

# Christian Missions and Covid-19 in Africa and Latin America: A Case Study of Brazil, Nigeria, and South Africa

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**Abstract:** Congregational worship among the religious organizations in Africa and Latin America, particularly the rapidly expanding Christian missions, has been of significant consideration in the light of medical recommendations involving social distancing and avoidance of large social gatherings concerning the coronavirus pandemic. This is among recent observations and has attracted more focus following an acute controversy over the role of the Church in Brazil *vis-à-vis* government policies on the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that a number of churches in Nigeria were allegedly initially reluctant to respond to the government lockdown declaration and the resultant ban on congregational worship. Simultaneously, the agenda of financial and material assistance to the poor by the large Christian denominations in South Africa as one means of sustaining the lockdown rather attracted criticism, as they were unable to sustain the project. Furthermore, the role of religious bodies came to the fore as global surveys demonstrated that, on average, the masses in these two continents are among the most religiously observant people in the world. As we shall see in the concluding section, this is the major consideration of Idayat Hassan, Director of the Abuja-based Centre for Democracy and Development, in his assessment of the African context.

**Keywords:** Coronavirus, Church, Christian missions, lockdown, religious, secular.

## INTRODUCTION

The need to address the coronavirus pandemic has become the focus of many authorities globally, and while every nation is expected to initiate projects along this line, the largest economies of each region naturally attract more focus. It is partly for this reason that the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, was appointed the Regional Head of the Covid-19 coordinating body in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in April 2020 [12]. Thus, where a case study is useful, a focus on various institutions of the large economies in an empirical investigation of each continent could help to assess the virtue and probable limitations of this approach. Narrowing this down to the Christian missions, it must be admitted that Christianity has an unrivalled horizon in these two continents, having most of the masses under its umbrella, particularly in Brazil, the largest economy in Latin America, and Nigeria and South Africa, the largest economies in Africa. Therefore, it is expected that the management of the Christian missions, particularly those operating in the largest economies of both regions, would initiate and sponsor projects that could be of valuable assistance in terms of helping the poor during the lockdown, in addition to integrating them into the national strategies and policies for preventing and finally eradicating the virus.

## THE SECULAR SECTOR: A GLANCE AT SOME CONTENTING ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIES

The first victim of the coronavirus (Covid-19) infection was from the famous Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, the headquarters of the Hubei province of China [1, 5, 8]. This occurred in the last quarter of 2019, and the infection spread rapidly to other parts of Wuhan and even to other towns in China. For this reason, the public has globally acknowledged that the virus has its origin in China. From China, the virus spread rapidly until many people in other countries were infected, such that by the second week of April 2020, it had become a global pandemic that had resulted in the loss of 80,000 lives [16].

It is argued that besides this, every other story about the origin of the virus is still an issue of research and, therefore, for now, attracts enormous controversy [16, 19]. One claim is that the pangolins, a creature with a scaly body and classified as a mammal, was the original carrier of the virus. The exponents of this view claim that human beings contracted the infection from this animal, particularly those with a culture of indiscriminate consumption of any animal protein, ranging from all species of rats and snakes to similar organisms, the majority of which can hardly be domesticated [16].

As the humanities and social sciences endeavour to analyze the complexities of the major contradictions through a historical study of similar pandemics such as smallpox and the career of Edward Jenner, who discovered a vaccine against it, the natural sciences are gaining veracity on the platform of their numerous

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hypotheses in the search for a cure, e.g., a vaccine against the coronavirus. Closely related is the hypothesis that a bat is among the original carrier of this virus [8]. Yet the only empirically established fact so far is its easy transmission from human to human, and not from animal to human. So far, no vaccine has been discovered to treat the virus; however, a few 'broad-spectrum antiviral drugs' have been medically established for partial treatment [19].

Outside the research laboratory and the hypotheses of the natural sciences and scholarly theories from institutions of learning, a number of stories have circulated among the masses in an effort to unravel the origin of the coronavirus. The major one, which is even popular in social media, is the belief that the virus emanated from the search for an improvement in wireless communication, particularly the most recent version known as the fifth-generation (5G) wireless internet communication system. Some issues in the story are also analyzed in the Financial Times of April 16 by Nic Fildes, and Mark Di Stefano in London, and Hannah Murphy in San Francisco [5]. The 5G is a technology recently being employed by almost every telecommunication firm involved in cellular data network providers in the developed world. The story claims that there has been an acute rivalry between China and the USA over being the first to record a major advancement in the invention and globalization of the 5G internet system. The exponents claim that the Chinese were gaining the upper hand but decided to keep their key inventions on the issue a secret, and in a bid to copy the new invention, US experts in the sector clashed with their Chinese counterparts in Wuhan and in the process there was a release of chemical explosives into the atmosphere that led to the development of the virus in contact with atmospheric substances and cells metabolism of the human body. This was speculated partly due to the form of reaction of the human body to the radio spectrum or radiofrequency radiation created through this type of explosive.

The US experts are said to have left with some of the Chinese experimental gadgets even though they were not very sure of how to operate them, and apart from the fact that unknowingly these items also contained the chemical explosives. Consequently, on arrival in their country, they were only able to prevent the emission of the explosives into the atmosphere for some months, and the consequent result was the gradual and later rapid manifestation of the virus in the Western world. As the situation gets beyond control,

developing into a pandemic, the Chinese government is said to have eliminated their indigenous members of the group that had the intention of exposing the truth to the world.

Another version of this story is widely read by many people, particularly through the social media in many African and Latin American countries, and circulated by an anonymous individual who claims to be a former executive and head of the largest business unit of Vodafone Telecommunications Company, Newbury, England from 2013 to 2015, but who currently runs his own Telecommunication Company that specializes in the radio spectrum. This version even won the support of some Nigerian senators such that Senator Dino Melaye insisted that the government be proactive in rejecting any 5G installations [18]. It was partly for this reason that the government had to intervene through the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to counter the local exponents of the version in an effort to pacify the masses by accepting that "in the meantime,...5G commissioning will not commence...until all doubts are cleared" [11]. This version claims that what is now referred to as coronavirus is the result of the reaction of the human body to the radio spectrum radiation emanating from the adverse effects of the radioactive waves of the 5G technology spear-headed by many advanced nations of the world. The writer claims that he knew from the onset that the technology would be harmful to humans but did not know it was going to take on this dimension. According to him, this causes poisoning of tissue, harmful fluids, viruses, and metabolically induced complications that the body tries to counter by restructuring its immune system [18]. The version claims that the pandemic started in the Wuhan city of China because it was among one of the earliest centres of complex installation of the 5G through joint projects of both Vodafone and the Chinese Telecommunication giant, Huawei, supported by a number of small telecommunication companies looking for such opportunities to penetrate the international community. Spain and Italy are recorded as being the next to roll out the 5G technology, after China, and therefore, also experienced a corresponding increase in magnitude with regard to the spread of the virus. This version also claims that it takes over six months after installation for the 5G to be harmful to human health.

However, the weakness of both versions is that they made no effort to reconcile their argument with earlier discoveries of the infection of the respiratory system

classified as a virus within the coronavirus family [1]. The first of this was said to have been discovered in 1937, followed by another in 2002 labelled SARS-CoV with a symptom of 'severe acute respiratory syndrome', and even a third in 2012 labelled MERS-CoV and known as Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus [1]. It must be admitted, however, that these nomenclatures are not without their own controversy as they were also adopted very recently, precisely in 2019, following the research efforts to unravel the truth about the virus, starting from the crisis it created in China. However, those who adopt them claim that the specimens were taken from past records. Moreover, according to Fildes *et al.* [5], the ruthless measures taken against exponents of these stories in China "as if it were equivalent to the advocacy of terrorism" and "the fact that regulatory bodies are being so intensely lobbied by the telecoms industry is...a source of concern" to a public that has started perceiving everybody including constituted authorities as well as regulating agencies of the Covid-19 as a suspect. With such acute controversy fuelled by what may be portrayed as different schools of thought, none of which is easy to refute, it is not surprising that as we shall see below the Church does not find it easy to handle the hazards surrounding the entire scene.

### **INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHURCH**

In Nigeria and South Africa, the two largest economies in Africa, and in Brazil, the largest economy in Latin America, the co-operation of the Church with the government and other relevant authorities as well as its general contribution to the search for a way out of the coronavirus pandemic may at a glance appear controversial to some people. This is because of a few churches which attempted to defy the coronavirus restrictions in Brazil and some African cities with regard to congregational services during the first few days of the lockdown announcements by relevant governmental authorities [3, 17]. However, this is apparently amplified and over-romanticized by critics of the Christian missions. For instance, nothing demonstrates this with regard to the Nigerian scene more than the claim in one of the media reports that "only a handful of churches obeyed a government directive to close shop or reduce physical participants to 20" [15]. Yet, out of more than ten mega-churches with headquarters in Lagos, only the Winners Chapel [4] and a few local churches including a branch of Redeem Church held congregational worship on April 22, which happened to be the first Sunday after the lockdown that was announced on April 20. As will be

explained below, there was no reoccurrence after that day. These critics fail to observe or deliberately ignore the fact that after those first two days, affected churches apologized, co-operated with the coordinating authorities and even made donations in cash and kind for the purchase of sanitizers and face masks for members of the public [6, 9]. Apparently, the development in Brazil analyzed in the Financial Times of April 3, 2020 [17] has also created a biased information framework in the secular sector towards the Church in both Africa and Latin America. Yet the existing evidence is insufficient to justify the assertion of the secular media that Christian bodies in Brazil are antagonistic to government policies and efforts made by other constituted authorities to address the Covid-19 pandemic.

The issue is that the country only declared partial lockdowns with a structure that allowed Christian missions and other religious bodies to conduct congregational services. Thus, a pastor of the evangelical Universal Church of the Kingdom of God conducted a congregational service with the faithful in Guaruja, Brazil, and this was also circulated in a number of social media outlets, e.g. Twitter and Facebook [15, 17]. In this case, there is actually no empirical basis for criticizing the Church, yet it has been employed by critics of the gospel to portray the Church as an enemy of dynamism even though the social distancing recommended by the government was observed by the missions. Similarly, all sorts of distorted information have been circulated in the media to antagonize key Christian denominations like the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, one of Brazil's biggest and most influential evangelical congregations. Yet its headquarters, the Temple of Solomon in São Paulo, which can seat about 10,000 people, is a place where social distancing among worshippers and other restrictions for the control of Covid-19 cases, are being observed [15, 17].

However, the Western world apparently wants all nations to dance to their tune of total lockdown, and for this reason, most media outlets are quite sceptical of the partial lockdowns in Brazil and a few African countries, e.g. Tanzania. However, rather than focus on the constituted authorities, i.e. government agencies and the political leaders in charge, they embark on the organized persecution of the Church through social media and other sources of information. In the case of Brazil, these media sources claim that the Christian missions put pressure on President Jair Bolsonaro to declare partial lockdowns in order to allow churches to

hold their congregational services [17]. Currently, the courts have intervened to sanitize the situation [17], but the portrait of the entire scene by these media agents with regard to the intervention of the judiciary is still apparently aimed at stigmatizing the major churches. In some cases, Christian leaders are quoted out of context by these media agents to justify their stories. Thus, President John Magufuli of Tanzania, a devout Catholic, who advised Christians in March to combine the lockdowns and medical recommendations with prayers as, "Corona is the devil that cannot survive in the body of Jesus" [17], was accused by these media sources of rejecting "Pope Francis's wishes that churches hold Easter mass without bringing their congregations together."

In the case of Nigeria, only the headquarters of the Winners Chapel Ministry held a congregational service in the first week of the lockdown when many issues were still in doubt, and it was a Sunday service. On the same Sunday, April 22, both the Faith Sanctuary and Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) outreach in Abule-Oja, Yaba, were open for worship [3]. The management of the Winners Chapel Ministry apologized for the mistake and never repeated the action. Even though the Church paid the stipulated fines, it also shared sanitizers and face masks for members of the public on its own accord [4, 9]. The headquarters of the Redeemed Christian Church of God at Redeem Camp, along Lagos-Ibadan Express, complied fully with the lockdown regulations and it was clear that what happened at the Abule-Oja branch in Yaba was an outcome of miscommunication. The general overseer of the RCCG, Pastor E. A. Adeboye, has been instrumental in enlightening members of the public on the need to comply with government programmes and medical guidelines through the online services of the Church since the lockdown. The RCCG's instructions and guidelines to members of the parish are even more thorough than those of constituted authorities from the secular sector. During the online service of Sunday, April 19, the parish strongly advised its members worldwide to observe the social distancing rules strictly, use of sanitizers and other medically prescribed preventive guidelines, even after the lockdowns. At the same time, all members were advised to avoid international travel after the lockdowns, except where absolutely necessary [4].

Another Christian mission that also does this, but with a better focus, is the Lord Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement, founded by Pastor Lazarus Muoka, and having its headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria and branches in many countries of the world including Brazil and South Africa. The parish instructed all its

members and branches, even before the lockdown, to adhere strictly to all government regulations and medical prescriptions from international agencies for the control of the virus, in addition to abstinence from international travel, except when crucial. As a Mission that classifies the violation of government policies and social violence, including violent protests against constituted authorities as anti-Christ, the leadership would not tolerate any act from branches or zonal leaders that constitutes a breach of its principles with regard to the coronavirus crisis. To some extent, the Mission was ahead of the secular sector in addressing the coronavirus pandemic. However, while admitting that the current medical recommendations and adoption of lockdowns could be of some assistance as palliative measures, Pastor Lazarus Muoka, strongly believes that only the gospel can provide a cure and eliminate Covid-19 from the earth [4, 10]. In his words in the official Facebook page of the Ministry, "Coronavirus will be crushed in one minute if churches reopen... world leaders made a very wrong move by closing down churches... God has the power to deal with coronavirus but allowed the pandemic to happen so that many can return to him" [2]. The website of the Church had a picture of a man who testified that he and his four children received healing from the coronavirus infection through online deliverance prayer of the Lord Chosen Ministry.

Besides, a number of churches in Nigeria made donations in support of the medical research project of the government towards the identification of local preventive drugs (palliatives) to minimize the spread of the virus and also for the distribution of sanitizers for members of the public including their members [4, 9]. The mega-churches like the Winners Chapel Ministry, Lord Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement, and RCCG were all involved. RCCG donated 200,000 hand gloves, 8,000 hand sanitizer, and 8,000 surgical face masks to Lagos State Government [9]. A few Pentecostal churches supported people with food to minimize the hazards of the lockdown in some parts of Lagos, the commercial city of Nigeria. Among them is the Mountain of Holy Ghost Intervention Church led by Prophet Chukwuemeka Odumeje [9]. One essential point to note here is that the critics of the Christian ministries have only narrated and circulated in social media the mistakes made by a few of the churches in the opening days of the lockdown, which at worst was a one-day congregational service held before restructuring their respective programmes in line with the principles and requirements of the lockdown.

As mentioned above, to some extent, the portrayal of the respective scenes was even amplified by the secular press with hardly anything said about the contributions of the Church in support of the government and other constituted authorities in the ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of the virus. Moreover, they refuse to admit that the controversies in the secular world regarding the origin of the virus has penetrated and negatively affected the Church as it has made many people believe that the entire controversy is merely a ruse. The leadership of many churches have to embark on serious online research in order to be able to convince their members that the exercise is not a hoax created to cover up the adverse effects of 5G telecommunication technology [2]. Three of the ministries that went the extra mile in trying to convince both their members and the public to ignore the controversies from the secular sector are Kingsway International Christian Centre, with its subsidiary headquarters in Lagos and head office in London, under the leadership of Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo; Day Star Ministry, and Covenant Christian Centre. Some other ministries contributed to public enlightenment from another perspective. According to them, while co-operating with the government and other constituted authorities in the fight against coronavirus, the Church should not make itself a gullible institution that can so easily fall prey to the evil strategies from the secular world, since every school of thought in the ongoing controversy is proving difficult to refute. In other words, with an aura in the secular world that tends towards making everybody, including every constituted authority a suspect, the Church cannot afford to approach the scene from a simple and naïve platform [2, 4]. The churches in this category also advise ministers of the gospel to simply project their viewpoints without citing and criticizing other ministers with contrary viewpoints, since each viewpoint has its merit in the light of the crises surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic [4]. The Christ Embassy Ministry, under the leadership of Pastor Chris Oyakilome, with headquarters in Nigeria and branches in a number of other countries, contributed along this line. Omega Fire Ministries Worldwide founded by Apostle Johnson Suleman also contributed from this angle. Apostle Johnson Suleman specifically warns ministers who criticize others, stating that "if you have a viewpoint, present it without mentioning people names" [2].

The role of the Church in South Africa is given a similar portrait by these media agents who claim, even in the absence of cogent evidence that "health

authorities are scrambling to trace hundreds of people who may have been infected at an evangelical service called the Jerusalem Prayer Breakfast in the city of Bloemfontein" [20, 21]. Yet this was a congregational service conducted before the South African government declared a national lockdown on March 24 2020. During the period 67 people tested "positive for the virus, including Angus Buchan, a well-known South African evangelist, and Kenneth Meshoe, leader of the African Christian Democratic Party, a right-wing movement with seats in South Africa's parliament" [20]. However, in the absence of any empirical evidence, it was subjective to attribute this maiden spread of the virus to Christian worship, especially when other social gatherings, including secular ones, were still taking place.

As already explained above, these critics of the gospel in Africa have actually dwelled heavily on the few mistakes made by a small number of churches in the continent at the expense of the numerous positive roles played by the majority. In South Africa, the Christian missions have given their best support to the government in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic since its "declaration...as a national disaster by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa," arising from "the increasing number of infected people" [21]. Among the major Christian bodies involved is Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) [20]. The President of the SACBC, Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, has been able to create significant awareness within the leadership of the Church, including all Bishops, on the need to be part of the policies and strategies put in place by the government to prevent the spread of the virus and gradually eliminate it. As a response to national policies on the issue, the Catholic Church is rapidly reviewing and restructuring its modes of operation, and this is reflected in the totality of its customs and traditions with regard to "public worship and liturgical services" as shown in the extract below [20]:

- Reception of the Precious Blood by Concelebrants and the Congregation has been suspended.
- Reception of Holy Communion must only be on the hand, not on the tongue.
- Sign of peace during the Holy Mass has been suspended.
- Holy water fonts at the entrance of the Church should be drained.

- Safe measures must be upheld in visiting and anointing of the sick.
- All clergy, including extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, should practice good hygiene by washing their hands both before and after liturgical services.
- All faithful are encouraged to wash their hands with soap or use hand sanitizers as frequently as possible.

These are to be combined with new policies on the maximum number of people per congregational service as defined by the management of the Church. This has been pegged at a maximum of one hundred people for Sunday Mass and the other sacramental celebrations. This also applies to services organized for elders, children, and the sick. In line with this, ordination and celebration of bishops, priests, and deacons have been suspended indefinitely, while wedding ceremonies are to be attended only by immediate family members. All previously scheduled travels in connection with the activities and programmes of the SACBC have been reduced to the barest minimum. At the same time all Diocesan, Deanery, and Parish services which involve travelling were cancelled, and the same applied to the programmes of parishioners who had intended to visit another parish for Easter celebrations. These were among the decisions approved by the management of the Church on the policy of avoidance of all unnecessary travels [7, 21].

As the reorganization of the Church and restructuring of its programmes in line with strategies for countering the spread of the coronavirus became cumbersome for the management bodies, a number of the constituted units were asked to depend solely on the policies and guidelines of government agencies in charge of the sectors to which they belong. Thus, the Church's health units and homes for the elderly, children, and other places of care were told to follow the guidelines of the public Department of Health Authorities in line with lockdown requirements and other regulations for addressing the coronavirus crisis. For the same reason, all schools under the Catholic Mission in South Africa were compelled to follow the guidelines of both the Department of Health and Basic Education authorities. In addition, the heads of the various units and departments were made to understand the importance of information flow and enlightenment of the brethren under their care for the purpose of countering the hazards of the coronavirus

pandemic, particularly in line with government policies and programmes on the issue [21].

Consideration was given for the creation of a special programme for assisting the poor, during which Bishop Sithembele Sipuka of Mthatha, South Africa, reminded the Catholic members of the need to reach out to the poor and give them all possible assistance, as he regards them as the class of people "most impacted by the fallout of the Covid-19...pandemic" [20]. However, this programme failed to yield a significant result due to poor funding. The Catholic Mission has an age-long scheme operated by almost every branch, and sometimes sponsored by regional headquarters, for assisting poor brethren both in-kind and cash. The recent programme initiated by the Mission for the purpose of handling the coronavirus pandemic is expected to transcend this traditional approach and therefore, also expand its horizon to possibly even assist non-Catholics. Though the Mission is putting in its best, it has not actually achieved this expected objective due to financial constraints.

Generally, all Christian missions in South Africa, particularly the Pentecostal churches responded creatively to events, in addition to reducing the number of congregational worships. This is combined with the adoption of current regulations and guidelines on congregational worship, which is pegged at less than one hundred members per service [7, 13]. Thus, according to Emmanuel Egbebu, the organist at Christ the King Anglican Church in southern Johannesburg, he played to a nearly empty church on Sunday, March 22. This is due to the fact that instead of the Church's normal four hundred worshippers on an average Sunday, there were only fifty-eight brethren due to the regulations of social distancing being fully observed.

The large Pentecostal churches started by enlightening the masses, including their members, on the nature of the pandemic and medically recommended preventive measures, through the sharing of leaflets [7]. For instance, the Apostolic Christian Church in Kagiso, west of Johannesburg, South Africa, circulated a number of leaflets among members of the public on March 22 for this purpose [14]. Most of the small Pentecostal churches have also responded in this regard through the circulation of information on their social media. A good number of them are on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube with programmes carefully structured to enlighten the public on the coronavirus disease with particular emphasis on current medically approved preventive measures. The

activities of such small Pentecostal churches have been noted in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria, and Durban. In Durban, for instance, one small Christian Mission that has featured prominently in social media in respect of the coronavirus pandemic is Platform Ministry International, a church that currently holds congregational services at No 225, Umbilo Road, Durban. The Pentecostal missions, both small and large, have emphasized the need for programmes that can protect and sustain the poor during this period of lockdown to mitigate the spread of the virus, but the inadequacy of funding has been a hindrance to the actualization of this vision [14]. It must be mentioned at this point that this has also created a platform exploited by the secular sector to criticize the Church.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, whatever the criticisms levelled against the Church from the secular sector, the Christian missions in these three large economies have kept strictly to global health regulations on the control of the coronavirus infection and also co-operated satisfactorily with government policies and programmes for prevention. This is despite the challenges they encounter *vis-à-vis* the acute controversies surrounding the pandemic in the secular world with some global syndicates circulating theories of 'everybody is a suspect' [5]. Taking a closer look at this, currently both the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other global agencies also strongly recommend "the principles of the 5Ps—prevention, preparedness, public health, political leadership, and the people," as one instrument of countering the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic [1]. A number of the Christian missions discussed in this work were very conscious of "prevention, preparedness," and "public health" with regard to the plight of the people during the pandemic, such that as explained above, some were even more alert than government agencies. Majority of them made enormous efforts to carry along members of the public, including their congregation members. The Christian missions in these three large economies have demonstrated the importance they attach to political leadership, through their support for public agencies and international bodies, and with regard to policies for eradicating the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, in light of the existing evidence, the Church is among the few organizations that have strictly observed these principles.

Based on the experience of these three countries, the study recommends the need for both government

and public agencies in Africa and Latin America to understand the plight of the Church and support it as one means of utilizing its virtue to address the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is more so considering the belief even among some constituted authorities that religious institutions still remain the most trusted platform by the masses. Precisely, Idayat Hassan, Director of the Abuja-based Centre for Democracy and Development, said based on the African context that "religious institutions remain the key to combatting the scourge, as they are the most trusted sources and platform...today" by the people [17]. As the secular media identifies the lapses of the Church *vis-à-vis* the coronavirus pandemic in both continents, it should also capture a portrait of the virtue and strength of each Christian denomination, particularly the large ones, and the roles many of them are playing in their respective localities to address the ongoing crisis. This would help public institutions and international agencies identify how religious bodies can be involved in the management of the entire scene within the context of the peculiarities of each region.

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