Twitter Thread by Justin Stearns



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It has long been a custom in the Islamic world to compose collections of 40 Hadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) for believers to memorize. Thread for the the era of Covid.

The most famous perhaps that of the thirteenth century Shafi'i jurist al-Nawawi, which I use in teaching.
https://t.co/RUmOoPHFmu

Collections of Prophetic traditions also exist for specific subjects or according to specific transmitters. And, separately, since the beginning of Covid, Muslim jurists the world over have been handing down legal opinions (fatwa/fatawa) on how best to respond.

Most recently, and the first such collection I have seen since the spread of Covid, the South African Shafi'i mufti Taha Karaan published a collection of hadith dealing with epidemics along with his own extensive comments.
https://t.co/lblY0TtHKu

The collection is fascinating for various reasons, both for the degree that it builds on premodern hadith commentaries and that which it presents a new synthesis of premodern views. If you're interested in the premodern stuff, check out my book.
https://t.co/BjXSJiBsP6

MT Karaan builds on the consensus of a wide variety of Sunni thinkers going back to Ibn Qutayba in the ninth century to explain those hadith that could be read as denying contagion or downplaying the risk of interacting with the sick.

His theological views here are Ash'ari and occasionalist, meaning that he believes (and cites al-Ghazali and others) that God creates the world at each and every moment and that while there is no secondary causality, God's creation has a habitual order to it that we can rely on.

He uses the term "normative" to refer to this order, referring here to God's norm, and his insistence on this issue — bolstered by his inclusion of the famous "Trust in God but tie your camel first" hadith helps forward his larger argument:

That Prophetic tradition contains a comprehensive view of how to fact epidemic disease, including Covid, that entails believing that God causes everything, that all diseases have cures, and that those who die of Covid (like plague) will be

martyrs and go straight to heaven.

This last claim is his most innovative in that the premodern tradition only plague results in martyrdom. I presume that this elevation of Covid to the level of plague reflects the degree of concern it has caused within the South African Muslim community.

I anticipate that this collection will not be the last such collection, and assume that we will see more appear in other parts of the world.

May be of interest to @FancyNahyan @elainevdalen @monicaMedHist @mmelvink