

## **The Church Perspective of Disease Control in Africa: A Case of Covid-19 Global Pandemic**

Johnwealthy Jacob Wobodo  
Religious And Cultural Studies  
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education  
Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
Email: johnwealthyjwobodo@gmail.com  
Cell: +2348039391050, +2347030227006

### **Abstract**

Corona Virus code-named COVID 19 is a contagious disease that is currently threatening human existence. Since its outbreak and spread across the globe, the world system is almost at a standstill. Experts have advocated social distancing and the use of other suppressive methods of hand washing and hygienic practices amid the pandemic as a strategy to curtail its spread. While this strategy appears to have worked considerably, the pandemic has in no small way created socio-economic dislocations and hardship for a great number of people in Africa resulting largely from the way many governments have responded to it. This paper, therefore, examines the church perspective of disease control in Africa. It deployed historical and phenomenological methods of research. The paper determined the extent to which the church responded and contributed to the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic around the world. While recognizing governments' efforts at providing palliatives at this critical time, it argues that the church is better placed to distribute the government palliatives to avoid the corruption that has characterized the entire programme. It concludes that The African herbal knowledge together with church prayers have better chances of providing lasting cure to Corona virus infection where science and technology have so far failed the world.

**Keywords:** Church Perspective, Disease Control, Covid-19 Pandemic, Africa

### **Introduction**

The outbreak of corona virus and its consequent upsurge around the world has raised a great concern for humanity. While the death toll and number of infections are still on the rise in many countries, scientists around the world are yet to come up with potent vaccines to cure it. The church as an institution is also concerned. The church is not naive of epidemics and has often responded through prayer, fasting, and even medically. Different reasons are given to have been the cause of diseases in human history, apart from religious belief, scientifically, it is the human contact with viruses and disease-carrying plants or animals, diet deficiencies, lack of exercise or good body care, injury, hereditary defects, the ingestion of harmful substances (drugs and poison), wearing out or degeneration of body organs, contact with extreme heat or

cold. The symptom is observed when there are changes in the body that indicate a physical problem. These body changes indicate the nature of the disease and become the first clues that the medical professional uses to make a diagnosis (Collins 2007). As Wariboko and Asuevia (2013) observed, science and technology have triggered an overwhelming change in society. The science and technological advancement have altered the natural environment and religious perspective of the world. The belief that diseases and sickness were caused by supernatural forces is replaced by the right knowledge of germs. Despite the so-called 'right knowledge of germs' and transmutation of the 21st-century society, experience has shown that some diseases or illnesses in Africa do not have laboratory cure. As Wotogbe-Weneka (2012) rightly observed "notwithstanding

the level of our scientific development, the fact remains that witchcraft-related diseases/sickness cannot be determined in the science laboratory but through the traditional African devices." We rather agree with his view but, in furtherance, the church believes that some diseases can only be cured in the laboratory by fasting and prayer, as her Master has power over the spiritual and temporal diseases. According to Wotogbe -Weneka (2012) "that is why some sincere western medical scientists even confess what they cannot find out in the science laboratory and advise that cure for the sickness be tried through the alternate medication method, and sometimes this works." As he rightly observed Orthodox medical scientists confess that "we treat but, God heals.' This assertion is imperative in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic that is currently ravaging the people around the world. Therefore the world leaders, sacred or secular, opt to bi-sensically hold on God, as medical efforts are being made. The church must arise and direct the world leaders of the need to anchor on God's medicine (the word), at the same time not negating the medical remedies for its cure. The World is right now on fire, with different jargon of expression: corona virus world war, hunger virus, fear virus, palliative, quarantine, isolation, social distancing, and lockdown, short down, 24 hours curfew, etc. The anxiety, fear, untold hardship, deaths as a result of these few months of COVID-19, is like an unfriendly August visitor, aligned with what Billy Graham (qtd in Wotogbe-Weneka 2012) once wrote: "our world is on fire, and a man without God will not be able to control the flames." Mistakenly, Leaders of the World seem to have neglected God amid the Covid-19 pandemic, and our fear should be if corona virus is of God, what will scientific laboratory do, rather the world opt with God through man will provide

ways out of this terrible time in the human history.

### **The Church**

The word "Church" emanated from the Greek word *ecclesia* which simply means an assembly or called out ones or elects. The church is a congregation of people who share the same faith and fellowship that have faith in Jesus Christ (Adetumbi 2017). But, in Hebrew, the term Church has translated *kehalYahweh*: the community of God. In the Jewish background, it is *edhah* which translates assembly like synagogue where people congregate for purposes of worship (Achunike 1996). Therefore, the Greek word "Ekklessia" is a synonym of the Hebrew word "kehal Yahweh" and the Jewish word "edhah" which simply means Church today. Achunike (1996) observed that the use of the Church is now extended to concrete buildings instead of people gathered for worship. He also pointed out that the Church denotes a branch of Christianity. It is against this background that we look at the church from various strands of Christianity. Church in this sense refers to churches and denominations such as Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Protestant Church, African Independent Churches, Pentecostal, and Neo-Pentecostal Churches. Scholars have observed the Church be assemblies of the brethren or individual Church or group of Churches rather than just a building. Berkhof (2006) opined that local Churches were established everywhere, and were also called *ekklesiai*, since they were manifestations of the one universal Church of Christ. According to him, *ekklesiai* (The Church) refers to: A circle of believers in locale (Acts 5:11, 11: 26, 1 Cor. 11:18, 14:19, 28, 35; Rom 16:4; 1 Cor 16:1; Gal. 1:2). A domestic *Ekklesia* i.e. Church in the individual house (Rom. 16:23, 1 Cor. 16:19;

col. 4:15, Phil vs. 2). A group of Churches (Acts 9:31).

It is the whole body throughout the world, of those who outwardly profess Christ and organized for worship, under the guidance of appointed officers (1 Cor. 10:32, 11:22, 12:28). In other words, the most comprehensive meaning of the word church rather refers to the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth that has been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their saviour. On the other hand, the Church as designated in the New Testament refers to, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27); the temple of the Holy Spirit or God (1 Cor. 3:16, Eph. 2:21-22, Peter 2:5); the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2). The Church is a peculiar called out people on earth to practice Christ's lifestyle.

### **What is Disease?**

The disease has been described as an illness affecting humans, animals, or plants, often caused by infection (Oxford Dictionary, 2006). For example, Leprosy, an infectious disease that causes painful white areas on the skin and can destroy nerves and flesh. A person suffering from leprosy is called a leper. The Leper is a person that other people avoid because they have done something that those people do not approve of. Another example is Malaria- a disease that causes fever and shivering (shaking of the body) caused by the bite of some types of mosquito. Tuberculosis is also a serious infectious disease in which swellings appear in the lungs and other parts of the body. Another disease is Ebola, a hemorrhagic fever called Ebola virus. It is a disease caused by four different strains of Ebola virus. These viruses infect humans and nonhuman primates (www.medicinenet.com). These diseases are in existence before the outbreak of coronavirus.

### **Brief History of COVID-19 Pandemic around the World**

Corona virus pandemic is a contagious disease that is currently ravaging the world. A new strain of the virus that affects respiratory organs, COVID-19, was reported in Wuhan, China in late- December 2019; it is now world pandemic. As of May 22, 2020, corona virus cases have affected 212 countries and territories around the world and 2 international conveyances. As of May 22, 2020, more than 5.1 million corona virus cases have been reported, with 333,000 deaths around the World. In Nigeria, the first confirmed case of corona virus disease was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus, caused by SARS-CoV-2. On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, and a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen (NCDC.GOV.NG & Wikipedia). Gradually and steadily many Nigerians were infected by the virus such that on May 22, 2020, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has reported 7,016 confirmed cases, discharged cases of 1907 and 211 deaths.

### **Christian Perspective on the Cause of Disease**

The cause of diseases in Christian perspective anchors on Old and New Testaments background. The Bible revealed that "all sickness is ultimately a result of the fall" of man. According to Larbi (qtd in Adeyemo 2006) "Diseases may be a punishment for violations of God's laws, while continued obedience to God may ensure good health." However, in the case of Job, it was observed that disease does not represent divine punishment. In response to the cause of disease, particularly the man born blind, Jesus Christ rightly said "This happened so that work of God might be delayed in his life" (John 9:3). Jesus

recognized also that some sickness is demonic in origin. Healing as observed in Adeyemo (2006) 'is the manifestation of God's goodness and compassion in response to human suffering.' In Old Testament accounts, a few of God's miracle healings were recorded, as in cases of Miriam (Num12:9-16), Jeroboam (1Kgs13:4-6), the widow's son (1Kg17:17-24), Naaman (2Kgs5:8-14) among others. On the other hand, Jesus cured the blind, the lepers, the disabled and paralyzed (Mark8:22-26, 9:17-27, John 9, Matt. 9:2-7), and he commissioned his disciples to continue the healing ministry.

### **The Cause of Diseases in Africa Perspective**

Africans believe that there is nothing that happens without a cause in human history; this thought by Africans is universal as last mover (cause) of everything has identified in history as God. So, a disease in African society's belief could have been caused by either a taboo committed, disobedient to the law of the land, immoral life lived, invocations against one, and many other things (Amaechi 2008). Tasies (2008) observed that "In traditional world-view Africans scarcely attributed material causes to ill health. Every sickness was thought to have external causes attributable to God's anger, ancestral anger, the divinities, sorcery, witchcraft, bad destiny, etc." Adeyemo (2006) affirmed that "In traditional African cosmology, God is the ultimate source of sickness and health..." In Ghana Proverbia's expression, it is observed that "Divinities and ancestor are mediators of health while diseases are regarded as having both natural and supernatural sources; ultimate causality is assigned to the supernatural. God can send disease, but more common diseases are understood to be caused by evil forces such as witchcraft and sorcery or to be a result of one's own evil

deeds. This truth on the cause of diseases in Africa reflected in the illusion of Ikwerre and Yoruba beliefs on smallpox disease. The Yorubas believed that Sopono is the god of the disease of smallpox and the god punishes offenders with the disease. They accepted such an illusion of the disease with cheerfulness, joy, gratitude, and without compliant as observed in Tasies (2008). However, western-style care via the Christian services weakened the illusion of god's alleged cause of diseases and prevention of such disease. It was observed that Sopono has lost out to vaccination, again and eventual extermination of smallpox. The same orientation is observed from the History of St Barnabas' Anglican Church, Igwuruta District, 1910-2014 that disobedience to gods is the root cause of many diseases and punishments on Ikwerre land (Wobodo 2015). Ikwerre people also believe that Ojukwu was the goddess of smallpox. The belief was that there was no cure for smallpox and any person affected with it live seclusion in a nearby forest. Sending the victim to nearby forests may also mean social distancing as in lepers and recent Covid-19 disease (Coronavirus). But the victim has socially kept a distance from others as a result of the disease, was looked after by a victim who survived it earlier. But painfully, if they could not find such an earlier survivor to care for the new victim using red cam-wood paste (Uhie), the person would remain on the nearby forest and some time eventually die. This illusion of traditional Ikwerre society was weakened with the advent of Christianity in Ikwerre and subsequent provision of drugs and vaccines for smallpox. Fleck (2013) observed that "it has often been claimed that illness and poverty were caused by witches who brought terrible misfortune to those around them." He opined that children had often been accused of being witches. The deeply held belief in and fear of child

witchcraft cut across all sections of society. Of course, with the age of Christianity in African, science and technology, we thought that obnoxious beliefs would have been a thing of the past. But many Africans, Christians and non-Christians believed that most of their problems and diseases are caused not only by child witchcraft, but Mother, Father, or Uncle Witchcrafts. They believed that a spiritual spell could have been given to a person through food and drink which afterward cause sickness.

### **African's Response to Diseases**

**Africa Traditional Doctor:** Some African medicines men and women helped Africans to tackle these diseases. Mbiti (qtd in Amaechi 2008) observed that Medicine men are the greatest gift and the most useful source of help. African medicine men are also known as herbalists, traditional doctors. Ujoma (qtd in Kehinde 2017) observed that there were traditional healing and medical practices which include herbalists, divine healers, soothsayers, midwives, spiritualists, born-setters, mental health therapists and surgeons in Africa.

**Game Blame :** Is described as a situation in which people attempt to blame others rather than trying to resolve a problem. Africans blamed the diseases on gods, witches, evil and wicked people. On some occasions, the alleged witches or evil persons are killed, with the belief that those under his/her spell will be healed.

**The Offering of Sacrifices:** Offering is seen as something that is given to God as part of religious worship. They offered sacrifices' to gods by their diviners who work to appease the gods in the god's inflicted disease. For example, David Orji was prevented from dying prematurely like his senior siblings through the help of a diviner who offered sacrifice in furtherance revealed

to his parents not to circumcise him like a baby until the age of 20, as an adult.

**Social Distancing:** It means keeping a certain distance from other people, in this case, keeping physical distance as a result of disease Africans observed and practiced social distancing before now. Of course, that was why those inflicted with smallpox (ojukwu as called in Ikwerre) were sent to the nearby forest from where they looked after a survived victim (s).

**Prayer:** Prayer simply means communication between man and God or other divinities. Is not a gainsaying that prayer was another way through which Africans responded to diseases. The majority of prayers are addressed to God and some to the living dead or other spiritual beings. The people through the Priest present the individual petitions for healings, and why, those who are healthy, prayed for protection from illness, dead and other maladies.

### **Missionary Response to Diseases in Africa**

Missionaries responded to disease control and cure all over the world. In Africa, the Missionaries came with a total message of Jesus Christ that cares for the body, soul and spirit. It was observed that Mary Slessor“ Always...Carried medicine for sick bodies as well as Christ's Medicine for their sin-sick souls. She found that human ministrations did far more to break down the wall of heathen opposition than her talks given at Sunday meetings"(Fleck2013).This assertion by Mary Slessor formed our cleared opinions and back ground on the missionary response to diseases in Africa. In Senegal, Falk(1987) observed the difficulty faced by missionaries in 1862, which of course was a general phenomenon in African continent. As he observed for first sixty years the majority of men sent out to



preach the gospel either died or were compelled to leave after a few months of service because of ill health (disease). But the Missionaries in addition to prayer built and established dispensary to tackle the spread and cure of diseases in Senegal. In Nigeria, the Niger Expedition of 1841 is a good example on how missionaries responded to disease and death caused by ill-health. Tasies (2008) observed at the down of the 17century, West African was notorious as the 'Whiteman's grave,' and many of the European missionaries who visited died of malaria or one of the many tropical diseases. Fleck(2013) described the 1841 Niger Expedition as thus: "The scenario as however, trails, were beginning to overshadow the expedition and there was great deal of sickness with the crew on the steam boat 'Wilberforce' and soon it resembled a hospital within a month, it was decided to send two of the steamers back to Fernando Po with the dead and dying. Precisely, out of 150 European 49 died within a month, with many sick of malaria.The Missionaries responded by discovery quinine as remedy for the treatment of malaria.The Missionaries built and established dispensaries and hospitals in Nigerian as a means of converting Africans to Christian faith. Fleck(2013) observed the missionary response to malaria epidemic in 1854 Niger Expedition as follow, there was"no European died of fever during the journey which took 118 days. this was the result of quinine being used for first time as anti-malaria....it was proved that by taking proper Precautions and using of quinine freely, it was possible for Europeans to venture the river for short periods."The Missionary in Nigerian gave special attention to lepers.Church in African contributed greatly to the care and healing of the lepers in the region; Leprosy as has been observed was prevalent in parts of the equatorial forest belt of Africa.From West to

East Africa,the missionary societies established leprosy colonies with hospitals where treatment was given to lepers.The missionaries taught Africans the basic hygiene and opened dispensaries and hospitals to treat the sick and maternity wards to help save the lives of new born and their mothers (Fleck2013).At Uburu for example, a missionary Dr. Hasting secured a piece of land for a leprosy camp, to enable the patients to come regularly to the hospital for treatment. It was observed by 19441,111Leprosy patients were on the roll for treatment. In Liberia, Hope Town a leprosy centre of the Assemblies of God was established; it occupied 350 acres of land where the Leprosy patients were settled. The Missionary understood the important of social distancing without arguing what God could do, but did there's.In addition, the Baptist's church had a centre for treatment of leprosy at central province of Liberia. In Ghana, the Worldwide Evangelical crusade treated leprosy patients.Falk(1987)observed that similarly, in one country after another ,those with leprosy are treated in order to alleviate their deplorable condition and,if possible, to integrate them into society.Infurtherance, this paper observed that the missionary response to diseases control and cure as follows:They prayed for the sick.,they built hospitals and health centres,They taught the people basic hygiene,they observed Social Distancing which led to establishment of Leper's colonies across the West Africa especially Nigeria:Uzoa Koli (Abia State),Oji River(Enugu State),Abudu (Edo State), Ago Ireti (Ondo State),Zaria (Kaduna State).

#### **Africa Independent Churches (AICs) Response to Diseases**

Isichei (qtd in Owete and Iheacho 2008) observed that Aladura churches emerged as a response to a society in crisis, afflicted by epidemics (influenza, smallpox, and plague)

famine and world depression. Deji and Ishola (2013) observed how circumstantial factors led to the establishment of AICs. As they wrote ... "These may be divided into two: the world influenza epidemic and the economic depression which followed." The 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic influenced Pentecostal growth across the globe and was instrumental in creating Independent Churches in West Africa who turned to fervent prayer and criticized mission churches for a lack of confidence in God. Deji and Ishola (2013) observed that the plague or disaster has been described as 'bubonic and smallpox epidemics.' According to them "it is recorded that within a short time as many died from the plague as had died from the four years (1914-1918) of deadly conflict on the battlefield. It was estimated that over ten million persons died from the disease. In Nigeria, it was observed that the disease claimed thousands of lives, and there was apprehension everywhere as the disease was spreading swiftly. AICs believe in faith healing, therein they insist on the work of Holy Spirit in the revelation and healings of the sick. They are known as prayer or spiritual churches as observed by ElechiAmadi (qtdTasie 2008) "most of the spiritual churches have prophets and apostles who are reputed to have the power of traditional medicine men." Deji and Ishola (2013) observed the indigenous Christian leaders and their followers started prayer band and healing meetings to tackle the outbreak of disease. These prayer groups culminated in the establishment of congregations like the Cherubim Seraphim society, the Diamond Society, the Faith Tabernacle among others which subsequently separated from the mainline churches.

### **The Church Response to Covid-19 Pandemic around the World**

The Church across the globe has responded to Covid-19 pandemic in various ways. It is against the background that we discuss the response of the Church from the following subheadings:

#### *Social Distancing*

Social distancing, in other words, physical distancing, means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. On the other hand, it involves keeping a certain distance from others (the distance specified may differ from time to time and country to country or even states) and avoiding gathering together in large groups. In a practical term, individuals are to stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from each other. Historically social distancing has been in practice before the term was introduced in the twenty-first century, its background date back to at least the fifth century BC. The Bible has one of the earliest known references to the practice in the Book of Leviticus 13:46: "And the leper in whom the plague is ... he shall dwell alone; (outside) the camp shall his habitation be." In Africa, social distancing and what it stands for has been practiced in antiquity. In contemporary times, social distancing measures have been successfully implemented in several epidemics. The church is not naive in responding to the covid19 pandemic around the world. The church has, like other sectors, practiced social distancing as a way to control the spread of corona virus around the world. It is non- pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) but a method used to reduce the spread of the virus, as long as the virus is circulating in the human population, or until a vaccine

becomes available. By reducing the probability that a given uninfected person will come into physical contact with an infected person, the disease transmission can be suppressed, resulting in fewer deaths. The measures are used in combination with good respiratory hygiene and hand washing by a population. In face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) suggested favourable term "physical distancing" as opposed to "social distancing", in keeping with the fact that it is a physical distance that prevents transmission; people can remain socially connected via technology. Social-distancing measures are used, including the closing of schools and workplaces, isolation, quarantine, restricting the movement of people, and the cancellation of mass gatherings (Wikipedia). Umberto Bacchi(www.vaticannews) observes that "As countries implement social distancing and lockdowns due to the corona virus pandemic, many places of worship have been forced to close." Churches are now keeping space 2 arms between members to prevent the spread of Covid-19 among adherents. Apart from that, churches amid Covid-19 in some countries are asked not to have more than 50 members in service. In terms of restriction, Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious faiths have stopped their custom of knocking on doors.

#### *Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)*

The wheels of ICT have a phenomenological influence on the fight against corona virus across the globe, in the dissemination of information about its crunch and havoc to almost all human sectors. The church-like other sectors have responded to the fight against Corona virus through the use of ICT devices and applications. Bacchi (www.vaticannews) was right when he observed that "As corona virus closes

churches, synagogues, and mosques worldwide, religious leaders are taking faith online to ensure God's word gets to the millions marooned by the pandemic. "ICTs amid COVID-19 have allowed the church to socially and spiritually connect in areas where her buildings are closed or locations where physical distancing is practiced. As we observed many of the Churches around the world have responded to the upsurge of COVID-19 by asking their members to join their services, activities/programmes via ICTs. For example, Casey Cep, on 29 March 2020 (www.Newyorker.com) wrote "The Gospel in a time of social distance: Turning Outward to one another as corona virus locks us down." She observes how "Many years ago, there was a debate at a rural church about whether the pastor needed a cellular telephone for his ministry. "Today, ICTs called it websites, e-mail, YouTube, Facebook life, WhatsApp, all would enhance social distancing and the same time enhances worship experience of churches across the globe. In Sydney "Hundreds of Sydney Anglican Congregation have held church services via live stream or video-conference for the second week in a row, on a special day of prayer for the effects of the corona virus"(Sydneyanglicans.net). In Spain, the Bishop's Conference suspended all talks, concerts, and catechesis sessions on church premises, and urged Catholics "with chronic diseases, elderly, weakened or with potential risk, and those who live with them" to follow masses via the media"(www.the tablet.co.UK). In Poland, the Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki urged Catholics to use a special dispensation to stay away from Sunday mass and watch or listen to services on TV or radio instead. In Germany, Mainz Diocese, a 52 years Bishop Peter Ichohgraf (www.the tablet.co.UK), who was diagnosed with coronavirus noted that "churches would be open for private prayer, with masses and sermons available on TV, radio, and



internet." In Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) amid an upsurge of Covid-19 directed churches in the country to conduct services online.' Nigerian churches responded to the directive as they used ICTs to reach out to their members across the globe with the gospel. For example, Anglican cable Network Nigeria (ACNN) is used to reach out to the public on the issue of the Covid-19 pandemic and faith. Omega Power Ministries (OPM) announced its programs via ICT platforms. Pastor Isaac Oyedepo (www.today.ng) on 14 Mach 2020 wrote "we are all encouraged to join a live broadcast streamed from our website and YouTube page. We are already victorious, although we are God's children; we are still housed in a physical body. The health and safety of everyone who walks through our doors are of priority to us at winner" Salvation Ministry, Deeper Life Bible Church, etc. fully embarked on the utility of ICT devices and applications, notwithstanding that the above churches have been using ICTs in their worship before now.

#### *Suppressive/Hygienic Method*

Amid this Covid-19, the church has joined in the practice of hand washing. Also, some of the churches provided small water tanks with soap or sanitizer in the front of their churches. Close of churches in some locale, suspension of rituals like Holy Communion, burial, marriage in some quarters.

#### *Prayer/Fasting*

The church around the world calls on her members to pray and fast amid the covid19 pandemic. For example, CAN ask churches in Nigeria to observe March 22 and 29, 2020 as days of prayers against the corona virus pandemic in the world (premium times ng.com). Most Rev.Okoh (The Primate Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion)

urged everyone to seek the face of God through prayer and fasting that God will deliver us from COVID-19." The primate directed that prayers should be offered in these prayer hours: 12noon, 3:00 pm, and 6:00 pm." According to him, God's word is assuring us that when we pray He will answer us"(Anglican.nig.ng).

#### *Welfare and Palliative*

Churches have embarked on welfare amid the COVID-19 pandemic around the world. The word 'Palliative' was commonly used by politicians and government amid the COVID-19, as an assistant to poor and vulnerable people in the society. Palliative means medicine or medical treatment that reduces pain without curing its cause. In other words, it is an action, a decision, etc. that is designed to make a difficult situation seem better without actually solving the cause of the problems (Oxford dictionary 2006). Palliative as assistance by churches, spirited individuals, organizations, and governments around the globe would refer to as a prototype of Welfare. On the other hand, Collins observed three meanings of the term welfare, among which are health assistant, help amid financial problems, and money paid (by the government) to people who are unemployed, poor, or sick (Wobodo, 2020). For example, Anglican Diocese of Ikwerre gave palliative to about five hundred members of her churches (Stations, Parishes, Districts, and Cathedral). The Mega Power Ministries (OPM) also gave palliative to the public. In Nigeria and across the globe, there were estimated numbers of assistance rendered to people in which space and time would not allow us to mention them all.

#### **Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion has created a strong belief that African Christianity and herbalist knowledge are in a good position

to direct the world in the fight against corona virus. Notwithstanding the laudable effort of Madagascar, an Africa country that has already produced a probable cure for COVID-19, called 'organic herbal medicine.' African continent ought to have been more confident than other continents of the world. This is because of her experience of malaria, Ebola, influenza, smallpox, among other diseases that are not common in other continents. As stated else-where, Africans and Christianity in Africa have contributed to the cure and healings of patients with these diseases, through their prayers, traditional medicines, and orthodox medicines, sometime concurrently. As this paper has shown, it explains why a person under treatment in the orthodox hospital may be attended with additional traditional medicine while still on the hospital bed. This has given a clear picture of how healing media work in Africa, in this case of corona virus, the church can concurrently pray for the patient to be healed, or even recommend herbal medicine for the patient given that there is no clear, proven scientific cause or cure. Rather, what is making the rounds are assumptions that range from the virus (germ), G-6 network, sin, to God's (gods) punishment. The church amid COVID-19 is in a position to ask for God's mercy on the earth and the same time glorify Him, anchoring her faith strongly on His healing power

### **Recommendations**

In order to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, which is currently ravaging the World, we recommend as thus :

1. Churches around the World should endeavour to build quarantine and isolated centres for her suspects and sick ones, from where orthodox or herbal medicine with prayer are concurrently offered for his/her healing.

2. The church should work in solidarity with the government and other organizations in assisting the poor and vulnerable people in their congregations and host communities. This will bring about a check and balance between the organizations amid COVID-19 palliative. In Nigeria for example, Federal and State Governments, particularly Rivers State, the palliatives given, do not have a clear estimate of persons or households they assisted. Both levels of government, perhaps including the local government have been alleged corrupt amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To avoid such a scenario again, the government should give palliative to church for onward sharing to the poor and the church in turn should give account on how it was shared in different locales.
3. Churches that are not yet practicing social distancing should do so, to avoid and reduce the spread of the pandemic. In furtherance, such churches should update their ICTs usage, which would help them socially communicate and connected amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. The church as an institution made up of professionals, should carry out researches through her experts such medical doctors, pharmacologists, epidemiologists, traditional medical doctors (herbalists), etc. not determining her spirituality, rather strongly anchor on God, might produce the medicine for covid-19 cure.

### **References**

Adetumbi, M.A. (2017). The Church and the

- agony of the present economic recession in Nigeria. *Religions Journal of the Nigerian Association for the Studies of Religions*, Vol.27. (2): 76-88.
- Achunike, C.H.(1996). *What is church history? An African perspective*. Nimo: Rex Charles & Patrick Ltd.
- Amaechi, N.M .(2008) . *Themes in Africa traditional religion*.Aba. Assemblies of God Press.
- Adeyemo, T (2006). *Africa Bible commentary*. Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers.
- Berkhof,L.(2005). *Systematic theology*. East Peoria,11:Versapress,Inc.
- Casey, C. www.newyorkers.com *Church officials weigh canceling services amid covid-19*. Retrieved from www.np.org.
- Collins, G.R (2007). *Christian counseling: comprehensive guide*. Mexico City: Thomas Nelson.
- Covid-19 Australia church increase response to pandemic-vatican news*. Retrieved from www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-04/covid-19.
- Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria*. Wikipedia. Retrieved from en.m.wikipedia.org
- Deji, I.A &Ishola ,S.A (2013). *African indigenous Churches*. Lagos: Africa Christian textbooks.
- Falk, L. (1997). *The growth of the church in Africa*. Bukuru: Africa Christian textbooks.
- Fleck, L.(2013). *Bringing Christianity to Nigeria: the origin & work of the protestant missions*. Bukuru: ACTs.
- First case of coronavirus disease confirmed in Nigeria –NCDC*. Retrieved from <https://ncdc.gov.ng>.
- How technology is aiding the covid-19 fight in Africa*. retrieved from [cipasa-or/2020/03/how-technology-is-aiding-the-covid19-fight-in-africa](https://cipasa.or/2020/03/how-technology-is-aiding-the-covid19-fight-in-africa).
- Kehinde, A.E &Toyin, A(2017). The message of Habakkuku to the Israelites & its relevance to contemporary Nigerian society. *Religions Journal of the Nigerian Association for the studies of religions vol. 27(2)* pp163-175.
- Nigeria to phase out lockdown in Abuja, Lagos & Ogun States, these are the details*. CNBC Africa. Retrieved from [www.cribeafrica.com/coronavirus/2020/04/27/nigeria](http://www.cribeafrica.com/coronavirus/2020/04/27/nigeria)
- Oxford advance learner dictionary 6<sup>th</sup> ed.* (2006).
- Practical considerations & recommendations for religious leaders & faith-based communities in the context of covid-19*. Retrieved from WHO-201...eng.pdf.
- Sydneyanglicans.net*
- The covid-19 shock to developing countries: towards whatever it takes programme for the two thirds of the world's population being left behind*. Retrieved from gts...2- en.pdf.
- Ufuoma , A.A.D (2008).*The proliferation of Churches in Nigeria: the Niger Delta experience*. Delta :Jo-irimi Press Services.
- Tasie, G.I.K. (2008) .Socio-historical review of early missionary enterprise & social change in West Africa.*In D.I Ilega & N.N. Iheanacho (eds.) Christianity in Nigeria, Advent, variety, trend* (pp155-177). Port Harcourt: StepsonPrinting House.
- Tribune-online ng.com*.
- Wariboko, P.V. & Asuevia, J.D. (2013). Modern social forces of religious change & the experience of the oriental religions. *In A.O. Kilani & N.N. Iheanacho (eds.) Cultural, development & religious change* (pp 130-136). Port Harcourt: Stepson Printing House.
- Wobodo, J.J. (2015). *History of St*

- Barnabas' Anglican Church, Igwuruta district (1910-2014).*In B.C. Enyindah. A Presidential address/bishop's charge.(pp 8-13) Port Harcourt: Archbishop.
- Wobodo, J.J. (2018). *Christianity in West Africa: a manifestation of African independent Churches,* Pentecostalism and proliferation of churches in Nigeria. Port Harcourt: Arheribook.
- Wotogbe-Weneka, W.O (2012). *Religion: modern denigrators & rehabilitators in national development.* Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.