ISSN 0794 - 3989



FOUNDED 1975

RELIGIONS

JOURNAL OF THE NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION

FOR THE

STUDY OF RELIGIONS

VOL. 30, No.1, JANUARY, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Benefits of the Exigencies: A Reflection on the Sobering Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic on the Church in Nigeria
Uchechukwu Monica AGBO 1 - 22

Coronavirus in the face of African Traditional Medicine: The Nigerian Experience
Segun Gabriel AKINOLA 23 -36

Interrogating Matthew 14: 22-33 in the Time of Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria
Olu Emmanuel ALANA 37-53

A Historical Exegesis of John 11:50: towards Solving Covid-19 Through Substitutionary Human Sacrifice
David Gbenga ATTEH 54-63

Responses of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council to Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria
Hezekiah Banji BAIYERI & Benjamin Chibueze DIARA 64-79

Covid-19: Moral or Natural Evil and the Question of God
Sarah Igunbor ETUAJIE 80-89

Covid-19 Phenomenon and the Response of Governor Yahaya Bello of Kogi State:
A Psycho-Religious and Economic Reality
Sunday Elijah IYANDA 90-102

Religion and Covid-19 in Nigeria: A Real Journey into New Religious Experience and Expression
Adeboboye Micheal OGUNROTIFA & Ifeoluwapo Ayodele TOLORUNJU 103-117

Sacrifices in African Religion and Covid-19 Pandemic
Oluwasegun OLADOSU & Ajayi Adetokunbo OLAIYA 118-131

Pentecostal Churches' Innovative Responses to Covid-19 Pandemic in Lagos
Ojo John OLAKUNLE 132-149

COVID-19 PHENOMENON AND THE RESPONSE OF GOVERNOR YAHAYA BELLO OF KOGI STATE: A PSYCHO-RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC REALITY

By

Sunday Elijah IYANDA, Ph.D
Department of Religions
University of Ilorin
e-mail: sundayemi@yahoo.com
elijah@unilorin.edu.ng
08034871397

Abstract

It is no longer a news that Covid-19 took the world by storm and that the world is still convulsing as a result of the adverse effects. The aftermath of the global pandemic is still monumental, and has paralyzed virtually all aspects of human endeavours. It is a virus that is reminiscent of pneumonia which is one of the respiratory diseases that affects human breath. The virus was said to have evolved from Wuhan in China in December, 2019, and spread to all continents including Africa. The pandemic has ushered in a global order called "the New Normal". Be that as it may, the Kogi State Government does not believe in the existence of the virus and the global lockdown as well as "the New Normal". It is against this background that historical, comparative and analytical approaches would be employed to examine the response of Governor Yahya Bello of Kogi State and the reality of the virus. The paper, therefore, concludes that since state was not affected as claimed by the governor Covid-19 protocols were not in place. To this end, all the economic, social, political, and religious activities were not paralyzed.

Keywords: Covid-19, New Normal, Psycho-Religious, Lockdown and Aftermath

Introduction

The outbreak of coronavirus called Covid-19, took the world by surprise. The coronavirus is described as one of the respiratory diseases that affects the breathing organs like pneumonia does.[1] The effects of the outbreak of the pandemic are monumental loss of lives. The virus was said to have emanated from Wuhan Province of China, while Chinese opined that the virus evolved in the United States of America. The corresponding effects of the outbreak of the pandemic are global lockdown, laden with the adverse implication on the socio-economic meltdown of which the developing nations like Nigeria are not exempted. The pandemic ushered in "the New Normal" which people are still coping with. It was in March, 2020 that the surge penetrated Nigeria through an Italian expatriate which was the genesis of the pandemic in Nigeria.[2] The pandemic really exposed human limitedness and weaknesses socially, economically, medically, technologically, religiously, and scientifically.

It could be deduced that the developing nations are not worst hit as predicted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other experts because the hot weather is not favourable to the virus and African climate is densely high in Celsius. Therefore, the death tolls of the super nations are over a million human souls, while the death rate in the developing countries are less than the super powers where things are working perfectly well. The global lockdown resulted into restriction of movements that crumbled social activities. Pilgrimage centers such as Jerusalem Israel and Saudi Arabia were completely locked down. Those affected with the virus were self-isolated or quarantined for not less than fourteen days so as not to infect or affect other people.[3] That led to the use of nose-mask, constant washing of hands, use of sanitizer and social or physical distancing were so as to control the spread of the virus.

As far as covid-19 is concerned, there are two schools of thought that emanated as a result of this pandemic. The first school believes that the virus does not exist, rather it is a fiction for the government and other medical personnel to swindle money, not only them but some scholars and other agencies. The Governor of Kogi State Alhaji Yahaya Bello and the Governor of Cross Rivers State Prof. Ben Ayade belong to this school of thought. The second school

of thought believes in the existence of the virus and the implications of non-adherence to the policies and protocols of the virus.[4]

Therefore, it is the intention of this paper to examine the response of Governor Yahaya Bello, the Kogi State Government to a psycho-religious and economic reality of Covid-19. In addition, the synopsis of Covid-19 phenomenon, the effects, responses of Kogi State Government, psycho-religious fact, economic reality, and evaluation of the virus will be fully examined.

Synopsis of Covid-19 Phenomenon

Coronavirus is a type of virus that causes respiratory illness, and a reminiscence of pneumonia. Covid-19 which emerged in December, 2019 was said to be a disease that has caused millions of deaths around the world and brought health challenges in some that have survived the illness.[5] SARS-COV-2 that is commonly called coronavirus is a specie of the "Several Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). It has also been described as covid-19 so as to show that this variant of the disease was discovered in 2019. As part of its manifestation, it is highly contagious but less fatal than the previously known species.[6]

As to the historical origin of the virus, there is an endless debate as to where it evolved. The virus was said to have originated in Wuhan Province of China in December, 2019. The Chinese vehemently denied this by asserting that it was transported from the United States of America through sporting events in 2019. This was opposed to by Donald Trump that it is Chinese virus.[7] All effort to identify the origin of the pandemic has been seen as more of political than scientific veracity. The two super power nations have been at logger head in an attempt to indict each other. Where it originated from is not the issue at hand, but the fact remains that the virus has crippled the globe in all aspects of human endeavour. History also has that in every one hundred years, there is an outbreak of pandemic globally. This has been traced back to history when in 1818-1820 and 1918- 1920, there were outbreaks of Epidemics Flu and Bubonic plague respectively.[8] A handful of people believe that history is repeating itself again. This shows that, the globe has been brought to its knees and all aspects of human endeavours were grounded by the

pandemic. It also shows how human weaknesses were exposed in all ramifications of life. As a matter of fact, statistics has shown that Super Power Nations such as United States of America, Japan, Brazil, United Kingdom among others are worst hit than developing nations. The reason why the developing nations are not worst hit by the pandemic could not be farfetched. The hot weather experienced in Africa is not favourable to the virus and African climate is also densely high in Celsius.[9]

The aftermath of the outbreak of the pandemic was the global lockdown that affected restriction of movement and other social and religious activities. This could be felt in the closure of the Saudi-Arabia and the State of Israel for the performance of pilgrimage. It must be noted that the pandemic necessitated series of developments such as e-learning, e-banking, e-worship/e-preaching, e-commerce, and e-marriage among others. The good aspect of the "New Normal" cannot be shoveled away because it has strengthened virtual activities and Webinar zooming of any meeting including wedding. Towards the end of 2020, when many nations were gradually coming out of Covid-19, the second wave emerged. Today the third wave has also been predicted, which is fondly called "DELTA VARIANT."[10]

The Effects

The effects of Covid-19 cannot be over emphasized, because the good and the ugly aspects of it were experienced during the pandemic. It will not be an over statement to say that, during the total lockdown, people stayed at home; prayed fervently against the virus; peoples' lives were improved spiritually with more sober reflection and intellectually because it helped people in academics to come up with different research discoveries. As part of the effects of Covid-19, the "new normal" was greeted with virtual learning, and meeting through webinar zoom. Educationally, e-learning becomes trendy, while many institutions combine virtual and physical learning together which has occasioned the use of nose mask, hand sanitizer, and physical /social distancing.[11]

It must be noted that, palliatives were distributed by the government, philanthropists, Churches, and individuals. Nigerian government was assisted by the World Health Organization (WHO)

and other international agencies financially,[12] materially, and in the area of service rendering.[13] It is worthy of note that some of the palliatives were randomly distributed by the philanthropists, Churches, and private individuals. The palliatives from the government were alleged to have been hijacked by some officials and kept in some designated warehouses for 2023 elections.[14] This was evident during the 'End SARS Protest' in October, 2020 and was eventually hijacked by hoodlums, thereby breaking into the warehouses and carted away palliatives. The Nigerian government is still swimming in the ocean of economic recession as government has continued to borrow from all available means.

It was discovered that some experts treat Covid-19 patients with Hydroxy Chloroquine, Zinc and Azithromycin. It is observed that some medical experts are economical with the truth about the treatment. This resulted into the politicization of the pandemic, and it makes many of them to have field day by capitalizing on the pandemic to make millions of naira during the period. This led to increase in the numbers of Covid-19patients on daily basis, when ordinary people with symptoms of headache and malaria were taken to isolation centers. The Gombe case as reported by Channel Television News and the Kano Saga of El-El Kabir feast break were obvious example. The incident made social critics and sceptics to believe that Covid-19 is a scam and ordinary epidermic. These made Kogi and Cross River States Governors to believe uncompromisingly that coronavirus is a scam.

The Response of Kogi State Government

Since the beginning of the Corona virus in Nigeria, the spread has significantly been unequal among the thirty-six states, and Abuja being the federal capital, with Lagos bearing much of the brunt of the disease. Nearly half of Nigeria's total infections were found in both states because Lagos is the commercial nerve centre and Abuja the Federal capital respectively.[15] This was said to be so because the two states are the country's main entry and exit points.

While other States have managed to keep the numbers low because of their population compared to Lagos and Abuja, Kogi state is the least impacted across the country with a total of just five

infections. Two out of the five died while three recovered. Bello in his remarks declared that, the five discovered in Kogi state were NCDC creation.[16]

At various points during the Covid-19 pandemic, Bello claimed that the virus was "an artificial creation". He refused to wear a mask at public events, such as meeting with President Mohammed Buhari and at the funeral of Tolulope Arotile.[17] He did not also wear a nose mask at the memorial prayers for Kogi State Chief Judge Nasir Ajanah who was said to have died of coronavirus on 28th June, 2020. There, Bello claimed that Ajanah did not die of Covid-19 whether medical experts and scientists may believe it or not. He added that it is a disease propagated by force for Nigerians to accept[18]. This could be ascertained in October 2020 when he rejected over one-billion-naira support fund for Kogi State from the World Bank because of his disbelief that Covid-19 is a glorified malaria."[19] The position of Kogi State Governor could be understood in his 2020 New Year's Eve address when he said that "we remain determined as a government not to respond to the highly controversial second wave with mass hysteria," and claimed Kogi State was coronavirus free.[20]

He also opposes vaccination contrary to the scientist's consensus that vaccines are safe and effective.[21] He is of the view that the vaccine makers are out to introduce the disease that would kill the people, and dissuaded them from taking the vaccine.[22] His attitude is an eye opener to many Nigerians as he was condemned by Governors' forum.[23] Governor Bello could imagine how the issue of coronavirus has been politicized and that the fear of the virus could kill faster than the virus itself. He concluded that it was an imported illness that was forced on people to shorten their lives.[24] He did not see Covid-19 as a problem to the people of Kogi State and that there are more prominent issues such as security and yellow fever that have to be attended to in the state. As controversial as Covid-19 has been, with less stringent adherence to its protocols, Kogi State still remains the only state with no case recorded even with the argument that the said cases allotted to them were recorded outside the state[25]. In one of his responses to Covid-19 when visited by Pastor Enenche, the Governor was against the commercialization of the pandemic in the country. He noted that the existence of the virus could not be over-

ruled but it should not become the only tropical issue discussed on every available media platform as there were other deadly events that were recording more fatality than the Covid 19.[26]

Following Governor Bello's response on the delivery of Covid-19 vaccines from the Federal Government, he said that he would not force anybody to take a jab, whoever wished could take. He maintained this because he had consistently dismissed the existence of the virus in the state.[27]

Psycho-Religious Reality in Kogi State

That fact that the pandemic took everyone by storm still remains non-negotiable. It also took the Church by surprise. During the global lockdown, virtually all the religious centres were completely closed down for three months. In some states like Ogun and Lagos, it was five to seven months. Christian leaders were helpless could not boast of God revealing the global convulsion as occasioned by coronavirus.[28] Many Churches were of the view that coronavirus is God's judgment for the sin of the 21st Century world. And that instead of feigning ignorance of the pandemic, the Church should first and foremost take necessary precautionary measure and later return to the spiritual aspect.[29] This was what some Church leaders frowned at because they had a strong belief that covid-19 could just be a reminiscence of the influenza of 1918 which was cured through prayers by the Aladura Movement. Some Church historians posited in 1918, health centers, hospitals and clinic were shut down, in the place of prayers Had the Christian leaders maintained their holiness, the pandemic would have not been wide spread. The failure of the Church leaders today demonstrated their level of righteousness Many have turned themselves to prosperity gospelers or money theologians. It is not surprising that Maxey and Ozodo in their book "The Seduction of the Nigerian Church."[30] state among others that the pursuit of materialism in the Church has put off the revival fires. The pursuit of materialism by many church leaders in contemporary times makes them not to be spiritually alert to the emergence of coronavirus as a global upsurge.

The psycho-religious reality in this regard talks about the state of mind of Kogi people. This becomes enamored with the

strength and belief that the virus does not exist at all. It is not out of place to state that some custodians of traditional religion in Kogi state must have engaged themselves with ritual preparations and offering different sacrifices especially in the night at the entrance of the state or community in order to ward-off the outbreak and its effects. As a matter of fact, these ritual preparations and sacrifices offered have the psychic potentials to dispel or curb the pandemic. These are evident in the submissions of Awolalu and Dopamu. More often than not, the Divinities are poised to reveal most of these dangers, and sacrifices/rituals are carried out so as to dispel epidemic. Last year, the Ooni of Ife sprayed ero in Ife town in order to ward-off the virus.[31] The fact that African climate is not friendly to the virus is a plus to the working of the divinities.[32]

Economic Reality of Covid-19 in Kogi State

Coronavirus has come to stay for a while. The economic reality of covid-19 cannot be undermined. This is because it has brought devastating changes to global activities of which Nigeria is not exempted. Since March, 2020, life in Nigeria has not been the same as thousands of people have lost their jobs. Everything was brought to a halt. Human beings were under lockdown, nobody could move or travel and there was inter-state lockdown which grounded the socio-economic activities so much that artisans could not engage in any meaningful endeavour. Some senior officers in bureaucracy were working from home while the lockdown lasted.[33] In states where there was corresponding ease, social and economic lives were regimented.

Due to the pandemic, there are hardly any good merchant or service providers whose mode of operation has not been adversely affected. The travelling costs, food prices, garments, and others have been skyrocketed. The global threats have contributed to a worldwide shutdown of many businesses. The lockdown did significant harm to global market demand, industries, revenue generation, and jobs among others.[34] The alarming rate with which the virus spread caught many economies by surprise, Nigeria inclusive. In the food sector, the average price of N19,250, a 50kg bag of rice has skyrocketed to N28, 750. All these and more are proofs that covid-19 has brought about a huge change in Nigeria's economic system and a lot of business may

pack-up in due time. The reality of the economic conditions is being felt by various Nigerian businesses organizations across different sectors, from airlines to banks, media and others. Many organizations disengaged their staff such as Air peace airline, Arik airline that employed nearly three thousand 3000 staff had to take a painful decision of dismissing some of her pilots and reduced the salaries of all staff.[35] It was not only this organization that was negatively affected but it cuts across all economic sectors.

As at today, the Nigeria government is still swimming in the ocean of economic recession as government has continued to borrow from the living, retired and the dead. But in Kogi State, there was no lockdown, economic was not affected because throughout the period of constraints, buying, selling, and production within the capacity of the state were on going. Economic, social and religious activities were not negatively affected like other part of the nation. This could be deduced from Governor Yahaya's release when he advised the Federal Government to focus on economic recovery and not procuring Covid-19 vaccines. He saw spending huge amount of money on getting the covid-19 vaccines as a misplacement of priority. He preferred being excused from the discussion on covid-19because he had taken a position and he did not see himself shifting from his earlier position. He emphasized that he was not in agreement with the Federal Government on the pandemic. Today, Kogi is secured in terms of economic delivery and it has manifested in the number of investments flowing into Kogi state.[36]

The Governor's response was corroborated by the Commissioner for Agriculture, David Apeh in his presentation where he elucidated on "Achieving Food Security In spite of Global Economic Downturn: The Kogi Story" He acknowledged that the global economic downturn is enveloped with a food crisis that pushed the price of basic staples food beyond the reach of millions of poor people. The state government in an attempt to alleviate the problem and cope with food security was in true collaboration with government and non-governmental agencies across the state[37]

The fact that the state is covered with a land mass and agriculture is the mainstay of her economy is collaborated with the World Bank to fund program such as agro-processing, productivity

enhancement, and livelihood support (APPEALS) project that empowers youth/women in rice, cassava, and cashew production. There were many other programs that came on board during the period known as Accelerated Agricultural Development Scheme (AADS) where six hundred earth ponds were constructed, spread across the senatorial districts of the state. Feed Mills were constructed to feed the fish, one hundred hectares of land each in three senatorial districts were cleared and fractionalized to be shared to youth/women beneficiaries with five cassava farms.[38]

The state also corroborated with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to fund projects which empowered youths and women in the development of agriculture by giving seventy-five Horse Power Tractors with full implements, one thousand Power Tillers that were distributed to women farmers all over the state. All these were done amidst Covid-19 challenges all in the process of ensuring food security irrespective of the shortage of resources in the state. The revitalization of economy during the covid-19 could be seen in the constitution of 36-member Economic Advisory Council by the Governor chaired by Aliyu Inda so as to provide evidence-driven decision making and rigorous evaluation of the economy.[39]

Besides, medical project cost 1.3billion naira is currently ongoing in order to boost the already existing ones. Assessing the comments of Governor Yahaya, he stressed that the medical project is being undertaken as a result of the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) raked in during the lockdown period. When the project is completed, the Governor asserted, it would be one of the states of art medical centres in Nigeria.

An Evaluation

It is an established fact that covid-19 took the world by surprise irrespective of faith and position. It affected virtually all the areas of human endeavours. The pandemic created 'new normal' where social distancing is permitted, restriction of movement, social interaction has necessitated development such as e-learning, e-transfer, e-banking, e-marriage, e-payment, e-delivery, e-accreditation, and e-commerce.[40] Towards the end of 2020, when some nations were gradually coming out of it the second wave of covid-19 emerged.

Medical experts opine that the second wave would be deadlier than the previous.

However, the Kogi State Government vehemently disagreed with the Federal Government on the existence of Covid-19 in the State. The Governor acknowledges that the State was able to record increased food production and food security. Although, the gains of the past were slowed down by Covid-19 pandemic, but the food productions have started picking up."[41]

Conclusion

Corona virus took the world by surprise because nobody prepared for it. The effect of the pandemic is so enormous that no area of life was left untouched. It claimed lives, but Kogi State stood out from the midst of the states that were ravaged. The responses of Kogi State Government on the existence of corona virus could not be far-fetched. The Governor believes that Covid-19 does not exist because Nigeria climate is unfriendly with the virus. Moreover, the pandemic is more of political creation than scientific reality.

It is worthy of note that throughout the period of lockdown which the whole world experienced, Kogi State was not locked down and all activities were ongoing. Weddings, burials and other social activities were not hindered. The use of nose-mask was not made compulsory and economic and religious activities were not negatively affected like the other parts of the nation and the world at large.

Endnotes

1. *Oxford Mini Dictionary*, (Oxford: University Press, 2007), 237.
2. Akiti Alamu, *Religion and Public Affairs in Nigeria* (Ilorin: K-Success Prints Media, 2021), 300.
3. N. A. Adegboyega et-al, "Quarantine as a Remedy for the Spread of Disease from thePerspective of Islamic Legal Maxim," *Journal of Religion and Culture*, 20. 1 (2020): 76.
4. Alamu, 305
5. Lauren M. Saver, *What is coronavirus?* www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health. Accessed on 1 4 July,2021.
6. *Information Retrieved in National Association for the Study of Religion WhatsApp Platform* on the 27 August, 2020.
7. Alamu, 300
8. Alamu, 300.
9. Alamu, 300.
10. Alamu, 301.
11. Alamu, 304
12. *US Assistance to Fight Covid-19 in Nigeria Reaches $21.4m,* https//ng.usembass.gov/u assistanceto=fight-covid-19. Accessed on 14 July,2021
13. Multi-Sector Collaboration in Nigeria's Covid-19 Responses, www.who.int/health cluster... Accessed on 14th July, 2021.
14. Alamu, 304.
15. Covid-19: *While Nigeria's New Cases, Surge, Kogi yet to Report New Infection in 175 Days,* https//www.premiumtimesng.com/news. Accessed on 15th J uly, 2021.
16. Covid-19:
17. Adedamola Olonilua, *Covid-`19: Five Controversies of Kogi State Governor-Yahaya Bello,* (*The Punch*). Accessed on 9 May, 2021.
18. Gbenga Odogun, *Covid-19only to Create Fear, Panic-Y ahaya Bello,* (*The Punch*), Accessed on 9 May,2021.
19. Sodiq Oyeleke, *Covid-19, Why Kogi Rejected World Bank 1.1bn Support Fund-Yahaya Bello,* (*The Punch*). Accessed on 9 May, 2021.
20. Dyeikazah Shibayan, *Yahaya Bello: Kogi Won't Respond to Covid-19 Second Wave withPanic,The Cable*. Accessed

on 9 May, 2021.

21. Tim Cooks, *As Vaccines Arrived? South Africa Faces Wide Spread Skepticism Over Safety,* Reuters. Accessed on 9 May, 2021.
22. Niyi Oyediji, *I will not Take Covid-19 Vaccine-Yahaya Bello,* The International Investigative Reporting. Accessed on 9 May, 2021.
23. Ufoma Vincent, *NGF Distances From Comment Made by Yahaya Bello on Covid-19Vaccine.* Accessed on 19 May, 2021.
24. *Covid-19 is a Hoax*
25. *Pastor Enenche Commends Kogi*
26. *Pastor Enench Commends Kogi*
27. *Despite Kogi Governor's Anti-Covid-19 Vaccine Stand, State will Take Delivery of Doses-Commissioner*, Sahara Reporters, New York-March, 10, 2021. Accessed on 20 July, 2021.
28. Alamu, 304.
29. Alamu, 304.
30. G. S. Maxey and P. Ozodo, *The Seduction of the Nigerian Churches* (Lagos: WATS, 2017), 53.
31. *There is a Current Outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Disease*, https//www.who.int/health-topic/coronavirus. Accessed on 27/04/2021.
32. Alamu, 302.
33. *The Covid-19 Economic Reality in Nigeria*, www.thecable.ng. Auguust 17, 2020, Accessed on 24 July,2021.
34. *The Covid-19 Economic Reality*
35. *The Covid-19 Economic Reality*
36. Yahaya Bello, *FG Should Focus on Economic Recovery not Procuring COVID-19 Vaccines,* Accessed on 27 April, 2021.
37. *Amidst Covid-19 Challenge, Kogi Setting the pace for Sustainable Food Security in Nigeria,* www.vanguardngr.com, Aug. 13, 2021. Accessed on 9th September, 2021.
38. *Amidst Covid-19 Challenge*
39. Blue Print, *Kogi Constitutes 36-Member Economic Advisory Council,* www.blueprint.ng/kogi April 8, 2021.Accessed on 27/04/2021
40. Alamu, 302.
41. *Amidst Covid-19 Challenge*