

The *Kairos* of COVID-19 Pandemic and the Quest for a New Life: A Paul Tillich Interpretation of History

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ABSTRACT

This article brings alive Paul Tillich's theological interpretation of history during COVID-19 as *kairos*. *Kairos* is explored in relation to three themes: creativity in science and its consequence of utility; psychological wellbeing and psychological illness; and the demonic and the profane. All the three themes which raise questions in existence in view of the inherent ambiguities are answered by the Eternal Life, the Kingdom of God, and the Spiritual Presence espoused by Paul Tillich. The article delves into human life in all its ambiguities and the quest for the new life under COVID-19. In this article, the creative and destructive realities of science under COVID-19 are explored. Furthermore, psychological issues related to the pandemic are discussed and the religious elements are also discussed. All the above show how under *kairos* such as in COVID-19, human actualizations from potentialities manifest in life in the quest for the ultimate. Besides, the work shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to scientific creations which would have never been explored for many years. In the intervening time, potentially, it raises concerns about human safety. The work also reveals how psychological wellness has been attained by some while the majority struggle to be whole under COVID-19. Additionally, in this article, there is a view on how the profane threatened the religious and how the demonic manifested in church and state. It further demonstrates that the Spiritual Presence present in secular or human institutions must be engaged to resolve the ambiguities in life generated by COVID-19.

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INTRODUCTION

At the right times in history, dynamic moments are experienced.¹ These right times in history trigger moments in which life in history is shaken to its core and engendering self-transcendence mode in human life.² According to Paul Tillich,³ these right times of shaking of the foundations known as *kairos* have always been with creation as it is with the symbols of the Kingdom of God and Spiritual Presence.⁴ It is the breaking

¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 371.

² Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 371; Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*. Carl E. Braaten, ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 1.

³ Paul Tillich (1886-1965) was a German-American theologian who is thought to be one of the most influential theologians in the twentieth century. He is famously known for his theological method of correlation.

⁴ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 372.

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in of the Kingdom of God and Eternity into history.⁵ Indeed, as there are many *kairoi* throughout history, so there is the Great *kairos* that is here already and is expected to manifest at the end of history.⁶

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic is a remarkable reality that has shaken history to its core. Moreover, it has led to self-transcending moments in the expression of human life. Based on the above, the author deems it fit to call the COVID-19 era a *kairos* moment. The *kairos* moment that COVID-19 brought in its wake resulted in human self-transcendence related to creativity and destruction. Furthermore, under COVID-19, human self-transcendence has manifested itself in self-identity and self-alteration as well as in the profane and the demonic.

Hence this work is interested in exploring the influence of COVID-19, firstly, creativity in science and the possibilities of its negative consequence of utility. Secondly, the work is interested in the examination of the realities of psychosocial wellbeing as against psychological illness. Thirdly, there is the engagement of the profane and demonic amid COVID-19. In all three cases, the questions they raise in existence in view of the inherent ambiguities are answered by the Spiritual Presence espoused by Tillich. This study stands to demonstrate how ambiguities of life were activated and manifested under COVID-19 as a *kairos* moment in history. It also demonstrates that the Spiritual Presence (found in all creation and in all human institutions) is still relevant as the Christian answer to the questions that the ambiguities pose.

Kairos: Creativity in Science and Consequence of Utility under COVID-19

The creativity of the human spirit within COVID-19 showed how resilient and yet how vulnerable humanity and the whole of God's creation could be. Scientific research in various laboratories all over the world was hugely challenged and tested. Scientists and public health managers were kept on their toes to validate scientific prescriptions in a world that is ambiguously built on science. This ambiguity associated with science showed up clearly when COVID-19 slowly but steadily devoured human beings like wildfire. The uncertainty inherent in science also known as controlling knowledge⁷ was to be seen in the confusion between those who believed in science and those who did not.⁸

Yet in this confusion, scientists continued persistently to research while insisting on certain prescriptions that came to the public domain as COVID-19 protocols. The goal was to obtain a vaccine that could be efficacious against the possible variants of the COVID-19 virus. The possibilities of following the existing scientific techniques in manufacturing such vaccines were slim. The hesitance to apply existing scientific techniques was because the prevailing technique could not deal with the anticipated variants of the virus. Therefore, to those who oppose science, this was the real case in point for the inadequacies of science. The fact that it is a knowledge that ought to be updated every now and then showed how less truthful it was. It showed that although science was captivated by the truth which is the ultimate, it never grasps it fully. Hence scientific knowledge is grasped by a continuous search which is the source of its strength and weakness.

This continuous search in the year 2020 and beyond stimulated science to move beyond the dominant principles, which now seem to be barriers or frontiers of the novel scientific technique. The barriers to the new scientific creations were justified on the basis that they could lead to unethical and destructive applications that will be inimical to human life. Yet, the presence of the pandemic, the suffering, and the dying coupled with its paralyzing impact on socio-economic and political dimensions of life shoved science into another inevitable ambiguity of creativity and destruction.⁹ Therefore, scientific research manifesting

⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 369-372.

⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 372.

⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 97-100; Langdon Gilkey, *Gilkey On Tillich* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 35-38.

⁸ Maria Chayinska, Ozden Mellis Olug, Arin H. Ayanian, Johana Claudia Gratzel, Tymofii Brik, Anna Kende, and Craig McGarty. "Coronavirus Conspiracy Beliefs and Distrust of Science Predict Risky Public Health Behaviors through Optimistically Biased Risk Perceptions in Ukraine, Turkey and Germany" *Sage Journals* (2021) 1-19. doi.org/10.1177%2F1368430220978278. 4.

⁹ Dolgin, Elie, "The Tangled History of mRNA Vaccines: Hundreds of Scientists had worked on mRNA Vaccines for Decades before the Coronavirus Pandemic brought a breakthrough" *Nature* 597 (2021) 318-324. doi:https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-02483-w.

as the power of human creativity produced an mRNA technique for vaccine production. The initial position had been the usage of proteins which lately has proven to be efficacious in the case of COVID-19 as reported by the DW media website on December 20, 2021. The mRNA vaccine which posed the danger of antiviral response to human immunity was a risk, but it no longer was a barrier. Clearly, COVID-19 as a pandemic has demonstrated a *kairos* whereby at the right time humanity has moved into a new face of being in existence. Now this *kairos* moment for the ushering in of the mRNA-engineered vaccine rather opens other possibilities that may include whole DNA technology.¹⁰ Again, this DNA technology has far reached consequences regarding human health and life expectancy. In some developed places like the United States of America, a lot of research has gone into the use of mRNA treatments for cancers and Tuberculosis as indicated by Sarah Fortune on the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health News website.¹¹

Moreover, the new phase of human life relates to how the dimension of the organic can be manipulated to produce a new being. As of November 23, 2021, the BBC has indicated that the world is at a point where fighting the destruction of cells, organs and organ systems has the propensity to lead to a new being.¹² And could it possibly be a new being that works in consonance with the Spiritual Presence which is also the Spirit of the New Being to overcome the decay in existence and elongate the life span of humanity and creation as a whole?¹³ Is this reality of the present scientific innovation of the *kairos* in history, the one, which breaks into history and yet is experienced as a transtemporal reality with the symbols of the Kingdom of God and Eternal Life?¹⁴ But the questions do not end in view of the possibilities of a distorted form of the new being. Hence, is it possible the new being makes science assume the position of the unconditional although it is conditioned with a goal of proffering eternal life for all?¹⁵ Is it a scientific era in which science becomes the demonic through science's demand for total loyalty and which in its wake causes the proliferation of the profane and the decline of the sacred?

Another COVID-19 management scheme was the lockdown whereby for weeks or months human movement was restricted. In Ghana, like in other countries, the lockdown restricted everyone except those providing essential services. So, health workers, law and enforcement officials and government officials were the only exceptions. On one hand, clearly, the lack of movement to prevent the spread of COVID-19 brought back the birds and other wild animals. On June 1, 2021, Mark Kinver reported on the BBC website about how this period led to the lowering of the burning of fossil fuels and consequently, very clean air and a clear atmosphere. Moreover, it became clear how scientific innovation can bring back good quality life through sustainable utilization of natural resources.¹⁶

On the other hand, the lockdown period was a period in which the world witnessed an unprecedented level of wildfires and flooding particularly in Europe, Asia, and America. In Africa, there was flooding and drought at the same time in different parts of the continent. All these climate change issues resulting from global warming which was reported by Vox on its website on December 30, 2021, were as a result of human action.¹⁷ Rising temperatures are the result of scientific innovation that promoted the industrial revolution and an era of science and technology. It is the destructive result of science because of science's limitations. Environmental pollution which resulted in global warming is the result of making scientific products an end in themselves. Gadgets and technological products must be bought to keep the economy moving at all costs.

The human freedom that engages science through the pandemic is in motion, but looking at the legends and myths in history it could only anticipate another path of growth and destruction. The tower of Babel is a typical example of how a well harnessed human spirit could yield high levels of creativity and

¹⁰ Jinyong Zhang, Hao Zeng, Jiang Gu, Haibo Li, Lixin Zheng, and Quanming Zhou, "Progress and Prospects in Vaccine Development Against SARS-CoV-2" *Vaccines* 8. 2: 153 (2020): 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines8020153>.

¹¹ In pursuit of an elusive foe, Sarah Fortune's Faculty Website | Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

¹² Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, 167-8.

¹³ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 280-2.

¹⁴ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 278-82.

¹⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 371.

¹⁶ Mark Kinver, Then and Now: Pandemic Clears the Air, [BBC News](#), (June 1, 2021). Accessed on 31st May 2022.

¹⁷ Dylan Matthews, Sigal Samuel, and Kelsey Piper, "22 Predictions We Made in 2021, and the 13 We Got Right Our Batting Average in Forecasting 2021," [Revisiting Future Perfect's predictions for 2021 - Vox](#), Accessed 31st May 2022.

development. But the inherent ambiguity could bring down the ‘towers’ of science. Paul Tillich wrote:

Perhaps the story of the Tower of Babel, telling of man’s desire to be united under a symbol in which his finitude is overcome and the divine sphere reached, is nearest to our own situation. In all these cases, the result is both creative and destructive, and this remains the destiny of technical production in all periods. It opens up a road along which no limit can be seen, but it does so through a limited finite being.¹⁸

Thus, with the advent of creativity triggered by the treatment of COVID-19, science is expected to accelerate its creative powers with perpetual excitement about future discoveries. The freedoms are expected to rise in the pursuit of science for discoveries. Yet through this same human centeredness, the limitations of the human person in all dimensions especially about devastating errors, as well as issues related to morality and religion would be made evident. So, the freedoms that science and technology may have existentially been bound to be impacted by the limitations associated with human life. This applies not only to the organic dimension but also to the realm of culture where science and technology rule. For example, it is becoming more likely, that cyberspace and cosmic space may be the platform upon which future life is to be lived. With the reason to reduce human contact and risks, it is most likely that almost every life transaction would be held in cyberspace. In Ghana, digitization and its related digitalization have rapidly become a reality and are bound to become the platform for all transactions. If this is pursued even in Ghana, then life in cyberspace is inevitable especially when it has been heightened by intermittent lockdowns since the year 2020.

The questions raised with regards to the fear of what science brings into existence and its impact on creaturely existence must be answered with the Spiritual Presence or theonomy. And with theonomy, science’s threat to human existence is cured by bringing meaning into life. For Tillich, “no thing is merely a thing”¹⁹ it has meaning and purpose of existence. When human beings regard these technologies with the needed respect at the level of eros, meaning is invoked. When a certain subjectiveness is rendered to the object of science through the theonomous presence, then it is viewed with a certain level of respect. Tillich poignantly states: “This is true even for tools, from the most primitive hammer to the most delicate computer. As in the earliest periods when they were bearers of fetish powers so today, they can be considered and artistically evaluated as new embodiments of the power of being itself.”²⁰

It may be important to note that this view of Paul Tillich is so relevant in view of the menace of consumerism which is the result of scientific utility. Its ramifications include sustainable utilization of resources and reusing scientific products. Sustainable utilization in this sense corroborates what Tillich stated about the regulation of production processes.²¹ This certainly acts to eliminate greed and other oppressive tendencies in human existence. It further implies that there would be less pressure on natural resources such as land, natural habitats, and water. Less pollution in this regard means lowering greenhouse gasses and cooling the world.

Tillich goes on further to state that the ambiguity of means and ends is concomitant to the creativity of science.²² In this pandemic situation, creativity levels have moved to the level of needs. It means the power of the human need drives the creative abilities of science into production. However, as production starts it hardly can stop because it serves as a socioeconomic common good. Of course, it is also a position for politics. Therefore, the vaccine production and all other management schemes under COVID-19 including the production of masks and sanitizers present to the world, new socio-economic and political challenges that are inevitable and irreversible. The implication of this is making profiting the priority in the production of drugs and medical services which may be related to COVID-19. The dangers include making human beings objects of exploitation. Such an unethical path, in the long run, may undermine the good health purpose for which the vaccine and other health accoutrements ought to be manufactured and distributed. The latter is based on reports by the UN that appeared on its website on December 30, 2021, regarding hoarding and

¹⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 73.

¹⁹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 258.

²⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 371.

²¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 258-9.

²² Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 73-4.

deprivation of the poorest in the world. Tillich describes this situation as the endless manufacture of products because they are “means” to realizing the human goal in history.²³ So, the products which are “ends” over time as they existentially cannot fulfil their goals become means without limit. The answer to the question of the destructive ends of science and technology which seem to be limitless is Eternal Life.

Inasmuch as Eternal Life is a reality for which the church may assume appropriation, Tillich says that the ambiguity instigated by the utility of science cannot be overcome from the outside. For that reason, neither the church nor the quasi-religions (the demonic of political authorities) have that ability. The resolution Tillich says, “can only be done by influencing the attitude of those for whom the things are produced—as advertisers well know.”²⁴ Nonetheless, the church in partnership with other institutions may work together strategically to create awareness to influence consumer appetites.

There is also the ambiguous reality of self and thing in the application of science in all its forms. And in the case of COVID-19, the new being into which humanity has been ushered is likely to be plunged into a new scientific era of treating humanity as a thing.²⁵ This does not justify an obscurantist position with regards to the creativity and new being which science presents. So, there are both the possibilities of enriching personhood but also the risk of turning persons into things. For Tillich, the role of the Spiritual Presence is paramount in changing human attitudes. According to him, the change of attitudes may be attained by working with any institution or organization which may be “outspoken foes” of the church.²⁶

All the above ambiguities in life become the context in which the question of overcoming this predicament arises. And the answers continue to remain in the realm of the Spiritual Presence, the Kingdom of God, and Eternal Life. In the above discussion, there has been an attempt to explore how the pandemic could be seen as the cause of a new scientific era. The discussion has also established some of the creative and destructive realities that may be associated with the ‘scientific new being’ ushered in by the pandemic. The questions of existence arising out of the ‘scientific new being’ are answered by theonomy in the Spiritual Presence and Eternal Life. The next discussion concerns issues of psychological wellbeing with specific reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. The author’s interest now is to find out how the pandemic stimulated psychological changes in the search for self-identity and self-alteration respectively.

Kairos: Psychological Wellbeing and Psychological Illness amid COVID-19 Pandemic

Undoubtedly, the *kairos* ushered in by COVID-19 plunged the whole world into a state of psychological stress. But prominently, what really made the issue a psychological one was the lockdowns imposed on cities around the world. The lockdowns altered daily routines all over the globe and Ghana was not an exception to it. School children were quarantined as basic schools were closed. Later, secondary schools and tertiary institutions were also closed, and students were quarantined at home. Now the stress for children and parents began to mount as parents needed to leave their children at home without any supervision. Moreover, parents who had their children in private schools had the trouble of losing the fees paid and having to pay additional fees for online schooling.

Fortunately, when the infections began to rise among workers, the government of Ghana imposed a lockdown on a few cities including the capital. At this stage, some parents were relieved because they could stay and monitor their children as they also worked from home. The lockdown became a rallying point for family members now. And some families were now at home and performing their duties from home whether it was schooling or jobs. Children in these families now had the opportunity to see their parents for most part of the day as their parents were present. For those who are Christians and due to work and hardly had any family devotion in the morning, this was the opportunity to come together as family and sing, pray and read the scriptures. It was a refreshing time to teach the children in a traditional Christian way and impart unto them Christian values that will stay with them for a long time. The real issue in all of this was that it brought a sense of joy and healing which seemed to have eluded people for many years as they run helter-skelter attending to their personal goals.

²³ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 73-4.

²⁴ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 259.

²⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 74.

²⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 260.

The lockdown exposed the brokenness, fragmentation, and unfulfilled lives of human beings. Psychologically, human wholeness is the good balance of the relationships with God, people, and the whole creation of God. It is that relationship that recognizes the human being in relation to others not only in thought but also in reality. The lockdown exposed the hidden needs of human lives which satisfied them and made them whole. Wives and husbands had more time to love and care for one another. Broken relationships in families could now heal and the broken and unfulfilled now had a chance to restore their humanness.

Tillich describes the wholeness of human-centeredness as a balance between the search for self-identity and self-alteration.²⁷ The balance achieved in the lockdown described above exposed the brokenness in the human spirit when it was driven away from itself. The possibility of being oneself and differentiating from oneself is always a temptation that could lead to emptiness and chaos.²⁸ This whole scenario has a place as a symbol of the fallenness of humanity. The urge to explore the potentiality of altering humans through association with or attainment of a certain status could lead to self-loss.²⁹ Unfortunately, as human beings discover themselves this way and lose themselves, they lose in addition, self-worth, and dignity. Self-loss too is a recipe for not valuing any life and as a psychological disorder, it is tantamount to loss of conscience.³⁰ Therefore, it is dangerous as people with self-loss could cause harm or injury to others. Inasmuch as they seek to dwell with others their lack of self and conscience has a propensity to have antisocial attitudes that result in further brokenness. It is a recipe for group violence, conflict, and instability in communities.

Therefore, although research in Ghana³¹ states otherwise, the lockdown engendered some modicum of psychological healing among certain families. It needs to be said that this analysis may be very peculiar to families who hardly stayed together before the pandemic and had stable income flow. For these families, it was time for family bonding which is a healthy way of engendering coping skills for overcoming fear and anxiety present during the pandemic. So, on one hand, the lockdowns aided some sections of the Ghanaian people. On the other hand, Ghanaians were generally anxious.³²

The anxiety of most Ghanaians may have stemmed particularly from socioeconomic factors, especially for private businesses that were almost grinding to a halt for lack of economic activity. But as social persons, there is obviously the sense in which others might have gotten fed up with the monotonous life of living at home without going out to have interaction and have new experiences. In developed countries, for example, many people demonstrated against the lockdown and other restrictions imposed on their lives as reported by BBC.³³ Tillich may have understood this second reason of stress as derangement because of isolation.³⁴ Human beings according to Tillich are social beings and when the social element is lacking because of an unrelenting inward movement to discover and affirm the self, there is a loss of wholeness. Wholeness of being could also be disrupted when self-integration is taken to the extremities. When this happens as may be witnessed in the COVID-19 experience there is derangement because being must always be in relation.³⁵ Psychologically, it may be associated with depression.

In effect, the *kairos* of COVID-19 has unearthed the ambiguities associated with human centered self. As it is inundated with the very difficult situation of balancing needs of self-integration and needs of self-alteration. Indeed, as Tillich has opined, this constantly needs the sacrifice of the human person for

²⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 35.

²⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 268.

²⁹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 371. 38.

³⁰ Paul Tillich, *Protestant Era* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), 264; Theodore Green, "Paul Tillich and Our Secular Culture" in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, Library of Living Theology Volume One, edited by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952), 56.

³¹ Godfred O Boateng, David Teye Doku, Nancy Innocentia Ebu Enyan, Samuel Asiedu Owusu, Irene Korkoi Aboh, Ruby Victoria Kodom, Benard Ekumah *et al.*, "Prevalence and Changes in Boredom, Anxiety and Wellbeing among Ghanaians during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Population-based Study" *BMC Public Health* 21.985 (2021) 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10998-0>.

³² Boateng *et al.*, "Prevalence and Changes in Boredom" 1-13.

³³ BBC, "Covid: Huge Protests Across Europe over New Restrictions" BBC News (21 November 2021). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59363256>

³⁴ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 37-8.

³⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 37-8.

the self-regulation for wholeness.³⁶ However, since it is apparent in the wake of the *kairos* of COVID-19, the question of human wholeness and sanity is raised. And for Tillich, the answer is the Spiritual Presence which in ecclesiastical terminology is the presence of the Holy Spirit. For Tillich, the Holy Spirit is needed to resolve the conflict between the poles of disintegration and derangement.³⁷ The divine presence in the conflicting milieu engenders the presence of all possibilities and overwhelms the ambiguity present. This is possible because the transcendent element of the Holy Spirit is unconditional and not subject to the conditional realities of essential and existential life. Tillich is quick however, to add that since this resolution brought in by the presence of the Holy Spirit happens in the realm of history it is fragmentary.

This also then raises the question of the Kingdom of God and particularly Eternal Life as the answer to the human psychological problem. Surely, an encounter with the Holy Spirit as the theonomous reality resolving the tensions in the reality of autonomous and heteronomous life is the basis for the preaching of the Christian message. Hence, the wholeness of being should be the church's prayer and action daily so that through the power of being itself and a new being, the wholeness of being and newness of being could be attained. But this healing is eschatological and for that reason, Christians must be sober and partner with other people who may be able to provide help for those who are caught up in self-loss and derangement. The subjects of *agape* and faith are the messages and actions that could engender healing and hope in persons who are deranged and suffering from self-loss.³⁸ Christian witnesses must partner with other organizations including faith-based organizations to present this message of Love and faith. Moreover, the work of humanist institutions that work with the principle of the 'unconditional acceptance of all' without contradicting the Christian message could be partnered in this same endeavor.

Ultimately, the situation rather presents Jesus Christ, the crucified but risen Lord as the hope of the COVID-19 crisis in which the world lives.³⁹ Thus, the *kairos* presented to the world has engendered, the situation in which people had to sacrifice their normal lives into lockdown modes and lockdown modes into normal life just showed how ambiguous life is.⁴⁰ Moreover, these sacrifices may have strained human-centered self and there is a need for healing. And the crucified but resurrected Christ remains that symbol of the need for governments, and private employers to understand that their productivity may be correlated to the psychological wholeness of citizens and workers. As the New Being Jesus represents the revelation of theonomous reality in concrete and which is experienced as the power of being itself that brings about the new being. It remains the hope of the world but instead of its hard-hitting exposure, it is represented by the Spiritual Presence and the symbol of Eternal Life.

This article has so far shown how COVID-19 has presented a *kairos* moment in which the ambiguities in creativity and destruction on one hand and on the other hand, identity and alteration of self are revealed; in the following last part, there would be a demonstration of how COVID-19 has exposed the demonic and profane in the church and the quasi-religions. It would also demonstrate how the church and state effectively walked a middle ground.

Kairos: The Demonic and the Profane under COVID-19

In Ghana, it became quite clear right from the outset, that the ecumenically united church was not going to take the place of the unconditional. The churches comprising the Roman Catholic Bishop Conference, Christian Council of Ghana, and Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council knew that as churches their lot was to anchor their faith in Jesus Christ who remained the solution of COVID-19. This resulted in prayers being said for the nation by the leadership of all the churches at the Presidential Palace of Ghana.⁴¹ The

³⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 268-71.

³⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 268-71.

³⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 269, 280-2.

³⁹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 269-71.

⁴⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 270-1.

⁴¹ Andrews Awuni, *COVID-19 Vrs. the Church: Tell the Children the Truth* (Ghana: Breath Seed Ltd, 2020), 6-7. Although Awuni feels the church has been denigrated by the action of the churches with government, he presents to us an accurate document about what really transpired. Awuni was a presidential staffer and spokesperson for President Kuffour, a former president of Ghana. He is now an Evangelist. When this book was published, he visited me, and we had critical and fruitful discussions on the matter.

churches also acted in unity as they worked with the state to ensure that reasonable practical measures were in place to prevent COVID-19 from ravaging the country.⁴² The churches by their action understood their limitations in terms of specialized knowledge regarding the prevention and control of diseases. So, they promoted the scientific endeavor to contain the coronavirus as they worked hand in hand with the Ghanaian government.

This action made it easy for the government of Ghana to implement its COVID-19 management protocols because of its consultations with the united front of the churches. All churches under their leadership followed to the letter, all the prescriptions or ‘commandments’ now being dictated by science. At the end of the day, science reduced the church ‘service’ to a non-essential service. Now being used as a tool by the government science reasonably covered the church into submission. The churches were locked down and the church’s ambiguous nature became plain for all. After all, the powers of the churches are not absolute and, on some occasions, they must submit to other ‘foes’⁴³ insofar as reasonably, their submission does not compromise on the tenets of their faith. Therefore, in Ghana the paradoxical relationship between science and theology whereby science was condemned but accepted and transformed as it worked with the church and state prevailed.⁴⁴ At the time, the church stayed under science, but the church’s object of faith remained above science. Indeed, Tillich’s method of correlation beautifully worked out in the entirety of his systematic theology shows this paradoxical relationship between science and theology.

The point is that, when the church humbled itself, it gained its credibility. And it brings to the fore, how time and again Tillich emphasizes how much the church ought to work with others who may even be traditional foes for the right influence to be exerted on society. The church by this is stronger and has more opportunities to present the gospel of life and the new being. The church remained in the tradition of faith by humbling itself to the point of becoming useless to society although paradoxically, it remained the backbone of the society in Ghana. This tradition of faith is that which is founded on the symbol of New Being revealed concretely in the crucified but risen Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church being humiliated reasonably in Christ in the power of the Spirit of New Being did not lose ground as it had seemed. The church is now rising with new life as the great Body of the New Being so long as it remained animated by the Spiritual Community.

All the above happened in the presence of science’s power and the power of politics to profane the sacred space of the church. At a point, the church looked threatened by losing its sacred space and particularly the heteronomous presence it had. The Protestant Churches, Pentecostal Churches and Charismatic Churches remained typically autonomous in Ghana. This means the expression of faith is based upon the inner life of the freedom to think and express oneself in a good conscience.⁴⁵ This disposition is accentuated by the Christian experience of conversion that brought wholeness and set the Christian on the path of holiness in relationship with God.⁴⁶ Other churches in Africa including the Roman Catholic Church and the African Initiated Churches are heteronomous in addition to being autonomous. Heteronomy helps to maintain the space and presence of the holy through ‘other laws’ in liturgy, vestments, aesthetics and architecture and ‘presence’ in the multidimensional realities of life including culture and morality.⁴⁷ So, when the church was restricted, it meant that, its heteronomous presence was hit. Moreover, the church dwelt on the autonomous understanding of being that hinged on the personal relationship with the symbol of God that is not limited by space, time and all the categories of being. Though the church survived by innovating through autonomy, it was threatened by the secular realities as it is even today. The autonomous nature of Christianity has taught the church many things including having services online. It has further opened new horizons for missions because mission is not only corporeal but incorporeal [dealing with mind, soul, spirit, and memory and information in areas that include ICT, psychology, and neuroscience] insofar as it has a new mission field in cyberspace.

⁴² Awuni, *COVID-19 Vrs. the Church*, 7-23.

⁴³ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 260.

⁴⁴ Charles Amarkwei, *Paul Tillich and His System of Paradoxical Correlations: Forging a New Way for Science and Theology Relations*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 2.

⁴⁵ Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, 24-5.

⁴⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 243-245.

⁴⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 245.

As religious as humankind could be, there is always the urge to move into the realm of self-transcendence. The attempt to move into the realm of self-transcendence as Tillich has shown from the standpoint of religion only leads to two possible actualizations. These alternatives are profanization and demonization of the religious and quasi-religious which include Christianity and the state.⁴⁸ Respectively, the profane is usually associated with autonomous Christianity while the demonic is associated with heteronomy in religious self-transcendence. It may be recognized that the attempt of the churches in Ghana to accept the paradoxical relationship with science led to the threat of its profanization. Particularly, this threat was real to Ghanaian autonomous churches that include the Protestant, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches. These autonomous churches may keep doing well as they engage seriously in ‘cybermission’. Nonetheless, an overemphasis on cybermission may lead to the profanization of physical space and other important traditions of the church. These important traditions such as fellowshipping in person are really the traditional medium of worship. Is the Christian life going to pervade human existence or it is going to be compartmentalized in cyberspace without its proper ethical expression in real life? The above question is a big one for Africa today because even though Christianity keeps spreading like wildfire, transferring its tenet concretely in existence today seems to be an illusion. Fortunately, development through leadership in overcoming waste through a systemic growth of the sacred in the multidimensional reality of life is key. And this Tillich assures is possible through the work of the Spiritual Presence in the churches.⁴⁹

For example, the reduction of sacred space in Ghana may be one of the several reasons for the slow pace of development. Perhaps fortunately it is on this note, that the building of a national cathedral may be welcome as strategic because it brings into national consciousness the reality of the sacred. Ghana’s national cathedral is situated just next to the parliament house which is certainly going to impose its presence on the conscience of the parliamentarians and other officials of the nation. Even, during the fight against COVID-19, the nation kept talking about the national monument. The dilemma among others was to either choose between supporting scientific research or commitment of money to building a national cathedral. In any case, the money for the building of the national cathedral is to be borne by the churches. The church and government have remained resolute to do both since doing one to the detriment of the other is not a commitment to development at all. It is a balance of autonomy and heteronomy by theonomy in the Spiritual Presence. It is the promotion of human development through creativity by engaging culture and religion without putting them in jeopardy. Operating in faith engendered by the power of the Holy Spirit is neither superstition nor fanaticism. On the contrary, it is finding meaning in the work of God in the world that transcends all human understanding. It is sincerely hoped that this way of being Christians would be strengthened in the whole of the African continent.

As it was possible that Ghana sailed through the pandemic gingerly in humility and faith in God, there were churches and nations that were gripped by the demonic. Some of these churches and nations felt humiliated by science so they resisted the protocols prescribed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The police in Ghana arrested some worshippers who disregarded the protocols because they endangered other people’s lives in the country. And at the time, the news of the South Korean church that spread the disease to other parts of that nation was still fresh.⁵⁰ This made it easy for both the churches and the government of Ghana to agree to act swiftly which ensured compliance with the COVID-19 directives. Understanding the posture of the defaulting churches directly points to the demonic elements in them. Similarly, countries that became symbols of the quasi-religions and disregarded the protocols with impunity represented the demonic.

These demonic elements appeared in these churches when they interpreted COVID-19 in terms of historical apocalypticism. In that way, science was seen as the tool of the Antichrist being spearheaded by big corporate organizations, the United Nations along with its pawn nations. The Christ Embassy Church

⁴⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 243-51.

⁴⁹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 371.

⁵⁰ Kang, Yun-Jung. “Lessons Learnt from Cases of COVID-19 Infection in South Korea” *Cambridge University Press Public Health Emergency Collection* (May 7, 2020), 1–8. doi:10.1017/dmp.2020.141.

was an open exponent of this position.⁵¹ Apart from being slapped in the United Kingdom with fines,⁵² the church branch in Ghana organized a crowded night vigil service without observing the protocols prescribed.⁵³

The point to be raised here is that these churches that were caught flouting the COVID-19 protocols were lured into assuming the demonic.⁵⁴ They became entrapped in this demonic position when they suddenly confessed a faith that suggested that the church was all-knowing and all-powerful. They did not realize that after leaving the mediaeval Christendom obscurantism (Grand Inquisitor),⁵⁵ the church had usually cooperated with science.⁵⁶ Although characteristically, these churches in question were autonomous in nature, they nonetheless represented the demonic. According to Tillich, the autonomous may lead to profanization as discussed earlier. However, where an autonomous church by its teaching and action represents another law that contradicts reason, it becomes another law. And in this sense, it has become heteronomous. And this other law which it has become is contrary to what God is doing in creation to heal and renew it. It is contrary to scientific reason because, even though it depends on it, it denies its presence in existence as a *logos* of the economy of the triune God in the cosmos. Tillich has emphasized that the *logos* never contradicts the *Logos* as their relationship it is only a paradox.⁵⁷

The demonic is overcome when there is meaningfulness in the paradox of relations through the Spiritual Presence or theonomy. However, the demonic phenomenon of both church and quasi-religions which expressed itself on the continent of Africa was extremely risky.⁵⁸ And those actions prevented the mass vaccination of people (*New York Times*, March 17, 2021).⁵⁹ Moreover, many may have died for not observing WHO prescribed protocols on public health safety. By their actions, they became a contrary law that did not protect lives and is contrary to what the Spiritual Presence is up to. The solution is by accepting that the church and nation are conditioned and thus limited in knowledge and power. Where these entities admit there is a need for a meaningful life to live for and fight for, and yet they accept their limitations, the involvement of theonomy is imperative. It is the openness to admit that salvation is not from the church and state although they are instruments and admitting that salvation is the work ultimately of the Spiritual Presence. It is also admitting that there are other means of healing outside of the church and political power.

At a point in the history of the world when COVID-19 emerged, the ambiguity associated with the human urge to transcend itself has been revealed. In the times of COVID-19, there has been the temptation to actualize the potentialities in essential life into existence. And in the religious self-transcendence of the church and state, both profanization and the demonic have manifested. Yet, it is possible to steer through a middle way that endeavors to sacralize the profane in existence by engaging the secular ‘heteronomously’ without contradicting the Christian message. Firstly, by baptizing the secular, the church can partner with science and state at the same time as shown by Ghana. And secondly, by steering heteronomy through a constant emphasis on the human conscience through the power of the Spiritual Presence. Taking the middle way will prevent the church from becoming demonic as well as being profaned but making the church relevant to society as it sticks to her godly tenets.

⁵¹ Kazeem Ugboaga, “Oyakhilome Reveals Frightening Story about Coronavirus and New World Order,” (April 6, 2020). <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/04/05/oyakhilome-reveals-frightening-story-about-coronavirus-and-new-world-order/>.

⁵² Ofcom, “Global Day of Prayer,” *Ofcom Broadcast and on Demand Bulletin* (January 15, 2021) accessed September 29, 2021. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/211188/loveworld-limited-sanction-decision.pdf.

⁵³ Sahara Reporters, “COVID-19: Ghana Police Arrest Christ Embassy Youth Pastor, Church Members for Flouting Safety Protocols,” *Sahara Reporters* (May 3, 2021). <https://saharareporters.com/2021/05/03/covid-19-ghana-police-arrest-christ-embassy-youth-pastor-church-members-flouting-safety>.

⁵⁴ Mackenzie D. Brown, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 23, 29, 33.

⁵⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1995), 225-43.

⁵⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 243-350.

⁵⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 16-17; 23-24; *Systematic Theology*, III, 367-9; 380-82.

⁵⁸ BBC, “John Magufuli: Tanzanian President dies at 61 after Covid Rumors,” *BBC News* (March 18, 2021). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56437852>.

⁵⁹ Abdi Latif Dahir, “John Magufuli, Tanzanian Leader who played down Covid dies at 61,” *The New York Times* (March 17, 2021). <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/world/africa/tanzania-president-magufuli-dead.html>.

CONCLUSION

This article may be concluded by stating that life under COVID-19 is really a *kairos* moment because human life has been shaken by it. Human life will never be the same again after COVID-19 is long gone. COVID-19 has led to the cascade of actualizations from potentialities in a bid for humanity to transcend its predicament under COVID-19. It is plain in the above discussion that the pandemic has stimulated a new scientific era poised in leading humanity into a new being or new life. But it has its own destructive ramifications that are irreversible and inevitable. The Spiritual Presence enables humanity to minimize the destructive tendencies while maximizing the creative tendencies

Human psychological wellness has also shown its ambiguity while engendering healing and loss of wholeness at the same time. The ultimate is the search for wholeness whether in lockdown or in the lifting of lockdowns to attain self-identity or self-alteration. It is a new way of balancing science, psychology, and the general culture of human life under the Spiritual Presence.

COVID-19 has exposed the ambiguities associated with religion. This is seen in the subjugation of religion by science under COVID-19. This has exposed elements of profanization and demonic in both church and secular institutions such as the quasi-religions. It has also shown that under the Spiritual Presence the profane and the demonic can be put at bay as religious and secular institutions work hand in hand for a better life.

Therefore, the quest for a new life could be realized when the reality is understood in a multidimensional and non-interventionist mode that is constantly mediated by the Spiritual Presence. And clearly, Paul Tillich's view of the interpretation of history in the light of COVID-19 gives meaning to the times in which humanity lives.

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