



INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF CORONA VIRUS ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN NIGERIA

Daniel D. Zading, Ph.D

Department of Arts Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo
danielzading@Gmail.Com

&

Hosea Nakina Martins

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Taraba State University, Jalingo
hoseaanakinamartins81@gmail.com

Abstract

Corona-virus is one of the deadly viruses that has left dreadful effects on religion and especially in Christianity in Nigeria. Since its 25th February 2020 the virus has shocked the world with high record of lost of lives, spiritual degeneration it and dwindled full Christian participation in religious worship. The paper adopted mixed methods approach, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected from the field by observation, Focus Group Discussion, Oral interviews and books. The paper unveils that, spiritual, moral, social life of Christians were deeply affected by the menace. The pandemic also necessitated in breeding greed, contempt, immorality which are not unethical to the teachings of Christianity. Also, many Christians were traumatized, stigmatised and died as a result of the effects of the coronavirus. The research recommends that, Christianity should be supported to ensure expression of love to our fellow brothers at all times. All stipulated laws or rules guarding the safety of lives should be observed by Christians for the safety and furtherance of God kingdom here on earth. Christians should always be ready and remain sober in prayers, maintain good hygiene in order to forestall any outbreak of the pandemic in the future. No doubt the impact of Covid 19 has its dreadful scourge on Christianity in Nigeria, and the paper highlight the effects, and makes recommendations there by admonishing a better proactive active measures to be taken against future outbreak.

Keywords: Corona-virus, Christian, Church, Pandemic, Nigeria and worship

Introduction

Christianity is one of the oldest and viral religious institutions being practiced in the world, and this one of the virile religions being practiced in Nigeria. It stems after Jesus Christ as its founder God created man in his own image and established in his friendship. As Image of God (Image Die), man embodies in himself a three relationship with God, fellow men and the created universe (Attah 58). Christianity is away of life and a religion of life (Ortese 20).

It is indeed very devastating to the Christian faith how Corona virus Pandemic left devastating impact on the church in Nigeria. The virus came with heavy devastating shock, which affected full worship and extension of Christ fraternal love to follow Christians. Also there is dwindling in spiritual and social, moral and psychological lives of Christians due to covid-19 impacts. There is lack of comprehensive understanding of the specific impact of the pandemic on Christian worship in Nigeria, including adaptations, challenges, doctrinal interpretations of various Christian denominations.



Hence, the effects of corona virus on Christian worship remained lamentable where their is recorded loss of faith of members, financial help and charity, evangelization became difficult. Despite these odds, Christianity has survived today and the virus is been battled gradually. The paper is going to examine Corona-virus pandemic and its impact on Christian worship in Nigeria.

Clarifications of keywords:

Corona-virus

The word corona as spelled in Greek Koeovex refers to the heart. While virus refers to a living things, too small to be seen without a microscope (Hornby 1660). The two words came to mean when joined together to mean virus of the heart. Or virus that affects the respiratory system. In a lay man's understanding, Corona-virus is a virus that affects the respiratory system. In another definition, According to Ofunrade Corona-virus is a severe acute respiratory disease caused by Corona virus 2, that is, SARS – (Sheeren, et al 91). It is also known as Covid 19 (Efuntade 144).

- v. Pandemic: A diseases that spreads over a whole country or the whole world (Hornby 10ed1061).

Church: is the English translation of the Greek word Ekkerir, meaning assembling of the people, act of assembled community itself (Iydobi 3) Catechism of the Catholic also defined it as “in the biblico-religious sense to mean the community of the people of God (NO.777).

- ii. Christian: Christiani is therefore a follower of Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem of Judea to Joseph and Mary (Gbenda 9). Ajim also posits that “a Christian is someone who profess the belief in Jesus Christ” (47).

History and Origin of Coro-Virus (Covid-19)

There is a common African adage which says “there is no fire without smoke”. This now brings us to unveiling the history of the world most devastating Pandemic, which has claimed lives and splitted unions and true worship in various religious institutions across the globe. Though the History and origin of the virus is shrouded in vagueness. According to Eche, Corona-virus started in December, 2019 when the world health organization declared it a deadly Pandemic in March 2020 (67). Ijoing further again, the same world Health Organization report on the 30th March, 2021, that “we have not yet found the source of the virus; and we must continue to follow the science and leave no stone curturned”. Tedros. Finding the historical origin of a virus takes time and owe it to the world to find the source so we can collectively take steps to reduce the risk of this happening (Eche as Qtd WHO 2021,67-68).

In summary also, Corona-virus is called Covid-19 because it started in December 2019 (68). The deadly virus is said to have originated from China, precisely in Wuhan, a city in the Hubei province of China (67) .In December of 2019 (Efuntade 144). The fist Covid-19 case to be reported in Nigeria was confirmed on Thursday, 27th February, 2020 (Ehanire on Website Retrieved). Notes the index is an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria. He returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on 25th February 2020. He was confirmed positive by the



virology Laboratory of Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), part of the laboratory Network of the Nigeria centre for Disease control. Unfortunately the number of Covid-19 cases continued to spread (Rahman 2021, on Website Retrieved).

Methods of Spreading Covid-19

Covid-19 Pandemic is spread through hand shake, sneezing, use of utensils, hugging, coming in contact with clothes, poor ventilated rooms or unprotected yawning. Persons can get the virus easily by coming also in contact with those have it. In fact, it's a contagious virus which spread in the air and people inhale. Also the virus can be contacted through ones own spittle, faces, urine, lack of washing of hands after toilet, eating, uncovered food or unwashed food. Dirty environment can also culminate in the spread of the virus, especially on surface ff items. Efuntade posits summarily that “the novel of Covid-19 is basically transmitted through human interactions, consistent handshake, contact with contaminated surfaces and those who possessed the virus” (153).

Effects of Corona-Virus on Religion: Perspectives in Christianity in Nigeria

The Impact of Corona virus pandemic on religion and especially on Christianity as one of the viral religions practiced in Nigeria some are this examined below:

Spiritual Impact

Man is called to fullness of life which far exceeds the dimension of his earthly existence because it consists in sharing the very life (Konye 24). However, the pathetic how such a free spiritual power is been ravished due to the corona virus pandemic.

Corona virus Pandemic has indeed weakened Christian spirituality entirely on the global Regular Sunday masses or services, and even daily churchsit at home' directives by the Federal Government to curtailed further spread of the diseases. Hence, many Christians become spiritually lackadaisical by remaining in homes. The fear of contacting the virus has succeeded in making ardent believers to lose hope, and they are crabbed by fear of loosing their lives. Active Christians find joy in full participation in worship, and the attitude of isolation, distancing has contributed in great measure in dwindling their spiritual life. Hence, many churches shutdown, and the affected full pledge Sunday services.

We cannot run away from the scenario of Covid -19 Pandemic, where many Christians had found exercises to dodge from active participation in the church worship especially on payment of tithes, receiving of sacraments and other prayers. Many have by cott church fellowship, prayer meetings, biblical study meeting because of the fear of Covid-19 Pandemic that has affected virtually all aspect of Christian spiritual lives. On the part of the clergy also, many have developed the habit of not even encouraging people to be more prayerful, and they themselves found excuses and abscond from delivering their spiritual duties. Outstations that were used to seeing their priests or pastors once a month, have indeed also lamented non seeing their spiritual leaders for months. All that one could get from a response of laxity is “don't you know the Coro-virus is deadly and the Federal Government has warns against gathering? “The sit at home directives are also yardsticks used by the clergies to deny their flocks spiritual nourishment.



Hence, societal meetings, visitation of sick members became worrisome for fear of Covid-19 virus. Worshippers who have no cars or bikes to travel to distant places to worship, are been harassed also when seen in multitude being conveyed in cars to worship centre by security agency. This act affected the spiritual capacity of Christians, who are mere passive attendants than being active attendants in their various church activities. As Pamu and Karbon further lamented that, “The process of recovering from spiritual degeneration is a lost of responsibility which leads to more guilty conscience” (77).

Financial Impact

Poverty exist when people lack means to satisfy their basic needs, and this is giving true caption under lack of financial muscles to cater for one’s own needs (Kass et 1). The impact of Covid-19 virus on Christian worship in Nigeria is lamentable because of the financial impact it has on Christian donars. The church as we all know is the assembly of Christ own faithful. Covid-19 has dreadful financial impact on the Christian faithful because, many of them lack money and other equivalent needs which they ought to support the church with, or their fellow members. Due to financial inability, many church activities like bazaar, church building support, less privilege support, and Sunday collections were highly impeded. Hospitality and charity was a problem to Christianity due to the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected reaching not to family but extending to other church members (Chidili 115).

Many churches and Christian families cannot pay their workers and even solved their financial needs. Thus, this is due to the impact on covid-19. Money is needed to cater for some of the needs of the church in areas like payment of workers salaries and some services like electricity, repairs of pews, roofs, or other items were really affected. Pastors or priests could not travel to administer sacraments, pray for their members due to lack of finance to even travel. Members like wise also suffer the in ability to pay tithes, baptismal cards and other church levies due to the financial impact that Covid-19 has brought.

Furthermore, many church properties were damaged and could not be repaired due to lack of funds. Some churches hardly fed their pastor, talk more of even feeding themselves during. Conventions, rallies and meeting. Die to lack of financial ability, Christianity and its teaching on love to follow brothers due to individualism to suited from greed due to lack of money.

There is huge lose of Sunday collection in most of the churches due to low turn up of members. Many Christians became financially handicapped to assist in the spread of the Gospel and even fend for themselves. It is asserts that “(aborare est Orare” meaning to work is to pray. Various Christians suffered setbacks due to lack of money to run them for the services of the Christian faithful’ further more, many devote Christians died as a result of lack of money to take care of their health, and that has also affected the efficacy of the Christian faith (Eche 72-73). It has been observed that, right from the inception of Christianity, it has always been an institution at the service of the poor. Thus, option for the poor is a legacy bequeathed by Christ Himself in his teaching, which today has been badly affected for lack of finance to support the mission of spreading Christianity reaching the whole world (Kass et al 15). Unfortunately, the outbreak of Covid-19 kept many Christian away from church, and there is incessant discontinuation giving due to loss of jobs by some members which contributed in the financial depletion of most churches. Another observation nited is that, charity which highly emphasized during lent has been affected for lack of money from fellow Christians. Thus, lack of finance has indeed been necessitated due to the impact of



covid-19. Financial ability in Christianity during the Pandemic has not been so favourable in waxing well the tenants of Christianity. However, covid-19 has a financial impact, even families who are supposed to show love to their fellow Christians are been hindered.

Moral Impact

Moral pertains to morally, rightness and wrongness, good and evil. In conformity with the prevailing moral order (Fairchild 1997). What happens during Covid-19 Pandemic to the Christian faith is the indispensable source for pleasure, postulation affected quality Christian life as order of the day (Ezeoba 722-723). Due to the dreadful impact of Covid-19 on religion, and especially in Christianity, many Christians stayed at home and commit all sorts of sins. Like domestic violence, beating their wives, swearing, lying and making unguarded and ungodly utterances, and defiling the name of God. The bodies of Christians which is supposed to be the temple of the Holy Spirit has been abused in immoral activities like abortion, ritual killings, joining of occultic groups. Incest, prostitution, drunkenness, stealing, kidnapping, banditry, abortion and unwanted pregnancies, constant sexual intercourse due to Covid-19 virus. Hence, immorality spur due to core reasons of the impact of covid-19 pandemic. High crime rate by faithful Christians were on the rise, and the sanctity of the human family and human bodies were abused (Eche 71). Charity relief materials were looted by many people with participation of fellow Christians and which the Ten Commandments number seven frowns at stealing (Ezeoba 72).

Psychological Impact

The impact of Covid-19 on the religion and especially in Christianity could also be seen on its psychological impact which it has on the members of the religion. However, it is lamentable that, fear of being sanctioned by relevant security agency if one contravened the isolation and stay at home directives worsened people's conditions. As a result of this virus, many Christian faithful were subjected to self isolation, quarantine, social distancing and even wearing of face mask and washing of hands with sanitizer, which others find it very difficult to adapt. Expression of true Christian spirituality by visiting fellow Christians were at halt and many Christians felt dejected and became psychologically imbalance due to covid-19 impact on them. Eche went on to recapitulate also that, many persons suffered from depression, tension, anxiety and severe stress which led to increase in cases of high blood pressure and resultant death of Christian faithful (71-72). These people who are traumatized due to the impact of Covid-19 died and their spiritual and qualities are missed in their various churches, families and associations.

Social Impact

Man as created by God is a social and political being. He is one of the finest and rational creatures that resides and interact with his fellow beings. Hence, the human function is basically seen in the area of communication which serves the purposes of mediating information across the boundary lines of the human organism or organization (Nwanze 44). Social interactions and sharing of feelings by members of a particular group or church is indeed affected.

As observed further, social interactions in the church was affected, people only gestitulate with sign language due to fear of the pandemic (Eche 71). Expressing joy, warmthness,



kindness, welcome, sympathy by hand shaking, hugging, kissing, embracing were considered serious breach of the covid-19 rules. Hence, social interactions, group the covid-19 pandemic. Expression of true hospitality to fellow Christians by fellow Christians in the church was hindered. Hence, hospitality demand was considered a problem, which prior to the covid-19 pandemic was far reaching to fellow church members. Not to the entire family community, but to the entire people (Chidili 115). However, the church today has passed through a difficult era due to covid-19 impact on church and family life.

Recommendations

Despite the dreadful impact of Corona virus on Christian worship in Nigeria, the paper has the following commendations:

- i. Christianity through its various denominational sects and leaders should continue to remain prayerful, encourage observance of covid-19 protocol in order to safeguard the faith from dwindling due to spread of the virus and its dreadful consequence on human lives.
- ii. Christians must remain ardent disciples of Christ by reaching out to the world in prayer and support of their faith. They are encouraged to fight against the virus, which is not yet over, but a continuous one in the faith founded by Jesus Christ.
- iii. All hands must be on deck to express true love of Christ as founded by mandated by the Church, which is His body to be our brother's keeper. Christians should also support the spread of Gospel in favourable and unfavourable times. Let the pandemic episode be a moment that Christ's own faithful will reflect about the purpose and meaning of life as given by Christ on the Calvary by remaining faithful bearers of Gospel.
- iv. Man, who is a procreator of God; divine purpose on earth should see himself as purposefully called to fullness of life, which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God as manifest in Christianity which was founded by Jesus Christ (Konye 24).
- v. Christians should adhere to admonition of by their religious leaders to always go for medical check up in order to remain healthy and propagate their faith in a challenging period like today, where people's quality life is bedridden by poverty disease, hunger and starvation.
- vi. Government should also support in the provision of social agencies like religious organizations like the church, mosque for public awareness and alignment with global best practice in curbing COVID-19 diseases (Efuntade 143).

Conclusion

So far, from the discourses examined on Corona-virus pandemic and its effects on Christian worship in Nigeria, it is needed melancholic and dreadful experience by Christians, where its members or adherents have been traumatized, suffered spiritual, moral and social degeneration. Even though, one was prepared for the virus but as it has come, Christians were deeply affected. Amidst the rising cases of casualties due to the virus, Christians should remain sober in prayer and commitment to the fight against covid19 pandemic.

No one can say that, the threats to lives issued as a result of the coming of Covid-19 pandemic have not affected all facets of the operation of Christianity in this milieu. Hence,



Christians must continue to be prayerful, abide by hygienic rules of safety and continue to support one another and the faith they practice so that, it can blossom as never before. The pandemic has indeed reawakened the consciousness of Christians to be prayerful and return to Christ for salvation amidst any threatening pandemic in the future.

Works Cited

- Adasu Moses Orshio. *Understanding African Traditional Religion. Part one*. England: Dorset Publishing Company, 1985. Print.
- Ayeni, T. Religion in Nigeria Despite Covid-19 Measures Accessed on <https://www.theafricareport.com/25532/religion-in-nigeria-despite-COVID19-measures/.20th/August,2022.web>.
- Ajim, Joshua A. "The Role of Christianity in the Fight against Corruption in Nigeria" *Kashere Journal of Religious Studies* (Christian Unit). Federal University, Kashere, Gombe State, 1.1, 2019. Print.
- Barth, Chidili. "Extended Family and Religious Life". *Shalom Proclaim Peace*, 6.2, 1988. Print.
- Eche, Mary Winifred. "A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Covid-19 on Family Relationship: Igbo-Nigeria Perspectives". *Igwebuike African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 7.4, 2021. Print. A Publication of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Tansian University, Umuanya, Anambra State. Print.
- Hornby, A.S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary New Edition*. Oxford: University Press, 2010. Print.
- Rahman, A. Nigeria COVID-19 Updated Accessed on 20 August, 2022 from <https://www.africanews.com/2021/02/16/nigeria-covid-19-hub-updates-covid-19/>. Web.
- Ezeoba, Aloysius. E. "The Relevance of Consolation Theology in Contemporary Africa". *NACATHS Journal of African Theology*, 5, 1995. Print.
- Fairchild, Henry Pratt. *Dictionary of Sociology*. Totowa New Jersey: Adams and Co, 1966. Print.
- Kanu, I. A. *A Hermeneutic Approach to the Study of African Traditional Religion, Theology and Philosophy*. Jos: Augustinian Publications, 2015. Print.
- Kanu, I. A. (2019b). An Igwebuike approach to the study of African traditional naming ceremony and baptism. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. Vol. 11. No. 1. pp. 25-50.
- Kanu, I. A. (2017g). Igwebuike and the logic (Nka) of African philosophy. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 1. pp. 1-13.
- Kanu, I. A. (2016a). Igwebuike as an Igbo-African hermeneutics of globalisation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 2 No.1. pp. 61-66.
- Kanu, I. A. (2015a). *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Nigeria: Augustinian Publications.
- Kanu, I. A. (2013). On the sources of African philosophy. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 337-356.
- Kanu, I. A. (2013). The dimensions of African cosmology. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, Vol. 2. No. 2. pp. 533-555.



- Pamu, Augustine and Karbon, Philip Benjamin “Paradise Lost: A Philosophical Approach to the Understanding of Human Guiltology”. *Jalingo Journal of Christian Religious Studies, and Societal Research*, 2.2, 2017. Print. A Publication of the Department of Christian Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, Taraba State University, Jalingo. Print.
- Gbenda, Joseph. S. *African Religious and Christianity in a Changing World: A Comparative Approach*. Nsuka: Chuka Educational Publishers, 2006. Print.
- Efuntade, Olugbenga. “Religion a Factor in the Management of Covid-19 Pandemic in Ede, Osun State, Nigeria”. *Voyages Journal of Religious Studies*, 6, 2020. Print. A Publication of Department of Religious Studies, Gombe State University, Gombe, Nigeria. Print.
- Eche, Mary Winfred (Qtd). WHO 2021. Print. “Who Call’s for Further Studies, data or Origin of SARS – Cov – 2 Virus” “A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Covid-19 on Family Relationship: Igbo-Nigeria Perspective”. *Igwebuike African Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. 7 No. 4, 2021. Print. A Publication of Tansian University, Umuaya, Anambra State.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Kenya: Paulines Publication Africa, 2000. Print.
- Attah, Mathew et al. “The Sacrament of Reconciliation: Examining the Concept of Unity in Africa”. *NACATHS Journal of African Theology*, 19, 2009. Print.
- Iyidobi, Cajetan. *The Church: A Threat to Our Culture*. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward Inc, 1972. Print.
- Kass, Anthony et al. “Poverty in Africa: Man Made or Divine Curse?”. *NACATHS Journal of African Theology*, 19, 2009. Print.
- Katsina, Robert I. *Religion and Social Change AT A Glance*. Makurdi: J.C. Igababee Printing and Publishing Press, 2019. Print.
- Lehmann, Arthur C. and Myes, James E. *Magic, Witchcraft and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural Fifth edition*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001. Print.
- Shereen, M.A. et al. “Covid-19 Infection: Origin, Transmission, and Characteristics of Human Corona Virus”. *Journal Advanced Research*, 24/5/ 2020. Print.
- Ehanire, O. *First Case of Corona Virus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria Retrieved on 19 August, 2022*. From <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/firstcase-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria.web>.
- Nwanze, J.E. “African Culture – A Definition with Emphasis on Communications Over Tones of Culture” *Shalom Proclaim Peace*, 7.1, 1989. Print.
- Ortese, Jude Ortese. “An Examination of Rerum Novarum in the Light of Plight of Workers in Africa: The Nigerian Experience”. *NACATHS Journal of African Theology*, 19, 2009. Print.