

‘Dr. Owójaiye is fast becoming one of the most outstanding evangelical voices on the African continent. He gracefully combines his skills as an exceptional Christian thinker and as a sound pastoral practitioner. This book is a product of his rich reflections on the impact of the coronavirus restrictions on corporate worship in Nigeria. The book offers fresh insights into the future of evangelical Christianity in Africa. I enthusiastically commend it to you.’

– *Georges P. Atido, Professor of World Christianity and Missiology and President, Shalom University, Bunia, Democratic Republic of Congo.*

‘Dr. Owójaiye’s book provides, not only a timely response to the current pandemic, but also a much wider lens with which to view the disease. He approaches the subject from the rich perspective of World Christianity as viewed by someone positioned in the majority world. I commend his unique effort to the reader.’

– *Mark R. Shaw, Professor of Historical Studies and Director, Center for World Christianity, Africa International University, Nairobi, Kenya.*

‘The author has used the example of ECWA as a hook around which to have a wide-ranging discussion of issues facing Christians in Africa today. I commend it to you.’

– *Paul Todd, Publishing Editor, Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) and Deputy Director, SIM Nigeria.*

‘This book on the unfolding apocalyptic phenomenon of COVID-19 is an important initiative. Babatomiwa Owójaiye breaks ground for what promises to be a thriving motif for intellectual endeavours for generations to come. The book is engaging, lucid reading and reminds the church about its unique role in history, especially in the face of plagues and pandemics

(suffering)—when the core tenets of love, care, sacrifice with courage and hope—shine out the brightest. I heartily commend it for the consideration of the church in Africa and beyond.’

– *Aiah Foday-Khabenje, General Secretary, Association for Evangelicals in Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.*

‘This is a groundbreaking eyewitness study on the COVID-19 pandemic from the majority world. Its beauty lies in its multi-disciplinary approach to the subject matter. The book is an indispensable primer for all who seek to understand the impact of the coronavirus lockdowns on how church is done in Africa. It is a must-read for scholars, leaders and all who seek wisdom to fulfil the mission of God in this new normal era of the world.’

– *Stephen O.Y. Baba, ECWA Clergy, Professor of Biblical Studies and former Provost, ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, Nigeria.*

EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO  
**THE CORONAVIRUS  
LOCKDOWN**

**Insights from the Evangelical  
Church Winning All**

**BABATOMIWA M. OWOJAIYE**

EVANGELICAL RESPOSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN:

(Insights from the Evangelical Church Winning All)

Copyright © 2020 Babatomiwa M. Owojaiye.

Published in the United States of America by WestBow Press (A Division of Thomas Nelson & Zondervan)  
1663 Liberty Drive  
Bloomington, IN 47403 [www.westbowpress.com](http://www.westbowpress.com)  
1 (866) 928-1240

Published in Nigeria by Harmony Publishing  
Plot 1 Emmanuel Anabor Street, Off Mopo Road,  
United Estate, Sangotedo, Ajah, Lagos  
Website: <https://harmoniypublishing.com.ng>  
E-mail: [publish@harmoniypublishing.com.ng](mailto:publish@harmoniypublishing.com.ng)  
Mobile: +234-703-2212-481

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid. The views expressed in this work are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, and the publisher hereby disclaims any responsibility for them.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture marked (ICB) taken from the International Children’s Bible®. Copyright © 1986, 1988, 1999 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-978-983-065-7 (PB)

# Dedication

To Boaz, my uncle, who believed in me and was used by God to help me chart a path in ministry.

To my children, Bísádé, Bùsólámi, and Bámisè for your support, endurance, friendship and godliness.

To Bíódún, for your godly character, love, support, prayers, and for being an awesome sweetheart. “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all” (Proverbs 31:29, NIV). You are special!

And to all of God’s children everywhere.



# Table of Contents

<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	V
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	XI
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	XIII
<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	15
<b>CHAPTER 1 SETTING THE STAGE</b> .....	19
Welcoming an Unwanted Visitor .....	21
COVID-19: A Strange Disease Ravaging Nations .....	27
Church's Responses to Plagues in History .....	30
<i>The Antonine Plague</i> .....	30
<i>The Plague of Cyprian</i> .....	32
<i>The Bubonic plague</i> .....	33
<i>The Spanish Influenza</i> .....	33
<b>CHAPTER 2 CONSPIRACY THEORIES, COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND AVERAGE NIGERIANS</b> .....	35
COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND AVERAGE NIGERIANS .....	40
<i>Anti-Social Behaviour</i> .....	41
<i>Loss of Jobs/Sources of Income</i> .....	41
<i>Increase in unemployment</i> .....	42
<i>Increase in family size</i> .....	44
<i>Insecurity</i> .....	44
<i>Change in lifestyle</i> .....	45
<i>Hunger</i> .....	46
<i>Disruptions of Educational activities</i> .....	47
<i>Inflation</i> .....	48
<i>Health Crises</i> .....	49
<b>CHAPTER 3 EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA</b> .....	51
The African Church versus the Church in Africa .....	53
Evangelical Identity and Spirituality .....	56
Religion versus Spirituality: A Biblical Perspective .....	64

<b>CHAPTER 4 PENTECOSTAL AND EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA: SOULMATES OR STRANGE BEDFELLOWS? .....</b>	<b>69</b>
Relationship between Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianity .....	70
Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Any Difference? .....	73
Nigerian Pentecostalism within the African Christian Tapestry .....	75
Nigerian Pentecostalism and Its Appropriation of Media ..	83
<b>CHAPTER 5 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CORPORATE WORSHIP IN ECWA .....</b>	<b>91</b>
Mode of Worship in ECWA .....	92
Essential Elements of Corporate Worship in ECWA .....	96
<i>Proclamation of the Word of God</i> .....	99
<i>Prayer</i> .....	105
<i>Spiritual Songs</i> .....	107
<i>Holy Communion</i> .....	108
<i>Christian Giving</i> .....	111
<b>CHAPTER 6 CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN AND CORPORATE WORSHIP IN ECWA .....</b>	<b>115</b>
Effects of COVID-19 Lockdown and Corporate Worship in ECWA .....	117
Corporate Worship Replaced with e-Worship .....	118
<i>Disparity in the Reach of the Targeted Audience Members</i> .....	118
<i>Traditional and Social Media, the Rural Poor, and Aged</i> .....	120
<i>Finances and Infrequency of e-Worship</i> .....	122
<i>Lack of Fellowship and Warmth on Social Media or TV</i> .....	123
<i>Incomplete Elements of Public Worship on Social Media or TV</i> .....	124

**CHAPTER 7 EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO  
CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN: THE CASE**

**OF ECWA** ..... 127

- Call to Patriotism, Unity and Love ..... 128
- Call to Repentance, Hope and Prayer for Revival ..... 130
- Call to Personal Piety and Family Revival ..... 132
- Call to Salvation and Readiness for the Second  
Coming of Christ ..... 137
- Christ Is the Answer ..... 138

**CHAPTER 8 INSIGHTS FOR THE FUTURE**

**OF ECWA** ..... 143

- ECWA History in a Glance ..... 144
- ECWA and the Creation of Social Capital ..... 148
- Does ECWA Need Any Improvement? ..... 154
  - Media and ICT: Implication for Youth*
  - Migration and Emigration* ..... 155
  - Palliatives for the Less-fortunate Members* ..... 159

**CHAPTER 9 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH IN**

**AFRICA** ..... 163

- Implication for Evangelism and  
Technological Investment ..... 164
- Implication for Ecumenism ..... 166
- Implication for Prosperity Preaching ..... 169
- Implication for Holistic Discipleship ..... 176
- Implication for Revival and Righteous-living ..... 177

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ..... 181

**SCRIPTURE INDEX** ..... 197

**INDEX** ..... 199



# Abbreviations

AIC	-	Africa Inland Church
A&E	-	Accident and Emergency Unit
AoG	-	The Assemblies of God
AMORC	-	Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis
BBC	-	British Broadcasting Corporation
AMS	-	African Missionary Society
AEA	-	Association for Evangelicals in Africa
DLBC	-	Deeper Life Bible Church
CAN	-	Christian Association of Nigeria
CBCAfrica	-	Centre for Biblical Christianity in Africa
CITAM	-	Christ is the Answer Ministries
COCIN	-	Church of Christ in Nations
COVID-19	-	Coronavirus disease 2019
DCC	-	District Church Council
ECWA	-	Evangelical Church Winning All
ELWA	-	Eternal Love Winning All
EPL	-	ECWA Productions Limited
ELWWA	-	Eternal Love Will Win All
EMS	-	Evangelical Missionary Society
FCT	-	Federal Capital Territory
FESTIGOS	-	Festival of Gospel Songs
FGCN	-	Foursquare Gospel Church in Nigeria

GCC	-	General Church Council
ICT	-	Information Communication Technology
LC	-	Local Church
LCC	-	Local Church Council
NAE	-	National Association of Evangelicals
NBC	-	National Broadcasting Commission
NBC	-	National Bureau of Statistics
NBC	-	Nigerian Baptist Convention
NCC	-	Nigerian Communications Commission
NCDC	-	National Centre for Disease Control
NMA	-	Nigeria Medical Association
PHEIC	-	Public Health Emergency of International Concern
UITH	-	University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital
WASSC	-	West African Senior School Certificate
WEA	-	World Evangelical Alliance
WHO	-	World Health Organization
RCCG	-	Redeemed Christian Church of God
SIM	-	Sudan Interior Mission (now Serving in Mission)
SU	-	Scripture Union
UMCA	-	United Missionary Church of Africa

# Acknowledgement

I have met three kinds of people in life and in my Christian pilgrimage—those who have discouraged me; those who are indifferent about me or whatever life throws at me; and those who have challenged, encouraged and helped ‘fan into flames the gifts of God in me’ (2 Timothy 1: 6, NIV). In any case, they all have continued to serve to the accomplishment of the purpose of God in and for my life. This book would not have been possible without the support of people who have challenged, nudged and encouraged me to undertake this project. These encouragers are too many to list here, but let me highlight just a few. Some proceeds from my unpublished theses and works form a small part of this book. So, for this, my appreciation goes to my supervisors: Professors Abiodun Ige, Zacchaeus Apata, Mark Shaw, Diane Stinton, Mark Fackler, Gyang Pam and James Obrempong-Nkansah for their tutelage and contributions at every stage of my student life and theses writing. My special thanks goes to Professor Mark Shaw. My interest in World Christianity was borne out of my contact with this erudite scholar and mentor in September 2009 at Africa International University in Nairobi, Kenya. And ever since, my love for the discipline has continued to wax stronger.

I take this opportunity to also register my unreserved gratitude to Professor Julius Owoyemi, Dr. Wanjiru M. Gitau, Engineer Seun Bolaji, Dr. Olaleke Folaranmi, Mrs. Bola Oludele and Mrs. Wanjiku Joyce Mwangi for reading through this work and for their immense contributions towards its success. Joyce Mwangi’s

support in this project was phenomenal, to say the least. Thank you for your friendship, Joyce. I acknowledge the encouragements of Pastor Eli and Mabel Alasan, Pastor Samuel and Mrs. Mary Jolayemi and Reverend Stephen and Mrs. Oluwakemi Ajise (my bosses at First ECWA, Ilorin) at every stage of this writing. My special thanks goes to the membership and leadership of First ECWA, Ilorin, Ilorin District Church Council and ECWA as a whole for giving me the environment, platform and latitude to grow in the grace of God. I thank all the members of the Centre for Biblical Christianity in Africa (CBCAfrica) team for labouring with us in our mission to deepen the roots of biblical Christianity and widen the transformative impact of the Christian message in the African public square. Thank you and may the Lord bless you all exceedingly.

To my children, Bisade, Bùsólámi and Bámisè: thank you so much for your understanding and support every step of the way. I salute my wife, Biodun. I owe you so much. I appreciate your deep love, unflinching support, and understanding for me always. Eku management wa o! Thank you especially for allowing me to use the time I should have spent with you and the children on this project. Your understanding and support cheered me to this point. What would I ever do without your support? May God reward you abundantly. My final appreciation goes to God, the giver of life and every good gift. I thank him for his unimaginable and unceasing love towards me and for granting me the grace to undertake this project. Without him I am nothing! Olúwa, modúpé o!

# Foreword

The coronavirus disease has unexpectedly blindsided the whole world within a very short period of time. It has been shocking to see self-assured, developed western nations, even worst hit than Africa, reeling in social, economic and religious confusion in the aftermath of this globally indiscriminate disease. It is therefore very encouraging to see the remarkable work rising to the occasion out of Africa to help people come to terms with the disruption brought to humanity by this disease. This book is a high-quality, timely response prepared from the perspective of one Evangelical tradition, ECWA, set within the broader context of Nigeria and the mission of the church in Africa, generally. Indeed, Babatomiwa's approach shows that the coronavirus has, not so much introduced new problems; rather, the disease has opened up wounds and scars we never bothered to heal properly.

The book goes into remarkable depth to highlight such things as the church's response to disease throughout history. Did you know that whenever epidemics occurred, Christians would be at the forefront of infection and contagion caring for the sick, even to the cost of their own lives? Babatomiwa opines that the church has always been part of the solution by offering unconditional love, sacrificial care, hope and brave witness. Even now in the year of our Lord 2020, the call of the deep unto deep is no different, and the fastest growing church in the world, the African church, cannot fail the test at this moment. Moses leads us to realize that the church has its God-given responsibility to maintain

the spiritual nurture of its members and at the same time, extend itself to meet new challenges that it was not prepared for. As the missiologist David Bosch observes in his book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991) by using Hendrik Kraemer's words, '... the church is always in a ... crisis, and ... its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it.' Bosch continues quoting Kramer adding, the church 'has always needed ... suffering in order to become fully alive to its real nature and mission.' Well, the suffering is here, and Brother Moses invites us, the church, to be aware of both contingency and crisis and to respond as a community committed to partnering with its Lord, to heal the broken-hearted, to bind up the wounded and continue to bring good news of the kingdom.

This is not just a book about the coronavirus. The work takes unexpected angles that reveal both the pastoral heart and scholarly mind of the author. He does a rounded exposition of evangelicalism and its relationship to Pentecostalism, particularly in its Nigerian expressions. There are dimensions of the contemporary circumstances of the church in Africa, both within the ecclesial circles and in the public sphere, that have been addressed by other scholars in whose footsteps Moses walks. The work has the potential to refresh conversations on stale debates in scholarship, matters such as prosperity theology, unhealthy denominationalism and ecumenism. I particularly like how Moses starts to point us towards revisiting the idea of Pan-Africanism, particularly as it might be expressed in the east African ideal of ubuntu, which itself invites us all to sit in and have a village palaver to eat together and listen to each other. Perchance, we might rediscover that in unity, we will be able to surmount the jaded image and content with which our mother continent is held abroad.

I invite you to join Brother Babatomiwa Moses Owojaiye as he sees this deadly challenge of COVID-19 as an opportunity to

introspect on long-term, deep-seated issues that the church in Africa needs to face up to. Together, we can address them so we can pursue long-term missional impact, even in our continuously changing and dizzying world. May the Lord bless these “five loaves of bread and two fish” (Matthew 14:17, NIV) into a meal to feed thousands with knowledge and wisdom on how to act in these disruptive times.

**Wanjiru M. Gitau, Ph.D.**

Senior Research Scholar, St. Thomas University, Miami, Florida

Author, *Megachurch Christianity Reconsidered: Millennials and Social Change in African Perspective*



# Chapter One

## Setting The Stage

**I**t was a sunny Sunday afternoon on November 4. I had just returned from church and was bored in the room I had rented in Isanlu-Isin, a town in Kwara State of Nigeria. I had traveled to Isanlu-Isin as a private student to take the West African Senior School Certificate (WASSC) examination. Previously, I had attempted the examination and failed when I was a student living in central Nigeria. As a result, I went to a place where I was not known to retest. I needed a different atmosphere to avoid being seen as a failure by residents, friends and colleagues in the community where I had initially completed the examination.

I lived alone in this new community. Although I came to this new town in order to fully concentrate on my studies, there were times I felt quite lonely and needed some fresh air. I attended church on Sundays to reduce the boredom, and change my environment. Although I grew up in a Christian family, I did not

know what it meant to have a personal salvation experience with Jesus - I was a reckless young man. Whereas many members of my immediate and extended family were not Christians, they were worried about the way-ward life I was living. I was equally aware of my reckless ways but was not yet ready to toe the line of the so-called “born-again” Christians.

On that fateful Sunday, after I had returned from church and taken lunch, I grew tired of reading and needed a distraction. The thought of going to watch a television program came to me. I went to the home of one of my neighbors, one of the very few families that had the privilege of owning a black-and-white television set in the neighborhood. The home was always bubbling with throngs of people coming to watch soaps or other programmes being aired on the television.

As I watched the television, a Christian film produced by a new Christian film industry, the Evangelical Vineyard Outreach Ministry (EVOM) World Outreach was being aired. Usually in Nigeria, a government-owned television like the one I was watching would broadcast Islamic or Christian content for a lengthy period only on Fridays and Sundays, unless it was the festive season. It was not uncommon, however, for a Christian film to air for ninety minutes on a Sunday.

The movie I watched was a newly released Christian film entitled, *Olugbala Gba Mi* (Rescue, Deliver or Save me, Lord). The film was written and produced in the Yoruba language. It took place in a typical urban settlement of Southwest Nigeria, and the story was about Banji and Boye, two city boys caught in a web of sin and worldliness. They were involved in uncivil activities. The boys grew in their sinfulness and reckless lifestyles until they encountered an elderly man, Pa Josiah, who spoke to them about Jesus Christ and the need to commit their lives to him. Banji and Boye’s encounter with Pa Josiah led them to a

conversion experience which brought significant transformation into their lives.

Their story struck me like a thunderbolt. As I watched the movie, it appeared as though it were story. I identified with the boys. Watching *Olugbala Gba Mi* birthed a major turning point in my life. This story marks the beginning of my journey in evangelical Christianity. I am still on the journey about three decades later. This book is more than just an academic interest for me. I am an evangelical Christian affiliated to the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). I write as an insider who seeks to understand and inform others about the effects of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) lockdown on corporate worship in ECWA and to offer helpful insights on the practice of Evangelical Christianity in ECWA and the wider African church going forward in the light of this new global reality. However, as you will later discover, I did not allow my affiliation to ECWA becloud the scholarly objectivity and rigour required for this kind of work.

## **Welcoming an Unwanted Visitor**

Since the first outbreak of COVID-19 in China, the people of the Ilorin metropolis, where I reside with my family did not feel the scary, ravaging and deadly impact of the pandemic until two index cases in our city were confirmed by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and announced through a press statement on Monday April 6, 2020 by Rafiu Ajakaye, the Chief Press Secretary to the Executive Governor of Kwara State and the Spokesman of the Technical Committee on COVID-19. The tension became more aggravated when the Executive Governor of Kwara State, Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq, made a press briefing the following day. While the press briefing instilled hope, courage and faith in the populace, the confirmation of the arrival of the pandemic in Kwara State by the governor came with a thick

sense of fear and confusion among the residents of the state. The index cases in Kwara State came about two months after Nigeria's index case was reported in Lagos on the February 27, 2020. Shortly after the national index case in Lagos, additional cases were gradually detected and confirmed in Ogun, Ekiti, Oyo, Edo, Bauchi, Osun, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Enugu, Kaduna, Benue, Akwa Ibom, and Ondo State, respectively. These states had confirmed cases of COVID-19 before that of Kwara, and before long, the presence of coronavirus was felt in almost every state in Nigeria.

Despite the accelerating spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria and globally, there was still a great sense of denial and security amongst the residents of Kwara State until the dreadful news of its arrival was confirmed on April 6, 2020. Since then, Kwara State has changed and might never be the same again. Of course, before this day, there was already a great sense of uneasiness following the ban of free human movement and large gatherings of people in the state precipitated by the national index case in Lagos. Partial lockdown and social distancing were part of the measures prescribed by the federal and state governments to prevent and contain the spread of coronavirus. Residents of the state endured the attending burdens of COVID-19 until the state's index cases were reported. The majority of the populace considered the process that led to the arrival of the pandemic in the state careless and irresponsible.

The alleged smuggling and management of a fifty-seven year old United Kingdom returnee, Muideen Obanimomo, into the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UIITH) by a professor of medicine, Professor Salami Alakija Kazeem of the same hospital, stirred an outrage amongst the residents of Ilorin, in particular, and the state, in general. The outburst was allegedly caused by the perceived unethical and unprofessional manner with which

Professor Salami handled an alleged COVID-19 patient in the state. The density of the outrage could be felt on the social media and in the press briefing made by the state governor. This development eventually led to the immediate suspension of Professor Salami Alakija Kazeem by the authorities of the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital.

Investigative Journalist Fisayo Soyombo had alleged through a media report that the Kwara State Government, authorities of UITH and Professor Salami Alakija Kazeem were in a conspiracy against the people of the state in an attempt to cover-up Muideen Obanimomo's COVID-19 case.<sup>1</sup> According to his report, Muideen Obanimomo flew into Nigeria from the United Kingdom through the Muritala International Airport in Lagos on March 20, 2020. Suspecting that he might have contracted the virus, he went into brief isolation in Lagos. Muideen Obanimomo's condition deteriorated days into his isolation in Lagos. Following this unfortunate development, Professor Salami, a cousin to Muideen Obanimomo, was contacted, and he advised that Muideen be brought to Ilorin for further investigation and close monitoring. Muideen Obanimomo set foot in Ilorin in the company of his wife on Sunday March 29, 2020. At that point, his condition had further worsened. Now under the alleged management of Professor Salami, Muideen Obanimomo was taken to one or two hospitals in Ilorin before he finally ended up in UITH Accident and Emergency Unit (A&E). On getting there, Professor Salami Kazeem as senior staff and specialist muzzled his social capital to secure other health workers on duty to provide immediate attention to his client. It was reported that after some observations, the health workers on duty suspected

---

1 Fisayo Soyombo, 'The Grand Coronavirus Cover-Up in Kwara' in <https://www.thecable.ng/the-grand-coronavirus-cover-up-in-kwara>, Posted on April 6, 2020, Accessed on April 8, 2020. Soyombo was former Editor of *TheCable*; *the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR)*; and *SaharaReporters*.

that the symptoms presented by the patient were similar to that of COVID-19. But Professor Salami was quick to dispel their suspicion, claiming that the case was food poisoning and not COVID-19. Muideen Obanimomo died a few hours after his arrival and treatment at UITH. Allegedly, Professor Salami went on to process the immediate release of the corpse for burial in accordance to Islamic rites. The corpse was released and the burial was conducted almost immediately.<sup>2</sup>

The outrage was heightened by people's knowledge about the calibre of the physician that Salami Alakija Kazeem was. Fisayo Soyombo lamented that 'Professor Abdulsalam is not just a physician. He is an academic in the fields of respiratory medicine with research interest in infectious and non-infectious pulmonary diseases such as tuberculosis, obstructive airways diseases and HIV/AIDS. A physician and an academic of this calibre would have gotten Obanimomo tested if he genuinely wanted to. The failure to test Obanimomo for COVID-19 until his death and afterwards has cover-up written all over it.'<sup>3</sup> Professor Salami was allegedly expected to have known and managed the case better. People became more suspicious when the wife of Muideen Obanimomo later tested positive for COVID-19. It was at this point that the seriousness of the allegations, as well as the magnitude of the unfortunate development, dawned on the leadership and residents of the state. Could Mrs Obanimomo's case be a coincidence or an isolated development? Meanwhile, the Kwara State Government and the authorities of UITH had denied any involvement in the matter, but that did not stop the dreaded hand of coronavirus from reaching Kwara State.

It should be on record that as much as a majority of the Kwara State residents believed that Professor Salami Alakija Kazeem was

---

2 Ibid.

3 Fasayo Soyombo, 'The Grand Coronavirus Cover-Up in Kwara'

culpable, there was no hard evidence to ascertain that Muideen Obanimomo died of COVID-19. Later, Mrs Obanimono also tested negative after being isolated and treated by the state government. This narrative serves to picture the distinctiveness of my context and people's initial responses to the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic. However, it is essential to clarify that this reaction was peculiar to Kwara State and may not be generalisable for the whole of Nigeria. Certainly, reactions are different from one context to another.

Nothing has challenged human existence in the twenty-first century more than the scourge of coronavirus, otherwise known as COVID-19. The coronavirus pandemic has brought upon the world a global health crisis of unprecedented proportion. It has touched on every aspect of human life and society. It has shaken the world in a nuanced, complex and complicated dimension. It is definitely not an overstatement to say that its impact has been felt in ways beyond human description. COVID-19 has, in one way or the other, affected every human being, community, society and nation in our modern world. Therefore, for obvious reasons, no single study can adequately describe the various ways that the pandemic has affected our contemporary world. It would be a daunting task to attempt to provide a detailed narrative of the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on mankind in a single study.

Being a new and an evolving discourse in the fields of human inquiry, the subject could be studied from a multi-dimensional perspective. It could be studied from an educational, religious, theological, sociological, missiological, medical, scientific, technological, biological, financial, economic, leadership and governance perspectives, to highlight just a few. Going forward, scholarly writings on this subject will begin to appear. This is a new journey in scholarship that will continue over a long period

of time. Therefore, writing on Coronavirus will depend on the perspective that the researcher is focusing on. One common and fundamental denominator in the discourse of the impact of COVID-19 is that it has left an indelible mark on the world and in the sands of history. The world is never going to be the same again following the outbreak of the pandemic.

Just as it is the case with every facet of human life and existence, COVID-19 has also posed unprecedented challenges to the nature and operations of religion globally. Coronavirus has now become one of the greatest enemies of religion. While religion promotes the gathering and social interaction of human being, COVID-19 promotes the dispelling of the same. Coronavirus is a scourge that killed several thousands of people within a relatively short period of time. The pandemic succeeded in challenging human greatness. Human ingenuity, education, wealth, science, research and technology put together are too frail to immediately help confront the scourge of COVID-19. Needless to say that advanced, wealthy, technologically savvy, militarily advanced and organized societies around the world were brought down on their knees by this pandemic. In order to reduce its impact on human existence, the measures of banning free human movement and convergence in large number had to be sustained through lockdowns. This singular development has affected the way religion is being practiced generally and evangelical spirituality specifically.

Religious leaders and adherents have devised means to keep their faiths afloat. While some changes have been mild, others have been complex and revolutionary. The impact has been further complicated by the sudden shift from traditional ways of practicing religion and the prolonged nature of the same. As sudden as the introduction of these new changes in religious practices may appear, most of these changes have come to stay. Invariably, we

must begin to adjust ourselves to the new ways of practicing our faiths in the contexts of our new local and global realities.

This book is one of the earliest of such to come out from Africa. It is a case study research that focused primarily on the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). Whereas the membership of ECWA spreads beyond the shore of Nigeria, the scope of this study is confined to ECWA in Nigeria only. This book examines the effects of the Coronavirus lockdown on corporate worship in ECWA and discusses the response of the denomination to the same. Even though the scope of the study is zoomed on ECWA, the implications of our findings in our investigation of the denomination is generalisable and extrapolated to the wider church in Africa. These implications are important for the future of Evangelical Christianity in Africa. I have employed the term Evangelical in an open, inclusive and generous sense to accommodate the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement in Africa. Significant attention is given in the book to describe the relationship between Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, as well as their place within the African Christian tapestry. I am aware that the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic came with a wide spectrum of opportunities and challenges. But this book focuses more on the adverse effects of Coronavirus lockdown rather than the opportunities it has created. The ban on religious gathering in Nigeria started in March and ended in August 2020. It lasted for an average period of twelve to twenty weeks, depending on the peculiarities of each federating unit of Nigeria.

## **COVID-19: A Strange Disease Ravaging Nations**

COVID-19 is an acronym derived from the words ‘coronavirus disease 2019’. The disease was labeled as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020, but

the official name for the virus was announced on February 11, 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO) as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus (SARS-CoV-2 2019).<sup>4</sup> It has infected millions of people and has been responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

In December 2019, just a month before the Chinese spring festival, an outbreak of a strange disease was reported at the Huanan Seafood wet market located in Wuhan, Hubei, China. This disease presented mainly with respiratory symptoms which spread and affected about two-thirds of the workers. The early cases of COVID-19 all had exposure to the seafood market; this is regarded as the primary spread. The majority of the spread was by secondary spread i.e. human to human transmission as evidenced by illness in those without contact with the Wuhan market or wild life and by the transmission of the infection from patients to healthcare workers. Within a month of the report of this disease in Wuhan, it spread to the rest of the country and beyond, involving countries like Thailand, Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Germany and the United States. 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 hardest hit country and the global epicenter of the pandemic in terms of the number of casualties who tested positive to the virus and those who died by the same.

---

<sup>4</sup> Tim Jewell, 'Everything you should know about the 2019 Coronavirus and COVID-19' in *Healthline*: <https://www.healthline.com/health/coronavirus-covid-19/> Posted on April 23, 2020; Accessed on April 25, 2020.

The most commonly reported symptoms are persistent fever, body aches, fatigue and cough, with frequent involvement of the lower respiratory tracts. Less common symptoms include headache and diarrhoea. Currently, there is no standard treatment, and vaccine development is still underway. The most effective way to control this outbreak is to prevent infection and curtail spread through personal hygiene, regular washing of hands with soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizer, social distancing and bans on large human gatherings and free movement. The outbreak in China occurred just prior to its largest annual cultural event; the Lunar New Year, a holiday that is usually characterized by a massive migration of people traveling in crowded vehicles for long periods of time. The Chinese government had little time to act before a large-scale disaster would evolve. They deployed traditional public health response tactics which included isolation of infected people, quarantine of exposed persons and enforcement of social distancing. This led to a total lockdown of free human movements, gathering and public facilities. The Chinese approach became a template for the prevention and containment of the disease globally. But, in less than six months, the disease has been responsible for the deaths of several people and drove the economies and health care systems of many nations in the world aground. There are ongoing theories challenging the authenticity of the Chinese government's claim that COVID-19 originated from a seafood market in Wuhan, China. Obviously, there is a lot to be heard about this deadly disease in future.

Most countries in the African continent, especially West Africa, have poorly funded healthcare structure and will be unable to up-scale to meet the needs required to combat an epidemic. In this region, the health expenditure per capita is lower than \$80, with fewer than five hospital beds available per ten thousand of the population. The crippling impact of this pandemic has been seen in countries with advanced healthcare institutions, especially the

United States, Italy and Spain with health expenditure per capita of \$10,246, \$2,840 and \$2,506 respectively.<sup>5</sup> By extrapolation, and according to many projections, the impact of this pandemic on Africa could be devastating if strict control measures aimed at minimising the spread of COVID-19 are not enforced.

## Church's Responses to Plagues in History

No doubt, COVID-19 is a plague of monumental proportions, and it will continue to occupy a towering space in the history of global health crises. This is due to the amount of pain and opportunities it has visited upon the modern world. But the coronavirus outbreak is not the first pandemic to ravage the world. Historians have documented at least four great plagues that devastated the world before the coronavirus pandemic. What were the responses of the church to the pandemics? Let us now briefly consider those that happened during the second, third, fourteenth and nineteenth centuries of the Christian era.

### **The Antonine Plague**

The Antonine plague is otherwise known in history as the Plague of Galen. This plague, according to historian John Horgan, 'erupted in 165 CE at the height of Roman power throughout the Mediterranean world during the reign of . . . Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (161-180 CE).'<sup>6</sup> The outbreak came in two phases. The first phase lasted for fifteen years from 165 to 180 CE; while the second outbreak occurred from 251 to 266 CE. A Greek physician who was an eye-witness to the outbreak

---

5 'Current Health Expenditure per Capita (Current US\$) | Data.' World Health Organisation Global Health Expenditure Database in *The World Bank*: 2015. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.PC.CD/> Accessed April 25, 2020.

6 John Horgan, 'Antonine Plague' in *Ancient History Encyclopedia*: [https://www.ancient.eu/Antonine\\_Plague/](https://www.ancient.eu/Antonine_Plague/) Posted on May 2, 2019.

described the common symptoms of the plague as ‘fever, diarrhea, vomiting, thirstiness, swollen throat, and coughing . . . the diarrhea appeared blackish which suggested gastrointestinal bleeding. The coughing produced a foul odour on the breath and exanthema, skin eruptions or rash, over the entirety of the body distinguished by red and black papules or eruptions.’<sup>7</sup> The disease lasted for two weeks before killing its victim. Although not all its victims died, the Antonine Plague was responsible for the death of about two thousand to five thousand - persons per day (at the peak of the outbreak), and about 10% of the 75 million people in the Roman Empire in total.<sup>8</sup> Scholars argued that the disease emerged from what is known today as China when the Roman military came into contact with the disease during the siege of Seleucia.<sup>9</sup> Studies have suggested that the plague could be smallpox. Historians observed that the outbreak of the Antonine Plague was the beginning of the fall of the Roman Empire.

Christian response to the plague was that of love, care and sacrifice. Instead of worshipping the Alexikakos, the Averter of Evil erected by the authorities of the Roman Empire, Christians in Anatolian town of Hierapolis risked being persecuted by directing their neighbours to the true source of life, Jesus.<sup>10</sup> They did this through their display of unconditional love and sacrificial care. According to Lyman Stone, ‘. . . as Christians cared for the sick and offered a spiritual model whereby plagues were not the

---

7 Ibid.

8 Lyman Stone, ‘Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years’ in *Foreign Policy*: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/13/christianity-epidemics-2000-years-should-i-still-go-to-church-coronavirus/> Posted on March 13, 2020, Accessed on May 5, 2020.

9 John Horgan, ‘Antonine Plague.’

10 Edwards Watts, ‘What Rome Learned from the Deadly Antonine Plague of 165 A.D’ in *Smithsonian Magazine*: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-rome-learned-deadly-antonine-plague-165-d-180974758/> Published on April 28, 2020, Accessed on May 5, 2020.

work of angry and capricious deities but the product of a broken creation in revolt against a loving God,<sup>11</sup> their actions challenged age-long worldviews, because people were able to view life and death in a completely new way. Quoting Rodney Stark, Lyman Stone explains that “the death rates in the cities with Christian communities may have been just half that of other cities.”<sup>12</sup> Their biblical actions of love and evangelism paid off in that they served to convert many to Christianity. This gave Christianity credibility and led to the spread of the emerging faith in the Roman Empire. Hitherto, the Christian faith and its adherents had suffered terrible persecutions in the Roman world.

### ***The Plague of Cyprian***

According to Historian John Horgan, The Plague of Cyprian erupted near Ethiopia in 250 CE and reached Rome, Greece and Syria the following year. The spread of the plague was helped by the incessant wars commonly fought around that time. The armed forces of the various nations in the region facilitated the spread unintentionally. The Plague of Cyprian lasted twenty years and was reported to have killed at its peak as many as five thousand 5000 people per day in Rome.<sup>13</sup> Horgan explained that the ‘sufferers experienced bouts of diarrhoea, continuous vomiting, fever, deafness, blindness, paralysis of their legs and feet, swollen throats and blood filled their eyes (conjunctival bleeding) while staining their mouths. More often than not, death resulted.’<sup>14</sup> By this time, the Christian responses and worldviews introduced during the Antonine Plague had gained significant prominence.

---

11 Lyman Stone, ‘Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years.’

12 Ibid. See also Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: a Sociologist Reconsiders History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

13 John Horgan, ‘The Plague of Cyprian, 250-270 CE’ in <https://www.ancient.eu/article/992/plague-of-cyprian-250-270-ce/> Published December 13, 2016; Accessed on May 5, 2020.

14 Ibid.

And so, it was much easier for the church to respond just as they did during the initial plague.

### **The Bubonic plague**

The Bubonic plague otherwise known as Black Death broke out in Europe killing over 50 million people. According to the World Health Organisation, the disease ‘is transmitted . . . by the bite of infected fleas.’<sup>15</sup> The infective organism is called *Yersinia pestis*. Scott W. Sunquist records that “the plague was brought to Europe in 1330 from China via rats and fleas.”<sup>16</sup> When the Bubonic plague hit Wittenberg in 1527, Christians in the city also confronted the disease with unmatched dedication to duty and sacrificial care for the victims, irrespective of religious affiliations. While non-Christians were fleeing from the pandemic, Christians in Wittenberg were charged by Martin Luther to courageously stand firm in faith in to offer care to those in need of it.<sup>17</sup> They did not fear contracting the diseases nor the risk of losing their own lives. This sent good signals to the world about Christianity and made the faith attractive to unbelievers.

### **The Spanish Influenza**

Otherwise known as the Spanish flu lasted just about a year, from 1918 to 1919. It was a viral disease transmitted from birds to humans. Scientists are unsure of the source of the disease, but the first case was reported in a military base in Kansas, United States of America on March 11, 1918. According to Scott W. Sunquist, ‘the flu infected 500 million people (about one-third of the world

---

15 ‘Plague’ in *World Health Organization*: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/plague/> Posted on October 31, 2017, Accessed on May 5, 2020.

16 Scott W. Sunquist, ‘Attentiveness: Pandemic’: *Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary*: <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/blog/pandemic/> Posted on March 12, 2020; Accessed on May 5, 2020.

17 Lyman Stone, ‘Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years.’

population). At least . . . 10% ‘of them fell to the disease, totaling about 50 million people in one year.’<sup>18</sup> The Spanish influenza is one of the deadliest pandemics in human history. While other pandemics were regional, the Spanish influenza is the first known outbreak of global proportion recorded in modern history. The outbreak of the Spanish influenza in the 1900s came at a turning point in the history of contemporary world Christianity. This was about the time that Protestantism, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism started gaining ground in Africa. The events that culminated in the birth of contemporary global Pentecostalism happened in Azusa Street shortly before this pandemic.

In Nigeria, the birth of Prophet Ayo Babalola in 1904 also took place before the Spanish Flu. The famous Ayo Babalola revival that took place later in the 1930s was part of the church’s response to the pandemic. Missionary efforts, the Aladura Movement, speaking in tongues, evangelism, faith healing, prayer and exorcism gained prominence during this period. These developments gave birth to some of the most renowned revival movements in the history of Christianity in Nigeria. Throughout history, the church never folded its hands in times of global health crises. It has always been part of the solution. The church reached those heights through the injection of unconditional love, sacrificial care, hope, matchless boldness, prayer and faith into the dying world of those days. Those actions increased the credibility of the church, especially among unbelievers. And when the church gains credibility in the public square, its opportunity to evangelise, and increase both spiritually and numerically skyrocket. How has the church in our time responded to COVID-19? Before we answer this question, let us first highlight some of the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown on ordinary people on our streets in Africa using Nigeria as a case in point.

---

18 Scott W. Sunquist, ‘Attentiveness: Pandemic’.