



A Theological Response of the Chapel of the Light, the University of Ilorin, to the Covid19 Pandemic

Caleb Oladokun Ogunkunle
Associate Professor
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria
Email-calebogunkunle@unilorin.edu.ng

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.10346>

Abstract

The entire world was bedeviled with fear and anxiety as a result of Covid 19 pandemic that has ravaged the world. The pandemic affected every segment of society, particularly the places of worship. Covid 19 pandemic negates the biblical injunction that promotes corporate worship (Hebrews 10:25). Thus, the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:29 have been negated and abrogated. This paper examined the theological response of the Protestant chapel at the University of Ilorin to Covid 19 pandemic. Historical and phenomenological methods were adopted as related literature on Covid 19 pandemic was reviewed, and facts that emerged during the lockdown period were analyzed and discussed. The study discovered that the Covid19 pandemic was real with its corresponding adverse effects. Despite the lockdown, Chaplaincy introduced virtual fellowship through different platforms such as Text messages, Zoom, WhatsApp, and others. Also, it was discovered that, unlike human beings, God is not limited to the four corners of a Church building hence, he could be worshipped anytime and anywhere. The paper concluded that members of the Chapel of the Light in particular and Nigerian Christians in general while fellowshiping with one another, abided by the laid down protocols of Covid 19 pandemic. The paper recommends that the reality of the 'new normal' should enable the church to chart and develop new methods of worship and evangelism with the effective use of information and communication technology.

Keywords: Response, Chapel of the Light, Covid 19, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

Introduction

A pandemic, which is "an epidemic of an infectious disease that spread across a large region or continent or world, affecting a substantial number of individuals" (Oniyangi, 2021, 4) is not a new phenomenon. There were cases of the pandemic in the Bible such as the plagues on the Egyptians in Exodus 7:14-12:36. Also, there have been several other cases of the pandemic in the history of humankind. These include the Athenian plague, Antonie plague, Justinian plague, Black Death, Spanish flu, Smallpox outbreak, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Swine Flu, and Ebola outbreak and among others (Damir Huremovic, Owojaiye, 2020, 30ff, Alamu, 2021, 300). Nigeria has had her share of pandemics as highlighted by Oniyangi:

Due to the 1918 Spanish flu, Lagos lost 15% of its population in the 1st 2 months of the pandemic, and the Leprosy pandemic of 1857-1859, which led to the establishment of the 1st Hospital in Nigeria by Reverend Father Coquard of the Catholic Church in Abeokuta, now known as the "Sacred Heart Hospital." Other pandemics that have occurred are smallpox (*Sopono*), Tuberculosis, Cholera, and more recently like the rest of the world, HIV/AIDS, and now Covid19 (Oniyangi, 2021, 5).



The coronavirus (Covid19) pandemic which started towards the end of 2019 remains the greatest challenge to human existence in the twenty-first century. It has affected every segment of the society-socially, economically, educationally, religiously, and among others.

The Covid-19 virus led to crises in a range of areas including economics, politics, social contexts, in religion and also ethically, the pandemic has changed all previously held notions and understanding (Verster, 2020). Nkwanyana, Apleni and Mabaleka (2022) elucidate that the Covid-19 pandemic wreaked chaos on tourism and religious destinations. For example, Christianity, social beliefs and values of individuals, pilgrims were threatened, and faith tested during the pandemic. Many shrines, temples and churches cancelled events and downsized their ceremonies as well as rituals as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, and this made individuals' wonder where the therapy would come from to manage with the growing COVID-19 infection rates (Douglas, 1994, quoted in Vorvornator & Mdiniso, 2021).

However, from the Christian perspective as rightly observed by Owojaiye (2020:117) no one would have "envisaged that a time would come in the world that the doors of the Church would be closed to corporate worship before the rapture takes place." One of the obligations of Christians is fellowshiping together with other believers in form of corporate worship as stated in Hebrews 10:24-25:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching (NIV).

Also, Jesus Christ says "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). The above passages show that Christians are enjoined to come together in corporate worship and fellowship. However, the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic which promotes social disintegration has disrupted this biblical injunction. The Covid19 pandemic brought about a lockdown of all sectors and places of worship for months which was least expected either by the government or religious leaders. Therefore, this paper examined Covid19 and the theological response of the Chapel of the Light, the University of Ilorin to it.

An Overview of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Covid19 is a respiratory disease that attacks the lungs and it is highly contagious. It is transmitted through droplets created from sneezing and coughing by those infected. The virus enters the body via the nose, mouth, and eyes. The most commonly reported symptoms of Covid19 are: cough, fever, fatigue, muscle ache, shortness of breath when moving around and loss of appetite or taste or smell (Handbook, 2021:6). The World Health Organization described it as a viral infection that causes respiratory illness (Omaka-Amari, 2020: 2). The severity and duration of symptoms for people who have Covid19 can vary. For some, people symptoms last 7-14 days and will be mild. For others, the symptoms can be severe, requiring hospitalization (Handbook, 2021: 7). Covid19 infects people of all ages but it appears that most people easily recover from it as shown in the total number of people affected, and the number of deaths. As of the end of November 2021, there have been about 261 million cases of Covid19; over 256 million people recovered while over 5 million deaths were reported. In Nigeria, as of the end of November 2021, a total number of 214,113 cases of Covid19 were recorded; a total number of 211,137 recovered while the total number of deaths was 2,976 (Oniyangi, 2021,10 & 15). Generally, older people and those with existing medical conditions such as cancer, chronic respiratory infections, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, kidney and liver diseases, and obesity are more likely to experience severe illness and death due to Covid19 (Omaka-Amari, 2020: 2; Oniyangi: 2021,7).



The Covid19 pandemic started in December 2019 at the Wuhan Seafood wet market in Wuhan, Hubei, China. Within a month of the report of this disease in Wuhan, it spread to the rest of the country and beyond, including countries like Thailand, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Germany, and among others. By the end of March 2020, the disease had been recorded in 177 countries. And by April 2020, the United States of America became the worst-hit country (Owojaiye, 2020, 28). Coronavirus has manifested itself in different waves which include the Delta variant that is ravaging various parts of the globe.

The Coronavirus pandemic entered Nigeria through Lagos on 27th February 2020 by an Italian businessman who visited the country. The second confirmed case was on the 9th of March, 2020 through a contact of the index. Since then, the story has not remained the same as several people have been infected with the virus. However, the government has made efforts to curtail the spread of the virus through:

1. Contact tracing as individuals who had contact with those who were confirmed to have contracted Covid19 were encouraged to do personal isolation and do the Covid19 test.
2. Sensitization of the general public through print and electronic media and encouraging people to stay at home and avoid crowded gatherings, observing social distance of two meters (six feet), regular hand-washing with soap and water, use of alcohol-based sanitizer, use of face mask and observing good personal hygiene.
3. Total lockdown of every sector of the society which was observed in Nigeria between March 2020 and October 2020.
4. Vaccine exercise: The Federal Government of Nigeria has made provisions for members of the public to be vaccinated. The issue however is that the percentage of those fully vaccinated is still very low. As of 18th October 2021, the total number of those with one dose was 5,348,573 which is 2.6 percent of the population, while the number of those that had been fully vaccinated was 2,681,129 which is 1.3 percent of the population (Covid19 vaccine <https://g.co/kgs/MVHWvR>. Accessed on 10/12/2021). It is reported that Nigeria has scaled up its Covid19 vaccination with new funding for vaccine purchase and deployment from the World Bank (World Bank, 2021).

There are some conspiracy theories or misconceptions associated with the Covid19 pandemic in Nigeria. First and foremost, the pandemic is believed to be an elite disease meant for the wealthy and those in the corridors of power. This view was further compounded by the fact that some of the first set of people who tested positive were elites and Nigeria's top-ranking politicians. Some of them include Mr. Abba Kyari, the Chief of Staff to President Muhammadu Buhari; Mr. Bala Mohammed, the Governor of Oyo State; Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, the Governor of Kaduna State; Mr. Okezie Ikpeazu, the Governor of Abia State; Mr. Rotimi Akeredolu, the Governor of Ondo State; Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa, the Governor of Delta State and his wife; and Senator Abiola Ajimobi, former Governor of Oyo State among others (Owojaiye, 2020, 35-6).

Second, the pandemic has come upon the land as a result of divine punishment on the elites for not doing the right thing for the nation. This view is being upheld by some religious people who argue that the level of wickedness and atrocities being perpetrated in general and Nigeria, in particular, is very high. A good case is the health sector which has been neglected over the years. Owojaiye notes that the general public's opinion is that the fall of Mr. Abba Kyari to Covid19 was from God and that it was a signal to corrupt politicians who failed to invest in the country's healthcare system before the outbreak of the pandemic (2020, 37). Baloyi and Pali (2022) state that in Zimbabwe for example:

Church worship services were mostly affected, as people were denied the opportunity to gather for worship in their usual places of worship service. However, when the number of COVID-19 cases dropped, the government of Zimbabwe maintained the state of emergency by not fully allowing free



movement of people and public gatherings. The Zimbabwean government would only allow a restricted number of individuals, roughly fifty or one hundred, to partake in public gatherings, especially in church worship services”.

Finally, some tied the Covid19 pandemic to the 5G expansion. Adherents of this view argued that the disease stemmed from the electromagnetic radiation emitted from the fifth-generation telecommunication network expansion in Nigeria (Owojaiye, 2020, 38). Incidentally, some Church leaders, especially Pastor Chris Oyakhilome and Bishop David Oyedepo are in support of this theory. Oyakhilome linked the coronavirus pandemic and the 5G network to the Biblical antichrist and part of the signs of the end time (as quoted by Owojaiye, 2020, 38-9). Bishop David Oyedepo was particularly against government restrictions on religious gatherings. According to him:

The Church is God’s banquet hall where we are fed with spiritual food to keep us alive and strong. So whatever stops the Church from fellowshiping is out to destroy what God is building...There must be a devil behind it. It is not a virus; it is a demon. There is a demon at work behind the scene. I told you in the morning, I smell a rat.

Chapel of the Light: A Historical Synopsis

Chapel of the Light, (formerly Chapel of Light) the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, was established in 1977, shortly after the establishment of the University itself in 1975. It was originally called "The Protestant Chapel", an interdenominational Chapel, holding services in the then Africa Hall situated at the mini-campus of the University, to cater to the spiritual and social welfare of the University community. Through the gracious assistance of the Rt. Rev. Bishop Herbert Haruna (Anglican Bishop of Kwara Diocese), Rev. F.O.B. Obayan, Permanent Secretary, Kwara State Ministry of Education, became the first Chaplain in 1977. He retired as Permanent Secretary in 1979 and became a staff of the Department of Educational Management, at the University of Ilorin in 1980 (Okorie, 2015, 9). The Chapel was officially opened in January 1978, when it held the first formal interdenominational service. The name was changed to "Chapel of the Light" later in 1978, the same year when the Chapel's first constitution was drafted.

Services were held in Africa Hall, a multi-purpose building at the Mini Campus, used for lectures, examinations, drama, and social functions during the weekdays and as a mosque on Fridays. On Sundays, this same hall served as a venue for both the Catholic and Protestant denominations to hold services at different hours. The need for permanent Chapel buildings solely for the chapel of Light became urgent. In October 1978, Archy Konsult of Ilorin, headed by Arc. Noah Tunde Ogunniyi designed the Chapel to be built on the permanent site of the University. The plan of the Chapel which has six sections/bays was in the form of a cross that has been built in stages, the last stage completed in 2016 (Okorie, 2015, 17-18). Meanwhile, the Chapel is still making use of the building at the Mini campus for worship and fellowship of members around the community and beyond.

The Chapel has a central committee (Council) that meets monthly to make policies and monitor the same for the physical and spiritual growth of the congregation. The leadership/chairmen of the council since its inception include:

Rev. F.O.B. Obayan	Nov. 1977 - Sept. 1980
Rev. Canon Dr. S.U. Erivwo	Oct. 1980 - Sept. 1982
Rev. Canon Dr. F.O.B. Obayan	Oct. 1982 - Oct. 1988
Mr. B.A. Oni-Orisan (Acting)	Nov. 1988 - July 1990



Mr. B.A. Oni-Orisan (Substantive)	Aug. 1990 - Feb. 1991
Prof. I.E. Owolabi (Acting)	Mar. 1991 - June 1991
Prof. I.E. Owolabi (Substantive)	July 1991 - Apr. 1995
Prof. T.O. Aro	May 1995 - Apr. 1999
Engr. S.A. Owoeye	May 1999 - Apr. 2003
Dr. P.O. Olatunji	May 2003 - Apr. 2007
Engr. S.A. Owoeye	May 2007 - Apr. 2011
Mr. A.B. Aganga	May 2011 - Apr. 2015
Pastor D.S. Odaibo	May 2015 – Apr.2018
Prof. A. A. Popoola	May 2018 – to date (Okorie, 2015, 49).

The Chapel has a chaplaincy whose membership represents the interdenominational nature of the congregation. Chaplaincy is made up of ordained ministers from different denominations such as the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Methodist, Baptist, United Missionary Church of Africa, Evangelical Church Winning All, and others. One of them is designated as Chaplain in Charge while others are called Chaplains. They must see to the spiritual growth and development of the congregation. Currently, the Chapel has four Chaplains namely, Rev. Dr. C. O. Ogunkunle, Ven. Dr. J. O. Osaji, Rev. E. S. Alasan and Rev. F. M. Babajide. The list of the Chaplains in charge since inception is as follows:

Rev. F.O.B. Obayan	Nov. 1977 – Sept. 1980
Rev. Canon Dr. S.U. Eriwwo	Oct. 1980 – Sept. 1982
Rev. Canon Dr. F.O.B. Obayan	Oct. 1982 – Oct. 1988
Pastor Dr. C.E. Osume (Acting)	Nov. 1988 – Mar. 1989
Rev. Dr. D.T. Adamo (Acting)	Apr. 1989 – Jan 1990
Rev. Dr. C.E. Osume (Acting)	Feb. 1990 – Aug. 1990
Rev. S.B.G. Olasehinde	Sept. 1990 – Sept. 1992
Very Rev. Dr. A.S. Oyalana	1 st Apr. 1993 – June 1996
Rev. Dr. A.M. Okorie	1 st July 1996 – June 2002
Rev. Dr. C.O. Ogunkunle (Acting)	1 st July 2002 – Dec. 2002
Rev. Dr. D.A. Alao (Acting)	1 st Jan. 2003 – June 2003
Rev. Dr. C.O. Ogunkunle	1 st July 2003 – June 2009
Rev. Dr. A.S. Idowu	1 st July 2009 – June 2015
Rev. Dr. C.O. Ogunkunle	1 st July 2015 – June 2018
Ven. Dr. J. O. Osaji (Acting)	1 st July 2018- Nov. 2018
Ven. Dr. J. O. Osaji	1 st Dec. 2018- 31 st December, 2021
Rev. Dr. C. O. Ogunkunle	1 st January 2022 to date (Okorie, 2015, 50-1 & Chapel Council Minutes, December, 2021).

Various committees have emerged in the Chapel over the years in which members of the congregation can use their gifts and talents in the expansion of God's kingdom in the University community and beyond. Currently, the Chapel has 13 different committees which include: Chapel Services Committee, Finance & General Purposes Committee, Building Committee, Choir Affairs Committee, Student Fellowship Affairs Committee, Sunday School Committee, Teenagers/Youth Fellowship Committee, Sunday Bible Study Committee, Home Fellowship Committee, Missions Committee, Welfare Committee, Library Committee, and Media & Publicity Committee. (For details on membership and duties of each committee, see: *The Constitution*, 55-61).

The Chapel, by its name and practices, is made up of believers from different denominations in and outside of the University Community. The membership of the Chapel at the Main campus is mainly students of the University of Ilorin while the membership at the Mini campus is made up of non-students who live in the neighbourhood and beyond. There are two services on Sunday mornings whenever the school is in session and the total attendance for the two services ranges from 900 to 1200. The attendance at the Unilorin Christian Union (UCU)



Sunday evening service ranges from 400 to 500. The Chapel has Sunday Bible Study and Children Sunday School. Tuesday is for the Women's Fellowship at 5:00 pm in different locations in the city and the UCU prayer meeting at 6:00 pm in the Chapel. Wednesday is for prayer meeting at 4 pm at Main Campus and 5 pm at the Mini Campus. Men's Fellowship meets the first Thursday of every month while the UCU Bible Study is every Thursday at 6 pm. The following activities take place on Saturday- Drama rehearsal at 2 pm; Usher's meeting at 4 pm; Evangelism at 4 pm; Choir practice at 4 pm (Main Campus); and Choir practice at the Mini Campus at 5 pm.

The Chapel has some other special programmes that bring together people from within and outside the University community. These include Joint Christmas Carols by the Choirs of Chapel of the Light and Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Chaplaincy which takes place on the second Sunday of December; A musical concert and Annual Congregational Meeting which is held on the last Sunday of April each year. The prayer meeting on the last Wednesday of each month is jointly held between Main and Mini campus Chapels and it is tagged "Hour of Divine Visitation." The Chaplains take full charge of the service and sometimes guest ministers are invited from outside. Also, the third Friday of every month is for the Chapel Vigil. The anniversary of the Chapel takes place on the last Sunday of November every year.

Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Chapel

The Covid19 pandemic was a blow to the Chapel congregation as all the programmes outlined above were suspended. Incidentally, the Chapel which is blessed with a significant number of medical practitioners resolved to obey the laid down Covid19 protocols. Therefore, the doors of the Chapel were locked for several months. Initially, it was not easy, however, the Chaplains and Chapel Council swung into action through marathon meetings on the subject matter and various resolutions were made. It was also resolved that the Chaplaincy together with the Media Committee should arrange for how the spiritual needs of the members would be met during the period of lockdown. Thus, the following means of communication were extensively used during the critical period:

1. Phone calls – The Chaplaincy pulled several calls to individual members of the congregation, checking up on them, praying for, encouraging, and counselling them.
2. Text messages – This was used by the Chaplaincy to send encouraging devotional messages and prayers to members especially, during individual' celebrations such as birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and others.
3. WhatsApp – This means of communication and evangelism was extensively used during the duration of the lockdown. Each fellowship and committee in the Chapel created a WhatsApp platform for effective communication and reaching out to its members. The Chaplaincy used WhatsApp to send Biblical passages, Bible studies on specific topics, messages, and prayer points to members of the congregation on Wednesdays for prayer meetings. Each family was encouraged to make use of the exhortation and prayer points during Wednesday's family prayers. The Chaplain in charge also used the WhatsApp platform to send out the order of Sunday worship service and announcements to members of the congregation.
4. Zoom – This was the most extensively used means of interaction and fellowship during the time of lockdown. Men and Women Fellowships had their regular meetings via zoom. Sunday worship services were conducted through the same platform. Some weeks into the lockdown, the Preacher for the day and worship leader made use of the Chapel Sanctuary to give the background and set-up of the Chapel. Also, the monthly vigil of the Chapel between 10 pm-12 midnight was held on the zoom platform. Furthermore, the monthly meetings of the Chapel council as well as some other committees were held via the zoom platform.



Other platforms, though not generally used in the Chapel, include Microsoft Teams, which is used for video or audio chat or call; Slack which is used for a chat; Google Meet used for video/audio call and chat; YouTube live stream/video; Instagram; Bluetooth; Facebook; Tweeter; iCloud; Face time; Safari; and among others (Alamu, 2021, 312). All these methods of preaching and evangelism are products of the new normal and they are called by different names such as 'mobile spirituality,' 'digital religiosity,' 'online for God,' 'emergent techno-spiritual practices,' 'virtual Christianity' or 'e-religiosity.' (Alamu, 2021, 312).

Apart from building up members spiritually, the Chapel Council through the Welfare Committee gave palliatives and welfare packages to members of the congregation during the period of lockdown. It was a big relief to several members as the gesture was highly appreciated by all.

Challenges of the new normal means of worship

Some challenges are associated with worship through social media. These include:

Lack of physical and warm fellowship and full participation: As a Chaplain, one of the issues I had to cope with during the lockdown was preaching all alone in a room or at other times, preaching to empty pews with the spontaneous reactions of members during message was missing. Also, several members of the congregation missed the opportunity for physical interaction with their Chaplains and other members of the congregation. This was particularly a problem as a significant number of the members of the Chapel had issues that required personal attention and counselling. However, this was not possible as a result of the total/partial lockdown that restricted movements.

Financial challenge: The time of lockdown was a period of financial crisis for several members of the congregation. The artisans in the Chapel could not go out to their places of work or market which meant that nothing came to them during that critical period. The people working with private organisations, for example, as teachers could not be paid during the period of lockdown. Even those in government employment had a delay in the payment of their salaries. All these created a big challenge for many members of the congregation. Therefore, many members could not participate fully in the online services and meetings due to a lack of money to either purchase a good phone or regular data for the meetings. This resulted in a few members excusing themselves from important meetings and services. This must have informed the leadership of Living Faith Chapel to sack forty (40) of her pastors "for having a Church growth index that falls below expectation" in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This was reported on social media by Pastor Peter Godwin. Responding to him the leadership of the Church said that the Church doesn't operate at a loss and that the income that is being generated from his station should be able to cater for welfare, and accommodation, and so as a result of low income, he was dismissed. (Olowoporoku, 2021).

Liturgical challenge: Administration of the Holy Communion/Lord's Supper is one liturgical item in the order of worship in the Chapel which many members look forward to every second Sunday of the month. Unfortunately, Communion service was suspended throughout the lockdown which some members to be affected spiritually. Even now that physical service has resumed and the Chapel has enough small cups for each member, a significant number of the members of the congregation excused themselves from participating in the Communion. Few of the members that excused themselves preferred a situation where each member would have his/her complete package of waver bread and wine, without making contact with anybody. The idea is good but the cost appears to be on the high side for the Chapel to bear.

Low attendance: There has been a small decline in attendance at the Chapel since the physical service started. On the one hand, some of the elderly members of the congregation excused themselves on the ground of being susceptible to the virus. On the other hand, some



members prefer to watch programmes of their choice on the several available electronic media platforms.

Network problem: This was a complex problem that prevented some members of the congregation from participating fully in the online services. The aged could not participate because they are not computer literate. Also, a significant number of the students lived with their parents in rural areas at the time of lockdown, hence they could not participate due to a lack of network. Some others could not participate due to a lack of a good phone that could access the platform of their choice.

An Evaluation of Online Meetings/Services during the Covid-19 Pandemic

It is appropriate at this point to have an evaluation of the online services of the Chapel at the time of total lockdown. This can be seen from positive and negative angles. On the positive side, the Covid19 pandemic has assisted members in their personal development. Both leaders and members had sufficient time to draw closer to God through fervent prayers and intense Bible study.

Secondly, the introduction of modern technology via the use of internet facilities has compelled the entire member of the congregation to improve their knowledge of information and communication technology. Before the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic, not many people including pastors had an interest in information and communication technology.

Thirdly, is the effective use of gifts and talents in the Chapel of the Light. Members of the Media Committee of the Chapel, who are mostly youths were available to make a significant contribution at the time of the Covid19 pandemic. They assisted in creating platforms for meetings and services for the congregation right from their different homes and cities.

Finally, is the expansion of the outreach and evangelistic ministry of the Chapel. The covid-19 pandemic has helped the Chapel congregation to explore other means of worshipping God, fellowshiping with one another, and spreading the good news of the kingdom. The online services helped the Chapel to reach out to other people outside of the congregation. Members who had relocated to other cities in Nigeria and even people in the diaspora were able to join the online services and meetings. Also, new members who were not originally members of the Chapel joined the online services and prayer meetings. Indeed, several individuals have been blessed through the online preaching and teaching ministries of the Chapel. Theologically, the phrase "the Church is marching on and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" is real. Ordinarily and humanly speaking, one was thinking that the Church will be negatively affected with Covid19 pandemic; rather, the pandemic has enhanced the spread of the gospel. Members of the Chapel have been blessed in different ways and many have been able to develop themselves spiritually. The beauty of the whole thing is that some of the online services and meetings started at the time of the lockdown are still used currently in addition to the physical opening of the Chapel.

On the negative side, the Covid19 pandemic hurt Chapel's finances. Even though some members of the congregation were able to transfer their tithes and offerings to the Chapel account, yet, many members were unable to do so as some lost their jobs while others could not attend to their businesses. Therefore, all forms of giving namely: tithes, free will offerings, seed offerings, and thanksgiving offerings stopped (Church-Hill, 2021, 5). As a result, many Churches could not meet their financial obligations. In addition, several congregations had to suspend their capital projects just as the pace of construction of the Female Fellowship Centre in the Chapel has been slowed down.



Importantly, the Covid19 pandemic has shown the limitations of human beings in wisdom and understanding. Despite the wisdom and technology of mankind, the pandemic caught the entire world unaware and with no solution in sight. Alamu, (2021, 300) notes:

This pandemic has therefore exposed human limitedness and weaknesses in all ramifications: socially, economically, medically, technologically, scientifically, and among others. The virus has adversely affected super nations and developing nations alike. Statistics have shown that these superpower nations such as the USA, Japan, Brazil, and the United Kingdom among others are worst hit than developing nations.

Theological Response to Covid-19 Pandemic

The covid-19 pandemic appears to be a wake-up call to the leadership of the Chapel for a re-assessment of her mode of worship. The Chapel was used for congregational worship before the outbreak of the pandemic. Covid19 has demonstrated the limitation of human beings as well as the unlimited nature of God who is actively involved in the affairs of humankind. One aspect of God that the pandemic has made humans appreciate is the immanence and transcendence of God, that is, God's nearness and distance respectively. God's immanence according to Erickson (1985:302-3) speaks of God's activity and presence within human nature and history. It means that God is present everywhere in the universe (Jeremiah 23:34 and Acts 17:27-28). God's immanence (nearness) means that God is active and present everywhere without limiting Him to a particular setting or location. This implies that whether the congregation is gathered together in a Church setting or the members are scattered in their different homes; the presence of God is with them. God is at work in individuals' lives and the entire congregation irrespective of the distance and location. God's transcendence, on the other hand, speaks of God being separate and independent of nature and humanity. It means God is not attached to or involved in, His creation. He is superior and distances Himself from the creation (Isaiah 6:1-6; 55:8-9; 57:15; etc. Erickson, 1985 312-3).

The point of interest from the above analysis of God's immanence and transcendence is as the Covid19 pandemic has shown the limitation of human beings so also, so it has demonstrated the unlimited nature of God. God is portrayed as a God of variety who has not limited himself to only one way of dealing with His people. In ancient Israel, He sometimes used the pagan nations such as the Assyrians (Isaiah 10:5-34 & 19:1-24) and the Babylonians (Jeremiah 25:1-38; Ezekiel 21:1-32; Habakkuk 1:5-11) to bring chastening upon Israel. In the same way, the Covid19 pandemic has shown that the worship of God cannot be limited to the four corners of the Church building. The covid-19 pandemic has brought about a new normal in the place of worship as justified in John 4:23 which says: "Yet a time coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks" (NIV).

One particular area in the Chapel of the Light, the University of Ilorin has responded theologically to the Covid19 pandemic in her prayer ministry. This is of course a critical thing to do and liturgy is essential since we are all part of God's nation, and we need to regularly pray together as well as alone and partake in holy communion (Nicolaidis, 2010; 2021). Prayer is a communication with the Almighty God who is both immanence and transcendental. Prayer is a vital tool in fighting a spiritual battle. It takes the forms of confession (1 Kings 8:47; Nehemiah 1:2-11; etc.); adoration (Psalm 45:1-8; Matthew 14:33, etc); communion (Genesis 18:33); thanksgiving (Exodus 15: 1-18; 2 Samuel 23:1-7); supplication (Daniel 6:11; Zechariah 12:10); intercession (Job 42:8; 1 Timothy 2:1; Thiessen, 1983: 302-3). Prayer is an expression of total dependence upon God. Jesus Christ lived a life of prayer as He spent quality time in prayer, sometimes the whole night (Matthew 14:23; Luke 6:12). He often prayed early in the morning in a quiet place (Mark 1:35). He prayed before engaging in special tasks such as



before starting his assignment (Mark 1:35-38); before choosing the twelve (Luke 6:12-13), and before He went to Calvary (Matthew 26:38-46; Thiessen, 1983: 227-8).

Prayer is a command in the bible as noted in several passages- Genesis 18:22-3; I Samuel 12:23; 2 Kings 19:15; Psalms 5:2; 32:6; Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 5:44; 26:41; Luke 18:1; 21:36; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 25; 1 Timothy 2:8; James 5:13-16. Ezra regarded prayer as more important than a band of soldiers and horsemen (Ezra 8:21-23) while the apostles placed prayer ahead of preaching (Acts 6:4).

The Chaplaincy being fully aware of the 1918 influenza in Nigeria and how the Aladura movements under the leadership of Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola used prayer to overcome the challenge (Alamu, 2020: 310-311) exploited the same prayer method in confronting the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the Chaplaincy organized a prayer chain among herself and other members of the congregation; pleading with God against the spread of the virus. Weekly prayer points were sent to members via WhatsApp platform during Wednesday prayer meetings. Some of the prayer points against the spread of the Covid19 pandemic include:

- Mark 4: 39- Praying for peace in the midst of is Covid19 pandemic
- Acts 27:20- God's deliverance from the ragging storm of coronavirus
- Praying for renewed strength for health care providers and healing for those down with the virus
- Acts 12:6- God's protection and renewed strength
- Acts 4:23- Father, let the end come soon to the spread of the Covid19 pandemic in Nigeria and nations of the world
- Praying against evil prophecy and imagination on Africa concerning Covid19
- Praying against the threats/spread of Covid19 in Nigeria and all over the world
- Pray for courage in the face of various news on Covid19 spreading around
- Pray for God's protection for all the health workers and those on essential duties
- Pray for healing for as many people that are sick/infected with Coronavirus
- Ask the Lord to sanitize your body with the blood of Jesus Christ
- Pray for the total eradication of the Covid19 pandemic in Nigeria and nations of the world
- Pray for God's protection and wisdom for Government Committees at the federal, state, and local government level
- Pray for God's wisdom and divine revelation for scientists as they seek for solution for Covid19 pandemic
- Plead with God for His divine intervention on Covid19 pandemic
- Ask the Lord to neutralize the power of covid-19 in Nigeria and nations of the world
- Ask the Lord to draw the hearts of men and women to Himself at this time of the pandemic
- 1 Chronicles 21:15- Plead with God to withdraw Covid19 pandemic from Nigeria and nations of the world
- Genesis 8:2- Lord, close every door of sickness, pandemic, pain, etc in the land
- Ask God to increase your immunity against Covid19
- Ask the Lord to remove savage beasts [Covid19 pandemic] from Nigeria and nations of the world
- Ask God for wisdom for those in World Health Organization as they co-ordinate various activities at this time of the pandemic
- Isaiah 43:2 -Pray that the waters of Coronavirus will not consume you and your family; the rivers of Covid19 will not take you away, and the fire of Covid19 will not burn you.

Conclusion



This paper examined the theological response of the Covid19 pandemic on Christians concerning the Chapel of the Light, University of Ilorin. Even though the pandemic was a blow to the congregation the members did not find it too difficult to migrate to online services and meetings. Text messages, WhatsApp, and Zoom platforms among others were extensively used by the Chaplaincy to meet the physical and spiritual needs of its members. The paper observed that the Covid19 pandemic has had a significant theological impact on the congregation as members of the Chaplaincy, Chapel Council, and the entire congregation used the period of lockdown to develop themselves spiritually. Both leaders and members of the congregation were able to improve their knowledge of information and communication technology. The paper concluded that even though humankind is limited in nature and knowledge, God is unlimited, hence his worship cannot be limited to the four corners of a Church building. He can be worshipped anywhere and at any time. Therefore, the paper recommends that the leadership of the congregation should be introspective, and re-assess the Chapel activities in order to ascertain what can be jettisoned and what can be added for effective outreach of the congregation to the University community. The leadership of the Chapel must as a matter of urgency empower the Media unit of the congregation to be effectively involved in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

References

- Adebayo, A. (2020). Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown of Churches in Nigeria on Pastoral Ministry: Matters Arising, *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(6), 1-15.
- Adichie, G. A. (2021). Examining the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Roman Catholic Church in South-Eastern Nigeria, *Journal of Multidimensional Research & Review*, 1(4), 65-80.
- Alamu, A. (2021). *Religion and Public Affairs in Nigeria Ilorin*, K-Success Prints Media.
- Baloyi, E. & Pali, J. K. (2022). COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the church landscape in Zimbabwe, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 103(1).
- Church-Hill, A. (2021). ICT: A Coping Strategy by Nigerian Churches amidst Covid-19 Pandemic, *Research Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 7(1), 1-6.
- Constitution of Chapel of the Light, University of Ilorin, Ilorin*. (2015). Ilorin. Unilorin Press.
- Covid-19 live update, *worldometers.info*. [Available online at <https://www.worldometers.info>] Accessed on 24/7/2021.
- Covid-19 vaccine. [Available online at <https://gco.kgs/MVHWvR>] Accessed on 10/12/2021
- Douglas, M. (1994). *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*, London: Routledge.
- Erickson, M. J. (1985). *Christian Theology, Unabridged, one-volume edition*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Falaye, T. A. (2020). Impact of Covid-19 on the Church of God in Nigeria, *KIU Journal of Humanities*, 5(2), 319-330.
- Handbook for Covid-19 Home –based care in Nigeria*. (2021). Nigeria Centre for Disease Control.



Nicolaidēs. A. (2021). Investigating the Holy Eucharist and the term ‘people of God’ according to the Eastern Orthodox Church, *Pharos Journal of Theology* , 102.

Nicolaidēs, A. (2010). The Laos tou Theou – an orthodox view of the “people of God”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 66(1).

Nkwanyana, S. M., Apleni, L. & Mabaleka, N. (2022). The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on tourism and Catholic religious destinations. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 103(1).

Okorie, A. M. (2016). *The History of Chapel of the Light, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria 1977-2015*. Ilorin. Mirror Neurons.

Olowoporoku, M. (2021) “Bishop Oyedepo: Why I sacked 40 Pastors” *PMNews*. pmnewsnigeria.com/bishop. Accessed on 16/11/2022.

Omaka-Amari, L. N., Aleka, C. O.; Obande-Ogbuinya, N. E.; Ngwakwe, P. C.; Nwankwo, O.; & Afoke, E. N.(2020). Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic in Nigeria: Preventive and Control Challenges within the first two months of Outbreak, *African Journal of Reproductive Health* (Special Edition on Covid-19), 24 (2) 87-97.

Oniyangi, S. (2021). *The Pandemic now and the next time: Matters arising*. University of Ilorin 8th Kola Olafimihan College of Health Sciences Endowed Lecture, Tuesday 7th December 2021, University Auditorium.

Osoba, G. G. (2016). *The Chronicle: A Historical Perspective of Unilorin Christian Union’s Journey (1976-2016)*, Lagos: The Skill House.

Owojaiye, B. M. (2020). *Evangelical Response to Coronavirus Lockdown: Insights from the Evangelical Winning All*, Lagos. Harmony Publishing.

Thiessen, H. C. (1983). *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

The World Bank Press Release (September 30, 2021). “Nigeria scales up its Covid-19 vaccination with new funding for vaccine purchase and deployment.” Nigeria Scales Up its COVID-19 Vaccination with New .[Available online at <https://www.worldbank.org/press-release/2021/09/30>]

Verster, P. (2020). A theological engagement with the Covid-19 pandemic, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 101.

Vorvornator, L. K. & Mdiniso, J. N. (2021). The Covid-19 Pandemic and Religious Activities: A Case Study of Esikhaleni Settlement, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 102, Special Issue. 2.