



Christian Missions and the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic in Lagos, Nigeria: A Survey

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Christian Missions in Lagos. It is an important aspect of Lagos history yet to receive adequate knowledge production. Hence, it has compelled a focused study of this subject. Christian Missions in Lagos have been actively involved in prayers, evangelism, and humanitarian activities but these activities were temporarily halted by the dreaded coronavirus-19 pandemic (COVID-19) which brought deaths and lockdown. Using mainly primary and secondary sources, photographs, and radio documentaries to substantiate its claim, this paper demonstrates that the pandemic did not only disrupt religious gatherings, Mission Schools, collection of tithes, but also humanitarian aid. The study recommends a sustained 'new normal' in Christian Missions and culture of virtual interactions to complement physical assembly.

Keywords – Christian missions, Covid-19 Pandemic, Lagos, lockdown, social-media.

Introduction

The world witnessed yet another lockdown after the 1917 Influenza pandemic which affected over half a million lives in the world, yet, it seemed like a trickle compared to the Coronavirus-19 pandemic which spread from Asia to Africa in 2020. COVID-19, as it was popularly called, was caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).¹ Since this generation has not experienced such a viral infection, nations and the World Health Organisation (WHO) engaged in prescriptive warnings and the need for social distancing in the activities of individuals and countries to prevent further spread.

Consequently, Airlines began to ban international flights across the world to limit the spread of the disease and its effects around the world. Most countries also commenced a lockdown of industries and

¹Ajisejiri, W. S., Odusanya, O. O., and Joshi, R., 2020. COVID-19 Outbreak Situation in Nigeria and the Need for Effective Engagement of Community Health Workers for Epidemic Response, Global Bio Security Journal, vol1, no 4, 2020, p1.





economy, schools and religious gatherings as scientists and medics were deployed to the laboratories to unravel the cause, spread, and remedy for the dreaded pandemic.

Lagos, the commercial city of Nigeria was not spared by the dreaded pandemic. The city is geographically and strategically located not only in the concentration of industries, military installations, and population but as a melting pot of culture. The word "Lagos" is derived from the Portuguese meaning 'lagoon,' and the town and island are known to the people as *Eko*, meaning 'war camp.'² On the British amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates in 1914, Lagos became the capital city of Nigeria.³

Since then, it has remained a home for all Nigerians irrespective of ethnic background, religion, and culture. Besides, the population of Lagos has continued to increase since the 1960s compared to other states in the federation and this has greatly affected infrastructure development and urban planning.⁴ The city of Lagos ceased to be the operational headquarters of the Armed Forces in 1990 owing to the transfer of the seat of power to Abuja by the Babangida administration.⁵

Following the advent of the COVID-19 Pandemic, there was apprehension in many quarters about the safety of the people of Lagos, economy and migration. This perhaps is because "when Lagos sneezes, the whole Nigeria catches a cold." The June 12, 1993 saga and the *EndSARS* Protest against Police Brutality were typical examples that provoked a lockdown in Lagos. This explained the importance of Lagos in the economy of Nigeria and her West African neighbours. The first hint of the Covid-19 came from Wuhan, a commercial centre in China where many people died as a result of the virus, yet the Chinese government underestimated the effect of the disease until it spread to mainland China, the USA, and Europe. With the spread of COVID-19 to Africa in 2020, there was a general lockdown in the economy and movement of people in Lagos metropolis.⁶ Consequently, a culture of social distancing; wearing of face masks, electronic learning ((e-learning), and distribution of palliatives became the new normal. Part of the social change also

² Smith, R.S. 1979. *The Lagos Consulate 1851-1861*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p2.

³ Mabogunje, A. 1961. Lagos – Nigeria's Melting Pot, *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 68, p131.

⁴ Olukaju, A., 2003. *Prioritising Infrastructure Development in Nigeria: Challenges, Constraints and Prospects*, NESG Economic Indicators, July-September, p18.

⁵ Nzemeka, J. A., 2015. *Wives of Military Personnel in Nigerian Barracks 1905-1999: A Socio-economic History*. Published PhD. Thesis, University of Lagos, p9.

⁶ *Coronavirus in Nigeria: Inside a Lagos coronavirus ward* Available at www.bbc.com/news/world-afric. 8 July2020 BBC News Africa.[Accessed on 10 November 2020]



included online transactions, electronic transfer, digital marketing, and home delivery of goods and services. These activities formed part of the new normal as people no longer gather around commercial places to adhere to social isolation caused by the pandemic.

This paper explores the effects of Coronavirus-19 on Christian missions in Lagos. It draws extensively on the experiences of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Baptists Churches, as well as the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in Lagos. The choice of these churches is strategic because they command large membership and could be found in different parts of Lagos. The study is important because it is a contribution to the existing literature on social history and diseases. The statistics of death caused by the pandemic in Lagos has been deliberately overlooked in this study because of the controversies and conflicting reports but suffice it to state that as of 27 October 2020, Lagos had confirmed cases of 20, 935, 698 active, 20, 029 recovered and 208 deaths.⁷

A few works already exist on the COVID-19 Pandemic and these include Mogaji⁸ which highlights the impact of COVID-19 on transportation in metropolitan Lagos. The author considered the present and long-term effects of lockdown on emerging economies such as Lagos with a high population density, poor transportation infrastructure and informal economy. Ajisegiri, Odusanya, and Joshi⁹ examine the COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria and the need for effective engagement of community health workers for epidemic response.

The work provides an overview of ongoing and increasing community transmission of the virus infections, inadequate testing capacity and overwhelming health resources. The authors concluded that the government needs to bring community health workers on board, deploy rapid epidemic intelligence and scale up the use of mobile applications for effective contact tracing.

Similarly, Rapisarda and Byrnes¹⁰ stress the unique nature of the Oceanic region and impact of COVID-19 outbreaks and how governments in the region defined the problems and strategies of containment. In the same vein, Shereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir, and

⁷ COVID-19.ncdc.gov.ng <http://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>; COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. [file:///C:/Users/User/Desktop/COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria-wikipedia.html](file:///C:/Users/User/Desktop/COVID-19%20pandemic%20in%20Nigeria-wikipedia.html).

⁸Mogaji, E., 2020. Impact of COVID-19 on transportation in Lagos, *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*; <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/transportation-research-interdisciplinary-perspectives>.

⁹Ajisegiri, Odusanya, and Joshi, 2020.

¹⁰Rapisarda, S. S., and Byrne, J. M., 2020. An Examination of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Prisons and Jails in Oceania. *Victims and Offenders* Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2020.1835767>. [Accessed on 11 November 2020].



Siddique¹¹ underline the history of COVID-19 infection, its origin and transmission. The work explained that COVID-19 had its origin in Wuhan city, China, and the disease was primarily associated with bats. Irekamba¹² underscores the impact of COVID-19 and how Churches cope without regular services. The work revealed that many pastors could not feed their families since they had no other means of livelihood other than the work of God. Due to the pandemic, many Churches resorted to online programmes while attempting to maintain social distance.

In the same vein, Orjinmo¹³ discusses the effect of Coronavirus and how Nigeria's mega Churches adjust to empty auditoriums. The author pointed out the conspiracy theories that prevailed during COVID-19 and how they contributed to to dwindling pews in the Anglican and Catholic Churches. Ojo¹⁴ also discusses the contextual significance of the Charismatic Movements in independent Nigeria which began in the 1970s. The author suggests that their rapid growth and success could be attributed to many factors. One of which was the presentation of the movements in a manner acceptable and relevant to Nigerian society.

On the other hand, Ajayi¹⁵ considers the years of missionary activity and impact in Nigeria between 1841 and 1891. The work deals with the emergence of the educated African elite which the author regarded as the greatest contribution of Christian missions in Nigeria. While Ajayi eulogised Christian missions in the making of a new elite, Ayandele¹⁶ explores the political and social history of Nigeria from 1842 to 1914. His emphasis was also on the reactions of the various sections of the Nigerian community including the chiefs, educated Africans, the ordinary people and slaves to missionary activity.

¹¹Shereen, M. A., Khan, S., Kazmi, A., Bashir, N., and Siddique, R., 2020. COVID-19 infection: Origin, transmission, and characteristics of human coronaviruses, *Journal of Advanced Research*, pp24, 91-98 Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jare.2020.03.005> [Accessed on 11 November 2020].

¹²Irekamba, C., 2020. COVID-19: How churches cope without regular services. *Sunday Magazine* Available at <https://COVID-19: Sunday Magazine -The Guardian Nigeria News-Nigeria and World News>. 24 May 2020.

¹³ Orjinmo, N., 2020. Coronavirus: Nigeria's mega-churches adjust to empty auditoriums. Available at <file:///C:/Users/User/Desktop/Coronavirus Nigeria's mega-churches adjust to empty auditoriums-BBC News.html>. [Accessed 11 November 2020].

¹⁴Ojo, M. A., 1988. The Contextual Significance of the Charismatic Movements in Independent Nigeria, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol.58, no.2, p175

¹⁵Ajayi, J.F.A., 1965. *Christian Missions in Nigeria: The Making of New Elite*. London: Longman Ltd.

¹⁶Ayandele, E.A., 1966. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis*. London: Longman Group Ltd.



The interesting aspect of these works lies in the fact that they provide general knowledge of the dreaded pandemic on the one hand and impacts on Christian missions on the other. Despite the contributions of these authors, there were still gaps to be filled, especially, the effects of COVID-19 on Christian missions in Lagos which this paper attempts to investigate. In the light of the above, we interrogate the following for insights: How did coronavirus emerge as a global pandemic and what was Nigeria's encounter? What was the role of Christian missions in Lagos? How did the Coronavirus-19 pandemic affect Christian missions in Lagos? And how did Christian missions adjust to the new normal?

In my attempt to answer these questions, I opened the discussion with the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic and Nigeria's encounters. This is followed by the role of Christian missions. Thereafter, I considered the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Christian missions, and Christian missions and the new normal. The conclusion of this paper brings together the various arguments, findings and recommendations.

Origins of Covid-19 Pandemic and Nigeria's Encounters

While COVID-19 has attracted international attention since 2019, most African countries and Nigeria, in particular, were oblivious of the pandemic until January 30, 2020, when the Director-General of WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the WHO having observed the high level of mortality in Wuhan, China.¹⁷ Available records indicate that COVID-19 was a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).¹⁸

According to medical experts, genomic analysis proved that SARS-CoV-2 is phylogenetically related to severe acute respiratory syndrome-like (SARS-like) bat viruses. As such, bats could be the primary vector of the disease.¹⁹ It is also believed that Coronavirus belong to the coronaviridae family in the Nidovirales order. It appeared as crown-like spikes on the outer surface of the virus, thus, it was named a coronavirus. An investigation has also revealed that coronaviruses are minute in size 65-125 nm in diameter and contain a single-stranded RNA as a nucleic material, size ranging from 26 to 32 kbs in length.²⁰

China has had a long history of virus infections, for instance in 2003, the majority of the Chinese population were infected with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which originated from

¹⁷Ajisehiri, Odusanya, and Joshi, 2020, p1.

¹⁸Shereen et-al, 2020, p91

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 92.



Guangdong province and gradually spread around the world. Also in 2012, some Saudi Arabian nationals were diagnosed with a virus called the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-Cov). In the report, the World Health Organisation claimed that MERS-coronavirus infected more than 2428 individuals and 838 deaths.²¹

At the close of 2019, the Chinese authorities formally informed the WHO of strange pneumonia with unfamiliar aetiology. The spread was assumed to have originated from the Hunan Seafood Market in the city of Wuhan where a variety of live and roasted animals such as frogs, birds, snakes, bats, marmots and rabbits were sold in large quantities.²² Research findings helped to discover that the spread of the pandemic was human to human, that is, close contact with an infected person and the symptoms included coughing, sneezing, respiratory droplets or aerosol, among others.

Though, it was speculated that the coronavirus was caused by the launch of the 5G Network in China where the pandemic started.²³ The stance of the United States against the development of the 5G Network by China and the attendant publicity in the world gave credence to the idea that the 5G Network was responsible for the pandemic. Thus, it was said that China had failed once again in her secret attempt to develop chemical or nuclear warfare in a laboratory in the city of Wuhan. The laboratory was said to have exploded into the air and therefore resulted in the COVID-19 pandemic. The argument seemed rife considering the speed with which the medical doctor and other medics who first alerted the world of the looming danger of COVID-19 were arrested and silenced, an indication that there was more to it than a mere accusation.

Nigeria's encounters with COVID-19 began on January 27, 2020, when the Federal Government announced the first index case of COVID-19 in Lagos, brought by an Italian (Centre for Disease Control, 2020). Therefore, Nigeria's Minister of Health, Dr Osagie Ehanire said in one of the briefings, "I wish to assure all Nigerians that we have been beefing up our preparedness capabilities since the first confirmation of cases in China, and we will use all the resources made available by the government to respond to this case".²⁴

²¹ Sarkar, R. A., 2019. A Risk factors for fatal middle east respiratory syndrome coronavirus infections in Saudi Arabia, analysis of the WHO Line List, 2013-2018. *Am j Public Health*.vol.109, no, 9, p1288.

²²Wang C., Horby, P.W., Hayden, F. G., Gao, G. F., 2020. A novel coronavirus outbreak of global health concern. *The Lancet*. 2020; www.dw.com >covid-19 Covid-19 –the-pandemic, spreads / DocFilm/DW/ 28 August, 2020.

www.bbc.com >news >world-afric Coronavirus in Nigeria: Inside a Lagos coronavirus ward. 8July,2020 BBC News Africa

²³ Orjinmo, 2020, p2.

²⁴ Ehanire, 2020. First Case of CORONA Virus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria. (<https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/ 227/> Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. 28 February 2020 [Accessed on 11 November 2020.



In a separate Press release, Ehanire said, "We have already started working to identify all the contacts of the patient since he entered Nigeria. Please be reminded that most people who became infected may experience only mild illness and recover easily, but it can be more severe in others, particularly the elderly and persons with other underlying chronic illnesses."²⁵

On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State of a Nigerian who had earlier had contact with the Italian. Due to the unfortunate situation, the Nigerian government outlined modalities to strengthen surveillance at the five International Airports in the country to prevent the further spread of the virus. As part of measures, the Nigerian government formed a Coronavirus Team to alert the authorities and was ready to activate its incident system in case of an outbreak in the country.²⁶The Team later metamorphosed into the "Coronavirus preparedness group" through its nation's leading public health agency, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) commenced point of entry screening for travellers.

The contributions of NCDC to flatten the pandemic curve were commendable. First, it strengthened the National Reference Laboratory with diagnostic capacity for epidemic-prone pathogens. Through this process, the NCDC supported 22 of the 32 states to establish emergency operation centres (EOC) and also trained rapid response teams in the 36 States of the Federation.²⁷Second, the agency provided important public health advisory to Nigerians, shared the case-definition and preventive information with networks of national and sub-national public health workers. Third, it built capacity for contact tracing and case management and at the same time strengthened five laboratories for diagnostic capacities.²⁸

A combination of factors facilitated the task of the NCDC in contact tracing and testing to flatten the spread of the disease. First was the support and cooperation of the general public who heard and also read in the newspapers papers of the death rate in America, Europe and Asia. The second was the determination of the Nigerian government to curb the spread of the pandemic in the country. Therefore with the spike in the COVID-19 pandemic, a Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 was set up to respond to the emergency

²⁵ Ehanire, qtd. In Adepoju, P., (2020). Nigeria's first case of coronavirus disease confirmed in Lagos - healthnews.ng.html. [Accessed 11 November 2020, p1.

²⁶ Odunsi, W. O., 2020. Coronavirus: Nigeria announces preventive measures, releases numbers. (<https://daily.post.ng/2020/01/28/coronavirus-nigeria-announce-s-preventive->

²⁷ Ihekweazu, C., (2020). Steps Nigeria is taking to prepare for cases of Coronavirus 2020. *The Conversation*. 2020 Available from <http://theconversation.com/steps-nigeria-is-taking-to-prepare-for-cases-of-coronavirus-130704>. [Accessed 11 November 2020].

²⁸ Ajisegiri, Odusanya, and Joshi, 2020, p2.



through a multi-dimensional, multi-sectoral and inter-governmental approach.²⁹

The Federal Government also decided to place a travel ban on China, Italy, the US, UK and nine other countries, in addition to the lockdown of Lagos, Ogun State, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja to contain the spread³⁰. There was also a ban on social and religious gatherings, intra and inter-state vehicular movement and people to check the spread of the disease. This development brought temporary disruption in the activities of Christian missions and the emergence of empty pews in Lagos Churches.

The Role of Christian Missions

Nigeria has been described as a religious country with two dominant religions - Christianity and Islam. These worship centres have made a tremendous impact since the nineteenth century when they were first introduced by the Europeans and the Arabs. Before the coming of Europeans, Africans were known for their cultures and social life, with the advent of colonial rule Africa was seen as a "dark continent" "primitive and backward" by Eurocentric scholars.³¹ During the period, European missionaries made concerted efforts to change African customs and behaviours, thus, the years 1841 to 1891 became phenomenal in the making of Christian missions in Nigeria.

It was noted that 1841 was the first Niger Expedition which marked the beginning of the movement to re-establish Christianity in Nigeria after the initial attempt by the Catholic missions and the Portuguese in Benin and Warri Provinces in the 16th century.³² Similarly, 1891 was the year Bishop Samuel Crowther died and this event marked the end of the first phase of the Christian missions in Nigeria. The gains of the movement cannot be glossed over. This is because it produced Western-educated and Christian middle-class elite, including catechists and clerks who took over missionary activities. The period also popularised the art of reading and writing in a hitherto neglected western culture and influence.

²⁹ Agbakwuru, J., 2020. Buhari sets up 12 members Task Force to control Coronavirus, Vanguard News Available from: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/03/buhari-sets-up-12-member-task-force-to-control-coronavirus/> [Accessed on 11 November 2020].

³⁰ Dayo, O., (2020, March 18) UPDATED: Lagos bans religious gathering of over 50 worshippers Available from <https://punching.com/breaking-lagos-bans-religious-gathering-with-over-50-worshippers>) ThePunch Newspaper 18 March 2020 [Accessed on 11 November 2020]

³¹ Olusanya, G. (1984). African Historians and the Pan-Africanist Tradition. In Erim O. Erim and Okon E. Uya (eds.), 1984. *Perspectives and Methods of Studying African History*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publisher, pp10-17.

³² Olukoju, A. 1997. Christianity and the Development of the Nigerian State. In A. Osuntokun and A. Olukoju(eds.), *Nigerian Peoples and Cultures*. Ibadan: Davidson Press, pp136-156.



Between 1841 and 1891, five principal missionary societies had had a foothold in Nigeria. These were the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (W.M.M.S), the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland (UPCS), the Southern Baptist Convention of the U.S.A and the Catholic Society of African Missions of France. These Churches were determined to make converts and spread the Gospel to parts of the country. As part of their legacy, they built schools, missions, and engaged in the development of plantation agriculture and cash crop economy through which they support their home countries and the industrial machines.

According to one of the scholars, "The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century witnessed a new era in the history of Christian missions in Africa. The new era was the establishment of many Churches by Africans, funded and directed by Africans in Africa.³³ Since its inception, Christian missions had a three-pronged mandate of spreading the three C's - Christianity, Commerce, and Western Civilisation.³⁴ Christianity came as an evangelical revival to succour Africans from the bitterness of slavery and the slave trade that occurred for over four hundred and fifty years (450 Years). This is because the abolitionists realised that legitimate trade in agricultural produce would no doubt overturn the infamous trade, while European civilisation would change the barbarism and primitive nature of Africans.³⁵

Thus, Thomas Fowell Buxton, one of the anti-slavery crusaders who was moved by the pitiable conditions of African slaves propounded a blend of Christianity, Civilisation and Commerce in his popular doctrine of the "Bible and the Plough." It explained that the only effective solution to the problem of slavery and slave trade was the destruction of the trade at source and its replacement with commerce and agriculture.³⁶ It was in this sense that the Christian missions deployed men and material in Nigeria in the 1840s and through missionary activities, the British administration found a reliable ally in Lagos and its hinterland.

The religious influence of Christian missions cannot be overemphasised. At the humanitarian level, it was intended to make Nigerians abandon their traditional religions and beliefs to the Christian way of life. Although, they failed in some aspects to suppress the indigenous cultures of Lagos but altered in many ways the life of

³³ Uduak, V.O., 2019. Religion and Migration: Exploring the Role of Deeper Christian Life Bible Church in Global Evangelism. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. 2(3), p.110.

³⁴ Ayandele, 1966, p 8.

³⁵ Olukoju, 1997, p137.

³⁶ Ibid.



the people.³⁷ Apart from this effort, Christian missions were aimed at stopping the spread of Islam which was making steady headway towards Southern Nigeria. Thus, in the early 20th century, the World Missionary Conference (WMC) stressed that the whole strategy of Christian missions in Africa should be viewed in relation to Islam. Aside from this consciousness, the spread of Christianity to Nigeria and Lagos, in particular, was regarded as a religious obligation and civilizing mission.

In the formative years of Christian missions, the majority wore European clothes, took European names at baptism and followed after European customs and social life demanded by missionaries. The missions succeeded in prohibiting human sacrifice, the killing of twins and other primitive practices. More importantly, was the mission's vision of literacy and Western education. Therefore, Mission schools and colleges developed in several parts of Lagos and environs for learning and production of middle-level manpower.

There was also the competition among missions for the making of catechists, teachers and interpreters of European languages. Thus, the Christian missions became an arena of worship and instructions. For instance, once the need for indigenous missionaries arose in a particular environment, their education, training and accommodation became a cardinal issue and this contributed to the spread of the Gospel and the success of Christian missions in Lagos.³⁸

Another important development of the period was the learning of local languages by the European missionaries to preach directly to the people. At first, they made use of liberated slaves converted to Christianity but as Christian missions began to expand, local priests, catechists, and lay churchmen formed part of religious teams and mission staff. Through this opportunity, there was an astronomical increase in the making of African elite who could read and write and this is followed by the introduction of the printing press and the writing of cultural history out of patriotism.

At the economic level, Christian missions promoted the growth of cash crops such as cotton, rubber, palm oil, groundnuts, indigo, sugar, hemp and others. These crops provided raw materials for some industries in Europe. The missionaries also brought with them foreign crops such as maize, cassava, and apples. Others included grapes, pears, oranges, pineapples and bananas, to mention but a few. These food crops supplemented the food culture of Europeans and the food security of the indigenous people. They equally established farms, plantations and experimental gardens where seedlings were raised and distributed to indigenous farmers to improve their yields. For

³⁷ Akpofure, R. and M. Crowder, 1966. Nigeria: A Modern History for Schools. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, p117.

³⁸ Ibid.



instance, there were the Moore Experimental Gardens in Ebute-Metta and Badagry, Lagos.

Similarly, Veterinary Stations were established for the raising of a high breed and disease-free animals such as goats, rams, horses, donkeys, camels, dogs, birds, and donkeys, among others. During the period, missionaries promoted trade in the coastal areas of Lagos and surrounding hinterland and also interfered in the political crisis in Lagos between Obas Akintoye and Dosumu. Indeed, it was the missionaries who supported European traders in calling for British conquest and annexation of Lagos in 1851 and 1861 respectively in the pretext of helping to abolish the slave trade.

However, missionary work in the early years was fraught with challenges, such as language barrier, transportation system, tropical weather and diseases, inadequate personnel and poor accommodation. Others were the hostility of Moslems and traditional worshippers, lack of finance and the nineteenth century Yoruba wars.³⁹ In modern times, the wave of Christian missions has increased with the emergence of Pentecostalism in the 1920s and Charismatic Movements in the 1970s. "Pentecostalism" may be defined as that stream of Christianity that emphasises personal salvation in Christ as "a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit."⁴⁰

Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements shared a lot of spiritual values in common. Both sects believe in miracles and signs of wonders, as well as salvation and sanctification. But more importantly, was the influx of the youths to these movements and the preaching of the Gospel of prosperity. On the other hand, "Charismatic Movements or Charismatic Revival" refers to historically younger Pentecostal independent and para-church movements, many of which function within non-Pentecostal denominations. The term "charismatic" itself derives from St. Paul's reference to *charismata pneumatika*, which means the "Gifts of the Spirit"⁴¹ It has to do with speaking in tongues, prophecies, visions, healing, miracles, signs and wonders which has been imbibed, valued and encouraged among members as proof of active manifestation of God's spirit.⁴²

The growth of the Charismatic Movements is to a certain extent dependent on the economic and socio-political development of Nigeria after 1960. The rapid growth of urbanization in the seventies which resulted from the oil boom coupled with social unrest and political uncertainties contributed indirectly. One of the commentators noted that "the massive growth of churches of African

³⁹Ajayi, 1965, p4.

⁴⁰Asamoah-Gyadu, K. 2006. African Pentecostal/ Charismatic Christianity: An Overview. Category: *Themed Articles* 8, p1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.



provenance in contemporary times is an indication that in 'Africa hands' Christian mission and evangelization have truly gone international and African Diaspora Christianity is at the forefront of the new initiatives."⁴³ For example, the Deeper Life Christian Ministry (DLCM) in its early years (1973-1979) supplied missing aspects in the growing charismatic revival in the educational institutions. These were in the area of teaching and studying the scriptures which the Church has come to be known.⁴⁴

The influence of Christian missions has also expanded in recent times to include evangelism, humanitarian and empowerment of members, support for indigent students and the physically challenged, employment generation, as well as payment of taxes. It is clear from the above that Christian missions contributed immensely to the making of the African elite and the transformation of some African cultures, traditions, and lifestyles.

The Effects of COVID-19 Outbreaks on Christian Missions

The lockdown in the economic and social activities of Lagos on 30 March 2020 came as a shock to many, though it was to prevent the further spread of the dreaded coronavirus pandemic. International attention was directed at the pandemic and how to save the world since the death rate was consistently alarming during the period. There was also increasing fear around the world following the behaviour of Donald Trump, President of America, who threatened to stop America's funding of the World Health Organisation (WHO) because the International Organisation did not criticise or set in motion modalities to punish China for the spread of the pandemic.

The spike in the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 in Lagos, Ogun and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, led the Nigerian authorities to the decision that the country would be in trouble if Lagos, the commercial hub of Nigeria with a high population density is not lockdown. Lagos has a lot of informal settlements and clustered habitations in Makoko, Yaba, Mushin, Ajegunle, Oshodi and Agege which would be difficult for contact tracing and tracking of the disease. Therefore, the occurrence of coronavirus in any part of these clusters would portend danger for Lagos. With the lockdown, it dawned on the public that the COVID-19 pandemic was a deadly virus disease. Therefore, the government embarked on the distribution of palliatives to the vulnerable and widows in the society to alleviate the effects of restrictions of movement, closure of markets, and offices.

The prolonged lockdown of commercial centres and small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) however resulted in robbery, rape,

⁴³Uduak, 2019, p1.

⁴⁴Ojo, 1988, p143.



and social vices as breadwinners no longer provide the essential needs of their families. Therefore, well-meaning individuals pleaded with the government to disburse money directly to the masses through the Bank Verification Numbers (BVN). But others did not support the idea because the supply of palliatives perhaps would alleviate the sufferings of the masses rather than outright payment of cash. Consequently, State Governments across the federation began the distribution of palliatives in various Local Government Areas (LGAs), but the process was not as successful as envisaged because it was hijacked by politicians and party agents.

Following the failure of the government to address the needs of individuals, some Christian missions and non-governmental organisations began to donate money to the government to solve the challenges of food shortages and alleviate the suffering of the masses. Corroborating the idea, Orjinmo said, "The Churches are also making donations to the government and financially stricken worshippers in a move that is likely to see them retain popularity."⁴⁵ Christian missions and non-government organisations embarked on direct distribution of palliatives to members and the vulnerable in society.

For instance, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) donated 200,000 hand gloves, 8,000 hand sanitisers, 8,000 surgical face masks to the Lagos state government. The Head of the Mountain of Holy Ghost Intervention Church (MHGIC), Chukwuemeka Odumeje was known to have provided food to people who were hungry during the two-week lockdown. Odumeje shared not less than 500 cartons of Indomie, 3,000 tubers of yams, rice, and other food items not only for his church members but other people.⁴⁶

The donation of Fifty Million Naira ((N50,000, 000) to the Lagos State Government by a Pentecostal Church with Headquarters in Lagos whose Pastor is known for austere and Stoic life was criticised by members who felt that the donation was their generous giving of tithes and offerings, hence, it ought to have been used for their palliatives.⁴⁷ The effects of lockdown on Christian missions in Lagos cannot be over-emphasised. First, it stopped religious worship in public places; second, Missions outreaches at home and abroad were temporarily interrupted. Third, Church finances declined as offerings and tithes from members were affected by the lockdown. Additionally, it brought spiritual indifference and dryness to believers who could not exercise their spiritual calling. As one of the commentators said, "Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, things have not been the same in every facet of life. There has been a standstill, and the church has not been spared."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Orjinmo, 2020, p3

⁴⁶ Ibid., p4

⁴⁷ Simoye, P. 2020, Personal communication, Lagos. 20 June, 2020.

⁴⁸ Irekamba, 2020, p1.



According to an informant, "the pandemic equally disrupted fieldwork, weekly and monthly programmes, empowerment and humanitarian activities, prison and hospital evangelism, collection of offerings and tithes, among others."⁴⁹ For the first two weeks in Lagos, churches were allowed to maintain social distancing and not have a gathering of more than 25 people. During this period, Church finances had not dwindled as they did at the peak of the lockdown and part-time pastors were still earning their income from employers or personal businesses compared to those not engaged in any vocation.

While many were thinking of the re-opening of business activities and commercial life, on 13 April 2020, the government extended the lockdown of Lagos, Ogun and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) for another two weeks.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the government only relaxed measures on markets and bank services to the neglect of religious worship centres. The actions of the government compounded the duties and obligations of missions in Lagos, members groan and spiritual activities halted. To many, churches would have been a veritable gathering for the sensitization of members on COVID-19 rules and regulations and how to continue with their daily activities without being infected.⁵¹

The burdens of missions escalated because most Church Headquarters were located in Lagos and from here financial assistance were made to outreaches and foreign missions, including the construction of churches, payment of pastors' salaries and other sundry services. Therefore churches began to experience shortages of funds as general offerings; tithes and free-will donations were no longer paid into Church accounts. Thus, reports of financial shortages in foreign missions continued to reach Headquarter Churches with little or no solution in sight. While Church leaders were disturbed that daily and weekly church activities and evangelism had been disrupted by the lockdown of Lagos.

Fig. 1. Anonymous Pentecostal Church in Abuja, 25 December 2020.

⁴⁹Ndubuisi, F., 2020. Personal communication, Lagos. 20 May, 2020.

⁵⁰ Bolaji O. (2020)UPDATED: Buhari extends lockdown for two weeks, makes face mask compulsory. Available from (<https://thenationonlineeng.net/updated-buhari-extends-lockdown-for-two-weeks>)The Nation Newspaper [Accessed on 11 November 2020].

⁵¹Irekamba, 2020, p2.



Source: Author

Efforts to rekindle mission activities could not go far even when churches commenced the home cells or Family church similar to the activities of the early Apostolic Church, the spiritual lives of some members had been affected. To revitalise mission work and spirituality, most churches engaged in radio and television transmission of programmes, internet, and online services but these platforms were not as viable as physical gathering. In the words of one of the Church leaders, "I sometimes cry over the plight of many people. I received text messages every day from so many people, including some that I know and some that I don't even know. They are all asking for help."⁵² As one of the informants stressed: "The period of coronavirus could be likened to the 'Biblical year of the famine,' a period in history when there was no hope yet, there was corn in Egypt."⁵³

Apart from the individuals, mission schools and Universities were also affected by the coronavirus lockdown. Most of the teachers and lecturers were not paid salaries because of the inability of students to pay their school fees. While teachers in private schools pleaded with the government to re-open schools and churches to enable them to continue with their life, teachers in public schools opposed the move because coronavirus was still active and claiming lives in many parts of the world and Nigeria is no exception. A closer look at their arguments suggests that public school teachers were not hard hit as those in private schools because their monthly salaries were regular from the government unlike their counterparts in the private schools.

The conflict of interest also played out between mega-churches and smaller churches. Since the mega-churches derived support from

⁵² *Ibid.*, p3.

⁵³ Onyembu, J. 2020. Personal communication, Lagos, 2 September, 2020.



foreign headquarters and donor agencies they argued that government should not make the mistake of re-opening worship centres because it would cause a spike in the pandemic while the smaller churches with headquarters in Lagos mounted pressure for the re-opening of worship centres. This implied that in every society there is self-interest and missions are no exceptions. It was the lingering arguments of stakeholders that prolonged the re-opening of schools and Christian missions in Lagos.

Also worthy of mention was the fact that the Federal Government of Nigeria was not in a hurry to re-open the lockdown because African nations had been receiving donations and medical supplies from European countries, China, and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Therefore, re-opening the economy and worship centres would likely affect the aid from foreign donors and Non-governmental Organisations which the present government would not desire since Nigeria's economy was suffering from balance of payment disequilibrium.

Christian Missions and the New Normal

The coronavirus pandemic certainly had a significant impact on Christian missions. Following the lockdown in the social and economic activities of Lagos, the question on the lips of many is how would churches cope with the situation? Three weeks into the lockdown, many churches were yet to have a breakthrough on how to reach out to members until it dawned on them that the use of social media, radio and television transmission of programmes would serve the purpose. But the first generation churches such as the Roman Catholic, Baptist, and Anglican Churches had hiccups because these churches were dominated by the aged who had little or no knowledge of the present digital age compared to the youths in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches. Therefore, the lockdown caused by the coronavirus led to the evolution of digital and online churches in Lagos.

During the period, weekly and daily online podcasts and webcasts were introduced to members in the transition to the "new normal". Through social media, many people connect to church programmes and activities around the world. Internet and online streaming of programmes were also harnessed by church leaders and members, and through these means, they adjust to the situation. Another transformation brought by the coronavirus-19 lockdown was the ingenuity of some Church choirs who showcased their rehearsals and choir practices online, similar to the tradition in some House Fellowship Centres (HFC) where zoom and webcasts were deployed leading to the success of social distancing and contact tracing.

Another significant development of the 'new normal' was the procurement of smart and android phones by Church members with



which they connect to programmes and events in churches. The adjustment made it possible for Sunday services to be conducted on radio and television and social media. The beauty of the transition was that it initiated many into the age of information, communication and technology. It also spurred competition of programmes, as churches intensified their efforts to employ different media channels to reach out to members and the public in general. Records indicate that the lockdown caused by coronavirus pandemic brought new enlightenment and global ideas in the organisation of missions. Thus, Church leaders and members continue to adjust and diversify the work of evangelism, church outreaches, social and humanitarian activities.

Part of the new knowledge and culture included the use of Google classroom, Twitter and WhatsApp in meetings and interactions with members, friends, and families. The period also popularised the use of zoom and webinar platforms, Facebook, text messages, telegrams, and other electronic resources for conferences and seminar programmes similar to the use of radio and television programming that have wider coverage and audience. "Sometimes, family members gathered at the parlour to listen to their Pastors and General Overseers (GOs) deliver spiritual messages and words of encouragement to members through radio and television channels"⁵⁴

"The blessings gave courage to Christians that the pandemic was a visitor that must be conquered if not now later in the future. There was also the reassurance that God understood the situation and nothing is too difficult for him."⁵⁵ One of the lessons of the pandemic years was the "failure of false prophets," they were unable to see the future using their crystal-ball, and also incapable of attending to the predicaments of members. While members looked to them to stop the pandemic, they were helpless in their garbs as their works were fictional and fictitious.

Another method through which missions cope with the lockdown was by setting up HFCs in various parts of Lagos. Even though this has been in practice before COVID-19, it proved more successful in adjusting to the situation.⁵⁶ In most HFC, sanitisers, soaps, infra-thermometers and nose covers were available to members. Also, test kits and hand washing basins were positioned at strategic locations of the church premises, while others had banners with inscriptions, "No Entry without Nose Mask," "Sanitize Your Hands Here," and "Have a Cough or Frequent Sneezing See Our Doctors." To ensure compliance with the rules and regulations of the COVID-19 pandemic, most churches established visitation teams who went around their church locations to

⁵⁴ Elumelu, H. 2020. Personal communication, Lagos, 20 May, 2020.

⁵⁵ Okoh, S. 2020. Personal communication, Lagos, 10 June, 2020.

⁵⁶ rekamba, 2020, p3.



ascertain the level of compliance to avoid the spread of the dreaded virus.

Fig. 2, Health Safety Notice



Source: Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Lagos. 10 October 2020.

It helped members maintain a steady relationship and contact with old and new converts. This was achieved through regular phone calls, use of emails, WhatsApp, Facebook, text messages, and telegram, to mention but a few. This is corroborated by Irekamba in the following lines, "Missions employed social media, such as Facebook, youtube, Instagram, telegrams, and zoom in most church activities. Through these electronic and internet resources, members overcame the lockdown and social distancing caused by the coronavirus"⁵⁷

The benefits of electronic and internet platforms were immense. They helped to keep church activities alive, maintain social distance, and flatten the COVID-19 pandemic curve. Also, the speed with which messages were relayed through electronic devices to members and feedback obtained was rewarding. This is because it brought the world into a global village, connecting the people and connecting the world. In counting the cost of the coronavirus pandemic, it is noted that the use of electronic devices and purchase of recharge cards for airtime was expensive since the majority were at home almost doing nothing. The transition to online and social media programming contributed to the expenses of the home. Lack of funds in most homes also brought reluctance to regular church

⁵⁷ibid.



programmes, supporting the palliative teams, and assistance to members.

The contributions of Christian missions during the lockdown were outstanding. The Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches organised cells and networks for the distribution of palliatives to members and non-members. These palliatives included noodles, rice, beans, garri, yams, powdered yams and cassava (*elubo*), and other foodstuffs. They also supplied cooked foods; clothing and bedding materials to the Physically Challenged Homes. Additionally, toiletries, disinfectants and boreholes were provided to the Blind Centres and Abandoned Babies Homes to give them a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, pastors of various church branches were mandated to identify the poor and widows in their midst for the supply of palliatives. This humanitarian gesture helped the majority overcome the lockdown since they had supplies. The provision of test kits, nose cover, infra-thermometer and medical equipment in Isolation Centres by churches showed the determination to overcome the virus. Though, this effort was criticised by some church members who complained that government palliatives only went to people who voted them into power. Government palliatives also turn out to be ingredients of wooing people into their political parties similar to the distribution of "Traders' Money" in Nigeria.

On 7 August 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria, after due consultations re-opened the COVID-19 lockdown on Churches and other worship centres. But the index cases in Lagos had risen to 12,000 with 700 fatalities. Indeed, the pandemic has left some lessons in the history of diseases, as well as the inequality between the poor and the rich in society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We have attempted in this paper to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Christian missions in Lagos. There is no doubt that the pandemic came as a surprise in 2019 from Wuhan, China and spread to Africa in 2020 without any cure in sight. Consequently, African' countries embarked on a lockdown of industries, movement of people, and worship centres to curb the spread of the disease. The Nigerian government also took proactive measures by banning international flights, setting up testing centres, tracking contacts, inaugurating the COVID-19 Team, as well as the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

The Team also embarked on contact tracing following the first index case in Lagos and later Ogun State and Abuja respectively. With the rapid spread of the pandemic, the Federal Government of Nigeria announced a total lockdown of Lagos, Ogun State, and Abuja on 30 March 2020. This is because these cities were epicentres of the



coronavirus and also commanded industrial and human populations. Due to this development, the activities of Christian missions in Nigeria were temporarily grounded to avoid the further spread of the pandemic.

Thus, Church activities, Mission schools, Prison and Hospital Evangelism, as well as the collection of tithes came to an abrupt halt. Christian missions began to support the government through donations and provision of palliatives to members and neighbours. Some Churches also donated physical cash, noodles and rice, testing kits, and medical equipment to the government to alleviate the sufferings of the common people since government alone cannot solve the problems of the whole country.

To keep the churches alive and adjust to the social change known as 'the new normal', Church leaders began virtual meetings with members, others connected through zoom, Instagram, Facebook, radio and television programmes. Also during the period, House Fellow Centres were established in various Believers' homes to adhere to the rules of social distance, while the making of coverts continued through the use of text messages, WhatsApp, phone discussions, webinars, and online programmes. Most churches also utilised webcasts, podcasts, and online meetings in their teachings and reaching out to members. Given the above, the following

Findings and recommendations are made:

1. This study established that the impact of coronavirus on Christian missions in Lagos was huge because it caused temporary disruptions in the activities of churches, Mission schools, physical and spiritual well-being of leaders and members.
2. The period initiated Church members into working from home since missions and movement of people was restricted.
3. Most Church leaders in the informal sector economy and small and medium scale enterprises(SMSE) enjoyed more working hours and increased productivity as a result of the involvement of family members.
4. The paper revealed that on the re-opening of lockdown in August 2020, most Christian missions in Lagos have undergone aspects of social change in the use of social media, online programming, virtual meetings, and management of funds, while members had acquired new knowledge in the use of electronic devices and other applications for evangelism, prayer meetings and conferences.

The study concluded that a continuous adaptation to the new normal in Church activities will augment physical gathering, make social distance possible, and connect the world faster irrespective of distance and cultures.



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