to several factors, chief among them being mistrust in western epistemologies and lack of adequate knowledge about the pandemic (Sipeyiye 2022) and the ‘wait and see’ attitude that people generally adopt when confronted by a crisis. This kind of response reminds us of the people’s response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic that hit Zimbabwe in the early 1980s. It was denial at first and, therefore, it is not surprising that with the advent of COVID-19, the same denial attitude characterised people’s first response. Observations are that some people in rural areas thought COVID-19 was a town pandemic while those in urban areas thought it was for the affluent who frequent outside countries. For those in the rural areas, it was business as usual since they thought they were ‘safe’ or rather ‘immune’ to the pandemic. We also observed that COVID-19 containment measures were very difficult to implement within rural communities as well as those in the urban areas who are in informal employment. The government had to deploy soldiers and the police in growth points, townships, towns and cities enforcing adherence to the COVID-19 measures. Those found on the wrong side of the law were punished. They were either sjambokked or made to roll on the

muddy ground. In other cases, arrests were instituted and the culprits had to pay fines for violating the COVID-19 measures.

Being religions based on relationships (Taringa 2014; Mbiti 1969), African Traditional Religion(s) were adversely affected by the ban on contact with one another through social distancing. It is important that what we observed with African Traditional Religion(s)' practitioners is that while some of them loathed the social distancing measure against COVID-19, others were amenable. For instance, the Ndau communities of south-eastern Zimbabwe have not found measures of social distancing and quarantining much of a problem due to lessons and experiences gained with other epidemics such as leprosy, chicken pox, measles, scabies just to mention a few (Muyambo 2022).

We also observed that people do not necessarily engage themselves into the science-religion debate in their deployment of the two in fighting COVID-19. They use what is convenient for them at any given time. For example, we have observed people steaming, taking *zumbani*, getting vaccinated and at the same time praying. Christians and Muslims, alike did not cease praying even though they were adhering to COVID-19 prevention measures as directed by government and WHO. In addition to praying and embracing science, they too resorted to traditional means such as *zumbani* and steaming. Equally, practitioners of African Traditional Religions resorted to science and religion in their fight against COVID-19 as they deployed both. Sipeyiye (2022) argues that traditional healers were consulted as a way of trying to understand the COVID-19 pandemic and that prayers to ancestors were made so that a cure could be discovered. As people were doing this, they never bothered whether this is religion or science, but were just looking for anything that could assist in the fight against the pandemic. Such a mixed approach means that people consciously or unconsciously straddle between the two.

Voluntarism or Coercion?

There have been arguments from general conversations that people's acceptance of COVID-19 protocols in Zimbabwe has been as a result of coercion, where the government used a heavy-handed approach to the adherence of COVID-19 protocols including vaccination. Muyambo, et al. (2022) indicate that the pastor interviewees revealed that their adherence to COVID-19 protocols as enunciated by WHO and the Zimbabwe gov-

ernment was voluntary. However, what we observed was that the adherence was coerced in the sense that certain privileges were withdrawn for people who were not vaccinated. For instance, they were denied to move in public transport, enter supermarkets, getting to work places, especially government employees and attending church services. Such a withdrawal of benefits and services, forced people to get vaccinated in order for them to have access to these services. At the time of writing this chapter, there were reports of Apostolic movements such as Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church which were initially against vaccination, be it of COVID-19 and measles, that have all of a sudden accepted their vaccination against COVID-19 and of their children against the resurgent measles epidemic that has hit Zimbabwe. Bishop Andyby Makururu who leads Johanne The Fifth of Africa International Church, an apostolic church based in Manicaland, has warmed up to COVID-19 vaccination. He said:

I have already taken my two shots of the COVID-19 vaccines and I'm encouraging my followers to take the vaccines too. I'm happy that my followers are also accepting the COVID-19 vaccines. They are following my spiritual guidance (Mambondiyani 2021).

Similarly, a senior leader of the Johanne Marange African Apostolic church in Mashonaland West is also quoted as having said, "Our church doctrine says we don't go to hospital when are sick or get vaccinated, but with COVID-19, it is a new ball game altogether" (Nyathi 2021). The question that comes to mind here is: Are these religious leaders doing this voluntarily or there is coercion? Chances are high that they are doing this in order to conform to government's decree on vaccination to all. As religious leaders of Apostolic churches known to be anti-vaccines, they want to give an impression that they are pro-government especially with the frequent visits political leaders are making to these churches. One wonders why the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church member openly says this when in public. Is it true that they are now vaccinating or they want to give a false impression in public? Although it is very difficult to ascertain whether the embracing of science into the fight against COVID-19 is voluntary or coercion by these religious groups, especially where evidence thereof is not produced, the culture evolutionary theory and belief studies may explain the occurrence. This could be that due to the elapsing of time, mindsets change or evolve abandoning long held beliefs that are no longer in tandem with prevailing circumstances. This is consistent

with what Ukah (2020:455) observes when he says that when church leaders such as Oyedepo, founder-owner of the Living Faith Church in Nigeria discovered that his flouting of the COVID-19 pandemic by holding church gatherings under the belief that “[s]hutting down churches would be like shutting down hospitals...”, received unprecedented criticisms, he apologised and urged his church members to comply with all initiatives of the government to combat COVID-19. The same can be said of Emmanuel Makandiwa, founder of United Family International Church (UFIC) in Zimbabwe, who initially denied in public the acceptance of the vaccine but later changed and urged his followers to be vaccinated. One wonders why such a change of position by these men of God. Is there [political] pressure behind the scenes? Isn’t this coercion rather than voluntarism? The point we are making here is that when we observe Christians in this case straddling both religion and science it could be that they have no option because they are coerced. Their deployment of the two in fighting against COVID-19 is not necessarily because of the close affinity and agency between the two, science and religion but circumstances beyond their control dictate their compliance.

Religion and Science beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic

This last section of the chapter focuses on whether it is possible or not to rethink the interface between religion and science beyond the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. Judging by what has been going on, that religious communities in Zimbabwe straddle between religion and science as they search for answers to the pandemic, we argue that the deployment of science and religion in crises is likely to continue as circumstances dictate. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it possible for religious leaders not only to innovate as we observed them “continuing religious commitments and rituals through social networks, TV channels, or live streaming” (Capponi 2020; Frei-Landau 2020 cited in Lee, et al. 2021), but effectively implementing public health information. This clearly demonstrates the importance of collaborating with religious sectors when facing public health crises.

Lessons learnt from the past epidemics and pandemics such as cholera, Ebola, HIV and AIDS have indicated diverse influences of religion when it comes to public health crises. According to Lee, et al. (2021) religion has acted as an important platform for intersectoral collaboration

with science and government to combat COVID-19. Within this collaboration, religion provides meaning, determining the indeterminate, or managing unmanageable risks (Lehmann 1977). Experiences from the past health crises have indicated that where other social systems exhaust their resources due to excessive complexity and uncertainty, religion has come to the rescue (Lumbreras & Oviedo 2020). According to these scholars, when uncertainty and risk increase as was with COVID-19 during its peak, the role of religion becomes more necessary and more difficult to replace by secular means. They further argue that religious faith can act as a value system which coexists with other value systems that arise from different social sources.

Another function that religion plays in the stressful time, the COVID-19 context, just like during the times of cholera, Ebola and the HIV and AIDS, is religious coping. The need for religion was witnessed when people were up in arms with governments where the church was closed. Since religion could not be accessed due to lockdown, religious leaders of different religious movements had to quickly find a solution on how this essential service of coping could be offered. That is when we witnessed the swift transition from face-to-face worshipping to online religion, even for those religious groupings that were not all that technology savvy. We do not see such a role changing beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Religion as one of the value systems that include science is not in competition but works together with others. We anticipate no change of the role of religion and science beyond COVID-19 because the two are the flip sides of the same coin. It is, therefore, not a farfetched argument that it is possible to rethink the interface between religion and science beyond COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. The two value systems will continue to provide safety valves in times of public health crises. They will continue to be re-configured as circumstances dictate.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to show that it is possible to rethink the interface between religion and science beyond the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. The chapter has shown that religion and science have been complementing each other from the past, especially in the earlier public health crises such as cholera, Ebola and HIV and AIDS. We have established that religion and science are the flip sides of the same coin, and that if ever there are signs of combat antagonism, it is simply a matter of

how one views the two value systems. Religion made coping with stressful situations possible where the other value system seemed to have failed. We noted that although COVID-19 containment measures could have been complied with, we must be alive to the reality that the compliance could have been due to coercion not voluntarism as well as instances of false vaccinations where members bribed health officials for them to get vaccination cards without getting the jab. Nevertheless, the interface between science and religion is likely to continue as circumstances dictate and people straddle between the two without necessarily getting into the science-religion intellectual debate.

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