

Editorial

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This issue, focused on the subject of African Christianity and Pandemics (with special attention being given to the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic) has been long in coming. The idea behind an issue like this emerged sometime in early 2021 after African Christians and their churches had been affected by coronavirus for a year. However, the conversations that you will find in this issue predate the COVID-19 pandemic's impact in Africa. As far back as late 2019, soon after the virus emerged in Wuhan, China, many of us, including the editors of this journal, wondered how the virus would affect Africa. We were concerned about the struggling health care systems in many African countries. Prophets of doom declared that the continent would lose a very high percentage of its people. One popular American figure is on the record to have prophesied; "there will be dead bodies on Africa streets." As I write this editorial at the end of 2021, even in the midst of Omicron, it is evident that COVID-19 has affected Africa to a much lesser extent when compared to the West, for instance. There are many factors behind this, but many African Christians believe that prayer has played a role in this.

While it is possible, and even likely, that the many prayers of millions of African Christians have helped shield Africa from utter destruction—4 million Africans died in the 1918 Flu pandemic—it will be wrong to believe that the continent has come out of the pandemic unscathed. African Chris-

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tianity, itself, has been changed by the pandemic. COVID-19 has, without a doubt, affected African Christians, their ministries and their churches.

Not a few church leaders and pastors have died because of COVID-19. Even the prophetic miracle workers who make their names by promising healing and prosperity to the sick and the needy have been in quarantine, with some of them succumbing to the virus. Church gatherings were closed, on and off, for most of 2020 and 2021. Their very theologies and ecclesiologies have been in question. Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals, has let many of them die even after they have prayed and believed while science, on the other hand, has had a demonstrable impact, be it through sanitisers or vaccines. Maybe their theologies must realise that faith and science are not opposed at all! Though, of course, science in the hands of bad people can be used for evil—and we saw this in the cautious vaccine intake in the continent. They *watch* and they pray. They trust the West and the East, but still exercise caution. They also demand some agency—the continent cannot be a charity case forever.

The essays in this issue will show that African Christians responded to the pandemic in various ways that, understood contextually, make sense. Above all, COVID-19 was understood to be a spiritual challenge that needed to be engaged as such—through prayer and fasting. This is in line with African thought systems. They adjusted many aspects of their theologies. Yes, God heals, but it will also be wise to wash and sanitise hands, wear masks, and not sing at funerals. Their ecclesiologies followed suit. Church services were either scaled back, decentralised, or cancelled. However, the praying never stopped.

You will find here essays from various countries, (Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and the UK) exploring issues pertinent to them in their own contexts. So you get to read about how Ghanaian Pentecostals and Rwandan Presbyterians have coped during the pandemic, and how Nigerian Christians have used the lessons from the 1918 pandemic to respond to COVID-19, how Bible (mis)translation in Zimbabwe makes it impossible to sing certain hymns in the light of the coronavirus pandemic and, finally, how African Christians in Britain have managed to huddle together and come out of the pandemic thriving. I pray you will find them informative and helpful.

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Liverpool, 2021.