

**Looting of Covid-19 palliatives in government's warehouses in Nigeria:
The viewpoints of Christianity and pragmatism**

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Abstract

No doubt, the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought untold hardships to the inhabitants of planet earth. To contain the spread of the virus, most countries had no choice but to put their countries on lockdown, which has caused many hardships. There is virtually no aspect of life that has not been affected negatively, be it economic, social, political, educational, and so on. To this effect, many countries got involved in the distribution of palliatives in cash and kind to cushion the impact of this pandemic on their citizens. In Nigeria, the case is not different as both the government and private firms, as well as some well-meaning individuals, got involved in distributing palliatives to the citizens. However, many citizens complained of not receiving any of these palliatives from the government, private firms, and individuals. It was later discovered that the palliatives meant for the citizens were stocked up in some government warehouses in many parts of the country. This made many of the citizens go in search of these warehouses and loot them. Thus, this study seeks to probe into Christianity's and Pragmatism's viewpoints on the palliative warehouses' looting aspect. It aims to know the morals involved in the reality of life as presented by the actions of the masses.

Keywords: Christianity, Pragmatism, COVID-19 Pandemic, Looting, Palliatives

Introduction

The advent of the novel coronavirus, popularly known as COVID-19, has taken a downturn in virtually every aspect of the world. It has affected the economic, social, political, religious, cultural, and environmental climes.¹ In Nigeria, the

¹ See Warwick McKibbin and Roshen Fernando, "The Global Macroeconomic Impacts of COVID-19: Seven Scenarios," 2 March, 2020. Retrieved online from: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/20200302_COVID19.pdf



case is not different as many of the populace cringed with one form of hardship or the other. This was due to the government's lockdown to contain the spread of the virus. Many citizens ordinarily known to be working and earning daily income were prevented from doing so. In this wise, the government is expected to provide reasonable respite for the citizenry, especially the population segment that relies on daily earnings for a living.²

Thus, as a way of cushioning the effect of the lockdown, the Federal Government of Nigeria and other private individuals and groups got engaged in one form of palliative measure. On the part of the government, the following palliative measures were rolled out for some targeted groups: Three months interest holidays for those holding Tradermon, Marketmon, and Farmermon loans issued by the Bank of Industry, Bank of Agriculture, and the Nigeria Export and Import Bank;³ and direct distribution of food and cash. On the part of private entities, groups and individuals donated food and money directly to the masses. The religious sector also actively distributed palliatives to its members.⁴ There was also a positive role being played by the Coalition Against COVID-19 (CACOVID), a private sector task force in partnership with the Federal Government, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), and the

(accessed 10-10-2020). Warwick McKibbin and Roshen Fernando, "The Economic Impact of COVID-19," in Richard Baldwin and Beatrice Weder di Mauro (eds.), *Economics in the Time of COVID-19* (London: CEPR Press, 2020), 45-52. Nuno Fernandes, "Economic Effects of Coronavirus Outbreak (COVID-19) on the World Economy," March 22, 2020. IESE Business School Working Paper No. WP-1240-E, Available at SSRN:

<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3557504> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3557504>. Joab Odhiambo, Patrick Weke and Philip Ngare, "Modeling Kenyan Economic Impact of Corona Virus in Kenya Using Discrete-Time Markov Chains," *Journal of Finance and Economics*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2020), 80-85. <http://doi.10.12691/jfe-8-2-5>. Abba Ahmed Bello, "Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Global Economy," MPRA Paper No. 103753. Retrieved Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/103753/>. Collins C. Ngwakwe, "Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Global Stock Market Values: A Differential Analysis,"

Acta Universitatis Danubius Economica, vol. 16, no. 2 (2020), 255-269. Ong Eng Koon, "The Impact of Sociocultural Influences on the COVID-19 Measures Reflections from Singapore," *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2020), 90-92. Paola Perez Nieto and Ilse Oehler, "Social Costs of the COVID-19 Pandemic," Background paper 9. (28 May, 2021) Retrieved online from: <https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Background-paper-9-Social-impact.pdf> (accessed 23 July, 2021). Oluwasegun Peter Aluko, "The Christian Church and Conspiracy Theories during COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria," in Benson Ohion Igboin & Babatunde Aderemi Adedibu (eds.), *Nigerian Pentecostalism and COVID-19: Dynamics, Worship, and Creativities* (Gliencke: Galda Verlag, 2022), 1-22.

²Cecilia Tacoli, "Food (in)security in Rapidly Urbanizing, Low-Income Contexts," in J. Crush, B. Frayne, & G. Haysom (eds.), *Handbook on Urban Food Security in the Global South* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), 31.

³Isaac Omo-Ehiabhi Eranga, "COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria: Palliative Measures and the Politics of Vulnerability," *International Journal of Maternal and Child Health and AIDS*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2020), 221.

⁴Oluwasegun Peter Aluko, "Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria: The Response of the Christian Church," *African Journal of Biology and Medical Research*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2020), 111-125. See also, Pius M. Osuntuyi, "Covid-19 and the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos: An Insight into Religious Beliefs, Ritual, Ethics and Experience," *Religions: Journal of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2020), 265-283.

World Health Organisation (WHO) with the sole aim of combating COVID-19 in Nigeria.

However, many masses complained of not receiving any of the government's palliatives. This was even on the heels of the government indicating at a point in time that they had distributed these palliatives to every family in the country. Amid the protests in the country over police brutality, mobs of citizens used the opportunity to overrun several government-owned warehouses. They looted food meant to be distributed during the lockdown.⁵ Thus, this study seeks to probe Christianity's and Pragmatism's viewpoints on the palliative warehouses' looting aspect. It aims to know the morals involved in the reality of life as presented by the actions of the masses.

Conceptual Clarifications

Looting

The concept of looting has different connotations but majorly leads towards a particular point, stealing. From the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry on "loot," it could be said to mean "rob."⁶ It is a term initially referring to the taking of goods by victorious troops, or sometimes by citizens, during or immediately following warfare, when defeated armies and populations were most vulnerable.⁷ According to Elia, looting is the deliberate, destructive, and non-archaeological removal of objects from archaeological sites to supply the demand of collectors for antiquities.⁸ It is the taking of another person's property during a natural disaster or a time of civil disturbance, regardless of whether such taking is ultimately found to be legal or justified.⁹

Looting is stealing, taking goods by force, amid military, political, or other social crises, such as war, natural disasters (where law and civil enforcement are temporarily ineffective), or rioting.¹⁰ It is a mob of people who publicly, openly, and directly seize goods. Looting has become a common practice by a victorious army as recorded in history.¹¹ Azamand Hoeffler define looting as "the appropriation of some of the other group's output, without military opposition."¹²

According to Quarantelli and Dynes, looting attits peak is almost always, if not exclusively, engaged by residents who receive support from segments of their

⁵TimothyObiezu, "Nigerians Justify Massive Looting of COVID-19 Supplies,"October 26, 2020.Retrieved online from <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/nigerians-justify-massive-looting-covid-19-supplies> (Accessed 10-08-2021)

⁶John A. Simpson, "Loot," in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

⁷Stuart P. Green, "Looting, Law, and Lawlessness," *Tulane Law Review*, vol. 81, Hurricane Katrina Symposium Issue, 2007, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=917440>.

⁸Ricardo J. Elia, "Looting, Collecting, and the Destruction of Archaeological Resources," *Natural Resources Research*, vol. 6, no. 2(1997), 86. <http://doi.10.1007/BF02803807>

⁹Green, "Looting, Law, and Lawlessness."

¹⁰Wikipedia (2021), "Looting," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looting>

¹¹WayneSandholtz, "Dynamics of International Norm Change: Rules against Wartime Plunder," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol.14, iss. 1 (2008), 101-131.

¹²Cited in Edison Carrasco-Jiménez, "The Looting During the Social Upsurge of October 2019 in Chile," *SocArXiv*. December 10, 2019. <https://doi.10.31235/osf.io/cyegn>.

local community. This appearance of normative backing can be seen in the almost spiralling pattern in civil disorder situations, which reveals cumulative shifts in redefinitions of property rights.¹³ The pattern proceeds roughly through three stages: (1) A primarily symbolic looting stage, where destruction rather than plunder appears to be the intent. It often seems initiated by alienated adolescents or ideologically motivated agitators in an area. (2) A conscious and deliberate looting stage, in which the taking of goods is organised and systematic. It frequently appears spurred by the involvement of omnipresent delinquent gangs and theft groups operating on pragmatic rather than ideological considerations. (3) A stage of widespread and non-systematic seizing and taking of goods. At this point, plundering becomes the normative, socially supported thing to do.¹⁴

On the part of Scott, one of the critical elements of looting is its collective or group character.¹⁵ This is so because many of the occurrences well thought-out as looting are often done by groups, from as few as a dozen actors to as many as thousands. However, Scott was said to have conceded that it is not all looting that multiple perpetrators commit. This may be true as some lootings done may not require joint action by many people. Just as Mac Ginty has rightly noted, many people who engage in what can be considered looting would prefer to view their actions as justified and acceptable rather than viewing them negatively.¹⁶ Nonetheless, he opines looting as a type of highly situational political violence that typically occurs in concentrated bursts and against a background of violence or tension and involves the expropriation of goods.¹⁷

Palliatives

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, palliative is something intended to make a bad situation seem better but does not improve the situation.¹⁸ This word is often used in the medical line to relieve pain without dealing with the condition's cause. That is, palliative reduces the severity of a disease or condition without curing it. It is an action intended to make the effects of a problem less severe but does not solve the problem. Often referred to as palliative care in the medical line, this kind of care usually meets the needs of all patients requiring relief from symptoms and the needs of patients and their families for psychosocial and supportive care.¹⁹

In line with the above description of what a palliative means, Ariche, Ikegbu, and Amalu opine that it is done to reduce the effect of a particular undesirable

¹³E. L. Quarantelli and Russell R. Dynes, "Looting in Civil Disorders: An Index of Social Change," *American Behavioural Scientist*, no. 5(1968), 8.

¹⁴Quarantelli and Dynes, "Looting in Civil Disorders," 8.

¹⁵ Cited in Green, "Looting, Law, and Lawlessness."

¹⁶ Roger Mac Ginty, "Looting in the Context of Violent Conflict: A Conceptualisation and Typology," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 5(2004), 859. 857–870. doi:10.1080/0143659042000231965

¹⁷ Mac Ginty, "Looting in the Context of Violent Conflict," 861.

¹⁸Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Palliative," retrieved online from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palliative>

¹⁹World Health Organisation, *Palliative Care (Cancer Control: Knowledge into Action: WHO Guide for Effective Programmes)* (Geneva: WHO, 2007).

condition without solving the root cause of the problem.²⁰ Palliative often aims at reducing the harsh impact of a bad situation but does not bring a permanent solution to the problem. These scholars, while looking at the palliatives for COVID-19, aver that they are donations in terms of cash or funds, relief materials like foodstuffs, medical equipment, and personnel donated by corporate bodies, international bodies, billionaires, and philanthropists to aid contain COVID-19 virus and cushion the ravaging effect of the pandemic on the poor and vulnerable persons in the society.²¹

Pragmatism

The word "pragmatism" originated from the Greek *pragma*, meaning "action," or "affair," or "a thing is done," a fact, that which is practical, realistic, or matter-of-fact.²² At the same time, Ormerod views pragmatism as initially coming from the Latin *pragmaticus* and the Greek *pragmatikos*, meaning deed. Pragmatism is commonly used in the English language to denote the practicalities of just getting on and doing what the situation demands.²³ It invites access to compromise, short-term expediency, and the path of least resistance without the encumbrance of theoretical principles or values.²⁴ Being a distinctly American philosophical tradition, its supporters argue that the truth of all beliefs, knowledge, and scientific concepts is provisional and defined by their practical use in ongoing experience, not by correspondence with antecedent truth or reality.²⁵

Pragmatism is an attitude, a method, and a philosophy that places prominence on the practical and the useful or on that which has satisfactory consequences.²⁶ This shows that the results of whatever action is being done or carried out must be suitable to the action takers. In essence, pragmatism uses the practical consequences of ideas and beliefs as a standard for determining

²⁰ C. K. Ariche, E. A. Ikegbu and N. S. Amalu, "COVID-19 Palliative Fund Donations: Altruism or Egoism: The Nigerian Experience," *Pinisi Journal of Art, Humanity and Social Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2021), 55.

²¹ Ariche, Ikegbu & Amalu, "COVID-19 Palliative Fund Donations," 55.

²² Mark Porrovecchio, "F. C. S. Schiller's Last Pragmatism Course," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 51, no. 1 (2015), 57+. Retrieved online from <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A421626503/AONE?u=anon~80614be1&sid=googleScholar&id=a513203a> (accessed 09-04-2022). See also, *Pragmatism and its Implications*, retrieved online from

<http://www.uop.edu.pk/ocontents/PRAGMATISM%20AND%20ITS%20IMPLICATIONS.pdf> (Accessed 09-04-2022), H. S. Thayer, "Pragmatism," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. May 18, 2020. Retrieved online from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pragmatism-philosophy> (accessed 09-04-2022)

²³ Richard Ormerod, "The History and Ideas of Pragmatism," *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, vol. 57, no. 8 (2006), 894.

²⁴ Barbara Simpson, "Pragmatism: A Philosophy of Practice," in Catherine Cassell, Ann L. Cunliffe and Gina Grandy (eds.), *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods*, Volume 1: History and Traditions (London: SAGE, 2018), 54-68. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526430212.n4>

²⁵ Arne Carlsen and Saku Mantere, "Pragmatism," in Seal Stewart Clegg and James Bailey (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies* (London: SAGE, 2007), 1298-1301.

²⁶ *Pragmatism and its Implications*.

their value and truth. It is the method of experimental inquiry carried into all realms of human experience.²⁷ It stresses the priority of action over doctrine, of knowledge over fixed principles, and it holds that ideas borrow their meanings from consequences and truths from their verification. Thus, ideas are instruments and action plans.²⁸ There is a harsher and more brutal connotation of the term in which any exercise of power in successfully pursuing practical and specific objectives is called "pragmatic."²⁹ One of the foundational ideas within pragmatism is that the meaning of an idea or a concept is the practical consequences of the idea/concept.³⁰ Thus, in law, judicial decisions that have turned on the weighing of consequences and probable general welfare rather than being deduced from precedents have been called pragmatic.³¹

Theoretical Framework

Routine Activity Theory

This study's argument is based on the routine activity theory. Routine activity theory, developed by Cohen and Felson in their article published in 1979, revolves around three things: a "potential offender (as in, a motivated offender), a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian."³² It is claimed that crime is more likely to occur when these three elements are present in time and space.³³ This theory includes the routine activities of both offender and victim. An offender may routinely walk through specific neighbourhoods looking for homes that appear as easy targets for burglary or into buildings in a commercial area to seek opportunities for theft.³⁴ This is because in many families, all adults work, and homes are often unoccupied during the day, which can become suitable targets for burglary. Also, capable guardians can be ordinary people who can intervene or serve as witnesses or police or security personnel. From a corporate security perspective, salespeople, truck drivers, and others who are "on the road" can become suitable targets when a capable guardian is unavailable, and a motivated offender is encountered.³⁵

²⁷Pragmatism and its Implications.

²⁸Thayer, "Pragmatism,"

²⁹Thayer, "Pragmatism."

³⁰Göran Goldkuhl, "Meanings of Pragmatism: Ways to Conduct Information Systems Research," Accepted to the 2nd International Conference on Action in Language, Organisations and Information Systems (ALOIS-2004), 17-18 March, 2004, Linköping University, Sweden. Retrieved from <http://www.vits.org/publikationer/dokument/457.pdf> (Accessed 10-04-2022)

³¹Thayer, "Pragmatism."

³²Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson, "Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 44, no. 4 (1979), 604. See also, Anthony E. Bottoms and Paul Wiles, "Environmental Criminology," in M. Maguire, R. Morgan & R. Reiner (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 320.

³³Michelle D. Fabiani, "Disentangling Strategic and Opportunistic Looting: The Relationship between Antiquities Looting and Armed Conflict in Egypt," *Arts*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2018), 22. <http://doi.10.3390/arts7020022>

³⁴Philip P. Purpura, *Security and Loss Prevention: An Introduction*, 6th Edition (Amsterdam: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2013), 59.

³⁵Purpura, *Security and Loss Prevention*, 59.

Although a motivated offender is one of the three central elements, routine activities theory is not very interested in a motivated offender. Cohen and Felson simply assume that a motivated offender is present. They are not interested in why the offender is motivated. Whether people decide to commit a crime depends on the other two elements, namely whether a suitable target and capable guardianship are present. In the case of burgling into warehouses that house COVID-19 palliative, the offenders saw a suitable target that was left with no capable security outfits. Purpura notes that commercial buildings without access controls or other security methods could likewise become suitable targets.³⁶

Background to the Looting

On Thursday, October 22, 2020, social media was agog and filled with the looting spree that was taking place in a warehouse located on Benster Crescent in the Mazamaza area of Lagos State. This occurred against the backdrop of the shooting of youths at the Lekki Tollgate in the state, now referred to as the Lekki Massacre. While many were still grappling with the untoward hardship from the lockdown due to COVID-19, they rushed to the warehouse to cart away what would at least serve as a palliative to them. First, hoodlums entered the warehouse and took what they felt they deserved before inviting residents in the area to come and partake in the looting.³⁷ They could cart away all the foodstuffs kept in the warehouse as palliatives. Also, hoodlums ransacked the house of the paramount ruler of Lagos State in his palace located on the state's highland, carting away many things, including personal effects and the palliatives meant for the masses.

As many people outside Lagos became aware of the looting spree in the state, they also swung into action by combing every part of their state believed to be where palliatives were kept. States like Osun, Kaduna, Kwara, Enugu, Adamawa, Plateau, Taraba, and even in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, and so on witnessed their own pillages. These looters targeted different state warehouses across the country stocked with COVID-19 relief supplies, which they believed ought to have been distributed to the poor and hungry.

The Viewpoint of Christianity

One of the major religions in the world with quite a large following is Christianity. This is a religion based on the life and teachings of the person of Jesus Christ. According to Hedrick, Jesus' teachings were primarily about how his followers should live, and these teachings are the ones that form the heart of Christian life for most Christians.³⁸ They are often filled with the ways Christians are expected to live and go about their daily activities. In short, Christians have

³⁶ Purpura, *Security and Loss Prevention*, 59.

³⁷ Onyedika Agbedo, Ijeoma Thomas-Odia, Maria Diamond, OgechiEze, Adetayo Adeowo, Joshua Akade, Lawrence Njoku, Anietie Akpan, AyodeleAfolabi, Charles Ogugbuaja and OluwaseunAkingboye, "COVID-19 Palliative and its Controversies: Interrogating the Looting Spree Dimension," 31 October 2020. Retrieved online from <https://guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/covid-19-palliative-and-its-controversies-interrogating-the-looting-spree-dimension/> (accessed 16-08-2021)

³⁸ Chad Hedrick, *What is Christianity?* (New Jersey: Piscataway, 2008).

some ethical principles they are expected to fulfil as enshrined in their Holy Scriptures (Bible). This is why Ogbuehi notes that Christian ethics judges every action of human beings to ascertain whether the step is good or bad. It deals with discourse about Jesus Christ and how the knowledge acquired through theological reflection about Jesus Christ can be brought to the bear in the study of human conduct.³⁹

The looting of COVID-19 palliatives in government warehouses is an ethical issue that needs to be looked into from the Christian perspective since it will not be out of order also to believe that many of those who actually “looted” were Christians. In some Christians’ WhatsApp groups during this said period, some of the members were really in support of the looting and were even of the opinion that they would take their portion since the palliatives were theirs. Some pastors were alleged to have been part of the looting spree. If the pastors or ministers of the gospel that are believed to be the mouthpieces of God are also at the vanguard of leading their members to loot, there seems to be a missing link. The question that would be asked now is, is the Christian religion now in support of looting? The answer is in an affirmative no, as there is virtually no good and worthwhile religion worth its name on planet earth that will support any of its adherents to loot, whether it is COVID-19 palliatives or not. This shows that the people involved must have carried out the act of looting based on happenings and events around them. Some might have hinged their action on specific events in the Bible, like the looting of 2 Kings 7. This example is more or less like the situation at hand now that the four lepers had to go to the city wall and call out people to plunder what the fleeing Syrians had left behind their belongings. With many being made to stay indoors with no means of having what to live on, they hurriedly moved to the warehouses housing the COVID-19 palliatives. They looted them upon hearing the news of opened warehouses. Still, others must have premised their action on the Israelites plundering the Egyptians on their exodus from Egypt, their land of affliction.

Nonetheless, since looting is stealing in all ramifications, it is vehemently spoken against by Christianity. It is sinful to loot, and sin is sin, no matter the colouration and perspective people might view it. According to Fallon, theft is forbidden by the strongly negative precept of the Decalogue, “You shall not steal” (Ex 20:15; Dt5:19; Lev 19:11). Stealing is seen as a dishonour to God, and it is an act that led to the destruction of the Temple by God as it is seen as an injustice.⁴⁰ Leviticus 19:13, it was stated that nobody is allowed to rob their neighbour. If anyone robs their neighbour, that is a transgression of the command of God, and it is considered a sin. Assuredly, the act of looting is kicked against in Christianity, whether the show is to favour the have-nots or not. It is in the list of sins that excludes its doer from the kingdom of God or for which a Christian should never be guilty (1 Pt 4.15) as it is a conduct that grieves the Holy Spirit of God (Eph 4.28, 30).⁴¹

³⁹Friday Ifeanyi Ogbuehi, “Christian Ethics in a Corrupt Society: A Challenge to Christians in Nigeria,” *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities, Special Edition*, vol. 18, no. 2(2019), 321. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v18i2.19>

⁴⁰J. A. Fallon, “Theft (in the Bible),” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Retrieved online from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/theft-bible> (Accessed 18-04-2022)

⁴¹Fallon, “Theft (in the Bible).”

In another instance, the act of looting government warehouses contradicts the government's authority. Also, the law of that particular time does not permit anyone to gather together in a cluster. This was breached by the looters, who were seen scrambling for one palliative or another. They disobeyed the government's directives and thus disobeyed God. This is as commanded by the apostle Paul when he says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. There is no authority except God, who has instituted those that exist. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."⁴² The apostle Peter also admonishes Christians to "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right."⁴³

Also, the fact that the looters were, as it seems, 'robbed' of some palliatives meant for them does not make it right to go and loot them. True Christians should not act wickedly, just like those hoarding the palliatives. Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."⁴⁴ Moreso, in a bid to loot the COVID-19 palliatives, some of the looters have knowingly or unknowingly looted non-COVID-19 palliatives. In Ekiti State, for instance, residents embarked on a looting spree of the Federal Government's silos located in Ado Ekiti on Friday, October 23, 2020. They carted away fertilizers that they mistook as cassava flakes (garri) and maize preserved for planting while searching for CACOVID palliatives. Also attacked were the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) warehouses, where materials stored as relief for flood victims were kept.⁴⁵ According to Ogbuehi, there is no gainsaying that any act that does not agree with the Bible's stipulations is considered bad, while an acceptable act according to the biblical standard is considered good.⁴⁶ In this regard, these acts are stealing, and nothing is good about them.

The Viewpoint of Pragmatism

Since pragmatism is unusual because it rejects formalisms and abstractions in favour of a genuine concern for how our worlds continuously unfold through our collective efforts to cope with the day-to-day necessities of modern life,⁴⁷ inequality and injustice can pressure a Christian into looting. It is a known fact that people are hungry. The rate at which many of the masses took to the available government warehouses lends credence to the fact that there is hunger in the land. Both young and old, men and women alike carted away foodstuffs like noodles, rice, cassava flakes (garri), spaghetti, and vegetable oil. According to a World Bank report cited by Aluko and Olawuni, the country's

⁴²Romans 13:1-2.

⁴³1 Peter 2:13-14.

⁴⁴Matthew 23:1-2.

⁴⁵Agbedo, et al., "COVID-19 Palliative and its Controversies."

⁴⁶Ogbuehi, "Christian Ethics in a Corrupt Society," 323.

⁴⁷ Simpson, "Pragmatism," 54-68.

poverty rate increased from 35.0 to 38.8 percent of the total population from 2011 to 2016.⁴⁸ This rate increased exponentially over three years with poverty and inequality from September 2018 to October 2019. Akwagyiram, while citing the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), opines that 40 percent of people in the continent's most populous country lived below its poverty line of ₦137,430 (\$381.75) a year. It said that it represents 82.9 million people.⁴⁹ If this number of people are living below the poverty line, there is no how they would not go out to "pack their own goodies" when they see the opportunity.

According to Vivian Bellonwu, the head of Social Action Nigeria, the amount of food kept in storage indicates "systemic failure." She notes that,

To think that certain persons could lock down this quantum of food and materials as we see them on their premises, in their custody, and watching. In contrast, people wallow in poverty and difficulty, which is unthinkable... I think that it is pretty mean, I think it is highly insensitive, and I believe that this is a betrayal of the trust of the people.⁵⁰

In all respects, the states where people looted government warehouses seemed to act not in the interest of their citizens. The constituted authorities, hoarding the foodstuffs that ought to have been shared with the poor masses, have shown beyond any reasonable doubt that they were indifferent to the plight of the people. If they were not, why were some states who also got the COVID-19 palliatives not looted? Many states in the north were said to have shared the palliatives with the masses; this was not the case with the states where the palliatives were looted.

While governments were said to have condemned the looting of the palliatives, many persons were pragmatic enough also to ask why the foodstuffs meant as palliatives were warehoused while hunger pillaged the country. However, it must also be said that the delay in sharing the palliatives was due to the bottleneck and bureaucratic processes involved with the CACOVID. Many states were said not to have received the needed order for them to have distributed the palliatives to the masses.

Pragmatically, the actions of the looters are based on the realities on the ground; one, there is massive hunger which is liable to make people do the inevitable, and two, there is insincerity on the part of the government over the years, which has made the citizens not to trust whatever is being said by them. As noted earlier, since many of the masses who ordinarily work daily were compulsorily made to stay at home and not do anything to contain the spread of the virus, every means of opportunity for them to eat would be judiciously used. With over 82.9 million people living below the poverty line in September 2018

⁴⁸Oluwasegun Peter Aluko and Ibukun Olawuni, "A Socio-Historical Perspective on Ponzi Schemes and Development in Nigeria: The Role of the Christian Church," *World Journal of Social Science*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2021), 41.

⁴⁹Alexis Akwagyiram, "Forty Percent of Nigerians Live in Poverty: Stats office," (May 4, 2020). Retrieved online from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-economy-poverty-idUSKBN22G19A> (Accessed 19-04-2022)

⁵⁰Obiezu, "Nigerians Justify Massive Looting of COVID-19 Supplies."

to October 2019 report, the lockdown has added more persons to the statistics as many were unable to fend for themselves during this period. According to Human Rights Watch, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the plight of families living in poverty in the country and has left many struggling to afford food and meet other basic needs.⁵¹ Dauda and Oyeleke opined that many had declared Nigeria the world's poverty headquarters, taking over from India.⁵² To this end, it is unsurprising that many tramped out en masse to loot the palliatives in government warehouses. Some even went as far as pillaging other individuals' shops and warehouses. This confirms the pragmatic interpretation that there is priority given to action over doctrine, experience over fixed principles, and ideas borrowing their meanings from consequences and truths from their verification.⁵³ The justification for the action of the looters does not come from the reality on the ground; it is based on the situation the looters have found themselves.

The Moral Perspective

The moral perspective on the looting of COVID-19 palliatives shall be viewed from the standpoints of the government and the people. First, the government as authorities hoarding what should have been shared with the masses is nothing but sheer wickedness. Some of those in power were also said to have used some palliatives as birthday gifts for people who attended the birthday party. The government was alleged to have even shared the palliatives on political affiliation. Many who received the palliatives were the political party members of the ruling party, the All Progressive Congress (APC). This is morally wrong as it is not only APC members who are Nigerians and in need of palliatives. Also, the ones that were ultimately shared could not reach a more significant percentage of people and were even of minute quantity. According to a report by Agbedoe et al., some of the people interviewed note that,

The food was shared with party members, and we did not get it because we were not party members of the party.... During that period, the chairman of our street called one Saturday morning to show us the so-called food that was to be shared. It was one DeRica of rice, one DeRica of beans, and one sachet of tomato paste for a street with about 80 houses. The chairman told us that only three of the palliative bags were sent to the Community Development Association (CDA), which comprises eight streets with over 500 houses. When they want to share electricity bills, they come to our

⁵¹Human Rights Watch, "Between Hunger and the Virus: The Economic Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on People Living in Poverty in Lagos, Nigeria," (July 28, 2021). Retrieved online from <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/between-hunger-and-virus-economic-impact-covid-19-pandemic-people-living-poverty> (Accessed 22-04-2022)

⁵²Rasaki Stephen Dauda and Olusola Joel Oyeleke, "Poverty and Inequality: The Challenges to Sustainable Development in Nigeria," *Ilorin Journal of Economic Policy*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2021), 2.

⁵³Thayer, "Pragmatism."

doorsteps, but when they want to share food with the masses, they will not deploy that same system.⁵⁴

The above shows the insincerity and callousness of those in authority at every level in the country. How can three bags of rice be shared adequately among 80 streets? This act has allowed people to take the laws into their hands whenever they see the wherewithal and what was done on hearing the warehouses break. Even when it was claimed by both the government and CACOVID that the palliative items were not hoarded, many of the masses still believed it was all a cover-up and gimmicks. No matter what the masses would have thought, the rebuttal was given by the authorities since many politicians, and traditional rulers have also seen hoarding and sharing as birthday gifts. Also, since many of the masses believe the government of the day has never been truthful in its dealings with them, they would not have taken their negation seriously. This shows a morally debased government. Or, what could be said of a politician, one Mojisola Alli-Macaulay, a member representing Amuwo-Odofin 1 at the Lagos State House of Assembly, who used the palliatives as birthday gifts? Or, Rilwan Akiolu, the Oba of Lagos, in whose house were found many palliatives people eventually carted away?

On the part of the people, it might interest many to think that palliative is their right as citizens of the country, but in the real sense, it is not their right. It is what the citizens have been given that belongs to them. The COVID-19 palliatives have not been shown to anybody; they have been kept in storehouses. This does not amount to it being the rights of the citizens. They do not have any say in burgling or going into burgled storehouses to take anything. These things are the properties of the government. But a question that may want to be asked very quickly is, "are the citizens not the government?" An answer is a no because the citizens have given the government the right to represent them by voting for them. Since everyone cannot become a government in a democratic country like Nigeria, there will always be representatives, and these are referred to as the government. This is why three persons were arraigned in court by the Oyo State government for conspiracy, stealing, and receiving stolen COVID-19 palliatives that belonged to the government. These persons were said to have conspired to commit those offences.⁵⁵

How are we sure that the people who looted were even in need of the things they looted? Is it not that they looted to re-sell? Some people did this as some of the palliatives with CACOVID inscriptions were readily seen in the market. This act shows that looting is far beyond people who do not have alone but includes all who are very covetous. A covetous person can be considered a thief or robber. S/he is even worse than robbers since robbers steal at night, but covetous people are shameless and steal with an open face in the middle of the

⁵⁴Agbede, et al., "COVID-19 Palliative and its Controversies."

⁵⁵See News Agency of Nigeria, "2 Oyo Government Officials in court for Allegedly Stealing, Selling COVID-19 Palliatives," (5January, 2021). Retrieved online from <https://guardian.ng/news/2-oyo-government-officials-in-court-for-allegedly-stealing-selling-covid-19-palliatives/>

marketplace.⁵⁶ Stander opines that such a person commits fraud and carries off their spoils with confidence out of the door in the sight of those he has injured. The actions of such a man are therefore more shameless and tyrannical than the actions of other robbers.

Even one who steals from want is under total penalty, though men excuse him.⁵⁷ The accomplice shares in the guilt of the thief.⁵⁸ More reason Sanders notes that,

There is no difference between petty theft and the theft of large items. Similarly, there is no difference between the theft of gold and the theft of silver. Your motive is the same. It is only a coincidence that one steals something small because if you had the opportunity to steal something big, you would also have stolen that.⁵⁹

The fact that many went to loot has caused an end to their precious lives. During the looting spree, some stampedes were recorded in some states; some were shot at by security personnel while others jumped from a high building and broke their bodies. This, in one way or the other, has opened up the argument that though these people are looking for how to relieve their hunger, they have done this at the expense of their lives. Thereby leaving family members, friends, and loved ones in chaos. Will it not be suitable for them just to have stayed at home and continued with what they have been doing before the availability of the relief materials? By the way, if the relief materials were not made available by the CACOVID, would not the looters fend for themselves?

As noted earlier on, looting is, first and foremost, a form of stealing. Depending on how it is perpetrated, the looter may be arrested for petty theft, robbery, grand theft, burglary, or a similar crime. Some states also have laws about looting, often with stiffer penalties. Unfortunately, a looter can only be charged with a crime if caught.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, to have access to the warehouses, many broke into them; this is nothing but burgling and is punishable under law. Section 410 of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act defined a burglar as “a person who breaks any part, whether external or internal, of a building, or opens by unlocking, pulling, pushing, lifting, or any other means whatever, any door, window, shutter, cellar flap, or another thing, intended to close or cover an opening in a building, or an opening giving passage from one part of a building to another, is said to break the building.”⁶¹ Section 411 goes on to say that anyone who breaks in and out of another person’s building is guilty of a felony

⁵⁶H. F. Stander, “Theft and Robbery in Chrysostom’s Time,” *Acta Theologica*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2009), 80.

⁵⁷Proverbs 30.9; 6.30–31.

⁵⁸ Leviticus 5.1.

⁵⁹Stander, “Theft and Robbery in Chrysostom’s Time,” 81.

⁶⁰Mavelane12. “Christians shouldn’t be involved in looting,” (2021). Retrieved online from <https://za.opera.news/za/en/religion/6561897fa59c21c7691e39e22afd2275> (Accessed 11-04-2022)

⁶¹ Jurist.ng, “Section 410 of the Criminal Code Act in Nigeria,” retrieved online from https://jurist.ng/criminal_code_act/sec-410 (accessed 04-02-2022)

and is liable to imprisonment for fourteen years. If the offence is committed at night, the offender is liable to imprisonment for life.⁶²

It must be noted, however, that two wrongs can never make a right. The government accused of hoarding the palliatives are wrong, and the looters are also inappropriate to have looted what does not belong to them. Of course, pragmatism would be hostile to deriving moral duties from an idea of pure reason. Christianity tends to tilt toward morality, while pragmatism is about the reality of life, the place of using reason rather than the moral aspect of life.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying that God is not happy with those who refuse to care for the poor, those who favour the rich and neglect the orphans and widows of society, but God does not call Christians to social disobedience to fix it, and these problems are not new to this day. It must be made clear that under no circumstance should a Christian be involved or have any right to break the law to loot in the name of getting their "rightful" palliatives. Two wrongs will never make one right; it will only make one wrong. At its most reprehensible, looting is predatory, ruthless, and productive of anarchy. At its most forgivable, it offers an accepted means of survival in emergencies.⁶³ The government is wrong in keeping the palliatives meant to be shared for the teeming population, especially when there was an obvious need for such palliatives. Neither does this permit the masses to become looters, as looters are robbers and thieves. There is no difference between thieves; the motives involved in going out to take what does not belong to one have shown that every thief is the same, not minding the circumstances involved.

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⁶² Jurist.ng, "Section 411 of the Criminal Code Act in Nigeria. Housebreaking: Burglary," retrieved online from https://jurist.ng/criminal_code_act/sec-411 (accessed 04-02-2022)

⁶³ Green, "Looting, law, and lawlessness."

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