COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE MORAL VALUES IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

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Abstract

Religious beliefs have always been the stimulating motives for human behavior. Man's need for religion is not specified to a certain era in time. Rather, it extends over all the times and eras; as a man still invokes religion in the face of ever-rising challenges. One of the most serious of these challenges that humans constantly face is epidemics and diseases. There is no doubt that the two religions, Christianity and Islam, enjoy a high moral heritage. This study aimed to demonstrate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on societies, and the importance of Islamic and Christian values in dealing with the pandemic in different societies of the world, by reviewing and analyzing the discourse of religious scholars and priests, and through the sacred texts of the two religions, in addition to reviewing the studies that discussed the pandemic and religious values. The study explained how the Islamic and Christian religious discourses employed morals to confront the pandemic, as they supported and emphasized the precautionary measures, such as home quarantine and social distancing. They also stressed the need for unity, cooperation and solidarity to confront the pandemic in order to preserve the security of societies.

Keywords: COVID-19; morals; Islam; Christianity.

Khulasah

Agama sentiasa menjadi motif yang merangsang tingkah laku manusia. Keperluan manusia terhadap agama tidak ditentukan pada masa dan zaman tertentu. Sebaliknya, ia menyebar sepanjang masa dan zaman kerana manusia memerlukan agama dalam menghadapi cabaran yang semakin meningkat. Salah satu cabaran paling serius yang dihadapi oleh manusia ialah wabak dan penyakit. Tidak dinafikan bahawa kedua-dua agama, Kristian dan Islam, memiliki warisan moral yang tinggi. Kajian ini bertujuan memperlihatkan kesan pandemik COVID-19 ke atas masyarakat, dan kepentingan nilai Islam dan Kristian dalam menangani pandemik dalam kalangan masyarakat yang berbeza di dunia ini. Melalui kajian dan analisis wacana ulama dan paderi, serta melalui nas-nas suci kedua-dua agama tersebut, di samping meninjau kajian-kajian yang membincangkan pandemik dan nilai-nilai agama, kajian ini menjelaskan bagaimana wacana agama Islam dan Kristian menggunakan moraliti untuk menghadapi pandemik. Kajian merumuskan bahawa ilmuwan dan ahli agama menyokong dan menekankan langkah berjaga-jaga dalam menghadapi pandemik, seperti kuarantin di rumah, penjarakan sosial dan sebagainya. Mereka juga menekankan perlunya perpaduan, kerjasama dan solidariti untuk menghadapi pandemik demi memelihara keselamatan masyarakat.

Kata kunci: COVID-19; moral; Islam; Kristian.

Introduction

Religious beliefs have always been the major motives for human behavior, despite the different philosophical and intellectual positions on religion. Due to the great importance of religion in directing human behavior and with the emergence of the global threat COVID-19 pandemic, there is an urgent need for a new religious discourse that surpasses the metaphysical approach that

deals ontologically and that heads into a theological debate to employ religion to serve the humanity to live in coexistence, peace and harmony.

Man's need for religion is not linked to a specific time. Rather, it extends to all times and eras; as a man still invokes religion in the face of rising challenges. One of the most serious of these challenges is epidemics and diseases. The invocation of religion in this regard infuses a moral spirit that helps in facing the dangers of the disease and its negative repercussions, which are extremely dangerous at all levels. Religion is the main source of the provision of moral values and ethics for humans.

The two traditions Christianity and Islam enjoy a high moral heritage. The present study discusses the employment of the Christian and Islamic religious discourse in the face of epidemics, especially COVID- 19. This pandemic forced humanity to enter an unprecedented era with new precautions, that our current time is called the COVID age. This paper is an attempt to reveal different aspects of Islam and Christianity by reviewing the moral system of the two religions at different levels (religious leaders, peoples and scriptures) to reach an integrated perception of how to deal with crises and calamities in light of an ethical system that seeks to preserve human beings regardless of their genders, origins or religions.

The importance of this article lies in its attempt to analyze the impact of the pandemic on societies and the fluctuations it caused in the various fields of life in the economic, scientific, psychological, or security fields, etc. It also shows the importance of invoking Islamic and Christian morals to confront the pandemic. In addition, it seeks to explore the effect of false religiosity on the spread of the pandemic and the increase of fear and panic in communities and to explain the importance of raising

awareness of such false religiosity and finding the necessary solutions to reduce it.

Morals have a great impact on the lives of people and nations when crises and calamities occur. Moral influence is not limited to one religion, rather all religions seek to adhere to and apply them in life, regardless of the different means and methods they follow. The Coronavirus, which began to spread from China and soon spread to all countries of the world, and its repercussions, affected various aspects of political, economic and social life. Morality in Islam and Christianity played a positive as well as a negative role in the spread of the pandemic in several societies. Morals were also the subject of controversy among the followers of these religions concerning how to apply them in dealing with the pandemic. Hence, this article attempts to explore the relationship between morals in Islam and Christianity and their role during the pandemic in various areas of life.

More specifically, the article attempts to answer the following main question: How was Islamic and Christian morality employed to confront the pandemic? Under this main question, there are some branching questions: What is the impact of the pandemic on societies? How did this impact affect different areas of life? Has the pandemic led to the emergence of a new moral crisis? The question of morality in Christianity and Islam comes at this particular time to shed light on these religious values and to employ them in the face of this pandemic and overcome it at a time when all materialistic approaches have failed miserably in addressing the dangers of this pandemic. Therefore this study seeks to reach a satisfactory answer to this question: Can the moral system in Islam and Christianity succeed in preserving human life in light of the Corona crisis?

COVID- 19: A Global Threat to Humanity

The human race has encountered throughout history the outbreak of many deadly epidemics and pandemics that wiped out entire peoples, and in some cases changed the course of history. The world today is witnessing an unprecedented epidemic crisis, perhaps the most dangerous and influential epidemic in modern history. We start with some definitions of terms.

An epidemic is defined as "every highly contagious disease that spreads quickly from one place to another, infects humans, animals and plants, and is usually fatal like the plague". A pandemic, on the other hand, is different from an epidemic in that it spreads across large geographical areas; encompassing continents or sweeping the whole world. An epidemic is a disease that spreads widely in a specific area and within a specific time. If the disease spreads throughout the world, it is then called a pandemic [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Coronavirus as the emerging COVID-19 virus of the Corona family. It was first identified in a number of asymptomatic patients in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. Most of the cases were related to the seafood and animal market there. The first outbreak of this emerging virus was recorded on December 31, 2019[2].

Thus, COVID-19 is one of the biggest health challenges facing humanity in the contemporary world, as it has caused injury and death to millions of people. It would therefore be a mistake to describe this challenge as

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[1] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "The Outbreak," *Britannica.com*, retrieved 27 Nov 2021, https://www.britannica.com/science/epidemic; Kara Rogers, "Pandemic Disease", *Britannica.com*, retrieved Nov 27, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/science/pandemic.

[2] WHO, "FAQ on Coronavirus," retrieved Nov 27, 2021, https://www.who.int/ar/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.

only a health tragedy. Rather, it is a large-scale global human tragedy that has affected all areas of life. It has caused social, economic, political and psychological crises that are still yielding negative effects on all countries of the world. This pandemic will undoubtedly lead to the reformulation of the present social, economic and political systems. This transformation will also lead to a radical change in the way humans interact with the environment in which they live. The catastrophe is not only in the huge numbers of injured and the dead but also in the enormous complications of the pandemic and the congestion occurring in various aspects of life. The following are some of these catastrophic effects:

i. Effects on the global economy

With the emergence of the crisis, the global economy witnessed a noticeable recession which increased with the expansion of the pandemic. The pandemic led to the disruption of economic facilities as a result of quarantine, social isolation and curfews which were precautionary means to protect against the epidemic. This affected the global economy significantly.

Indicators of employment, industrial production and services show that the recession in economic activity will be unpredictably severe. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global economy recessed in April 2020 at a rate of 3%. The rate is expected to rise to 7% if the crisis continues in 2021-2022. We can expect the severity of this recession if it is compared to a recession rate of 1% in 2008 during the global financial crisis. It will take a long time to compensate for the economic losses depending on the extent of control over the pandemic[3].

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[3] Nūrullah Ghūr, *Fayrūs Kūrūnā wa Tadāʿiyyātuh ʿalā Niẓām al-Iqtiṣād al-ʿĀlamī ʿalā al-Madā al-Ṭawīl* (Turkey: Markaz Sita, 2020), 50-51.

The level of supply of materials and intermediate products has decreased globally from 52% to 48% during the previous ten years [4]. The pandemic caused this percentage to decrease as well. This decrease in the level of supply of goods severely affects the vital areas of large as well as small goods in the global economy. Indicators show that most of the recession in the global economy caused by the pandemic will result from the provision of materials and goods globally.

It is expected that the pandemic will lead to more cautious measures and will accelerate the change of economic policies, as happened in some countries after the financial crisis. With the spread of the epidemic, a sense of the unfair distribution of wealth was heightened as a result of liberalism. Fears of high levels of unemployment lead to doubts haunting employees concerning their sustenance and sources of income. The decrease in the real income rate of some individuals will increase the number of people living below the acute poverty line which is expected to rise to 49 million. The debt ratio will consequently rise also[5].

ii.   Effects on the educational sector

Educational institutions have the greatest role in the advancement of societies, as they are the symbol of knowledge, culture, and innovation, the leader of change in societies and the guarantee for achieving development and progress for people. The effects of the pandemic swept over all aspects of life in the world and the education sector was no exception. In fact, it was the most affected sector. Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, said: "We have never witnessed such turmoil in the field of education". With the speed and size of

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[4] World Development Report 2020, *Trading for Development in the Age of Global Value Chains* (Washington DC: World Bank Report, 2020).

[5] Nūrullah Ghūr, *Fayrūs Kūrūnā*, 50-51.

educational disruption resulting from the closure of schools and universities in order to avoid the spread of the virus among its members, governments sought to provide distance education for their children where students stay at their homes away from schools and universities and learn remotely[6].

According to UNESCO reports, the pandemic has caused 1.6 billion children and youth to drop out of education in 161 countries around the world. This means that an average of 60% to 80% of students drop out of schools and universities. Many countries closed down schools and universities, which in turn affected education badly[7]. While some countries resorted to lectures and lessons recorded on internet platforms, other countries suspended study until further notice due to the shortage of information technology infrastructure. Questions about how to align classes and schedules are still troubling educators. Some sectors succeeded in covering their schedules through online platforms, while it was not possible for others.

As a result, e-learning has been used as an alternative to physical education in most countries of the world. Although recently, the educational system restored part of its face-to-face nature, still some countries use e-learning while others opt for blended learning by integrating traditional learning with e-learning. However, e-learning faces many challenges that include, for example, the lack of adequate educational equipment for all students, the

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[6] Khalīl al-Dahshan, "'Aẓmat al-Taʿlīm wa al-Taʿallum fi Ẓil Kūrūnā: Al-'Ufuq wa al-Taḥaddiyāt," 4 June 2020, retrieved Nov 29, 2021, shorturl.at/cjoHR

[7] Khaymi Safidra, "al-Taʾlīm fī Zamān Kūrūnā al-Taḥaddiyāt al-Furas UNESCO" in *al-Taʿlīm: Min al-Iṭṭirāb ilā al-Taʿāfī*, Worldbank.org, retrieved Nov 29, 2021, https://blogs.worldbank.org/ar/education/educational-challenges-and-opportunities-covid-19-pandemic

lack of a powerful administration that organizes and manages the e-learning process in some education sectors, in addition to the shortage in electronic curricula for all courses, not to mention the unavailability or weak connection of students' internet networks or their frequent interruption during the lesson.

There are other challenges and problems at the level of students, teachers and parents. Thus, the current challenge today is to address the negative effects of this pandemic and its repercussions on learning and teaching, and to direct efforts to benefit from this experience in reviewing the educational process and improving its quality.

iii.   Effects on the psychological security

As the number of COVID-19 victims increased with no foreseen ceiling, the pandemic caused a state of panic, fear and terror that gripped societies. For a long period, there was no proven treatment or vaccine to control the spread of the pandemic. Even with the advent of the vaccine, security and psychological reassurance for many people were not achieved due to the emergence of a large number of rumors about the dangers of vaccinations. Since the onset of the pandemic and till now, social distancing and lack of personal encounters is the best solution to stop the virus as the infection is airborne by inhaling the air through the mouth or nose, or touching affected surfaces and then touching the eyes, mouth or nose. However, this solution had an adverse effect on the mental health of individuals and societies which left humanity confronting great existential anxiety that threatens humanity as a whole.

The adverse effects of social distancing varied with the presence of social media networks, which reduced the feeling of isolation and anxiety, achieved a balance between work and family affairs and led to a change in the lifestyle within the same family. Parents tried to strike a

balance between working remotely and paying attention to their children learning remotely. While this divergence strengthened some family relationships, it also exacerbated differences in other families.

The level of international media interaction with the pandemic varied among various media broadcasts. Some caused panic and increased terror with the outbreak of the pandemic, as they saw the virus as a war waged to control the population of the world or a commercial project to bring profits for pharmaceutical companies from tests and vaccines. Some thought it is an attempt to break China's economy and control it, or advocated the conspiracy theory that Bill Gates has a program that seeks to control humans through e-portals whereby COVID- 19 was manipulated as an excuse to implement his program[8]. These and other rumors increased the adverse effect on the psychological and mental health of individuals who believed in these rumors, even after they turned out to be hoaxes. This is because these rumors fulfill the pent-up desires and hopes of some who could not actually achieve them. After all, they lack the means to do this[9].

For some, the pandemic has become a new phenomenon and an excuse for the suppression of human rights, as authorities use their power to implement many different restrictions to keep the virus under control. Some governments have taken strict measures to monitor and trace the infected and their contacts. China used facial recognition technology for the same purpose; while Israel uses technology to extract information from the phones of

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[8] Muḥammad Ḥassan Dakhil, "al-Tadāʿiyāt al-Sīyāsyah li al-ʿAwbiʾah al-ʿĀlamiyyah: Wabāʾ Kūrūnā ʿUnmūdhajan," Buḥūth Journal 35 (2020), 127.

[9] Mahrous Basyoni, "The Ethics of Dealing with Crises from an Islamic Perspective," *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 36(1) (2018), 85, https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2018.0203

the infected or the potentially infected[10]. Some countries, such as Denmark[11], have also implemented a compulsory vaccination project for all citizens.

Undoubtedly, isolation, social distancing, spreading and circulating conspiracy theory rumors lead to more complicated psychological problems and badly affected the psychological and mental health of people [12]. Psychological security is a basic and necessary need in a person's life that is acquired through interaction with the environment around him throughout his life. Studies indicate that a person's psychological security is endangered and threatened when exposed to psychological and social pressures that are beyond his capacity to endure. [13] COVID- 19 pandemic has undoubtedly caused many adverse psychological effects including the fear of infection and the pressure of home isolation.

This pandemic forces us to reconsider many policies and review many priorities to avoid similar crises in the future, or even to turn them into a blessing that is used to immunize future generations from such crises. Despite the crises and dangers, life keeps going on. This pandemic will pass, but its effects will be devastating. This should motivate us to exert efforts to avoid similar crises. It is

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[10] Noha Abu al-Dhahab et al., "Khubarā' Markaz Brūkinjz al-Dawḥa Yasta'riḍūn Tadā'īyāt Fayrūs Kūrūnā al-Mustajid 'alā al-Sharq al-Awsat wa Shamāl Afrīqiyyah," March 26, 2020, retrieved Nov, 28 2021, shorturl.at/eqzC2.

[11] Touma Bitar, "Nīqāṭ 'alā al-Ḥurūf: 'Aḍwā' 'alā Awhām Kūrūnā," June 4, 2020, retrieved Nov 28, 2021, http://agoraleaks.com/?p=70671

[12] "Al-Tabā'ud al-Ijtimā'ī Kūrūnā Yuhaddid Siḥataq al-Nafsiyyah: Fakayfa Taḥmīhah?" *Al-Sharq al-Awsat Newspaper*, January 4, 2020 retrieved Nov, 28 2021, shorturl.at/aqAB8.

[13] Raghdaa Naisa, "Mustawā al-Shu'ūr bi al-Amn al-Nafsī wa'Alāqatuh bi al-Tawāfuq al-'Ijtimā'ī: Dirasāt Maydānīyyah 'alā 'Ayinah min al-Aḥdāth al-Muqīmīn fī Dar Khalid bin al-Walīd li al-Iṣlāḥ fī Minṭaqat Qudsīyyah bi Muḥāfaẓat Dimashq," *Damascus University Journal* 30(2) (2014), 81-126.

imperative that humans keep in mind that the scramble for industrial progress and armaments may lead to even greater harm and counterproductive results. The proof for this is that one small virus succeeded in bringing the entire world into quarantine and isolation while weaponry and industrial and technological development have not helped in confronting it.

This is a valuable opportunity to rethink the future of the world and work on the positive exploitation of its resources by transferring a large part of the economic and financial potential used in the arms industry and investing it in education, health and scientific research. However, this cannot be achieved without a sense of belonging, cooperation, and sharing with others. Here, the importance of awareness of the humanistic dimension comes into play. Invoking the long-absent moral dimension in dealing with the pandemic will aid humans in building a sound and secure future for the coming generations to attain all the aspired goals.

The Moral Crisis

COVID- 19 pandemic emerged in a global world that was supposed to move towards the establishment of international organizations that reflect more global human solidarity in the economic, social and cultural fields of life and that establish the bases of an economic and financial system in harmony with the functions of the contemporary global organization that seeks to meet the international humanitarian needs[14].

The question that is at stake now is: have these global organizations and their affiliated bodies been able to confront this global threat? Did the global order and the international organizations confront this danger? There is an indisputably abject international failure in the face of

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[14] Wissam Neamat Ibrahim al-Saadi, *Ṣundūq al-Naqd al-Duwalī al-Dawrūh fī Taḥqīq Mutaṭalabāt al-Niẓām al-Duwalī al-Jadīd* (Cairo: al-Markaz al-ʿArabī li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʾ, 2020), i, 1, 9.

this pandemic. This failure is not limited to national states only but is extended to the international organizations and bodies that were established during the twentieth century and represented this new international order. In most cases, governments and international organizations seemed crippled to keep pace with this challenge.

COVID-19 brought about tremendous and radical changes in international relations, which revealed to the world the ills of the new international order. The health crisis turned into a global moral crisis; the ordeals and calamities uncovered the inner nature of peoples and nations. Western countries, out of fear of the epidemic, regressed to the time of maritime piracy and armed robbery. Many countries that used to call for human rights in life and coexistence repudiated these values and declined the practice of maritime piracy; such as the Czech, which intercepted a ship loaded with medical masks heading from China to Italy. Italy by its turn pirated a ship bound for Tunisia, loaded with medicinal alcohol. It is as if COVID is recalling the imperialist motto 'survival for the strongest'[15].

It seems COVID-19 has uncovered the moral crisis that befell international relations showing their concern for materialistic interests only. The proof of this is the disintegration of major Western bodies such as the European Union whose fragility and ineffectiveness was evident in its first real test. Italy, one of the active countries in the EU, repudiated it and raised the flag of China instead of the EU in appreciation of its assistance in facing the crisis. After each European country isolated itself from the other member states, each became

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[15] Abdel Majid Hilal, "al-Maghrib wa Jā'iḥat Kufīd 19 Muqarabāt Jughrāfiyyah li al-Wabā' bayn al-'Alamī wa al-Maḥalī," *Ansaq Journal* 1-2(4) (2020), 190.

concerned only with its citizens who reside within its borders[16].

The United States diverted the course of a shipment of masks that was destined for the German police and bought medical supplies at exorbitant prices to cut off the way for other countries to get these supplies. About 200,000 N95 masks, which are personal protective equipment used to protect hospital workers from infection, were diverted while airborne, to the United States as they are transferred between planes in the Thai capital, Bangkok. This act was described as modern piracy.

France accused the United States of buying masks that France had ordered from China while on the tarmac of Chinese airports and before the planes took off. Sweden accused France of seizing medical supplies coming from China. Canada issued a warning to the US against restricting international trade in medical materials and equipment amid the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic[17].

Based on the above mentioned, the superpowers in the international order are witnessing heated competition imposed by the crisis instead of concerting efforts and enhancing cooperation. In the meantime, fears are heightened that this competition may slip into the manipulation of the medical equipment networks and affect the fair distribution of the vaccine, which may have severe consequences for poor countries. This is what the World Health Organization described as the shocking imbalance in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines between rich and poor countries, and called for a more equitable distribution of the vaccines[18].

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[16] *Ibid*., 191.

[17] Ahmed Qassem Ahsin, "al-Niẓām al-Duwalī wa Ja'iḥat Kūrūnā: Sijāl Ta'thīr al-Awbi'ah fī al-'Alāqāt al-Duwalīyyah," *Arab Politics Journal* 50 (2018), 50.

[18] "Fayrūs Kūrūnā: Ra'yīs Munaẓamat al-Ṣiḥah al-'Ālamīyah 'yakshif' khilal Ṣādim fī Tawzī' al-Luqāḥāt bayn al-Duwal al-Ghanīyyah wa

The moral crisis is manifesting in employing the theory of the clash of civilizations in dealing with the pandemic and ignoring the rights of human coexistence and peace among human beings. Discussions have started about the upcoming conflict between the US and other new superpowers, as some analyses indicate that the USA may engage in a military conflict with China after the pandemic ends in order to force China to discuss the conflicting international relations and global issues, prominent among which are the economic issues and areas of influence[19.]

There is no doubt that such behavior leads to the destabilization of societies, which is contrary to both Islamic and Christian morality which calls for compassion, sympathy with others and the rejection of selfishness, through participation during crises. God honored man with the blessing of freedom of choice, distinguished him with reason and commanded him to use these blessings to reach wise decisions. By applying these blessings and adopting the Islamic and Christian morality that calls for unity, cooperation and solidarity, we can resolve these conflicts that have spread in the world due to the pandemic and reduce the unnecessary panic that has spread in our communities.

The pandemic has played a major role in the awakening of the world, as it has aroused Muslims to think about their brethren who have been displaced due to wars and persecutions. The world is calling for a return to the morals that emphasize defense, mercy, justice, affection and thinking about others, which are morals that Islam calls for. The Qur'ān states: "The believers are but brothers" [Q, 49:10]. Similarly, Christianity also urges:

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al-Faqīrah," *BBC News*, Oct 4, 2021, retrieved Nov 28, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/arabic/world -56701730.

[19] Sulayman Ahmad, "Qirā'ah fī al-Makhfyī wa al-Mu'lan fī Ḥarb Fayrūs Kūrūnā," retrieved Nov 26, 2021, shorturl.at/gzK05

"Don't let anyone call you 'Rabbi', for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters" [Mat, 23:08].

In addition, the pandemic reminded many people who live without fear and enjoy comfort in normal daily conditions that they should not take life for granted at all, they should not forget to remember God, worship Him and thank Him for His blessings, and to keep on the right behavior and the straight path. It was said that Sūrah al-Fātiḥah includes four fields of knowledge, namely: "The knowledge of what achieves perfection, which is the morals, the highest of which is to reach the state of eternal presence with God, to resort to the virtues of monotheism and follow the path of righteousness. To those, the sūrah referred to by mentioning [the path of those You have blessed, not those who deserved Your wrath nor those who went astray."

These are morals that Christianity also promotes: (Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth) [Ephesians 5: 7-9].

Evoking Moral Values in Christianity and Islam to Confront the Pandemic

One recurring question is always posed regarding the effective role that religion can play in handling the risks of global crises. Unfortunately, one prevailing view underestimates such a role in confronting hardships. The prominent work of the father of modern Christian Theology, philosopher and biblical scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher in the philosophy of religion in his book *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, issued in 1799. In this book, his main concern was to restore to

religion its high status and attack the harms it suffered in the Enlightenment by romantic sceptics and despising intellectual secularists.[20] Schleiermacher, after this book, became one of the greatest theoreticians of religious pluralism and religious tolerance. Religion, for him, is not viewed from a purely metaphysical angle as just a way of thinking, a belief, or a way of contemplating God and the world. Rather, religion incorporates also a means of action, an amazing desire and love, and a distinctive pattern of work and behavior[21].

As religious beliefs express opinions about God and the world, they also direct life through behavior and action and define the dimensions of man's role in the universe[22]. Therefore, the philosophical mind, since its formation, has been paddling in the spaces of Logos and Myths, the conflicts of God and the universe, and theology and politics, resulting in various approaches and diverse opinions. Human nature is undoubtedly extremely complex, as it includes various dimensions in its composition. Those who have a single perspective regarding human nature would definitely err and go astray.

Religion in modern academia has become a rich subject for many schools of thought in the humanities, including psychology, sociology, ontology, and anthropology. The relationship between the public sphere and religion has always been controversial. Almost all political perspectives are shaped by a religious belief regardless of the degree of secularization of the country. The religious factor cannot be ignored in directing major political decisions, regardless of their negative or positive impact.

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[20] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Nabīl Fayyadh (Beirut: n.p., 2018).

[21] *Ibid*., 92.

[22] *Ibid*., 95.

John Coleman does not hesitate to acknowledge that the Biblical scriptures are the most powerful and persuasive symbolic sources for public ethics in the United States today, regardless of whether the influence of this religious heritage may be conscious or unconscious. The morality that Spencer used as the proof of religion recurringly reveals its divine source; as the original human inclination for a moral obligation is part of the human nature created by God. According to Kant, this inclination is the essence of almost all aspects of religion. The essence of religion is not rituals or ontological systems. Rather, it is the fulfillment of the duty to respond to the call of conscience, which is the very call of God. Kant made this statement about morals after the heated debate in the 18th century in the West about the essence of religion.

On the other bank of the river, we find Feuerbach in the 19th century who declared that religion is not the source of morals. Rather the moral feeling transcends religion, especially when he compared between love and faith. He explains that the human component (reason, free will and love), by nature, reflects morals which are the highest qualities in man, or it is a man in his ideal perfection. Such perfection that religion cannot achieve. Feuerbach exalts morality over religion and makes it the pathway to prove the divine. However, he does not reject the mutual exchange between morality and religion in constructing and influencing moral actions[23].

With this influential presence of religion in human behavioral actions, religion is always recalled to play its role in correcting, guiding and reinforcing human actions through sustaining common values and bridging the gap between human beings. The world is certainly in dire need

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[23] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Perchin (Weird: Dar Al-Rafidain, 2017), 360-379.

of invoking religion and its moral components in the face of this dangerous epidemic that is threatening mankind.

Invoking the Moral Role of Christianity and Islam in Confronting the Pandemic

In all aspects of life, whether negative or positive, religion occupies the highest place in dealing with these ordeals. In the pandemic crisis, religious institutions played a major role in dealing with the pandemic. The religious message achieved a great victory in preserving human life. It also reinforced the moral and human dimension in societies; where the importance of science and knowledge to confront the pandemic was emphasized. The religious moral message helped people to take rational actions as it supported the lockdown on worship and religious rites gatherings and called for respecting and observing the legal precautious procedures to preserve people's lives.

Surveying different societies during the pandemic, communities can be classified into two categories: The first category: Those who are weak in faith. The reason for this is due to the individual's adherence to a system of values that relieve his fear and endurance. However, with the passage of time and by the increased psychological pressure accompanying the spread of the pandemic, doubt starts to infiltrate people's beliefs in these values. Some would wonder: Why does God - the Almighty - send us this pandemic while we believe in Him and worship Him? A person may feel confusion between his desire to protect his values, beliefs and religion and his doubts regarding the power of religion to protect his life. This often happens when rumors are at large or due to a lack of information about the pandemic, especially with the spread of social media and its exploitation by some extremists who incite fear and panic in societies. All this in turn leads to weakening faith and belief among communities.

The second category: Those whose level of faith, religiosity and practice of religious rites increase as the crisis elevates; as they continue contemplating the role of religion in protecting them from the epidemic. So that they generate ideas that make them believe that religion, faith and returning to God will protect them from the epidemic. They do so because they view the epidemic as an affliction, a trial, and a reminder from God to them.

What we propose is that religion works in human life in different ways. Religion does not conflict with science as religious scholars acknowledge the significance of the experimental sciences and acknowledge their results and workable solutions to crises and problems facing humanity. This is noticeable in the approval of religious scholars of the medical measures that were taken to confront the pandemic. They served as a supportive force for governments, health efforts, and legal forces; whereby they called on people to abide by the laws and follow the precautionary measures. They urged people to reject rumors, fabrications and falsehoods that were spread by some institutions of different agendas.

This is evident in the positions taken by the official religious institutions, ministries and endowments regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that reflects the true complementation between science and religion. Official religious figures were at the forefront of those who responded to the state's precautionary measures. Religious gatherings were prohibited from performing religious rites and rituals in mosques or churches. Scholars invoked religious texts to confront epidemics and disasters and their attitudes were representative of the rational trends in Islam and Christianity. In addition, they followed a universal humanistic character, rejected intolerance and coercion against other religions and societies and viewed

humanity as one unity inflected with the pandemic rather than a punishment for a particular sect or people[24.]

This wise religious trend made people aware of the dangers of the pandemic called for the need to overcome political and ideological differences, and promoted the need to stick to the moral values of tolerance, justice and hope and to reject extremism, violence and racism through complying with the measures forced by the authorities.[25] This attitude was enough to spread peace in the hearts of people and acknowledge them of the threats of the pandemic and the necessity of cooperation and solidarity. This also contributed to overcoming the pandemic materially and morally. In addition, this attitude contributed to strengthening the official efforts and helped sustain a secure and quiet environment for doctors and other sectors to control the virus[26].

The attitude of the clergy on the pandemic reflects a positive image in dealing with the pandemic as they reinforced the principles of religion that require adherence to the measures of the Ministry of Health. In doing so, scholars emphasized the principle of preserving human life as the top priority. [27] The matter necessitated the establishment of religious rites at homes away from gatherings and did not lead to their disruption or cancellation. The ruling is fixed but the application of the

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[24] Ali Asaad Watfa, *Awhām al-Muqaddas wa Muṭlaqatuh fī Zamān al-Awbī'ah ma bayn al-Dīn wa al-Aydūlūjiyyat al-Dīniyyah fī Zamān Kūrūnā* (Kuwait: Kuwait University Scientific Publication Council, 2020), 31.

[25] Aḥmad Firdaus, "Kūrūnā Yuflis Tujjār al-Dīn wa al-Sīyāsah," *Anfa Press*, March 21, 2020, Nov 30, 2021, https://anfaspress.com/news/voir/62969-2020-03-21-03-28-10

[26] *Ibid*.

[27] Watfa, *Awhām al-Muqaddas*, 31.

ruling is accommodated within the circumstances and contexts[28.]

Christianity has an active role in urging cooperation and solidarity among Christians in overcoming the dangers of this pandemic. With the accelerated steps of countries towards more precautions and strict restrictions on religious rituals to prevent the outbreak of COVID-19, several international churches decided to take parallel measures, including closure of or shifting some rituals that are used to be performed in religious gatherings. A religious trend emerged in the Christian community, represented by most churches, which bet on introducing the moral dimension in Christianity and presenting it as a savior of the abject failure of Western governments in managing the crises and risks of the pandemic. This trend evoked the Christian moral values necessary to handle COVID-19, representing a regenerative tendency that emerged in Christianity recently. It is a response to the development and radical reform that occurred in Christianity and was known as the liberation of theology. Christianity in this new era shifted from the preserved theological templates that it placed in a dogmatic fence and shifted to a functional and practical form of Christianity that responds to the real challenges facing the Christian community. Therefore, the Catholic Church called, through the papal encyclicals, to surpass the obsolete approach of the church in confronting epidemics in the past[29.]

In addition, the Catholic Church recommended modifications in the practice of devotional rites, responded

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[28] Moataz Al-Khatib, *Kūrūnā bayn al-Shaʿāir al-Dīnīyyah wa Ḥifẓ al-Nufūs*, March 18, 2020, retrieved Nov 30, 2021, shorturl.at/eoyDI.

[29] Lyman Stone, "Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years, Practical Theology Says Care, Sacrifice, and Community are as Vital as Ever," *Foreign Policy*, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/13/christianity-epidemics-2000-years-should-i-still-go-to-church-coronavirus/

to the arising scientific issues and health instructions, and urged Christians to physically distance themselves from religious gatherings and to find new ways for worship using technology and the internet. The concept of the church in the new perspective is not limited to a place of worship. Rather, a church means the people of God. The word 'church' means the people who have been summoned, and therefore everyone will be called upon to work on finding new ways to cooperate and care for the weak in times of crisis, to help the needy and the poor and to provide them with a helping hand. The true Christian is required to share with other Christian brothers in their crises.

Islam also commanded physical distancing from people with infectious diseases. This is confirmed in the hadith: "Flee from a leper as you would flee from a lion.[30]" On the authority of ʿAlī bin ʾAbī Ṭālib, the prophet said: "Do not keep looking at the lepers, and if you speak to them, make a distance of a spear length between you and them."[31] It was forbidden to contact lepers because it was a contagious disease that spread among people at that time[32]. This attitude towards leprosy can be generalized against all infectious diseases.

The history of Islam is replete with many examples that reflect the role of religion in dealing with disasters, epidemics and pandemics. Chief among them is the way ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb dealt with the plague of Emmaus (*ṭāʿūn ʿAmwās*) in the Levant where he referred to the hadith of the Messenger (PBUH) about the plague: "If you are informed of the plague in a land, do not enter it, and if

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[30] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Ṭibb, Bāb al-Judham, Ḥadīth 5707, 1/7, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5707.

[31] Narrated by Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Kitāb al-Ṭibb, Bāb al-Judham, taḥqīq Majmūʿah bi Ishrāf Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ (Beirut: Dār al-Risālah al-ʿĀlamīyah, 1430), 1172/2, Ḥadīth: 3543.

[32] Al-Kamākhī, *al-Mahayhaʾ fī Kashf Asrār al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, ed. ʿAḥmad Alī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2005), 2/437.

it falls on a land while you are in it, do not leave it."[33] This hadith shows that the first person to institute social isolation and quarantine measures was the Prophet (PBUH), as he ordered people not to leave their homes during the outbreak and spread of the epidemic.

These precarious measures against leprosy apply to all other infectious diseases. This is what was confirmed by the Egyptian Dar al-Iftaa when declaring: "If people go out in the time of epidemics in collective marches to pray collectively and supplicate for the removal of the epidemic, there would be a higher risk of increasing the spread of the disease. That's why this is one of the forbidden abominations, and deviations in the religion"[34]. Ibn Ḥajar emphasized that by saying: "As for Gathering for it [the epidemic] as they do for the prayer for rain, it is a deviation in religion that occurred in the great plague in Damascus during the year seven hundred and forty-nine." He also mentioned: "People went out to the desert, including most of the great people of the country, prayed and sought help, but the plague became more infectious after that.[35]" These extracts indicate the prevention of gatherings during the epidemic even if it is to pray in order to lift the epidemic, which is what jurists and religious scholars relied on their method of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic showing the importance of following the approach of the predecessors to limit the spread of infection.

Thus, Christianity and Islam prohibited gatherings, whether it was for the sake of performing worship, jobs or even supplication. Both religions tried to search for a

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[33] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Ṭibb, Bāb al-Judham, Ḥadīth 5728, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5728.

[34] Muhammad Shehta, "Ḥukm Masīrāt al-Du'ā' ḍid Kūrūnā: Al-Iftā' Tu'akkid Ḥurmatahā bi al-Adillah," *Elbalad News*, March 30, 2020. Retrieved: Nov 29, 2021, https://www.elbalad.news/4248478.

[35] Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Badhl al-Mā'ūn fī Faḍl al-Ṭā'ūn*, ed. Aḥmad Iṣṣām 'Abd al-Qādir (Riyadh: Dār al-'Āṣimah), 328-329.

suitable alternative for that, whether it was through attendance with the need to pay attention to physical distancing and taking the necessary measures, or even taking advantage of the means of technology to gather for worship and supplication, especially in Christianity, which was keener to implement this. Islam was keener to stress that one should not leave a country where the epidemic had spread to prevent mixing and transmission of the epidemic.

In this context, some Christian moral principles and values in the Bible were revisited through deep discussions and dialogue, to highlight their true meaning, like love and altruism. Under COVID-19, generosity was magnified, took the lead in virtues, and was attributed as an act of saints. The Church called on Christians to help the weak, the destitute, and those at risk to secure their living and compensate for their health needs. In order to confront the psychological crisis that occurred with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Church worked to charge its followers with a healing energy of faith derived from the most famous teachings of Christ: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"[36] and "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."[37]

Accordingly, it can be said that Christian moral teachings, especially in times of crisis, gave Christians strong faith energy and courage in providing assistance to the needy, to the extent that the life of an individual Christian seemed less important than the life another fellow Christians[38.] One of the greatest strengths of the Christian faith is that it teaches Christians that God knows

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[36] Mathew 07:12, *Bible: Old Testament and New Testament Books Arabic Translation Shared from the Original Languages with Greek Books from 7th Translation of the Bible* (The Bible House in the Middle East. 1996)

[37] John 13:15, Bible.

[38] Stone, "Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years."

the end from the beginning, so a believer should not be surprised by what happens as God is always with His people regardless of the dangers they face. The central tenet of the Christian faith is that God lived with them as human beings who shared with the believers their sorrows and who comforted them to relieve them of their affliction.

Most churches responded to the health measures and precautions applied by states and called on Christians to obey rulers and leaders according to the instructions of the Bible. Christians were reminded that strict adherence to these measures is not just a matter of personal protection but for the good of all.

The Church expressed sympathy with medical groups and called on Christians to pray around the world for medical workers who put their lives at risk during the pandemic, for governments and leaders who must make wise decisions, and for scientists as they race against time to develop a vaccine. The church directed Christians in light of this crisis to the supporting and soothing supplications in Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day"[39].

Dependence on medical science does not mean ignoring the spiritual aspect. A Muslim has to resort to praying to God, supplication, repentance, seeking forgiveness and drawing closer to God Almighty with every good deed. Ibn Ḥajar says: "Among what everyone should hasten to are: responding to grievances, paying

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[39] "Coronavirus: A Christian Response," *Christianity.org*, https://christianity.org.uk/article/coronavirus-a-christian-response

debts, repenting to God, regretting for going back to disobedience, and writing a fair will without doing injustice (to any of the heirs). This is required at all times and is confirmed when diseases occur in general, and for those who become infected in particular"[40]. This can be achieved through supplication, prayer and repentance to God. Ibn Ḥajar says: "The one who is distressed with a serious calamity should hasten for prayer.[41]" Al-ʿAynī says: "They should hasten to the remembrance of God, prayer and charity because that is what God repels affliction with.[42]"

In addition, it is important to seek social solidarity and spending in the cause of Allah, as the prophet (PUBH) says: "The food of one person suffices for two; the food of two persons suffices for four, and the food of four persons suffices for eight.[43]" Imam al-Nawāwī says: "In this ḥadīth, the aim is to exhort people to share food as though little it may be, it will be sufficient and blessed for those present"[44]. Islam furthermore outlaws' monopoly as the Prophet (PBUH) says: "No one hoards but the sinner.[45]" The guilt of monopoly grows and intensifies if the monopoly occurs in times of epidemics, calamity and

[40] Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Qasṭalānī, *Irshād al-Sārī li Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: The Great Amiri Press, 1323AH), 315.

[41] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1379AH), 6/394.

[42] Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-Qārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, authenticated by ʿAbdullāh Maḥmūd ʿUmar (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2001), 1, 7/89.

[43] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Ashribah, Bāb Faḍilat al-Muwāsāh fī al-Ṭaʿām al-Qalīl wa anna Ṭaʿām al-Ithnayn yakfī al-Thalāthah wa Naḥwah, ḥadīth: 179, 2059, 3\1630, https://sunnah.com/muslim:2059d

[44] Al-Nawawī, *al-Minhāj: Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bin al-Ḥajjāj* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1392AH), 14/23.

[45] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb Al-Musāqāh, Bāb Taḥrīm al-Iḥtiqār fī al-ʿAqwāt, Ḥadīth: 130. 1605. 3/1228, https://sunnah.com/muslim:1605b.

hardships because this leads to injustice and overburdening and stirs up panic, anxiety and fear.

Thus, religious scholars have taken a position stemming from the teachings of Islam in confronting the pandemic. They called for following the precautionary measures imposed by the authority based on the available knowledge of medical resources. They assured that medication and the search for medicine is a matter approved by Islam and its teachings when calamity descends. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the prophet (PBUH) said: "God does not send down a disease but that He creates a cure for it.[46]" It was reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* that the prophet (PBUH) said: "Every disease has a cure. If the medicine suits the disease, it will be cured by the will of God Almighty.[47]" Jurists agreed that "treatment with medicine and guarding against the epidemic is obligatory"[48].

Following these teachings, the Islamic civilization enjoyed an abundance of hospitals, medical and pharmacological schools, and was exclusively concerned with scientific diagnosis and treatment away from superstitions. Hospitals in the Muslim world treated all people without discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims or between the rich and the poor[49].

The terrible plague of the 2nd century, which killed nearly a quarter of the population of the Roman Empire, contributed to the spread of Christianity, as saints cared for the sick and set an example of devotion and adherence to the morals of Christ. The most famous epidemic in Christian history was the Siberian Plague in the 3rd

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[46] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Ṭibb: Ma Anzal Allāh Ḍā'an ilā Anzal lahu Shifā', Ḥadīth: 5678, 7/122.

[47] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Salām, Bāb li kulli Dā' Dawā' wa Istiḥbāb al-Tadāwī, Ḥadīth: 69, 2204, 4/1729.

[48] Al-Qasṭalānī, *Irshād al-Sārī*, 7/96.

[49] National Geographic, *Alf Ikhtirā' wa Ḥaqīqah Mudhish Ḥawl al-Ḥaḍarah al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Nahḍah Miṣr li al-Nashr, n.d), 44.

century, in which the Christian clergy did so well,
resulting in the tremendous growth of Christianity. Saints
devoted themselves to the care of the living and the death
rates in cities with Christian communities were half that of
those in other cities[50].

Ethical values in Christianity and Islam have revived
in our faith, morals, and our family and human relations,
and made us believe that adhering to our morals will
guarantee us victory over crises and epidemics, through
solidarity and cooperation with our brothers regardless of
race, gender, religion or sect. It also revived in us a feeling
of cooperation, a sense of the pain of others and meeting
their needs for food and medicine. It taught us to
reconsider our behaviors and actions in what is known as
moral accountability. Therefore, the crisis made us feel
that we must return to the moral values that characterize
Christianity and Islam to create a world order based on
love, tolerance, justice and human brotherhood. All people
are brothers equal in rights and duties, as called for by
Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-ʿAzhar Aḥmad al-
Ṭayyib who stated "We will be fine when we do good to
every human being as they deserve"[51].

The pandemic alerted us to the existence of many
common moral values between Christianity and Islam,
such as tolerance, love, altruism, the necessity of believing
in God and destiny, feeling the pain of others, and the
necessity of bearing social responsibility and having good
morals. This urges us to look for ways to address
extremism, hatred and violence against the others, due to
the need to move forward together and to spread love,
tolerance, coexistence and the defense of human rights.
Islamic values clearly showed how and to what extent a

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[50] Stone, "Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years."
[51] Baṭriyarkīyat al-Kaldān, "al-Kanīsah fī Muwājahat Fayrus Kurunā
ʿĪd Ḥulūl al-Rūḥ al-Quds, The Middle East Council of Churches,
https://www.mecc.org/regionalar/2020/5/25/--1

person's belief is related to the correctness of his actions, and that this is linked to a person's faith and commitment to religion and morals.

Christianity has shown the depth of the link between Christian moral values and Christian belief. A person who adopts his religious values and builds his behavior on them can only be a benevolent person, as his religion wanted him to be, whether he was a Christian or a Muslim. Priests and monks were keen to conduct rituals and liturgies in different ways, and were keen to convince people of this. Carol Kutsushi, a Christian residing in Nairobi, says: "We will conduct the rite of the Holy Communion on Good Friday through the Zoom application on the Internet. Because of the current situation, we cannot get the bread that is used in churches, so we will use another material that represents bread. We will take a piece of plain bread and a quantity of grape juice, pray over these materials we have chosen and then recite the Communion together."

The church to which Carol belongs usually holds small weekly gatherings in the houses of the followers, but she says that these gatherings are now taking place through the internet, and as a result, the number of times members of these gatherings contact each other has increased. She says, "Our religious leaders send us weekly materials for discussion, and we discuss them via Zoom every Tuesday and Friday, and then we pray. It is not without difficulty, but I think it is a beautiful way to get closer to the Lord while you are sitting in your home, especially since the children are participating in reading the Bible." Carroll confirms that this method has many benefits, as she says, "I think it brought us closer to each other than before."

In Britain, the Islamic tent project usually organizes a collective *ifṭār*, in which a tent is set up in an open yard in London or other famous sites. The followers of various

religions are invited to attend and eat breakfast. This year, they held a virtual *ifṭār*, by sending boxes that people can build their ideal experiences for breakfast. This included recipes, games, and brochures that show facts about Islam, and the breakfast feast continued throughout the month through the Zoom application[52].

A number of Muslim scholars and clerics also tried to adhere to preventive measures, and they were keen that people pay attention to them, by holding prayers and some possible rituals through applications such as Zoom, or broadcasting holiday masses on television screens. Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha prayers were also broadcast in many countries via live broadcasting on Facebook. Several *sheikhs* and religious scholars in Arab countries broadcast Tarawih prayers on their Facebook pages throughout the month of Ramadan, in addition to recording religious lectures for those interested. At the same time, some found internet applications to be not a bad way to facilitate remote marriage matters.

However, it was not possible to hold some particular rites and rituals, from a distance, such as the baptismal masses, or blessing water during the Holy Week. Nevertheless, one of the priests in Michigan found a way to complete the ritual, by using a green water toy gun. The picture of the water toy gun went viral on social media[53]. With these clear proofs in Islam and Christianity that attest to the true essence of the teachings in the two religions in the face of the emerging pandemic, the extremist discourse that refuses to adhere to the preventive measures in churches, mosques and places of worship, should be rejected.

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[52] "Kayfa yumkinu Iḥyāʾ al-Shaʿāʾir al-Dīnīyah fī Zaman al-Wabāʾ," *BBC News*, retrieved June 21, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/arabic/world-52215440

[53] *Ibid*.

Combating False Religiosity in Interpreting the Pandemic in Christianity and Islam

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some radical religious trends emerged that took a stance that is completely different to that of the official stance of Christianity and Islam. Such extremist stance contributed to the spread of the disease and the transmission of infection. Several Christian religious leaders offered metaphysical explanations for the spread of the virus and the repercussions of its dangers to humanity, claiming that it is a divine punishment for the spread of sins and misdeeds. Anba Agathon, Bishop of Maghāgha, who is from the hard-line in the Egyptian Church, declared: "Coronavirus is the wrath of God and His punishment for humanity for their evils. He punishes them with an unprecedented deadly epidemic."[54] Among some Muslims, it was rumored that the Coronavirus is a divine retribution for the secular communist regime in China because of the injustice, aggression and violence they practice against Muslims. Others described the pandemic as "the soldiers of God avenging for the oppressed"[55].

Other pseudo-religious persons in Christianity and Islam claimed that believers are immune from the virus, and accordingly, refused to close places of worship and called for the continuation of religious rites, opposing the precautionary measures[56]. Some ultra-Orthodox Christian

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[54] Isaac Ibrahim, "al-Kanīsah wa Jāʾiḥat Kūrūnā: Ughliqat al-Abwāb wa lakin Ẓaharat al-Tashaqquqāt," retrieved April 14, 2020, shorturl.at/fsxD0

[55] Watfa, *Awhām al-Muqaddas*, 54-55.

[56] Christoph Stark, "Kūrūnā, Fayrūs Yafriḍ Nafsahu ʿalā Shaʿāʾir al-Adyān al-Mukhtalifah," March 15, 2020, retrieved Nov 30, 2021, https://p.dw.com/p/3ZNEO; Nāṣir al-Ajili, "Kūrūnā fī al-ʿIrāq: Khurāfāt Rijāl al-Dīn," March 11, 2020, retrieved Nov 30, 2021, shorturl.at/vQRZ6; Angel Abdullah, "Kūrūnā wa al-Nuṣūṣ al-Muqaddasah: Tadayyun al-Dunyawī," March 16, 2020, retrieved Nov 28, 2021, https://180post.com/archives/9158; Mehdi Khalaji,

churches sued their governments to get exemptions from stay-at-home orders. Others said they would not comply with these orders and would hold their religious services in person at Easter. This caused tension between these countries and these churches[57]. The Pew Research Center reported that more than 20% of white evangelicals - more than any other group - believe that "parents should be able to make the decision not to vaccinate their children, even if doing so may cause health risks to other children and adults.[58]

Christian radicals tend to include vaccinations within a worldview that generally distrusts science and views scientists as a threat to the moral order. In some cases, these protests were led by clergy and church leaders in the conservative evangelical community where they used their pulpits to discourage church members from getting vaccinated[59].

The main reason behind this challenge and the failure to respond to all the precautionary measures to limit the spread of the virus is the biblical quotations the radicals use mostly out of context - to justify their extremist positions. They view their religion as the source of immunity from the virus, and they say that gatherings are necessary because true Christians welcome death. They accuse the state and the authority of being the cause of the outbreak of this pandemic to eliminate the chosen few

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"Fayrūs Kūrūnā fī Irān: ʿAwāmil tataʿallaq bi Rijāl al-Dīn," March 11, 2020, retrieved Nov 30, 2021, shorturl.at/iuLS4.

[57] Matthew Gabriele, "Christian Groups That Resist Public-Health Guidelines Are Forgetting a Key Part of the Religion's History," retrieved April 20, 2020, *Time.com*, https://time.com/5824128/early-christian-caritas-coronavirus

[58] Monique Deal Barlow, "Christian Nationalism is a Barrier to Mass Vaccination Against COVID-19, *The Conversation*, retrieved April 1, 2021, https://theconversation.com/christian-nationalism-is-a-barrier-to-mass-vaccination-against-covid-19-158023

[59] *Ibid*.

believers. Some evangelists have even linked vaccinations to the symbol of submission to the Antichrist.[60]

Misguided interpretation of religious texts has also cast a shadow over some extremist Islamic trends that spread rumors and myths about ways to treat the pandemic. This is what the global index of the Egyptian Dar al-Iftaa warned against, emphasizing that 55% of the myths concerning the cause and treatment of the pandemic were published on social media, 40% of them were reflecting ignorance of religion or wrong interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition, and 30% of these myths aimed at spreading panic and anxiety among people to achieve certain goals[61].

The most dangerous of these myths are: that COVID-19 was mentioned in Sūrah al-Muddaththir[62], that whoever finds a hair in Sūrah al-Baqarah and drinks its water will be treated from the virus[63], that the soil of al-Ḥusayn heals the afflicted[64], and many other myths and lies[65]. Believing in these superstitions and rumors only reflects ignorance or misguided religious interpretation. Some people use the texts out of context to support falsehood by interpreting the sacred texts in a way that serves their purposes. They claim that the fatwas issued by official religious figures are engineered to suit the rulers' whim or to serve the

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[60] *Ibid*.

[61] "Taḥdhīr min 10 Khurāfāt ḥawl 'Ilāj Fayrūs Kūrūnā," *Arab World News*, Feb 4, 2020, retrieved Nov 29, 2021, shorturl.at/hpyD1.

[62] Watfa, *Awhām al-Muqaddas*, 73-74.

[63] "Taḥdhīr min 10 Khurāfāt ḥawl 'Ilāj Fayrūs Kūrūnā," *Arab World News*.

[64] Christo Al-Murr, "Qirā'ah fī al-Khiṭāb al-Uṣūlī al-Masīḥī Zaman Kūrūnā," Jan 4, 2020, retrieved Nov 27, 2021, shorturl.at/joIX5

[65] George Elia & Muhammad Hussein, "al-Iftā' al-Maṣrīyah Tuḥazir min Intishār al-Khurāfāt bi Ism al-Dīn li al-'Ilāj Kūrūnā, March 4, 2020, *Al-Ain.com*, retrieved Nov 29, 2021, https://al-ain.com/article/ifta-corona-egypt-azhar-862768; Burin Habib, *al-Kūrūnā fī al-Zaman al-Raqamī*, March 8, 2020, retrieved Nov 29, 2021, shorturl.at/dwAF1.

dominion of politics by dedicating money to certain sects and doctrines. By doing so, the sacred texts turn from a solution to the crises into fuel in the crisis industry. God states in the Quran:

> "Layer upon layer of darkness. When he [the misguided] holdeth out his hand he scarce can see it. And he for whom Allah hath not appointed light, for him there is no light" [Q, 24: 40].

These dissonant voices of extremist groups in the two religions and their misinterpretation of the pandemic should not obscure the fact of the efforts of the leaders of the two traditions and their valiant sacrifices in resisting the pandemic.

In conclusion, the researchers confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic caused enormous tensions in international relations revealed to the world the flaws and shortcomings of many major superpowers, uncovered the failures of materialism and its futility in managing the global health crisis, and turned the health crisis into a global moral crisis. The adversities and calamities have revealed the essence of matters, the true nature of peoples and nations, and uncovered the vanity layer of civilization that developed countries tore and regressed to robbery and piracy. The study showed the urgent need for a new religious discourse that goes beyond the dialectical metaphysical approach into a more ethical religious approach through which these values are employed to serve man and society in the face of the dangers of disease and its negative repercussions.

The study emphasized the rich moral heritage that is stored in the two religions, Christianity and Islam, which constituted a safe haven of protection for their followers from the dangers of the emerging pandemic, especially with the terrible international failure and the inability of governments and international institutions to face this

challenge. The study also marked the positive attitude of religious scholars and leaders in addressing the pandemic through the acknowledgment of the principles of religion that require the necessity of commitment and taking health precautions following the principle of preserving the human soul.

Undoubtedly, Islamic and Christian morality acted as an important factor in the context of the crisis and tried to explain and exercise a degree of societal control over societies in the face of the epidemic and related issues and problems. The positive role of Islamic and Christian morality in the pandemic period is related to the nature of the problems faced by societies during the spread of the virus, as societies were overwhelmed by a state of tension and anxiety, to the point that some despaired of the human ability to treat the disease. Here, the role of Islamic and Christian morals appeared in achieving and restoring stability, psychological rest and reassurance for members of the society. Ethics play a major role in a productive and peaceful life, as they help individuals to accept inexplicable facts with ease.

In addition, Islamic and Christian moralities have worked to refine the individual tendencies that have accompanied the state of tension and anxiety that resulted from the outbreak of the epidemic. Islamic and Christian moralities resist the natural tendency of humans to exaggerate individual selfishness, materialism, and narrow rationality. They encourage individuals to show solidarity, altruism and help others.

There is another aspect that we can see in Islamic and Christian ethics, which is the aspect related to the obligatory function of individuals, which requires putting forward a set of instructions and laws that aim to organize the lives of individuals and societies, where they control their behavior, especially in times of crisis. This pattern appears in Islamic ethics through religious texts that

control relations among individuals during times of hardship. This comes in accordance with the Prophet's Hadith about the plague, when directing individuals not to enter or leave the places where the epidemic spreads, which religiously establishes the concept of quarantine to confront epidemics. Likewise, Christianity morals advocated the same through the sermons of many priests.

Christianity as well as Islam had a role in confirming that the crisis and the pandemic were a destiny from God and not a punishment, as some radical parties wanted to interpret according to their whims and agenda. This appeared in the speeches of various religious leaders. In Sheikh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib's TV message, on March 29, 2020, he called on individuals and societies to resort to God through prayer and supplication so that God would relieve this crisis and reveal this anguish and concluded his speech by praying. He also emphasized the qualities of mercy, benevolence and divine relief. This aspect of faith was also manifested in the Vatican Pope Francis's prayer, on March 27, 2020, in which he said: "We call upon you, Lord, from a raging sea, turn to us, O Lord, and do not leave us in the midst of the storm, and tell us again: Do not be afraid, that we will cast all our worries on You, because You take care of us".

Islamic and Christian ethics also played a major role in supporting health policies; most religious trends ordered the policies imposed by governments to be followed. When religious institutions took decisions demanding the cessation of collective religious rites and gatherings and demanded individuals to adhere to the precautionary measures, religious institutions and most of the sheiks and clergymen demanded people adhere to these measures and consider this as one of the things that serve the fundamental goals of religions, which presented the idea of preserving self over other things. The religious Muslim leaders used the historical experience and

religious texts that allow the closure of places of worship and the suspension of religious rituals such as collective prayers and pilgrimage. Religious institutions in many Islamic countries issued fatwas on the necessity of stopping collective religious rituals to prevent the harm resulting from the outbreak of the virus, and the same was the case with Christian religious institutions as churches banned gatherings, collective prayers and celebrations.

In addition, Islamic and Christian ethics presented a framework supported by religious texts and principles, to manage societies during the pandemic, that focused on a number of values, such as: compassion, community solidarity, altruism, helping others, and cooperation. As a result, Islamic religious institutions issued many fatwas that allow the early payment of zakat to meet the needs of the poor and the needy in light of the circumstances resulting from the pandemic. The grand Imam of Al-Azhar also decided to double the value of the monthly subsidy disbursed by the Egyptian House of Zakat and Charities to its beneficiaries during the months of April and May 2020. The religious organizations and institutions in Western countries continued their social solidarity activities, and called on individuals to donate and contribute to efforts to combat the virus.

The study shed light on the proper employment of religious texts to combat the pandemic and to benefit from the luminous historical experiences in Christian and Islamic histories in the face of the dangers of epidemics. It, furthermore, denounced and condemned the religious misinterpretations of the pandemic as they do not represent the essence of the two traditions.

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