



Leviticus 13:1-8 and The Handling of Pandemic Victims Among Priests in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Leviticus 13:1-8 presents God's instruction to his people, Israel, on how to combat the health pandemic. The hermeneutical propagations will help the priests and church leaders fight the virus, especially among priests in Nsukka, Enugu State. According to this text, the priest is to act as a health instructor in a situation of overwhelming health challenges. It describes health challenges and the role of the priest in overcoming them. Therefore, this text can serve as a model for combating contagious diseases like Covid-19. It is on record that the emergency of the Corona virus pandemic overwhelmed the health workers. This opened a gap, which necessitated that other people, like the priests, could come in and fill it. A rhetorical-exegetical method of biblical interpretation was used. Again, observations and interviews sufficed to ascertain the extent to which the priest helped enforce precautionary measures for Covid-19 as advanced by the World Health Organization and the National Center for Disease Control. It was discovered that the priests and other ordained men of God in Nsukka, Enugu State, are not totally committed to the extra services of helping the health workers in their fight against Covid-19. This is because it does not reflect on their sermon. Also, social distancing was not observed in the churches visited, and no testing kits, not even infrared thermometers, were found in most of the churches visited. Worse still, some laity were observed entering and worshipping without a facemask and no sanction. Washing of hands with soap and use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer were noticed not to be in place in most of the remote places of worship centers that were visited. Therefore, this paper engages the priests and religious leaders within the study area to preach health protocols, provide testing materials, and establish isolation centers to assuage Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, health protocols, Leviticus, priests

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1. Introduction

The book of Leviticus is the third in the Pentateuch. According to Sailhamer, Leviticus belongs to the books of the Pentateuch considered as God's revelation to his people

through Moses.¹ It is largely concerned with the creation and preservation of the divine-human community.² It also deals with legislation for a holy living that affects all members of the Israelite camp.³ The entire material of the book of Leviticus falls into two theme. One is “instructions for priest and worship”.⁴ The second one is on instruction that relates to community living. Interestingly, the verses under study fall within the part identified by Mills and Wilson as “*instructions for holy living that affect all members of the Israelite camp.*”⁵ It is considered as God’s divine instruction to his chosen nation on how to live a unique and distinct life different from others within the cosmic boundaries of the Ancient Near East. Therefore, it could be surmised as a book of divine instructions.

In the Hebrew Bible, the title of the book of Leviticus is derived from the Hebrew words of the book. According to Obiorah, “In the Hebrew Bible, however, the names of these five Books are derived from the key word in the first verse of each Book”.⁶ This is a formula across the books that make up the Pentateuch. The very important Hebrew words from where the name Leviticus came from are thus: Leviticus 1:1 יְקָרָא אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר. This is translated as “The LORD summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying”. The most important words that accentuate Leviticus is *wayyiqra* which means “and he called”. It is more of holiness code. The goal of these codes is to enforce tranquility among the chosen people.⁷ At the center of the text under study is the position of the priest as a health instructor. The text brings out the roles of the priest during sickness. The priest is to act as a health instructor, prescribing health protocols to mitigate transmission. To be more precise, the priests are to act as “health instructors and preside over restorative process”.⁸

Previous research on the church's concern for the sick due to the pandemic has been published. Elkanah K. Cheboi's research uses the case study method to look back at how the church handled several outbreaks of disease that have occurred in the world including the Covid-19 pandemic.⁹ Another paper is a thesis by Rania

¹ J. H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

² W. E. Mills dan R. F. Wilson, *Mercer Commentary on the Bible: Volume 1. Pentateuch/Torah* (USA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 116.

³ Mills dan Wilson, 116.

⁴ M. F. Rooker, “Book of Leviticus,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. oleh T. C. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1030.

⁵ Mills dan Wilson, *Mercer Commentary on the Bible: Volume 1. Pentateuch/Torah*, 116.

⁶ M. J. Obiorah, “The Pentateuch and the Former Prophets” (Onitsha, 2015), 8.

⁷ C. M. Calum, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 18.

⁸ R. L. Hubbard dan R. K. Johnston, *New International Biblical Commentary: Leviticus and Numbers* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001), 81.

⁹ Elkanah K. Cheboi, “Epidemics, Pandemics, and Plagues: How the Church Responded throughout History, and Implications for Churches in Battling the Covid-19 Pandemic,” *ShahidiHub*

Altoun that discusses how Christian churches have and carry out crisis management for congregation members who are down during the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰ The next study is by Joseph Galea, who did historical research on the 1837 cholera pandemic in Malta. In his research, Galea explained that the Catholic Church, through bishops, priests, diocesan priests, and Capuchin Fathers, was instrumental in helping the sick and dying.¹¹ Based on a review of some of the previous studies, the research we are doing is different in terms of methods and research locations. This paper will, of course, analyze how the church faith in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria, handled pandemic victims based on a hermeneutical review of Leviticus 13:1–8.

Thus, this research studies this code within the context of health protocols laid down by (health workers especial the institutions of) World Health Organization (WHO) and National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) in Nigeria. It is on record that on 27 February 2020, Nigeria joined the rest of the world in the fight against COVID-19 since its first case was dictated in Lagos.¹² The virus overwhelmed the health workers thereby requiring an intervention from other institutions to help curtail the pandemic.¹³ Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate the contribution of the priest in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic among Christians in Nsukka, Enugu state.

2. Research Methods

The research method adopted for this study is Rhetorical analysis. “Rhetorical analysis is the art of composing discourse aimed at persuasion¹⁴. This method assumes that “all discourse is aimed at influencing a particular time”¹⁵. Put differently, Rhetoric analysis is the “art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing”.¹⁶ Again, semi-structured interview was employed to get response from the

International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies 1, no. 1 (2021): 31–48, <https://www.shahidihub.org/shahidihub/index.php/ijtrs/article/view/29>.

¹⁰ Rania Altoun, “How the Covid-19 pandemic closed 2000-year-old doors. : A case study about the Christian Churches Covid-19 pandemic crisis management and what affect it had on the parish members.” (Uppsala University, 2021), <https://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1610153&dswid=7312>.

¹¹ Joseph Galea, “Healing the Body and the Soul during the Cholera Pandemic of 1837 in Malta: the role of church and clergy,” *MALTA MEDICAL JOURNAL* 34, no. 3 (2022): 125–39, <https://www.mmsjournals.org/index.php/mmj/article/view/559>.

¹² Osagie Ehanire, “First Case of Corona Virus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria,” Nigeria Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020, <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/first-case-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria>.

¹³ Jimoh Amzat et al., “Coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and socio-medical response during the first 100 days,” *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* 98 (September 2020): 218–24, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijid.2020.06.067>.

¹⁴ Pontifical Bible Commission, *The interpretation of the Bible in the church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 22.

¹⁵ M. J. Obiorah, *Bibliotheca Divina: A Basic Introduction to the Study of the Bible* (Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 2014), 93.

¹⁶ Obiorah, 93.

priest while personal observation was conducted by the researchers. A simple random sampling techniques was used to select priests from Catholic Churches, Anglican and other Neo-Pentecostal churches for this research. These churches are the dominant denominations in Nsukka. The criteria for inclusion and exclusion of participants were based on being a priest while the observation was conducted by the researchers. The interview was conducted in both Igbo and English language respectively since the researchers are proficient in both and the response recorded with phones and stored in clouds. The information was later analyzed to select those that relate to the theme of the research. Data got were analyzed using thematic descriptive data analysis.

3. Result and Discussion

The Hebrew Text

It is always important to start an exegetical work with a proper contact with its original text. Jean Louis Ska notes that: *“a close reading of the original text is an excellent start. The subsequent analysis will deepen this first contact and develop into real familiarity.”*¹⁷ Suffice this to say that the analysis of this text is based on the way it appears before the reader or what Childs in Chinweokwu will call “final form.”¹⁸

וַיִּדְבֹּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר **Leviticus 13:1**

אָדָם כִּי־יִהְיֶה בְּעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ שָׂאת אוֹסְפַתְחַת אוֹ בַּהֲרַת וְהָיָה בְּעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֹגַע **Leviticus 13:2**

צָרַעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל־אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים

וַיִּרְאֶה וַיִּרְאֶה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנֹּגַע בְּעוֹר־הַבָּשָׂר וְשָׁעַר בִּנְגַע הָפִךְ לָבָן וּמִרְאֵה הַנֹּגַע עֵמֶק **Leviticus 13:3**

מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ נֹגַע צָרַעַת הוּא וַיִּרְאֶה הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמֵא אֹתוֹ

וְאִם־בַּהֲרַת לְבָנָהּ הוּא בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ וְעֵמֶק אֵין־מִרְאֵה מִן־הָעוֹר וְשָׁעָרָה **Leviticus 13:4**

לֹא־הָפִךְ לָבָן וְהִסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנֹּגַע שִׁבְעַת יָמִים

וַיִּרְאֶה הַכֹּהֵן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְהָיָה הַנֹּגַע עֵמֶד בְּעֵינָיו לֹא־פָשָׂה הַנֹּגַע בְּעוֹר **Leviticus 13:5**

וְהִסְגִּירוֹ הַכֹּהֵן שִׁבְעַת יָמִים שְׁנִית

וַיִּרְאֶה הַכֹּהֵן אֹתוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שְׁנִית וְהָיָה כֹּהֵן הַנֹּגַע וְלֹא־פָשָׂה הַנֹּגַע בְּעוֹר **Leviticus 13:6**

וְטָהְרוּ הַכֹּהֵן מִסַּפַּחַת הָיָא וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְטָהַר

¹⁷ Jean Louis Ska, *“Our Fathers Have Told Us”: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Roma, Italia: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2000), 1.

¹⁸ E. N. Chinwokwu, *“A Critical Introduction to The Traditions of Jesus”* (Nsukka: UNN Press, 2015), 22.

Leviticus 13:7 וְאִם-פֶּשֶׁה תִּפְשֶׂה הַמַּסִּפַּח בְּעוֹר אַחֲרֵי הָרֹאֵתוֹ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן לְטַהֲרֹתוֹ וְנִרְאָה

שְׁנִית אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן

Leviticus 13:8 וְנִרְאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהֵנָּה פֶּשֶׁתָּה הַמַּסִּפַּח בְּעוֹר וְטִמְאָה הַכֹּהֵן צָרַעַת הוּא פ

The Researcher's Rendition

13:1 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

13:2 When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body, he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests.

13:3 The priest shall examine the disease on the skin of his body, and if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous disease; after the priest has examined him, he shall pronounce him ceremonially unclean.

13:4 But if the spot is white in the skin of his body, and appears no deeper than the skin, and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall confine the diseased person for seven days.

13:5 The priest shall examine him on the seventh day, and if he sees that the disease is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall confine him seven days more.

13:6 The priest shall examine him again on the seventh day, and if the disease has abated and the disease has not spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only an eruption; and he shall wash his clothes and be clean.

13:7 But if the eruption spreads in the skin after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again before the priest.

13:8 The priest shall make an examination, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a leprous disease.

Literary Style Found in the Text

A prominent literary style found in the study text is “repetition”. The writer observed that this repetitiveness is not just a style of writing; it extends to the way in which the discourse is presented. Evidence of this style appears in verse 2, twice on verse 3, verse 5, twice again on verse 6 and 7. Repetition is used to create emphasis. Lambdin notes that the juxtaposition of Hebrew verbs is to stress a word¹⁹. The predominant words that are profusely repeated include among others; priest, disease, skin or body. This repetition is probably to create emphasis about the position of the priest and his actions or involvement during health pandemic. This is because, in each

¹⁹ T. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (Britain: Longman and Todd Ltd., 1973).

instance where the priest is mentioned, it always stands as the subject performing the action. Obiorah corroborates this argument when she notes that “*verbs are repeated in order to warn against something, to emphasize.*”²⁰ Again, the repetition could be to provide important information about health pandemic with its impending danger to humanity. This is because leprosy as well as COVID-19 is pandemic and inimical to human existence hence Nigeria has recorded 2.120 deaths as at 19 June 2021 in all the states.²¹ This technique helps to give important highlights to the event. This repetition also connotes what Obiorah called “*dominant word*”. According to her, “*a word becomes a dominant word based on its appearance, or when its idea dominates in a text because of its frequency.*”²²

Delimitation of The Text

Chapter 12 begins with God’s instruction to Moses and ends with priestly duty to child birth and cleanness. Interestingly, chapter 13:1 begin also with God’s instruction to Moses to emphasize a “*plot of resolution*”. A plot of resolution, according to Ska, “*is a gradual development of events and order of events are essential and the development is unraveling.*”²³

Leviticus 13:1-8 can be seen as a unit which can stand on its own. This is because, verses 1 to 8 encapsulate every instruction to the priest on diseases. In this way, one could deduce evidence of a unified plot according to Ska who notes that in a unified plot all the episodes are very important to the narrative.²⁴ To appreciate authors point, verses 1 to 8 contain a full instruction on how to contain skin diseases and from verse 9, one discovers that the earlier instruction on skin diseases is repeated. Therefore, one can study verses 1 to 8 as a literary unit complete in itself. This also corroborates Ngengi’s opinion that “*a literary unit is a biblical passage that has significance in itself.*”²⁵ The idea here is that verse 1 down to verse 8 has a single narrative unit that is very coherent and all the episodes are significant to the discourse.

The text under study is God’s instruction to Moses to his chosen people. It encapsulates divine instruction to the priest on how to actively handle diseases to avoid spreading to the other member of the society. There are three main characters in this text; the instruction giver, Moses and Aaron and one minor character the sick person. The location is probably the tent of meeting.

²⁰ M. J. Obiorah, “Hebrew Poetry: Lecture Note for The Use of Students” (Nsukka, 2015), 14.

²¹ The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), “COVID-19 NIGERIA,” The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), 2021, <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng>.

²² Obiorah, “Hebrew Poetry: Lecture Note for The Use of Students,” 14.

²³ Ska, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, 18.

²⁴ Ska, 18.

²⁵ Ngengi Albert Mundeke, *A Handbook on African Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Limuru, Kenya: Kolbe Press, 2012), 33.

The Structure of The Text

The instruction found in the study text falls within God's instruction to his chosen nation on how to live prosperously in the land that he is given them. In verse 1, God delivered the speech to Moses and Aaron. It opened up the discussion and tells what God said to Moses and Aaron or to the priest. For convenience, change of character shall be used to indicate and signal a new scene. Bar-Efrat supports this line of thought when he opines that character participating in a narrative can be used to determine the structure²⁶. Again, theme shall serve to signal a new scene. Therefore, verse 1-2 is centered on God's instruction to Moses and Aaron. This instruction is directing the chosen people to send their sick ones to the priest. Therefore, verses 1-2 is God's directive to send sick people to the priest. In verse 3-5, a new scene is observed because the attention is shifted to what the priest should do "theme". Apparently, verses 3-5 give the first instruction to the priest. The priest should examine the person to determine if the person is sick. Again, verse 4 repeats the same instruction but adds that the person should be confined for seven days while verse 5 says that a reexamination should be conducted after seven days. Thereafter, a possible confine should be fashioned. So verses 3-5 is called the priestly function. The new theme in verses 6 is that the priest should order the sick to wash his clothes after yet another examination. The essence of this action is to ensure containment. This verse shall be called reexamination and washing of sick person's clothes. The possibility that the sickness will persist occasioned another testing in verse 8 before the person is declared leprosy in verse 9. So verse 8 is termed third examination and pronouncement.

The structure of Leviticus 13:1-8 could be summarized thus. Verses 1-2 is directive to send sick people to the priest. Verses 3-5 is the priestly function. Verses 6-7 is reexamination and washing of the sick person's clothes. Lastly, verse 8 is termed third examination and pronouncement.

A Close Reading of The Text

The study text is very important because it prescribes how we can overcome health challenges in 21st century and beyond. Similarly, every book of the holy Bible that was canonized was for the purpose of theology. That is in fact the sentiment that Okenyi expresses when he says: *"every record especially the Biblical record is not just for only record keeping but has a message to preserve for the knowledge and*

²⁶ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), cited in Ronald H. van der Bergh, "A Narratological Analysis of Time in 2 Samuel 11:2-27a," *Old Testament Essays* 21, no. 2 (2008): 498-512, http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1010-99192008000200016.

consumption of the future generations."²⁷ This is because the sovereign character of God's purpose will not be questioned or altered. It creates newness.²⁸

Directive to Send Sick People to the Priest (vv 1-2)

In Leviticus example, sick people are to be sent to Aaron, the priest or his children who are priests. Interestingly, twenty one chapters out of the twenty seven chapters of the entire book of Leviticus starts with the clause, "*the Lord spoke to Moses.*" This is because "*from this moment on, YHWH speaks to Moses from the Tent and no longer from the top of Mount Sinai.*"²⁹ Therefore, the clause serves to signal a very important transition in the religious life of the chosen people. The Hebrew verbs וַיֹּדֶבֶר waydabbēr which means "and he said" and לֵאמֹר la'mōr with the nuance "to say" is the formula that introduced God's action of speaking to Moses in these Chapters. In each case, Moses is given instruction on behalf of the chosen people. In this instance, he was instructed to take sick people to the priest.

The precise sicknesses identified are שֹׁאֵת ṣ'ēṭ this means "swelling", סַפְּחָה sappahat which means "an eruption", or בִּהָרָה which means "bright spot". This has been traditionally translated as צָרַעַת "leprosy"³⁰. Apparently, these "*chapters show that impurity is not just of the cultic variety but has implications in wider community life.*"³¹ To this end, the head of the community is involved to ensure that God's people are preserved.

The Priestly Function (vv 3-5)

At the heart of this text is the function of the priest. According to Hubbard and Johnston, "*the priests are quite important here; they serve as public health instructors and preside over restorative processes.*"³² The priest takes the central stage during testing of sick person to ascertain if the person is sick or not. "*The priest shall examine the skin...and pronounce him impure.*"³³ Similarly, Noth notes that "*the priests shall examine the diseased spot on the skin of his body... and pronounce him unclean.*"³⁴ From the text, the priest is required to do these to ensure that the sickness does not spread to others.

²⁷ B. Okenyi, "A Study of 2 Samuel 13:1-22 for Proper Guidance and Counseling" (University Of Nigeria Nsukka, 2012), 14.

²⁸ James Luther Mays, *Psalms: Interpretation: A Bible commentary for teaching and preaching* (Kentucky, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 347.

²⁹ Obiorah, "The Pentateuch and the Former Prophets," 11.

³⁰ Hubbard dan Johnston, *New International Biblical Commentary: Leviticus and Numbers*, 80.

³¹ Hubbard dan Johnston, 80.

³² Hubbard dan Johnston, 80.

³³ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 153.

³⁴ Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (London: Westminster Press, 1965), 98.

Reexamination and Confinement (vv 4-5)

The instruction to examine and reexamine a sick patient by the priest is predominantly repeated throughout the selected text. For instance, the idea begins in verse 2, and was repeated in verses 3, 4, 5 and 6 to form what Obiorah called “dominant word”. According to her, “*a word becomes a dominant word based on its appearance, or when its idea dominates in a text because of its frequency.*”³⁵ Dominant words create emphasis when a word is repeated. In this context, this means that both the nouns for sicknesses as well as the verb *וָהֹבִיחַ* *wəhûḇā’* “shall be brought to” were repeated in order to create emphasis.³⁶ Put differently, the idea of the repetition may be to keep readers at alert about the esoteric function of the priest in a situation of health pandemic. Again, it may be to emphasis the carefulness taken before pronouncing a sick person clean or unclean. Observably, testing is required to ascertain ones health status. The option to quarantine the sick person for seven days is provided. This is to avoid contact with other members of the community.

Reexamination and Washing of Sick Person’s Clothes (v 6)

The instruction to reexamine a sick person carefully extends partly to verse 6. At this time, the sick person should wash his clothes after another testing. This is to avoid contamination with other people in the community. To support this argument, Hubbard and Johnston note that “*the well-being of the community is at stake.*”³⁷ To be more precise, “if the spot does not meet these initial tests of uncleanness, further testing is needed, and the person is isolated for a week”³⁸ thereafter, the priest reexamines again and possible seven days isolation is prescribed.

Third Examination and Pronouncement (v 8)

After another possible isolation, “*further diagnostic guidance for skin conditions*” suffices.³⁹ There is a condition to finally make a pronouncement of cleanness or uncleanness. What is paramount in the text is that testing is important and gives condition for pronouncement of sickness.

Based on these interpreted parts of the text, it can be concluded that the priest in the context of Israel had a very important and strategic role. This role was not only related to the ceremonial spiritual practices that must be carried out but also to ensuring that the lives of the people were well organized. Immediate treatment of people affected by leprosy was one of the tasks to be performed by the priests. It is

³⁵ Obiorah, “Hebrew Poetry: Lecture Note for The Use of Students,” 14.

³⁶ Obiorah, 14.

³⁷ Hubbard dan Johnston, *New International Biblical Commentary: Leviticus and Numbers*, 80.

³⁸ Hubbard dan Johnston, 80.

³⁹ Hubbard dan Johnston, 80.

not only about indicating who is sick and who is not, but also about how to help those who are sick to the point of declaring them cured.

Covid-19 Protocols by World Health Organization and National Center for Disease Control

To curtail the spread of Covid-19, World Health Organization and National Center for Disease Control proscribed protocols. According to Nche:

They also recommended some public health and social preventive measures to curb its spread. These preventive measures include movement restrictions, partial closure or closure of schools and businesses, quarantine in specific geographic areas and international travel restrictions. Other measures include physical distancing (i.e. avoid direct physical contact [e.g. hugging, touching, shaking hands] with other persons), hand washing, respiratory etiquette etc.⁴⁰

As a follow up, NCDC also adopted both social preventive measures and physical distancing to assuage spread of the virus. For clarity The NCDC was established in the year 2011 in response to the challenges of public health emergencies and to enhance Nigeria's preparedness and response to epidemics through prevention, detection and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases.⁴¹ In this study, such protocols like social distancing, handshake, movement restrictions, hugging, touching hand washing etc are major targets.

Christians in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State

Christianity is the predominant religion in Nsukka Local Government with few exceptions of African Traditional Religious adherents. It is generally believed that Christianity gained a foothold in Igboland and, by extension, Enugu State on 2 July 1857.⁴² This is because, according to Uwaegbute, the CMS missionaries led by Samuel Crowther reached an agreement with Obi Akazua of Onitsha, heartland of Igbo on this day.⁴³ Observably, Christianity moved to other Igbo communities including Enugu from Onitsha. Furthermore, the evangelization of Igboland was a joint effort of many missionary bodies including the CMS, Roman Catholic missionaries, the society for

⁴⁰ George Nche, "Why we still shake hands: How beliefs inform young people's socializing choices amidst Covid-19 in Nigeria," *advance.sagepub.com*, 2020, 2, <https://doi.org/10.31124/advance.12820256.v1>.

⁴¹ The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), "COVID-19 NIGERIA."

⁴² Kingsley Ikechukwu Uwaegbute, "Christianity and Masquerade Practices Among the Youth in Nsukka, Nigeria," *African Studies* 80, no. 1 (2 Januari 2021): 40–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2021.1886049>.

⁴³ Uwaegbute.

African missions, and other smaller evangelical missionary thrust from Europe and America.⁴⁴

However, Igbo church historians agree that it was from Eke in Udi town, between 1921 and 1960 that the Roman Catholic Church started spreading to other towns like Enugu (the capital of the eponymous state, Nsukka, Awgu, Udi, and Nkanu).⁴⁵ What is obvious is that Nsukka aborigines have accepted Christianity to a large extent. The predominant Christian denominations include; Roman Catholic Church, Church of Nigeria Anglican communion and some Pentecostal churches. Added to this is a small population of traditional advents. Therefore, interviews and personal observation will be made on these churches to determine their level of response to World Health Organization's precautionary legislations on containment of Covid-19 in Nsukka Local Government Area. Again, the research will attempt to investigate the effort made by the priest within these churches to ensure that their members conform to the rules especially from WHO and NCDC.

Nsukka is used specifically here to refer to the aborigines of the Nsukka Local Government Area. It is made up of the following major towns Nsukka Local Government: This is made up of the following major towns: - Alor Uno, Anuka, Ede Oballa, Edem, Eha-Alumona, Ibagwa Ani, Lejja, Nsukka, Obimo, Obukpa, Okpaligbo, Okpuje, Okutu and Opi.⁴⁶

Observation on The Priestly Functions During the Pandemic in Nsukka

The exigency of Covid-19 necessitated the World Health Organization to prescribe a lockdown. Further cases finally occasioned a total lockdown of churches, social gathering etc. Unfortunately, some church leaders did not abide by these instructions. For instance, Orjinmo writes that it took force and arrests of some church leaders to get the message of the lockdown across.⁴⁷ However, the lockdown was eased and usual church activities started but with precautions. These precautions were to curb further spread of the disease.

However, the researchers observed that the Catholic Church diocese gave a sum of twenty four million naira in three trenches during the lockdown as palliatives through the parish priests.⁴⁸ Other churches made similar effort but their efforts were basically humanitarian as no serious effort was made to enforce the precautions on

⁴⁴ Uwaegbute.

⁴⁵ Celestine A. Obi, *A hundred years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985: a history publ. to mark the first centenary of the Catholic Church in Onitsha Ecclesiast. Province within the former lower Niger Mission* (Africana-FEP Publ., 1985), 227-303. Uwaegbute, "Christianity and Masquerade Practices Among the Youth in Nsukka, Nigeria."

⁴⁶ Nsukkapedia, *Composition Of Nsukka And The Identity Challenge* (World Press Theme: VMagazine Lite, 2019).

⁴⁷ Nduka Orjinmo, "Coronavirus: Nigeria's Mega Churches Adjust to Empty Auditorium," BBC News, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52189785>.

⁴⁸ N. Paul, Personal Communication, Nsukka, 19 June 2021.

their members. For instance, within the five months of intense observation, the researchers visited 20 denominations within the study area. While some churches provided buckets, water and soup, others did not. Worst still, even where there were buckets and water, the buckets had no tap in accordance with the stipulation that the water should be running water. Put differently, out of the 20 churches, 11 churches visited had buckets, water and soap for members to wash their hands. Even those who provided these materials did not provide stringent order for members to wash their hands before entering the church hence some washed their hands while so many refused to wash their hands before entering the church.⁴⁹

Again, face mask was scarcely emphasized especially in remote areas of Nsukka. The observance of face mask was conspicuous within the Cathedral services of both the Catholic and Anglican Communion while others paid lip service to this. Asadu observes that the priest will only warn members to wear their face mask but lacked the charisma to check them out of the churches.⁵⁰ Again, social distancing was swept under the carpet. Effort to enforce social distancing through multiple services lasted for two months. Thereafter, the members ignored social distancing rule and filled churches to the brim. The church leaders could not discipline the members to observe social distancing partly because numerical attendance translates to financial strength.⁵¹

To further buttress the attitude of the priest in upholding the precautions laid down by the World Health Organization. Infrared thermometer was not provided in 13 churches visited. According to Ogbu, the presence of infrared thermometer was only provided in the two Cathedrals. Ugwu observes that little efforts were made to ensure that members are checked and their temperature certified before allowing them inside the churches. Most of the churches under this category are Pentecostal churches, Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Communion outside the main city of Nsukka.⁵²

Table 1: List of Interviews⁵³

NO	NAME	AGE	LOCATION	OCCUPATION	INTERVIEWEES
1	W. Onah	64	Iheakpu	Catchiest	The Researchers
2	E. Elias	32	Obukpa	Teacher	The Researchers
3	B. Ugwuowo	47	Nsukka	Rev. Fr.	The Researchers
4	F. Obeta	34	Ibagwa Ani	Archdeacon	The Researchers
5	N. Paul	38	Opi	Rev. Fr.	The Researchers

⁴⁹ W. Onah, Personal Communication, Nsukka, 02 May 2020.

⁵⁰ E. Elias, Personal Communication, Nsukka, 10 June 2020.

⁵¹ B. Ugwuowo, Personal Communication, Nsukka, 08 June 2020.

⁵² F. Obeta, Personal Communication, 13 July 2020.

⁵³ The names in the table are pseudonyms.

Leviticus and Priestly Function During the Corona Virus Pandemic in Nsukka

The results of the findings presented the affinity/nexus between the studied text; Leviticus, and the context; the functions or the attitudes of some selected priest towards prescribed measures for mitigating the spread of Covid-19. There is a close affinity between the text and the study context as can be seen bellow:

Sick People Should Go to The Priest

At the heart of this text is the instruction that sick people should be sent to the priest. This is the exquisite example, that sick people especially people with infectious diseases should be sent to the priest. This idea is to make sure that the person is examined, treated and or isolated to avoid a wild spread of the disease. In contemporary Nsukka society, people with infectious disease are not sent to the priests but to the professional medical practitioners. However, in a situation of pandemic like Covid-19, the overwhelming medical practitioners needed support from others especially as it concerns campaign to send those with symptoms to them. Unfortunately, this is opposite of what played out in Nsukka society where priests could not even enforce precautionary measures stipulated by the World Health Organization. Worst still, they could neither obey the rules nor advise their members to go for testing.

The Priest Shall Examine the Person

Leviticus example exerts that the priest should examine an infectious disease to avoid spreading. Infrared thermometer is one of the medical gadgets used in examining human temperature. Observably, rise in human temperature is one of the symptoms of Covid-19. It is very likely, the first symptoms of the virus. Based on this, the World Health Organization recommended that persons entering into a public gathering should be carefully checked to ensure containment. Therefore, the priests were given instruction to check the temperature of their members before allowing them into the church podium. This is part of the example required in Leviticus model.

In contemporary Nsukka churches, infrared thermometers were conspicuously lacking in over 90% of the churches visited. There were neither infrared thermometer nor sanction against those with symptoms. No social distancing and almost zero use of facemask were observed by members within the churches especially outside the metropolises.

Reexamination, Washing of Clothes and Pronouncements

The priests are required to reexamine the sick person, recommend the washing of clothes and finally make pronouncements as regards the person's health

conditions. Possible 7 days isolation is required to still ensure that the disease is contained. This means that the priest should advise their members to isolate in a case of conspicuous signs of symptoms. The church can even build isolation centers for their members. Unfortunately, there was no clear evidence of church owned isolation center neither did the church advertise that members should be isolated in a case of evident symptoms.

Recommendations and Implications for Policy Makers

Based on the text, the priests are to examine sick people. A study on the churches in Nsukka show that Infrared thermometer is evidently lacking. Therefore, it is recommended that church leaders should obtain the device to assuage contamination of infectious diseases. Again, based on the text, infectious diseases are taken seriously hence the priest is at the central stage. Based on the findings, the priest alien with some people who believe that the virus is not in Nigeria or even if it does, is not serious? According to them the government and some elements are *“politicizing and embezzling funds donated by the international community and private business organizations to help stem the pandemic in the country”*.⁵⁴ Based on this mistrust, *“the citizens usually question reported figures of C19 cases and sometimes jettison safety instructions from the government. Some even question the reality of the virus in Nigeria”*.⁵⁵ Therefore, policy makers and church leaders should endeavour to take the issue of C-19 seriously to avoid wild spread. To pursue this, campaign through their different media outlets should be exploited vigorously.

According to the text, priests are to serve as health instructors during health challenges. They should help the professional health workers to deal with excessive issues of health challenges. Our study provided areas where they can come in; like recommending their members to a medical doctor for further actions, insisting on precautionary measures. Furthermore, the priests should be trained on issues related to health to equip them with the necessary knowledge to help the health workers.

4. Conclusion

The issue of Covid-19 pandemic is very crucial today since its outbreak in 2019. Many people believe that the outcome of the pandemic has reordered the world today. The option of involving other institution in the fight against Covid-19 is crucial in other to mitigate its wild spread. Against this backdrop, this paper is very apt since it explores the option of involving the priests in the fight against Covid-19. It is instructive that the Leviticus example found in Leviticus 13:1-8 proffers a model that is

⁵⁴ Nche, “Why we still shake hands: How beliefs inform young people’s socializing choices amidst Covid-19 in Nigeria,” 14.

⁵⁵Nche, 14.

comprehensive enough to help us reduce the spread of Covid-19 and other related health issues.

The study revealed that through social distancing in the church, effective examination of sick patient, use of hand sanitizer could help to mitigate widespread of contagious diseases such as Covid-19. Therefore, Leviticus example posits that sick people should be sent to the priest for examination. Reexamination is again recommended and possible seven days isolation is prescribed. In this paper, the priest should act as health instructor by recommending health protocols and helping to enforce them. They should as well recommend isolation of suspected sick person to assuage wild spread.

Though the work is centered on Exegesis of Leviticus 13:1-8, the text does not provide all the necessary approaches to the fight against COVID-19 hence there are only two areas of affinity. Therefore, the researcher suggests that other works should come up to fill other gaps. Again, the people interviewed are very scanty, only five, further works should insist on a greater number of interviewees. Furthermore, the paper raised other concerns like “numerical number of church attendant translates to more financial figure”, further research can investigate those aspects more.

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