



ABSTRACT

Truth be told, religion have provided motives for men to act in ways that were both immoral and contrary to their self-interest. Just as it have served an independent causal factor that leads to conflict; as evidenced in various religious induced violence in Nigeria. At the same time, religion equally serve as an instrument of conflict resolution, national development

RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST SPREAD OF COVID 19 IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

It is an immutable truism that Nigerians are highly religious and spiritual. This is attested to by the fact that the country is nearly even divided between adherents of the two world major religions – Christianity and Islam. While, the remaining [estimated] 2 percent belong largely to African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Animist. Given this preponderance, one may be not be wrong to assume that the country will be very peaceful and stable. As recorded histories of the world indicate that religion and its tenets have been a binding force that unifies as well as create nationalistic sentiments and civilizations as demonstrated by Jerusalem, Rome, and Mecca, etc. suggesting that religious traditions and practices constitutes veritable instruments of social cohesion, social control, behavioural modification and conflict resolution. The religiosity of most Nigerians was demonstrated by Campbell (2020, p.1) as follows:



Nigerians like to say that they are the world's most religious people and the happiest, despite their low standing on most of the standard indices of development. In fact, they say, they are the happiest because of the hope that religion provides. Conventional religious practices are widespread, from regular attendance at churches and mosques and private reading of the Bible and the Koran. More than fifty years ago, the Nigerian government declared that the number of adherents to Christianity and Islam was equal, and that therefore neither was a minority religion. Nobody knows the relative size of the two religions, though in general each claims to be "really" the largest. Holy Week, Easter, and Ramadan are the high

and humanitarian interventions going the numerous roles played by religious leaders, Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) and religious bodies in conflict zones as well as places that require humanitarian interventions. This study examines the role played by the religious organizations in the country in the first against Covid-19 in Nigeria especially during the lockdown. Despite, problematising reactions of some religious leaders, towards the state-imposed lockdown guidelines for preventing the spread of Covid-19 virus in the country The study argued that religious leaders and religious organizations contributed immensely through their donations both in cash, materials, food, information, directives, and facilities, etc. It concludes that religious leaders and religious organization constitute veritable instrument for social control. Hence, the state needs partner with them in order to ensure that the curve is flattened in parlor. The study made practical recommendations for combating spread of the virus,

Keywords: Covid 19, religious leaders and organization. Palliative, lockdown, guidelines



points of the religious years, with processions and packed churches and mosques.

Contrarily, religion in the Nigerian context has for decades triggered and sustained fault line that create divisions, enmity, exclusion, marginalization, deprivation, alienation, intolerance, sectionalisation, instability, politicization and violent conflict. This is evidenced in the many and diverse incidences of religious induced violence witnessed in the country since its political independence on October 1, 1960. Ironical as it is, popular opinion on religious intolerance and conflict in the country make it appear as if it is restricted to a particular part of the country as well as a particular religious set. In reality, the problem associated with intolerance features in all parts of the country and religious denominations. It is in recognition of the conflict potentials of the religious creed and discourse in the country that the 2009 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended prohibited state religion when it provided under its Section 10 that “the government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion”. Besides, in order to protect the religious freedom of citizens among other things, it further provided under Section 38 (1-3) that:

1. Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own or a religion not approved by his parent or guardian.
3. No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupil of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.



Cashing in on these fundamental rights especially in abusive manner by leaders, practitioners and adherents various religious denominations in the country; issues relating to religion have contributed in no small measure in creating tensions between/among citizens on the one hand as well as between citizens and the state on the other.

Expectedly (it was no surprise that), when the novel corona virus (Covid 19) that currently ravages the world was declared a pandemic in early 2020 by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Some religious and faith leaders in the country debunked the existence of virus while some others prophesied to their willing congregation that Covid 19 cannot affect them since they are only carrying corrosive anointing but were in addition covered by the special blood of Jesus. It was this opposing narrative that compelled the OFCOM, the British broadcast regulator to sanction and prevent Pastor Chris Oyakhilome's LoveWorld Television from airing in the British air space in May 2020 due to his strong Conspiracy theory that associates Covid-19 pandemic to the development of 5G networks (Ibrahim, 2020). In the view of this, these religious leaders and their follower severally violated with reckless abandon the preventive measures that were put in place to checkmate spread of the virus by the Presidential Taskforce (PTF) on Covid 19 most especially, wearing of nose mask, face shield, constant washing of hand, use of hand sanitizer, practice of social and physical distancing, closure of schools, lockdown, staying at home, avoidance of crowded places, restriction of social functions/activities, ban on religious gatherings/activities, etc. This made religion to appear as an obstacle on path of the state towards attaining the reasons for instituting these preventive and lockdown regulations, which appears to have contributed to the spread and resurgence (second wave) of the virus between late 2020 and early 2021. At least the statements of the Chairman of the Presidential Task Force on Covid 19 and Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Boss Mustapha suggests this, when he opined that:

It is, however, very instructive to stress the factors that have contributed to rise in numbers from late November 2020 included that increased local and international



travels, businesses and religious activities, reopening of schools without strict compliance with Covid 19 safety measures (Ifreke, 2021 online).

Despite, these apparent oppositions, faith based organizations played crucial roles in the fight to limit the spread and community transmission of the virus. It equally, assisted in ameliorating the plights of the citizens during the lockdown period when most businesses and markets were shutdown, thereby making it difficult for people to access food items. It is therefore, these contributions of religious organization (Faith Based Organisations) that this study interrogates.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine the ways Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) contributed to the fight against coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria.

Methodology

The methodology for this study comprised desk-based research, and expert reviews of the analysis. A literature review was conducted with open source material. This involved a comprehensive search and selection of relevant documents based on scope, relevance, credibility, and completeness. Given the novelty of the subject and lack of much published works on the subject at the moment mainly as it regards the role and contributions of FBOs, the bulk of the material used for this study was sourced from secondary sources of documentary evidences from official publications, newspapers, magazines, tweets, internet, etc. Besides, in order to appreciate the reasons some religious leaders and their followers were opposed to imposition of lockdown by the state, most especially the closure of places of worship (or restriction as per time and number of worshippers allowed), the researcher conducted elite interview with some religious leaders in the country.

Major findings

Nigerian state and Covid-19 lockdown measures

COVID-19 pandemic is probably the biggest scourge and uncertainty that the world has faced since the Spanish Flu of 1918 -1920 and the World



Wars of 1914 and 1944 (Abati, 2020). The pandemic has presented us with an unprecedented global challenge, touching every community in every nation of the world. The pandemic is causing systems of work, education, finance and domestic lives to grind to a halt, affecting nearly every aspect of people's lives (UNICEF, 2020). In the case of Nigeria, Nigeria announced its first COVID-19 case on February 27 - an Italian who came into the country on February 24 and displayed symptoms of the disease while visiting Lafarge Cement Company in Ewekoro, Ogun State (Abati, 2020). Since then the number has been increasing, such that as at January 27, 2021 the total confirmed cases in the country stood at 126,160 with 24, 254 active cases, 100, 365 discharged cases and 1,543 deaths (<https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>). The state by state break down of this number is presented in the table below:

Table 1: Confirmed Cases of Covid-19 in Nigeria by State

States Affected	No. of Cases (Lab Confirmed)	No. of Cases (on admission)	No. Discharged	No. of Deaths
Lagos	46,935	8,431	38,205	299
FCT	16,341	5,254	10,963	124
Plateau	7,740	816	6,871	53
Kaduna	7,458	732	6,669	57
Oyo	5,232	1,046	4,110	76
Rivers	5,093	701	4,313	79
Edo	3,689	571	2,982	136
Ogun	3,263	557	2,664	42
Kano	2,889	390	2,423	76
Delta	2,249	460	1,737	52
Ondo	2,222	175	2,000	47
Kwara	1,887	308	1,540	39
Katsina	1,812	84	1,701	27
Enugu	1,738	296	1,421	21
Nasarawa	1,720	1,382	325	13
Gombe	1,581	167	1,372	42
Osun	1,470	329	1,109	32



Ebonyi	1,393	166	1,197	30
Abia	1,220	114	1,094	12
Bauchi	1,136	36	1,083	17
Imo	1,046	239	790	17
Borno	900	90	774	36
Akwa Ibom	783	302	471	10
Benue	749	196	535	18
Anambra	720	366	334	20
Sokoto	707	31	650	26
Niger	688	257	417	14
Bayelsa	661	74	563	24
Adamawa	631	363	240	28
Ekiti	532	89	435	8
Jigawa	450	49	390	11
Taraba	349	101	233	15
Kebbi	267	51	203	13
Yobe	221	14	199	8
Zamfara	194	17	170	7
Cross River	189	-2	179	12
Kogi	5	0	3	2

Source: <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>

The table is arranged in descending order starting with the state with the highest number of cases and ending with the one with lowest number of cases.

In terms of its mode of transmission, the World Health Organisation states that:

Covid-19 is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing), touching surfaces contaminated with the virus. There is also a possibility of transmission through feces. Since this is a new virus where the source and how it develops is not yet entirely clear, the risk of transmission from the body can be caused by the fluid coming out of the body.



Current evidence suggests that transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) occurs primarily between people through direct, indirect, or close contact with infected people through infected secretions such as saliva and respiratory secretions, or through their respiratory droplets, which are expelled when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks or sings.

Responding to the rising menace of the virus the federal government in an attempt to contain its spread to other parts of the country that were deemed safe at the time issued stay-at-home orders on March 30, 2020 on Lagos, Ogun state (due to its proximity Lagos as well as that most people that do business in Lagos resides to Ogun), and Abuja, the national capital. As the situation, started spiraling out of control, which is evidenced in the discovery of the virus in the other parts of the country; state governments taking a cue from the federal government replicated the lockdown measures of stay at home, closure of schools, places of worship, markets, offices, businesses, transportation, intra and inter-state travel, imposition of curfew, compulsory use of face shield, nose mask, sanitizer and washing of hand with soap, social/physical distance, etc. Again, all social activities such as weddings, funerals, going to cinemas, clubs and beer parlors were prohibited. Besides, most states do not only adopt the federal governments' lockdown measures; they even added to it based on their peculiar conditions. Expectedly, the President while giving his lockdown and stay-at -home order exempted hospitals and all related medical establishments as well as organizations in healthcare related manufacturing and distribution. He noted that the lockdown (especially the initial 14 days imposed on Lagos, Ogun and the FCT) was to identify, trace, and isolate all individuals that has come in contact with confirmed cases of COVID- 19 (Ibrahima, 2020).

Moreover, the country equally took the extra precaution of conducting detailed screening, data capturing and profiling of all travelers returning or coming into the country at airports and other points of entry, in order to ascertain their health status. After which they were mandatorily required to self-isolate for 14 days before mingling with people in the society; being the standard procedure and incubation period for persons that may had come in contact with the virus. Depending on the state,



guidelines for social gatherings, including religious congregational worship, have limited attendance to between twenty and fifty persons, as well as requiring social distancing. In the case of Kaduna, a city in north-central Nigeria, religious congregational worship was suspended (Nwaka, 2020).

Whereas mainstream Christian churches and Muslim authorities, such as the Catholic Church, Anglican, Methodist, etc, as well as the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) accepted and supported government restrictions by complying with them. They also ask their members to abide and practice same (Campbell, 2020). The Pentecostal churches and radical Islamic clerics and adherents opposed were opposed to the lockdown. They described it as satanic and is targeted at preventing them from conducting worships. Given this view a number of them violated the lockdown measures with reckless abandon. Consequent upon which in both Christian and Muslim communities, many Pastors and Imams were arrested while others were suspended for violating these state imposed measures. Abati (2020) noted that:

There are also some religious leaders going about telling the people that Corona Virus cannot touch Christians or Muslims. One popular Pastor even preached on Sunday that whoever goes for testing is likely to be infected and so, no Christian should go for testing because Corona Virus is a manifestation of the anti-Christ. In Katsina, one Muslim cleric insisted on holding Friday prayers in defiance of official directives. The State Task Force on Corona Virus dispersed the crowd. What followed was that some of the members of the group stormed a police station and burnt down the vehicles in the compound. They said they were defending their right to pray and assemble. They are mad. Every Pastor or Imam who violates the rules on the containment of COVID-19 should be arrested and made to face the full wrath of the law.

Furthermore, some church ministers who saw Covid-19 and its concomitant restrictions as satanic claimed to have quick solutions to the



pandemic. Among them were T. B. Joshua, who predicted that Covid-19 would disappear after heavy rainfall on March 27, and Elijah Ayodele, who claimed he was in possession of holy water and oil that could cure the disease. In addition, on April 13, Goodheart Val Aloysius of Father's House International Church in Calabar asked the government to gather all those who had tested positive for Covid-19 in an isolation center for him to heal them. To emphasize his seriousness, he called on the government to hang him if he failed to heal all those who had tested positive (Nwaka, 2020).

Reflections on the contribution of Religious organizations to the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria

Religion has the potential to promote as well as impede the public good. It has a special appeal as well as compels people even the strongest of men to either refrain from taking a particular course of action or as a catalyst for subscribing to it. Therefore, in the fight against coronavirus, FBOs constitute a veritable support system to efforts of government in ensuring that the virus is contained. Experience over time, demonstrates that people listens more to (obeys) their religious leaders more than they do any other persons including professionals in various fields of human endeavour. For instance, most Nigerians would rather fast and pray against unemployment and hunger to improving their skills and credentials as well as taking necessary steps that will enable them secure an employment. The point is that religious leaders, posses special influence on their adherents in addition to sharing a more closely knitted bond than government. In fact, when government (public) policies affect people negatively, most persons often take it to religious authorities for succor by seeking spiritual interventions. The validity of this assertion is demonstrated in the conclusions reached at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit that recognised the unique roles and comparative advantage of engaging FBOs, in humanitarian contexts when it observed that FBOs:

- Have both close proximity to and are part of populations affected by crises



- Are embedded in local communities and maintain relationships of trust and familiarity
- Are first responders who continue to provide assistance and protection during and after crisis
- Hold influence with national, provincial and local actors including governments and traditional leaders
- Share a critical responsibility and role in working for peace with the ability to facilitate sustainable behaviour changes based on faith motivations and worldview
- Provide ongoing pastoral support to communities including providing a sense of hope during and after disaster. In some crises this has been combined with training in psychosocial support, psychosocial first aid and palliative care (CAN DO, 2020).

Although a number of religious associations violated the government lockdown guidelines. Nigeria's religious community is contributed in various ways to the fight against Covid-19. Highlighting, the importance of religious leaders in combating health crises, the United States Centre for Biotechnology Information notes "religious leaders and faith organizations have the potential to influence health education, health promotion and positive health outcomes amongst members of their faith community. They also provide potential access to at-risk populations... encouraging health service utilization." Furthermore, the United States National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health, observes that "As custodians of the day-to-day cultural values, traditional and religious leaders command more respect and authority in their communities than unfamiliar trained health personnel, who can easily be viewed as having suspicious agendas." This indicates that religious leaders provide wide range of supporting activities to the national guidelines and local conditions as demonstrated in the table below:

Table 1: Ways religious leaders can provide support to health pandemic guidelines



Coordination	Behaviour Change	Social Distancing	Counter-narratives	Welfare Provision	Facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise on policy and public messaging Make contingency plans for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) social distancing (2) humanitarian coordination (3) community welfare support (4) fundraising (5) easing of restrictions Implement contingency plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate and model government guidelines and scriptural imperatives and precedents Empower women and youth Sensitise local service providers Resolve disputes Model responsible behaviour by receiving treatment publicly and with publicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate and model social distancing Change religious practices Close selected places of worship Provide alternative forms of worship (online) Mobilise mutual community support Manage safe resumption of group religious practices when restrictions are eased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counter narratives that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) stigmatise infection (2) risk marginalisation exclusion, domestic or community violence (3) risk spreading contagion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support to the most vulnerable in the local community Mobilise the community Raise funds for the local community Coordinate with humanitarian organisations Support reintegration of post-treatment individuals into the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide facilities for treatment or storage purposes such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) church, mosque or synagogue halls and kitchens (2) car parks (3) unused residential or other accommodation Raise funds for provision of essential equipment and supplies for local health service

Source: Tony Blair institute for global change (2020, p.6).

As earlier mentioned, most orthodox religious organisations recognized the existence of COVID-19 and took steps to ensure that their followers abide and observed lockdown measures introduced by government as a means of curbing spread of the virus. In the light of this, many FBOs both of the Christian and Islamic divide participated actively in the fight against the virus. Specifically, they modified traditional rites and rituals associated with their system/style of worships in line with the lockdown guidelines, suspension of service and masses (for Catholics), initiation of online worship, splitting of congregation into smaller numbers, creation of home cells. Most importantly, FBOs supported government effort towards containing the virus during the lockdown by not only making donations both financially and materially. Some in addition made available their facilities for the government to use as isolation and quarantine centres.

Table 2: Selected donation made by FBOs in the fight against covid-19 in Nigeria

S/n	Name of religions organization	Contribution
1	Catholic Church	The Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) offered all its 425



		health facilities across the country as isolation centres for Covid-19 patients.
2	Anglican church (Church of Nigeria)	The Province of Lagos covering the 13 dioceses in Lagos and Ogun States, Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) donated the sum of N5 million to Ogun State Government as part of its contribution in the fight against the virus.
3	The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)	The Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG donated 11 Intensive Care Units, ICUs to Lagos, Ogun and Plateau States with ventilators to improve the medical response to the disease. Among these are the Enoch & Folu Adeboye Intensive Care Unit (ICU), Plateau State Specialist Hospital, Plateau State Enoch & Folu Adeboye Intensive Care Unit, Redeemer's Health Centre Mowe, Ogun State and the Enoch & Folu Adeboye Intensive Care Unit, Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, Lagos State. It also donated about 8,000 hand sanitizers, 8,000 face masks and about 20,000 hand gloves to Mainland Hospital Yaba
4	Dunamis	The Dunamis International Gospel Centre (DIGC), donated to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja medical equipment and relief materials worth millions of naira to help fight the outbreak of novel coronavirus
5	WINNERS Chapel	The Living Faith Church Worldwide (Winners Chapel International)



donated state-of-the-art Ambulances and Test Kits and other medical supplies to Lagos and Ogun state governments in the midst of the pandemic.

Medical equipment were also donated which included 10 cartons of disposable face masks, 40 pieces of infrared thermometers, 2 cartons of blood pressure monitors, 20 cartons of latex hand gloves, 500 pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE), amongst other medical items.

They also donated foodstuff to cushion the effect of lockdown on the less privilege. The items presented include: 400 bags of rice, 150 bags of beans, 400 bags of garri, 500 gallons of vegetable oil.

6 **Elevation Church**

The Elevation Church has also joined COVID-19 efforts in providing relief to citizens during the lockdown in Lagos state, by providing food materials for 2,000 families to assist them over the 14 days lockdown period.

7 **The League of Imams and Alfas**

The League of Imams and Alfas in Ogun state donated the sum of N2.5 million to the State government to support its fight against the spread of Coronavirus.

The Wakeel Muslim for Yorubaland, Edo and Delta, Sheikh Iskeel Awwal handed over the draft cheque to the Deputy Governor, Mrs. Noimot Salako-



	Oyedele in Abeokuta, the State capital.
8 The Muslim Coalition Against COVID-19	It donated food items such as 300 bags of 10kg rice, 300 cartons of spaghetti, 25 Cartons of Royco seasoning, 15 Cartons of 1litre groundnut oil and 50 sacks of Omo detergents to the Minister of State for FCT, Dr Ramatu Tijjani Aliyu for distribution in FCT during the lockdown. The body was established mainly for palliatives distribution targeted at mitigating hardships caused by the Federal Government lockdown order on families and disabled persons.

Source: Compiled by the authors from Taiyese (2020), Adebowale, 2020, Adediran, (2020).

On his part, the president-general of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Sultan of Sokoto Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, informed the country's Muslim community that Prophet Mohammed himself had advocated for the existing version of social distancing in times of disease, "leaving the town and hiding on mountains and in caves, [suspending] congregational prayers and *Jumu'ah* (Friday) prayers, temporarily." Further, the sultan notes that Muslims have a religious duty to prevent the spread of disease (Nigeria Working Group on Peace building and Governance, 2020). The spiritual leader, had on March 2020, admonished adherents of Islamic religion to pray against the virus as well as to observe personal hygiene in order to contain the spread of the virus. Taking cognizance of the fact that festive periods especially religious ceremonies often witness increased human traffic, travels, congestions and contacts that make it a threat factor capable of escalating community transmission and spread of the virus. The Sultan, while declaring Friday, July 31, 2020, as the day of Eid-El-Kabir directed all



the Imams and District heads in Sokoto State and the larger Muslim communities in the country, to observe their Eid prayers at the mosques in their towns and villages instead of the customary Eid grounds. This measure according to a press statement that was signed by the Chairman Advisory Committee on Religious Affairs, Sultanate Affairs, Sokoto, Prof. Sambo Wali Junaidu, on behalf of the sultan on Wednesday, July 22, 2020 was attributed to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. The statement reads:

Eminence, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar CFR, mni, the Sultan of Sokoto and President-General Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) has declared Friday, 31st July 2020 as the 10th day of Zulhijja 1441 AH and the day of Eid-El-Kabir for the year. Furthermore, in view of the current situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sultan hereby advises all the District Heads and Imams in Sokoto State, to observe Eid prayers at their Jumu'at Mosques in their respective towns and villages and not at Eid grounds. Also, the council advises the muslim communities throughout the country to observe Eid prayers at Jumu'at mosques to curb the spread of the covid-19 pandemic (Olisah, 2020).

As part of the efforts to limit the spread of the virus the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) required its members to adopt online teachings during the holy month of Ramadan as congregational worships had been suspended. On this note, Ankara (2020) argued that "Individual Scholars and Organisations are encouraged to employ available means of disseminating information such as radio, television, other virtual facilities, print, social and traditional media for dissemination of tafsir and other da'awah [preaching] activities,".

Meanwhile, the Catholic Churches in Nigeria in its immediate response to the discovery of the case in the country issued circular containing precautionary measures to be adopted by parishes and parishioners across the country.



Also, in compliance with government directives, religious associations and worship centres adopted new modes of practicing their faith as a way of assisting in combating the spread of the virus. In the light of this, a good number of them resorted to online worship services, others developed home cell worship services, cancelation of all midweek activities, splitting their members into smaller units at various corners of church premises as well as multiplying the number of masses and services they celebrate. For instance, St. Matthias Catholic Church Amarata, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State resorted to the use of tally in deciding who attends which masses and when; whereas, others completely suspend all religious activities. Again, in identifying with the effort of government while calling for more actions; the Catholic bishops of Ibadan ecclesiastical province in a communiqué issued after its meeting held at the Jubilee Conference Centre, Ibadan from January 25-26, 2021, observes:

We commend the spirited effort of the government at Federal and State levels in providing facilities and regulations for confronting the pandemic at the onset and for support and palliatives arrangements for the vulnerable segments of our population. We however regret that to date, many Nigerians still conduct themselves in a risky manner, hardly observing any of the recommendations issued for their own safety. Seeing that the pandemic remains deadly, we plead with all Nigerians to keep themselves protected by following all the laid down rules meant for their own safety. We urge the authorities and the media to sustain public education and enlightenment, provide more testing centres so as to provide the public with sufficient facility and understanding of what is at stake. We strongly recommend that the authorities not allow anyone to use the COVID-19 pandemic for selfish gains or interests. We also plead that our medical experts be allowed to subject to appropriate test, the COVID-19 vaccines coming into Nigeria in order to secure the confidence of Nigerians so



that they may willingly submit to the medication. It would be immoral and unjust to compel anyone to take the vaccine.

Concluding remarks

In Nigeria religion constitutes one of the greatest source of conflict both at individual and states level, which continues to play out in the contradictions between the science and religiosity of Covid-19 pandemic in the country that have resulted in many a cleric doubting and rejecting the existence of the virus. Despite this, religious organizations and religious leaders have been playing vital roles by providing various forms of support and assistance to the government in an attempt to ensure that the virus is defeated. While some donated consumables, money, facilities, medical equipments other contributed through information dissemination, issuing directive to their followers, etc. Besides, majority of religious organizations in the country modified and adopted new form worship especially online worship, live streaming and splitting of members in places where religious activities were not completely suspended. This demonstrates that religious leaders and organizations are active participants in public matters and that people listens and obey their instructions.

In the light of this, the study recommends as follows:

- ❖ Government should partner with religious organizations both in formulation and implementation of policies, especially those that touches on humanitarian issues.
- ❖ Where possible, government should not just equip and mobilize medical practitioners and law enforcement agents. It should as a matter of necessity mobilize religious leaders to educate and advice the people on what to do flatten the curve of the pandemic.

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