

Christians' Response to the Covid – 19 Pandemic in the Light of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25 – 37)

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ABSTRACT

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The COVID-19 pandemic struck and shocked the world, overwhelming the health, social, economic and religious spaces of the world. The varied effects of the pandemic also came with its attendant varied responses with Nigeria included. Scholars and several authors have researched the consequences and responses of both individuals and governments to the COVID-19 pandemic but have not focused their attention on the Christians' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria in the context of the neighbourliness concept of the parable of the *Good Samaritan*. Therefore, this paper, leaning on Taylor's *tend and befriend* theory of connectedness and support, presents a concise framework of the Christian response to the COVID-19 pandemic vis-à-vis the ascription of the "love your neighbour" proposition of Jesus in the parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37). The paper employs analytical methods and relies on primary data sourced from the biblical text (Luke 10: 25 - 37) and secondary sources consisting of official media reports, and published scholarly articles on the pandemic in both online and offline media channels. The responses of the church in Nigeria included both welfarist and non-welfarist actions. The paper recommends that Christians cum the church should focus more on

offering financial and material help to members and non-members alike to continue to mitigate the socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID -19 pandemic, Christian responses, the parable of the Good Samaritan, love, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic struck and shocked the world, overwhelming the health, social, economic and religious spaces of the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel human coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, which began in Wuhan, China on December 8, 2019, a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020.¹ There was already a report of over seven million cases globally as of June 7, 2020, and following this WHO declaration, the *Coronavirus Preparedness Group* was constituted on January 31 in Nigeria.² Nigeria recorded the first case of Covid-19 on the 27th of February, 2020.³

WHO categorised Nigeria as one of the 13 high-risk African countries concerning the spread of COVID-19. Nigeria is also among the vulnerable African nations, given the weak state of the healthcare system.⁴ Sociologically, the pandemic caused global social disruption by limiting global social relations. In respect of the ideals of globalisation, the pandemic “de-globalised” the world in terms of human migration with airports shut, down and social events (sports, festivals and the like) postponed indefinitely and coupled with the “stay-at-home” policies affected in local communities. On the other hand, the pandemic reconfigured the norms of globalisation because the limited physical interaction became transferred into social media interactions and communications, which defeated the constructs of social interactions that were limited to time and space.

The coronavirus spread over the world and affected more social and economic activities of countries globally, generating global health problems with consequent effects on governments, economies, education and lifestyles including churches and other religious institutions worldwide. COVID- 19 likewise changed the regular worship services schedule and other important events that fall within the Christian calendar. The varied effects of the pandemic also came with its attendant varied responses.

There is a large body of literature on the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria as written by a varied number of academics, media reporters, health practitioners, and other researchers both in and outside of Nigeria since the first reported incidence of the pandemic in Nigeria. These persons have focused on different aspects of the pandemic in the Nigerian context. Some have examined the consequences or impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic from the economic,⁵ health,⁶ psychological,⁷ Sustainable Development Goals,⁸ recreational and job⁹ and food security¹⁰ perspectives. Some other scholars have looked at the responses of the government and Nigerians to the pandemic: Medical¹¹ and multi-sectorial.¹²

On the other hand, Apuke and Omarexamined television news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria from February 2020 to July 2020,¹³ while Birisibe and Udeme did a review of newspaper coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.¹⁴ Ilesanmi and Afolabi¹⁵ and Olapegba *et al*¹⁶ assessed the various perceptions and practices that were associated with the COVID-19 pandemic among residents in selected geographical settings or communities in Nigeria. Moreover, some scholars have simply given a general and historical overview of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria intending to argue out how to effectively manage the pandemic and to propose responses relating to the varied matters arising.¹⁷

But these researches, despite the incisive and consequential usefulness of their submissions, have not focused their attention on the Christians' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and the context of the

analysis of a biblical injunction. Therefore, this paper examines the various responses of Christians in Nigeria to the COVID-19 pandemic since its inception and concerning the "love your neighbour paradigmatic assertion of Jesus in Luke 10:25-37. The paper employs analytical methods and collates primary data from the selected biblical text and various secondary media reports, official sources, and published scholarly articles relating to the COVID-19 pandemic in and outside Nigeria and in offline and online platforms. Data were subjected to content analysis.

Taylor's *tend and befriend* theory of connectedness and support forms the conceptual framework for this paper. The term "tend and befriend" was coined in 2000 by Shelley Taylor, a Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Taylor's "tend and befriend" theory explains one of the many responses to the pandemic – our kindness to strangers. Taylor, in consonance with her research team, opines that when threatened or stressed, humans typically affiliate with one another instead of attacking each other, especially the females. This hinges on the fact that humans have a biological system that regulates behaviours in the same way basic needs like hunger or thirst are also regulated.¹⁸ The "tend and befriend" theory says that when faced with a perceived threat, such as occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, humans will tend and rely on others for connection and support. The theory was born from observing animals in laboratory settings and recording how, when shocked, they attacked each other.¹⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic shaped changes in human behaviours and attitudes consequent upon the varied responses to the threat of the coronavirus. On the other hand, human beings are social creatures that possess love and understanding in abundance. People tend to develop a sense of duty and reasonability during a period of crisis and fulfilling the desire to play their part.²⁰ According to Taylor, humans are social creatures that instinctively rely on interaction with others. So, when there is a stressor, people will instinctively seek out support from others.²¹ Thus, Taylor's "tend and befriend" theory suggests that during times of significant stress, we turn to others for connection, support and

solidarity, even among strangers. This perception is evident in the action of the Good Samaritan being referenced in the selected biblical text. He offered support to a fellow human being (a stranger), whose life was under threat and has experienced stress. Consequently, this paper argues that the COVID-19 pandemic puts on Christians the necessity to respond to the threats to the life of others through actions predicated on neighbourly love.

The Christian response to the COVID – 19 pandemic has perhaps been a wakeup call for more Christian families on the need to care for one another as the coronavirus disease ravaged the world in general and caused dislocated and dysfunctional relationships in Nigeria due to limitations in social relationships. Thus, the paper focuses on the Lucan concept of the neighbourliness of the *Good Samaritan* concerning how Christians are to show love and hospitality during the COVID – 19 pandemic. This paper is significant in that it gives a biblical response to a situation that requires Christians to exhibit a loving lifestyle contrary to what societal norms contextually propose.

General Overview of the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Christians and Churches in Nigeria

The multiplicities of available reports about the coronavirus in Nigeria show that the pandemic affected all the strata of societal institutions including the church. So, Christians too were heavily impacted by the pandemic. Generally, there was said to be a shift in people's lifestyles within the country in terms of social relations, and political and economic interactions; religion and education were contemplated to have become the new normal with its overwhelming effects on the global economy.

The increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria led to an initial lockdown of churches following the directive of the Federal Government which was re-enacted by various state governments and brought about an abrupt end to a physical gathering of worshippers as churches were closed and all public ecclesiastical processes to cut down the spread of the virus.²² This brought disruption to and ecclesial

processes of the church. At the thick of the pandemic, Christians had to access church worship services online. The church had to leverage social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Zoom, Google Meet, and Whatsapp. There was likewise the use of online radio and T.V. channels to disseminate church programmes and worship services. These were strategies that the churches imbibed to survive and sustain their processes and procedures. Thus, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for online transactions and live streaming of their services became the norm.

Also, theological colleges and Bible schools were affected by just a few innovations from conventional classroom instruction to eLearning channels such as Google or virtual classroom, including radio and television teaching sessions by some schools and churches which were closed. The COVID-19 era brought a new normal that required everyone in their places of worship to adhere to the protocols laid down by the Government and health-monitoring institutions on hygiene discipline and regulated social ethics.

Some of the identifiable effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Christians and churches in Nigeria, as gleaned from various published reports and research on the subject matter are put in the following paragraphs.

The first was either the loss of church membership or decline in church attendance or the transfer of membership from one church to another. In a developing country like Nigeria, where power supply is a major challenge and ICT is still considerably novel in a lot of rural areas, the loss of regular weekly gatherings led many churches to lose their membership. The pandemic disorganised the original pattern of the church so much that certain members who were not well established in their churches pre-pandemic joined other affiliations or stopped attending church services generally. Some of the challenges to some worshippers were the expected compulsory use of soap and water to wash hands at the point of entry, the use of disinfectants that some were not sure of the quality of the content, powered air-purifying respirators,

face shields, gloves, ventilators, face masks and face - shields. For those whose churches have located some distance from them, there was a major challenge of moving from one location to a much farther location for fear of contracting the virus in transit, so some decided to worship nearer home.

Another consequence of the poor attendance to church services was poor financial remittances. There was a sharp decline in the financial resources of many churches. According to Chukuwuma, churches execute projects mainly through tithes, offerings and donations from members. Many churches have been able to build standard well-equipped worship centres through the money realised from members. But the outbreak of COVID-19 reduced the financial capacity of many churches.²³ Most church leaders emphasise that one's financial prosperity is determined by how one gives financial support to the church. During church services, members are reminded of the importance of giving tithes and abundant offerings. Special prayers are made for those who pay their tithes and donate money to the church. During church services, some church members also make big donations as a way of showing off their wealth. Unfortunately, the outbreak of COVID-19 kept many people away from the church and the incessant sensitisation on giving; hence, many church members ceased giving. The loss of jobs experienced by some members was also partly responsible for the financial depletion of churches.

Some churches informed their members, through various social media platforms, to pay their tithes and offerings into the church's bank accounts and through mobile banking applications. However, these efforts proved abortive. Before the pandemic, many church members only give when they came for physical church services after multiple promptings by the leader. But with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, where there was neither a Pastor nor a Priest to prompt them to give, such members lost the urge to give. The churches became financially incapacitated. Money is an essential tool for the Christian ministry to thrive and just like every other institution; it is difficult for any organisation to work effectively and efficiently with the lack of

money. The lack of regular physical services for religious activities in most churches made receiving the varied forms of offerings and tithes from members decline significantly, and by extension, the salaries and emoluments of full-time church workers were equally affected.

The decline in the financial flow in some of the churches during this period also brought the consciousness of the church into building the lives of the members through the support doled out to alleviate their needs rather than embarking on physical projects. It is however worthy to observe also that there might not necessarily have been so many declines in the finances of all churches, but that most churches felt the financial challenge more because they had more to cater for than they used to. For example, they had to purchase hand sanitisers, masks and other hygiene kits for the use of members and clergy, giving palliatives to needy members in the form of material provisions and cash gifts.

Furthermore, one other impact of the pandemic is that of economic privation. The upsurge of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria promoted hardship as a result of the non-flow of money due to the lack of adequate planning for the social welfare package by both the Church and the government in situations such as the pandemic. COVID-19 became a public health crisis as several deaths were recorded on daily basis. The situation caused a huge debt loss due to non – performing loans as those who had borrowed money to do business could not fulfil their obligation due to the sudden change in the structural and the lower economic downturn caused by several business closures on government directives due to the pandemic. Several disruptions occurred in various lines of business and several manufacturing companies had to close down due to a lack of enough safety measures in place to cater for their staff, and also the challenge of transportation. The expected profit projections of the banks were on the decline as fewer people serviced their loans so the banks were also very reluctant to give out more loans as the uncertainty in business projections was dim. There was a drop in the price of crude oil, which is a major source of revenue for Nigeria, due to reasons not being unconnected with the pandemic. The demand for aviation fuel also dropped as the ban and travel restrictions made

less number of people patronize aviation companies. The global demand and supply chain of goods and services was very much on the decline as most companies had to put the business on hold for the safety of their staffers and also to ensure that the goods do not get infected or contaminated with the virus.

For those that have good economic standing in the churches and the society, it was a time that the fear of economic collapse made them panic buying, and hoarding goods and cash based on the scary speculative effect emphasised as per the likely future operating costs. Some women, children and family members were seen moving from one house to another, one street to another in search of daily bread from well-to-do individuals. In addition to these effects, the pandemic reduced the free movement of religious adherents across faith and also led to the death of affluent members. Furthermore, it led to starvation, hunger and abject poverty of both the high and low-income earners as sources of revenue were reduced daily. The churches that were a cynosure of all eyes, which made extra income from visiting guests, better referred to as tourists, could no longer receive the type of patronage they got from other members of the society and quarantine became the law once one travelled from one country to another.

Another important impact that the COVID-19 outbreak had on churches is the way it helped some of the Christian leaders to go for further learning in line with technological demand and advancement. It also helped and encouraged pastors to understand societal trends while learning to take advantage of every situation and resource at their disposal. A lot of these leaders had to learn to be technologically savvy to take advantage of every resource at present to serve as a platform for Christian ministry. And there were obvious modifications to prominent ecclesial processes such as the celebration of the Eucharist/Holy Communion, child dedication, solemnisation of Holy Matrimony, and funeral masses. These services usually bring together several persons such as church members, family and friends.

ANALYSIS OF THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN IN LUKE 10:25-37

A parable is "a short, simple story designed to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle, or moral lesson; a figure of speech in which truth is illustrated by a comparison or example drawn from everyday experiences".²⁴ The word parable is from the Greek *parabole*. Para means "beside," and *ballo* means "to throw." The idea is to throw or place something beside another thing to make a comparison. Thus, a parable represents a method of teaching in which the teacher uses familiar concepts or ideas to illustrate unfamiliar concepts in terms the learner understands. In the New Testament context, the unfamiliar concepts are spiritual truths.²⁵ A parable, then, is a simple story which compares earthly matters to spiritual truths. A parable generally teaches only one basic truth. Jesus took familiar examples from everyday human life and nature and used them to teach spiritual truth.²⁶

Jesus used parables as one of the key ways to teach his audience and in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Psalm 78:2 Cf. Matthew 13:34-35). The New Testament records over thirty parables spoken by Jesus. And the parable of the *Good Samaritan* was one of those parables, which is focused on loving one's neighbour. McClaflin lists the parables in four major subject areas. These four areas are the Kingdom of God, salvation, discipleship, and future events. In each category, Jesus attempted to convey a message that would both teach and affect the way the listener thought, lived, and believed. Using familiar concepts such as agrarian examples of planting or maritime activities of fishing, Jesus was able to impart unfamiliar and spiritual truths that the hearer would relate to and remember more readily.²⁷

According to Booth, it is necessary to know the historical background and setting of the story in order to understand a parable. The political, social, geographical, and religious circumstances at the time the parable was spoken must be considered.²⁸ Some scholars believe that parables are puzzles that are not clear and explicit because they do not follow the laws of philosophical and mathematical logic.²⁹ This assertion

notwithstanding, Jesus' parables do not have hidden meanings because he explains the meanings of his parables in the context of his audience and geographical location. We are only to take care of the applications of the interpretations of the parables.

The Background of Luke 10: 25 – 37

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is abruptly interrupted by an expert in the law who intends to test the Lord (Luke 10:25). The expert asks, "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29b NIV). As the majority of rabbinic parables function as exegeses of the scriptural text or narrative,³⁰ Jesus puts forward the parable to elucidate the greatest commandment - "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18b; Luke 10:27b).

The parable relates the story of a man travelling the road from Jerusalem to Jericho who was beaten, robbed, and left wounded on the side of the road. Historically, the location of the parable is the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Jerusalem was known as the city of worship with its magnificent temple, while Jericho was the residence of many people including priests and Levites. Therefore, it was expected that priests and Levites would travel regularly to Jerusalem to perform their temple duties.

The city of Jerusalem, as described by Booth, is located on hills about 2500 feet above sea level. Jericho lies in the Jordan River valley near the north end of the Dead Sea which is some 1200 to 1300 feet below sea level. From Jerusalem the seventeen-mile-long road to Jericho descends 3500 feet, winding between steep and barren cliffs. In Bible times the road was sometimes called the "red" or "bloody way" due to the many bandits that preyed upon the travellers.³¹ According to Stiller, "the road was notorious for its robberies and became more dangerous when Herod lay off forty thousand construction workers, leaving plenty of unemployed, some of whom turned thievery".³²

The wounded traveller was sequentially passed by, bypassed, and neglected by a priest and a Levite, but surprisingly helped by a

supposedly ignominious Samaritan. The Samaritan, in Jesus' interpretation, performs as an example of one who loves his neighbour that came to help the victim by bringing him to a sheltered place (cf., Luke 9:58b) and by instructing the innkeeper to spare no expense in his treatment (cf. Luke 2:7b). Although the story is about the man who was attacked, the main character is the Samaritan. A critical background to this parable is the knowledge that the Jews had a disdain for the Samaritans same for the Samaritans too. Samaritans were descendants of Assyrians who settled in the former kingdoms of the land of Northern Israel in the Sargon time (Refs. 2 Chronicles 28; Ezra; 2 Kings 17; Nehemiah).³³

Samaritans were viewed as half-Jews and they were excluded by the Jews from the covenant promises. And Josephus, as pointed out by Chambruka & Gusha, writes that hostility between the Jews and Samaritans was fuelled when the Samaritans desecrated the Jerusalem temple by scattering bones in it on one Passover night.³⁴ One would not, therefore, expect a Jewish rabbi (Jesus) to give a positive picture of a Samaritan. This was therefore a characteristic surprise to the audience.

The priest, who was the first person to pass by the wounded traveller, might have been returning after performing temple duties at Jerusalem. Priests were members of the tribe of Levi. The parable is silent on the reasons why the priest had to pass by the other side of the road, but this could be as a result of the fear of the robbers who may likely still be around or for the concerns of purity as a priest going for temple worship.³⁵ Leviticus 21:1–2 prohibits the priest from being defiled by a corpse through contact. They were only allowed to be in contact with the bodies of their nearest kin – mother, father, son, daughter, brother and virgin sister. So, the priest, not knowing whether the injured man was dead or not, had to play it safe because defilement had severe consequences for him and his family. According to Stiller, “if the priest became unclean, he must return to Jerusalem, stand by the Eastern gate with the unclean, and go through the process of purification”.³⁶ Hence, we need to understand the actions of the priest holistically in terms of the three spheres – spiritual, economic and social.³⁷

The next person to pass by was the Levite. Again, these were the descendants of the house of Levi and were part of the priestly community. Their role was to help or assist the priest in preparing the animals, grain and birds for sacrifice. They were also affected by purity laws as they also worked in the temple (Cf. Numbers 18:3).³⁸ Also, the literary positioning of the parable will give us a deep insight into its interpretation. The parable is positioned within what is called the travel narrative in which Jesus sets his focus towards Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), which will be the trip that will finally end with his triumphal entry and crucifixion.³⁹

The Contextual Analysis of Luke 10: 25 – 37

Over the centuries, parables have been misunderstood, over-analysed, and treated as foundational to the establishment of doctrine. A parable is not the primary source of doctrine. Rather, the parable illustrates and confirms doctrine.⁴⁰ Thus, Bailey asserts: “Understanding the central analogy of a parable is a safeguard against excessive allegorizing”.⁴¹ Doctrine encompasses a body of truth whereby Christians may live and conduct themselves. As it pertains to the Bible, it is not an individual text, but a body of truth that establishes doctrine. In essence, parables can serve to support doctrine; not establish it.

In understanding this parable, we must first and foremost see the notion that Jesus poses to his supposedly Jewish audience – to consider a Samaritan, with whom they have severed relationships, as a neighbour.⁴² Jesus challenges the different layers of barriers that we have set among ourselves – ethnic, tribal, religious, racial, economic, religious, and many others. These barriers will make us lose sense of our humanity and will deprive us of meaningful interpersonal relationships. We will then act in judgement and selfishly rather than acting in compassion and mercy. This is a call to be humanitarian. As Snodgrass points out: “All three travellers see the man, but for the priest and Levite, seeing is the impetus for caution and self-protection, while for the Samaritan seeing is the source of compassion which motivates his helping”.⁴³

The paradigm of the *Good Samaritan* parable serves to demonstrate that the demand to love God has to be complemented by what God demands of the love of the neighbour (Refs: Deuteronomy 10:18-19; 2 Chronicles 28:15).⁴⁴ The social identity indicators of the parable of the Good Samaritan accentuate the need to live out our religiosity or professed faith through beneficial actions toward others. Also, the application of the Good Samaritan parable can directly reduce intergroup conflicts and eliminate all forms of discrimination not hinged on legal and moral ideals. The story catches its essence in our daily lives as the lessons therein are meant to teach us to help others in times of need regardless of tribe and colour. The analogy in the story, when properly put in context makes one conscious of the fact that it is not enough to desire to help, but most important to carry the thought into action.

In our present day, we hear a lot of emerging prejudices which were not recorded to have been prevalent prior till now which include Xenophobia, bestiality, and transgender. All these amongst others have created a strong divide in society; but the story has demonstrated the unlimited kindness and compassion one should have for one's neighbour, more because in the eyes of our maker, we are equal. It is therefore our responsibility to do what is right and needful; to be honest and sincere in helping others without expecting anything in return. Talk is cheap, they always say, especially in our world of today when several issues are on us but we are encouraged through the story that all we need is a little act of kindness.

THE PARABLE OF THE *GOOD SAMARITAN* AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE COVID – 19 PANDEMIC IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

The parable of the *Good Samaritan* throws up certain applicable and actionable templates for Christians in Nigeria and the context of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Blomberg draws three cogent lessons from this parable and they apply to the situational context of this research.⁴⁵ First, from the example of the priest and Levite comes the principle that religious status or legalistic casuistry

does not excuse loveliness. Second, from the Samaritan, one learns that one must show compassion to those in dire need regardless of the religious or ethnic barriers that divide people. And lastly, from the man in the ditch emerges the lesson that even one's enemy is one's neighbour. By implication, there should be no prejudice to any person before showing compassion or rendering and receiving help.

The ethos implied in the parable abhors discrimination of any shape and colour. As Chambruka and Gushua point out, in the setting of the parable, the two characters, the lawyer and the Samaritan are inheritors of the discrimination that dates back to previous generations. The lawyer represented Jews who always discriminate against the Samaritans as unclean people of mixed blood. The separation led to bad blood between the two to the extent that the Samaritan woman was not prepared to give Jesus water at the well simply because their ethnicity was different.⁴⁶ Thus, we explicate our humanness and the nature of God by placing value and dignity on every human despite their status. And we must all be "good Samaritans" that pull the "needy" out of their ditches of deprivation and despicability.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria elicited some significant actions from various churches in Nigeria. Whilst some of the responses were aimed at preventing the further spread of the virus, others were targeted at supporting people with palliatives to push on with life in these times of economic turbulence.⁴⁷ So, there were both non-welfarist responses and welfarist responses. Some of the non-welfarist responses of Christians to the COVID-19 pandemic include prayer, fasting, sensitization campaigns on the dangers and preventive measures put in place by the government and health authorities, provision of sanitary buckets and hand sanitisers, and revitalisation of house fellowship or live-streamed services.⁴⁸

On the other hand, the welfarist response of the church involves the sharing of palliatives and aligns with the good neighbourliness and exemplary love concept of the parable of the *Good Samaritan*. This response has been termed "social action evangelism".⁴⁹ So, in response

to the ravaging coronavirus, the church stood up as the good Samaritans to give a soft landing to some of its members and did their best to pull them out of the ditches dug by the pandemic. One significant response was spiritual support. Some churches provided online prayers during the lockdown to ensure spiritual stability/ and ensure spiritual growth. Some churches also made Bible study teaching series available online for members which also blessed lives when people could not gather in person at the worshipping centres. Recorded messages were also made available for members to trend online for greater outreach. However, it is recognised that some church members, especially the elderly or those without digital access, found it difficult to get access online through technology marginalisation, the options of conventional media like radio, and television were explored. Falaye reported that alternatives are also being sought. Ideas being tried in different places include using radio channels, people sharing in a service individually at a set time with a common prayer sheet delivered, ringing the church bell to call people to pray at home at the same time, and gathering in their household to share in service, a Bible study or to watch a live stream or recording together.⁵⁰

Another Christian response was the giving of social and material support. The church played a critical role in supporting families and communities preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic. A lot of churches engaged in Corporate Social Responsibility as they gave out goods and foodstuff to alleviate the suffering of their members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are premised on the actionable templates exhumed from the act of neighbourliness of the Good Samaritan and on Shelly Taylor's "tend and befriend" behavioural theory of connectedness and support.

1. Christians cum the churches in Nigeria should sustain the welfarist spirit exhibited during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic rather than the urge and craze to build big and mouth-

gaping infrastructures which do not have sustainable benefits to members and non-members inclusive.

2. The church should reach out to the most technologically handicapped members and non-members of the church to be ICT compliant and digitally skilled by providing social online links for learning, training the youth on skills development that can create streams of income from home, awareness on the benefits of the ICT to run programs and to market products, and “do it yourself” hygiene products like the hand sanitisers, disinfectants and soap. This will make those concerned become financially empowered to take of their basic needs and the church and society.
3. Church leaders and members should create alternative means of surviving hard times rather than depend on statutory remuneration and handouts that are no longer sustainable in the kind of economy existing in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context. Nigerian churches and members should look beyond tithes, the seed of faith and other offerings as a means of sustaining and surviving their livelihood and ministerial activities.
4. Nigerian theological institutions, Bible schools and churches should introduce information and communication technology as a course to offer by students in their institutions. This will enable the seminarians to be ICT compliant, which is the current innovation in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic cut across the different layers of society and in different sectors with the church included. The pandemic has pushed many human activities to opt for changes. One such drastic change coronavirus introduced concerns the faith of the believers who congregate for worship services and other important

functions that fall in the Christian calendar that the church observes. The COVID-19 pandemic did not make the doctrinal pattern of the church change, it helped more of the churches in Nigeria to build a more creative social community that cares about the needs of their members and to show more love in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility by way of activating the welfare department of the Church to give to the needy. This led to competition amongst some Churches and migration amongst the members whose aim is to seek where they can derive more gifts for sustenance. The use of ICT devices and applications and social media helped in the curtailment and spread of the virus within religious centres as most worship centres were closed and members were encouraged to participate in the church's programmes on online channels. Thus, information and communication technology devices and applications were viable coping strategies employed by Nigerian churches amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. More importantly, the church in Nigeria should not reduce the welfare of the COVID-19 pandemic period but accentuate it in line with the gleanings from the actions of the Good Samaritan and the propositions of Shelly Taylor's "tend and befriend" theory of connectedness and support.

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