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THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN A PANDEMIC:  
REFLECTION, RESPONSE, AND REVIVAL

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by  
Chia-Chu Chao  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN A PANDEMIC:  
REFLECTION, RESPONSE, AND REVIVAL

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With special thanks to my parents, F.Y. Chao and K.Y. Kuang Chao,  
for their inspiration in my life

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDC	Center for Disease Control and Prevention
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
US	United States
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

## PREFACE

There are many thanks I like to address in developing this thesis. I appreciate the Lord for granting me this thesis opportunity; my advisor, Gregg R. Allison, approved and encouraged me to pursue a topic that interests me as relevant to Public Theology and Christian Ethics. I have received invaluable critiques that have helped develop my writing and inspired thoughts that I did not realize were possible: thesis fellow Torey Teer and thesis editor Nicholas J. Campbell. To my family members, including my husband, sister, and brothers, I acknowledge their support.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This research project, “The Church’s Role in a Pandemic,” is written amid the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In exploring the church’s role in the COVID-19 pandemic, I will perform a reflection on the church’s position, then its response, and finally, its revival. In this chapter, I will explain the research questions to help formulate a thesis by interpreting and critiquing current discussions on the church’s role in combating the pandemic. Then I will describe how my methodology uses biblical, theological, historical, and practical grounds to prove my thesis statements with my arguments. Next, I will provide an overview of the chapters with an outline to display each chapter’s heading and its layout briefly. At the end of this chapter, I will summarize the contributions to the field this research project will provide.

#### **Research Questions and Thesis**

COVID-19 became prevalent worldwide in 2020, and its dramatic and permanent impacts are perplexing and unprecedented.<sup>1</sup> Compared with pandemics throughout human history, COVID-19 has struck the world most severely. The situation remains unsettled with a series of virus variants, and the pre-pandemic certainties no longer exist. COVID-19 affects humanity extensively, yet, rectifying it is beyond people’s capability. The era of COVID-19 was full of turmoil, namely, natural calamities,

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard,” last modified March 7, 2023, <https://covid19.who.int/>. The first known infection from this disease, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) caused by a novel CoV-2, emerged in China as reported in December 2019. The virus spread rapidly through the entire world. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially named this Coronavirus disease COVID-19. As declared by WHO in 2023, this global pandemic caused several million deaths across the globe between 2019 and 2023, and its variants continued.

economic chaos, and political strife. Threats to well-being, including physical, mental, and spiritual, are primary concerns in turbulent times. Consequently, the pandemic caused anxiety in almost every country; many feel insecure and threatened.

Before COVID-19, humans might have been proud of their accomplishments in scientific research and technological development, bringing the world to its modern state. However, humans must know God created them in his image (Gen 1:26—28), and people’s capabilities are God’s gifts, and their wisdom comes from God.<sup>2</sup> Thus, all humans are to glorify God for their achievements. In the meantime, COVID-19 has influenced people’s worldviews in confronting the COVID-19 crisis, and they may look to God and wonder if God is in control as the world’s creator. Yet, the Bible addresses tribulation signs in Jesus’s Olivet Discourse (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).<sup>3</sup> The book of Revelation mentions the great tribulation (Rev 7:14) and its occurrence at opening the fourth seal (Rev 6:7—8). As established in the Bible, humans must know that God holds tomorrow (Ps 31:15; Prov 16:9, 27:1; Jas 4:13—15). In brief, God created the world, and he knows and controls the future, including tribulations such as COVID-19.

Knowing God is sovereign over the universe, Christians learn from the Bible to seek his kingdom and righteousness instead of dwelling on anxiety (Matt 6:33—34). Through unceasing prayers, Christians rely on the Holy Spirit’s guidance to gain strength and wisdom from God’s empowerment (Prov 2:6—7; Phil 2:11—12, 4:11—13; 1 Thess 5:17—19). The people who love God are called according to God’s purpose and know that all things work together for good to fulfill God’s plan (Rom 8:28). Hence, by loving and glorifying God, they recognize his purpose in permitting COVID-19. People should entrust God with faith in him to live in his peace, which surpasses all understanding to

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<sup>2</sup> Scriptures in this thesis are in English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise specified.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus delivered this prophecy while he was with his disciples on the Mount of Olives. The Olivet Discourse is also called the Discourse on the End Times. Jesus told them to stay awake and pray as he summarized his teaching in Luke 21:36: "But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

guard their hearts and souls in Jesus Christ (Phil 4:6—7). To love God and their neighbors (Mark 12:30—31), Christians must communicate with their community and the world to have true peace only in Christ, as he has overcome the world (John 16:33). Jesus told his beloved followers to love one another, for God loved them (1 John 4:11); the church must live out Christ's teachings, especially at the COVID-19 difficult time.

The church must care for those suffering and fearing instability during COVID-19 to fulfill Christ's Great Commandments (Matt 22:36—40). The church must accomplish Jesus's purposes in building his church (Acts 2:42) on earth, including developing the Christians to be the salt on earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13—16) to transform society. The church's role is to help the world through a Christ-reflected and gospel-fueled true community.<sup>4</sup> COVID-19 is the time for the United States of America (U.S.A.) churches to reflect on how they may serve the public in God's vision for his glory.<sup>5</sup> The Lord might have intended to utilize COVID-19 for the church to wake up the fallen world. For the Christians, who are called to conform to Christ's purpose, God will make all things work together for good (Rom 8:28). The church may fulfill its purpose of redeeming non-believers and teaching Christians to obey God's will to mature spiritually. Furthermore, the church can stir up its revival by reaching out to the public for the world to know God's eternal purpose in Christ (Eph 3:11) and understand peace with God (Rom 5:1). The Lord might have granted this critical moment for Christians to reflect on their faith, respond to God's love for humankind, and be Spirit-filled through genuine repentance to implement God's salvation plan through Jesus, the church's head, for the whole world.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jerry Bridges, *True Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Max Stackhouse, *Public Theology for a Global Society: Essays in Honor of Max*, ed. Deirdre Hainsworth and Paeth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Genuine repentance means humble and teachable (Luke 3:7—14; 2 Cor 7:9—11).

Thus, COVID-19 might be God's alert to the church to transform individual members to serve their communities collaboratively.<sup>7</sup> God encourages the church to thoroughly implement his will through leadership's cognitive reflection and active response to the pandemic to move the church progressively toward revival. Christians should comprehend the church's role in supporting its ministry to serve the community and the world during COVID-19.<sup>8</sup> The church's position to the public should be spiritually faithful to convey the apocalypse concepts in the Bible and teach the general community with Christ-centered messages (gospels and epistles) to win over Satan's destruction for the world's continued survival (John 16:33).<sup>9</sup> Helping seeking God's righteousness and kingdom, Christians should obey Jesus's command and the Holy Spirit's guidance to actively proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:19—20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8) to reveal Christ's church full of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:12—13). Concisely, complying with Jesus's words via the Holy Spirit will sustain people's souls and help to win the spiritual warfare caused by panic in COVID-19.

In this thesis, I argue that the church should commit to its essential role as “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit” to serve the community and world while facing a global pandemic, using COVID-19 as an example.

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<sup>7</sup> Bridges, *True Community*, 1, stating “The word community is used for a variety of purposes to denote groups of people who have something in common...In recent years, many Christian leaders and pastors have begun to emphasize the importance of community among believers... What is biblical community? Is there biblical basis for using the word community in our Christian context? To answer the questions, we need to explore the meaning of the Greek word *koinonia* and its common English translation, the word fellowship... In our Christian circles, the word fellowship has come to mean little more than Christian social activity...In both Acts 2:42 and 1 John 1:3, the *koinonia* means *sharing a common life* ...It is sharing a common life with other believers – a life that, as John says, we share with God the Father and God the Son. It is relationship not activity.” ; 3—6. also meaning “partnership, communion with others, sharing material possessions.”

<sup>8</sup> In the COVID-19 challenging time, they must not only fundamentally follow God's instructions at creation by exercising “dominion over” the world and being fruitful (Gen 1:28) but also further mature to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22—23) in God's enlightenment to glorify the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> Christ is the church head through the Holy Spirit's leading Christians and reviews the ministry's performance assessment. To fulfill the church's role in pandemics, as God instructed, the church must reflect and respond to COVID-19, which can lead the church to revival through regeneration.

<sup>10</sup> The church should glorify the Lord in this turbulent time through a humble reflection and vigorous response to begin a gradual revival process with the Lord's blessings. Being God's people (1 Pet 2:9—12), the church's ministry must commit to establishing a closer relationship with God. This comprises submitting entirely to Christ, the church's head, and listening obediently to the Holy Spirit's guidance to work synergistically with the community. The church should utilize church members' gifts to contribute to the congregation and community to build a solid body of Christ (Matt 7:24—29). In addition to ministry to God and members, the church should strengthen its ministry to the world during pandemics. Church leaders must also devote themselves to working with other churches and faith-based organizations to fulfill the community's needs during this pandemic.

In essence, through these ministry commitments, the church's role in COVID-19 may include: (1) supporting the congregations to help overcome fear and create care services to meet people's spiritual, mental, physical, or financial needs; (2) providing emotional, mental, and spiritual vaccines (i.e., proclaiming the gospel) to lead the communities to the Lord; (3) participating in good deeds as a biblical response to poverty; and (4) moving into a new era of opportunities with aspiration, promise, and enthusiasm by probing spiritual revival and hope renewal to strengthen faith through continuous prayers to God, meditations on his words to become doers of his will, and experiencing his grace.

### **Current Discussion on the Church's Role in a Pandemic**

This thesis aims to prove that the church's role in a pandemic is the biblically prescribed obligation to transform reflection and response into a revival with God's

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<sup>10</sup> The church is "the people of God" (Heb 4:9, 11:25), "the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27, Eph 4:12), and "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19—20).

blessings.<sup>11</sup> Recognizing humans' limitations in resolving severe attacks caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic, Christians rely on Bible-based faith and Christ-centered messages to serve God and overcome fear. Christians turn to God by praying for the world, pursuing Jesus's teaching, and surrendering to the Holy Spirit's leading to serve the community and world for God's glory.

This thesis interacts with Christian authors, speakers, and ethics teams. To integrate their thoughts about the church's role in a pandemic, I will take their views on the church ministries and insights on facing COVID-19 as input for evaluation. First, these works will be referenced to define the relevant terms, provide perspectives on the church's reflection and response to COVID-19, and explain the church's revival vision formed through transformation. This section synthesizes the main themes from the selected authors.

### **Concept Briefing**

Gregg Allison presents Scripture affirming God's people in the new covenant as capturing the biblical church, including sustained doctrinal reflection and practical application to ground the church's role as a "salt and light" in a community.<sup>12</sup>

The COVID-19 crisis has caused the world to transform to accommodate people's safety in their daily life. The fundamental adaptation in locking down, social distancing, self-care, and well-being affects systems in education, church, government, market, and communities. Yet, the crisis can provide an opportunity for innovation as the Lord is doing new things (Isa 43:14–21). The church, amid COVID-19, can manifest a revival vision to glorify God upon prudently progressing through the biblically-based reflection and response stages.

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<sup>11</sup> In tracing relevant evidence throughout Scripture, this research project applies biblical arguments to identify the church's role in the general community.

<sup>12</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

Being merciful and comforting (2 Cor 1:3), God cares for his people and calls for them to cast their anxiety on him (1 Pet 5:7). Being God's people and the body of Christ on earth, the church, therefore, must be steadfast in loyalty to God's mission to care for his people. Being the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church should follow his guidance for regeneration (John 3:3—6). Jesus claimed himself as the Son of God to serve (Matt 20:28) and fulfilled his promise of having the Holy Spirit as a helper to dwell in the hearts of God's people (John 14:15—27; Acts 2). The church asserts itself as God's servant to humanity to support the community (fellowship) with God. The church's faith in God and practice of God's mission are significant in leading the community to face the pandemic.

### **Reflection**

Since Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18–20), the church can apply Jesus's teachings to people's daily lives by submissively walking with the Holy Spirit. In doing so, the church can fulfill its role in helping the community suffering from COVID-19. Being the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church must reflect on its healthiness to fulfill its roles, such as expository preaching, teaching sound doctrine, and providing clear gospel messages so that the congregation can practice principles of loving God and neighbors.<sup>13</sup>

The reflection practices below list concepts about the church's support and guidance for people suffering from COVID-19.

**Prayers and meditations.** Melody E. Harris emphasizes a prayer to the Spirit of God to give Christian readers wisdom and understanding of God.<sup>14</sup> Hearing what the

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church? (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches)*, 5th ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Melody F. Harris, *SALVATION PANDEMIC: Message to the Dying Church*, ed. Kasey H. Friday (Silver Creek, GA: Independently Published, 2021). Aiming at the teacher, the preacher, and the

Holy Spirit says to the churches will help church leaders prevent any misleading teaching to cause contradicts God’s words, for example, salvation.<sup>15</sup> The church needs reflection on the gospel truth in Jesus’s followers’ hearts and souls to awaken the dying church. Robert Gram claims churches should utilize meditation for contemplation, upon Scripture, to a brief prayer.<sup>16</sup> He describes how biblical themes provide resilient hope during the pandemic.

**Faith and trust.** John Piper invites Christian readers to stand on Jesus Christ, the solid Rock, for he reigns over COVID-19; he provides biblical answers regarding God’s actions in COVID-19 to sustain Christian souls.<sup>17</sup> Kathy Zacca states that COVID-19 is not the real cause of fear, and the more destructive than virus-like is that people’s hearts and minds have turned away from God.<sup>18</sup> She suggests that Christians partake in reflection of God’s sovereignty, including asserting God’s power, knowing God’s peace, and exposing evil in this world. Walter Brueggemann suggests treating COVID-19 as a

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disciple of Jesus, the author takes the Gospel truth against those who overthrow believers and keep them not see the Light. He advises the churches to listen to the Spirit's words (Rev 2:29).

<sup>15</sup> Salvation is by faith in God, a gift by receiving, not by anyone’s doing. Thus, it is for each individual who is willing to trust God. Ephesians 2:8—9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

<sup>16</sup> Robert L. Gram, *Christ and Covid-19: Meditations for Peace in Times of Turmoil* (Rhinebeck, NY: Epigraph Books, 2020). The author offers insight and practical steps to thrive rather than survive. By discussing ways to manage fear, grief, and negativity, he explores how self-defeating behaviors rise and an overcoming method. He challenges Christians to simplify life like Jesus so that they can celebrate daily blessings overlooked.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020). The author offers six biblical answers to God’s actions through the coronavirus. (1) God gives the world in the coronavirus outbreak, as in all other calamities, a physical picture of the moral horror and spiritual ugliness of God-belittling sin; (2) Some people will be infected with the coronavirus as a specific judgment from God because of their sinful attitudes and actions; (3) The coronavirus is a God-given wake-up call to be ready for the second coming of Christ; (4) The coronavirus is God’s thunderclap call for people to repent and realign people’s lives with the infinite worth of Christ; (5) The coronavirus is God’s call to his people to overcome self-pity and fear, and with courage and joy, to do the good works of love that glorify God; (6) In the coronavirus God is loosening the roots of settled Christians, all over the world, to make them accessible for something new and radical and to send them with the gospel of Christ to the unreached people of the world.

<sup>18</sup> Kathy Zacca, *Standing on Faith Together: In a Post-Pandemic World* (Monee, IL: kathyzacca.com, 2020). The author invites readers to “*Stand on Faith Together*” with Christians to watch God perform miracle after miracle through God’s people’s faith and unity (4).

call to reflect biblically on this experience of personal loss, grief, and anxiety.<sup>19</sup> John C. Lennox explains how belief in God can help Christians communicate and cope with the COVID-19 outbreak, for God loves people and is sovereign rule over the universe, including resolving pandemics.<sup>20</sup> David K. Clark states that the church must biblically reflect its sound theology, providing Christians with God's vision, fostering the Lord's wisdom, nurturing God's children's covenantal relationship with God, and leading them to know and love God.<sup>21</sup> Jerry Bridges illustrates that God's complete sovereignty, infinite wisdom, and perfect love are always at work on people's behalf, even when people do not understand what they can see.<sup>22</sup> The more people know about God, the more trust in him can help people overcome fear in challenging times. Max Lucado encourages readers to trust in God, who works miracles in dealing with challenges people face.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020). The author states that the lingering impact of the virus has summoned people's best science and technology to respond to the human emergency. He applies the transactional mode of the covenant in the Bible: "Good people prosper" and "evil people suffer"; he quotes Psalm 77 to turn from self to God to interpret YHWH's purposeful enactment of force. (5)

<sup>20</sup> John C. Lennox, *Where Is God in a Coronavirus World?* (Epsom, SY: The Good Book Company, 2020). The author states Christian belief helps to cope with the suffering caused by COVID-19. He examines the coronavirus in light of various belief systems and shows how the Christian worldview helps make sense and offers a confident hope to cling to.

<sup>21</sup> David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology.*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). Asserting that systematic evangelical theology is the science by which evangelical believers learn of God, Clark claims that the insights of apparently contradictory viewpoints can and should be drawn together. He works past the false dilemmas, imprecision, overstatement, inferences, and generalizations that often cloud theological discussion and arrives at clear definitions, precise distinctions, careful analysis, and modest conclusions. Clark argues that systematic evangelical theology is rooted in the Bible and focused on Christ. Good theology leads to knowing and loving God.

<sup>22</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008). The author states his exploration deep into the Bible for answers on God's sovereignty during the darkness and adversity in his life. The answers to his questions changed his life, including how he can grow through adversity.

<sup>23</sup> Max Lucado, *God Will Help You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020). The author states that no setback is too big to solve with God, and no prayer goes unnoticed; God is still working. In each chapter, he raises reflection questions to help Christians identify the obstacles, such as needing guidance and feeling anxious. He offers reassurance through miracles that God will meet and interact with his children amid life's messes.

**Biblical themes.** D.A. Carson examines vital biblical themes related to human suffering and evil with a careful exposition of key biblical passages and practical pastoral applications.<sup>24</sup> Listening to people’s prayers, God works to his mighty power without limitation.

**Leadership discipline.** Jack Shitama states that the key to effective church leadership is the leader’s ability to be a non-anxious presence with faith in God.<sup>25</sup> The church leadership team needs to discipline themselves through constant reflection.

### **From Reflection to Response**

In addition to reflecting on the church’s role in facing COVID-19, some authors present specific responses to challenges, such as vaccines and attitudes toward the challenges.

**Hope and vision.** N.T. Wright discusses what Christians should think about the COVID-19 crisis by reflection; he explores discovering a way of responding to this pandemic: Reading Bible and Christian history carefully can offer simple answers to Christians’ responses.<sup>26</sup> Jeff Kinley uncovers God’s prophetic plan by pondering on

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<sup>24</sup> D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). The author intends to help Christians to think about suffering and evil (11). Most Christians ruefully admit that there are times when Christians’ faith is surprised by grief. He is persuaded that the biblical truths outlined there have enormous potential for stabilizing the faithfulness of God’s people (12).

<sup>25</sup> Jack Shitama, *Anxious Church, Anxious People: How to Lead Change in an Age of Anxiety* (Earleville, MD: Charis Works, Inc., 2018). The author claims the significance of developing as a non-anxious presence with God’s guidance to lead change in an anxious church. He analyzes the anxiety symptom based on a family systems approach to congregational leadership. He makes family systems concepts accessible and practical through examples from personal experience. At the same time, utilizing this approach to leadership in his ministry as a church pastor and ministry executive, he can lead significant change in the local church, a regional ministry, and a denominational professional association.

<sup>26</sup> N.T. Wright, *God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020). The author intends to shape Christians’ faith by answering questions: What should be the Christian response? How should people think about God? How do people live in the present? What can people learn about themselves? How do people recover?

COVID-19.<sup>27</sup> He inspires people to live with hope in response to the pandemic by providing biblical wisdom, which can vaccinate them confidently against ignorance, naivety, and anxiety in today's world. Elias K. Bongmba claims that the Christian community is obliged to people's living during the pandemic because "God created humanity in the image of God" (Gen 1:26), and the church has its ethical mission to serve the public.<sup>28</sup>

**Changes in communication, life, and God's message delivery.** Mark D.W. Edington gathered discussions about how Christians need to change habits of isolation and regather the church to respond to COVID-19.<sup>29</sup> Andy Stanley and Lane Jones emphasize communication to deliver captivating and practical messages.<sup>30</sup> They advise church pastors to convey their messages in a life-changing way to optimize the audience's time. Paul D. Tripp helps people discover the needed different interfaces in people's lives and with others.<sup>31</sup> Following Jesus's example, the author reveals how to get

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<sup>27</sup> Jeff Kinley, *Aftershocks: Christians Entering a New Era of Global Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2021). The author reveals how current societal and global trends foreshadow the end times approaching. The prophecies about what is coming should renew Christian's passion for lovingly proclaiming Christ to a suffering world.

<sup>28</sup> Elias K. Bongmba, *Facing a Pandemic: The African Church and the Crisis of AIDS* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007). The author states that facing pandemics traces the HIV/AIDS virus in Africa's history, its spread, and its impact on African society and public policy. Before considering new priorities needed to combat the pandemic, the author's central argument is that the theological motif of the image of God invites a prophetic critique of the social environment in which HIV/AIDS thrives and calls for a praxis of love and compassion.

<sup>29</sup> Mark D. W. Edington, ed., *We Shall Be Changed: Questions for the Post-Pandemic Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2020). This book is a gathering of brief essays from thought leaders around the church on pressing topics that the church needs to consider now—in preparation for the end of this pandemic. The editor Edington designed to spur conversation within parishes, fellowship groups, and clergy gatherings about embracing the gifts given this time while anticipating and addressing the challenges the church will confront in its wake.

<sup>30</sup> Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication* (New York, NY: Multnomah, 2006). The authors share seven imperatives to empower readers that help engage and impact the audience to challenge their minds to change their lives. Their concepts of simplifying communication include: determining a goal, picking a point, creating a map, internalizing the messages, engaging the audience, finding the voice, and starting all over.

<sup>31</sup> Paul D. Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change (Resources for Changing Lives)* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2002). The author states becoming a better leader starts with a transformed inner life. He shows leaders how transforming their inner lives will influence their church, including developing a deep and inner life

to know people and lovingly speak the truth to them. This strategy can help congregations facing COVID-19. Timothy S. Lane and Paul D. Tripp explain how Christ changes Christians' hearts, desires, motivations, and behaviors by his grace; they equip and challenge Christians today to live out the gospel daily.<sup>32</sup> Changing hearts is a gospel promise and helps Christians respond to COVID-19.

**Theological theory, faith and messages, and church community.** J. Rodman Williams urges the church to undertake its task of theology in the proper spirit: an attitude of prayer, a deepening sense of reverence, an ever-increasing purity of heart, a spirit of growing love, and a theological approach rooted in the glory of God.<sup>33</sup> This renewal theology focuses on such a spirit becoming a faithful and powerful witness to the living God. Charles S. Kelly Jr., Richard Land, and R. Albert Mohler Jr. examine the eighteen doctrines outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message Statement.<sup>34</sup> By combining biblical insight with historical and contemporary illustrations, they intend to assist Christian readers in understanding essential Baptist beliefs, identify the biblical foundation for these beliefs, and apply them to their Christian walk. Jennie Allen draws on insights from science and history, biblical truth, and her own life stories to help readers to engage, adventure, and implore others to experience the Christian community.<sup>35</sup> Jerry Bridges guides readers through koinonia and its implications for

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with Christ, examining its implications for surviving stress, planning, decision-making, building teams, creating healthy culture, and influencing others.

<sup>32</sup> Timothy S. Lane and Paul D. Tripp, *How People Change Facilitator's Guide: How Christ Changes Us by His Grace*, 3rd ed. (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective (Three Volumes in One)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). The author focuses on a study of the Christian faith. (11) He presents Christian truth in the way of being conversational.

<sup>34</sup> Charles S. Jr. Kelley, Richard Land, and Albert R. Jr. Mohler, *Baptist Faith & Message* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Jennie Allen, *Find Your People: Building Deep Community in a Lonely World* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2022). The author conveys that building an authentic Christian community reflects God's heart for Christians to experience a relationship with God. The concepts can help overcome barriers, find simple ways to start genuine conversations, strengthen relationships through understanding

today's church.<sup>36</sup> He helps Christians learn what the twenty-first century's Christian community should be.

**Prayer for God's mercy and wisdom.** Nuala Kenny warns that the pandemic has unmasked global political and religious dissent, as shown in Christians disunited, increasing health and social inequity worldwide and issues of systemic sexism, ageism, racism, and white privilege in the church and the world.<sup>37</sup> The church should respond to COVID-19 from vulnerability as a wounded healer. This experience allows the church to comprehend the insight of God's love and mercy (Eph 2:4—5) to his children and equip them to support each other to become a Christian community with a new life.

### **From Response to Transformation**

When the church carefully reflects on its role and takes proper actions to respond to the congregation and community needs in COVID-19, the church transforms in ways that please and glorify God.

**Training and changing thoughts.** Peter Scazzero shares his insight on becoming a better leader, starting with a transformed inner life to handle environmental change.<sup>38</sup> The church can utilize the COVID-19 crisis as a training opportunity to assist members with spiritually transforming life. John Carter points out that personal

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the conflict, identify the need for friendship support, and learn the five beneficial ingredients for healthy companies.

<sup>36</sup> Bridges, *True Community*. The author conveys what God Intended for the Body of Christ. He states the fellowship among believers in the biblical community had rich and varied meanings: covenant relationship, partnership in the gospel, communion with God and others, and the sharing of earthly possessions.

<sup>37</sup> Nuala Kenny, *A Post-Pandemic Church – Prophetic Possibilities* (Toronto, ON: Novalis, 2021), 27, 37. The author states that facing COVID-19 challenges the usual way of life, and it is an opportunity for Christians to reflect on their faith and the church.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2015).

transformation requires radical change.<sup>39</sup> Yet, People’s lives will not transform until they change their thoughts. While becoming a Christian ignites the transformation process, a Christian’s relationship with God, eternal destination, and authentic self regenerates as new. The author teaches Christians that God has designed a conversion plan for every person that goes beyond the initial moment of salvation. Whether God’s children realize it or not, they can influence the direction of their life through a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

**Church leadership transformation.** Bob Whitesel suggests Christians, including the church leaders, rethink “how to” lead the church to grow. They must move from entertainment activities to experiencing God, replace largeness with relevance, and make the most of online attendance.<sup>40</sup> Thom S. Rainer gives the church a faith-based guide for its leadership in the post-quarantine world by giving Christian readers hope and a vision for the church congregation’s future.<sup>41</sup> Kay Kotan mentions that the crisis can give birth to an opportunity. The global pandemic has been horrific, but the situation can also be an accelerator for enhancement.<sup>42</sup> COVID-19 has caused the church to learn to adopt the alternatives of previously imagined worship methods—online services.

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<sup>39</sup> John Carter, *The Transformed Life: Discover How to Live from the Inside Out* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House Publishers, 2013). The author aims to explore the Christian growth journey as the transformation process requires Christians’ participation. He focuses on faith and instructs practice issues.

<sup>40</sup> Bob Whitesel, *Growing the Post-Pandemic Church: A Leadership Church Guide* (Las Vegas: ChurchLeadership.press, 2020). The author explores how to lead God’s people in difficult times based on Paul’s theology and practice in his letters to churches. He describes ten leadership skills as reformation needed to remain relevant in a world where electronic communication is increasing. He offers “7 organic steps to building bridges across racial divides” to manage the continuously rising racial tensions. He concludes with a look at the future church from a biblical perspective that recurring problems may emerge after catastrophes.

<sup>41</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges and Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation* (United States of America: Church Answers, 2020). On the back cover, the author reveals insights based on what he gathered from thousands of surveys of church leaders and in-person consultants. He aims to prepare the church for the post-quarantine world and identify critical opportunities for the church congregation.

<sup>42</sup> Kay Kotan, *Being the Church in a Post-Pandemic World: Game Changers for the Post-Pandemic Church* (Knoxville, TN: Kevin Slimp, 2021). The author assists Christians in recovering the significance of becoming a healthy, vital, culturally relevant church. In addition to teaching how to

### **Experiencing God and walking in his promises for faith renewal.** David

Jeremiah invites Christians to experience the transforming power of God’s Word to help them trust God in challenging times, know God is at work even when they cannot see it, and deal with confusing or disappointing circumstances.<sup>43</sup> The purpose is for the experience of a challenging season to grow closer to God and trust his plan. It is a reminder that people are not alone and God is working all things together for their good. Derek Prince offers biblical teaching on God’s love and atonement, the identity and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the purpose of testing.<sup>44</sup> By learning to walk in the promises of the Bible, Christians can experience renewed freedom and understanding of how to access divine provision as God’s children as they know what it means to have a life transformation. Robert D. Jones uses wisdom and practical techniques for reconciliation to guide readers on their journey to pursue the peace of Christ while helping others do the same.<sup>45</sup>

In short, “from response to transformation,” the church may gradually transform to approach revival with God’s blessings by encompassing reflection and response to its role in pandemics. God supports the church’s commitment to serving the

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embrace being visionary, spiritually grounded, highly committed, innovative, resilient, and courageous, reflecting questions at the end of each chapter help to utilize the resources learned (1—2).

<sup>43</sup> David Jeremiah, *God Has Not Forgotten You: He Is With You, Even in Uncertain Times* (Nashville: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2021). The author intends to help the audience navigate the uncertainties of the present while embracing God's promises for the future. He invites Christians to gain strength from God, grow closer to him, and trust his excellent plan to sovereign the world.

<sup>44</sup> Derek Prince, *Transformed for Life: How to Know God Better and Love Him* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2002). The author offers biblical teaching to Christians to learn the meaning of being transformed for life by combining his six books from ministry: Extravagant Love, The Divine Exchange, Who Is the Holy Spirit?, Life's Bitter Pool, Fatherhood, and From Curse to Blessing.

<sup>45</sup> Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). The author provides a step-by-step process for pursuing peace in Christian relationships: please God, repent, and love. Christians can help each other to transform the church by applying this guide, which is: (1) Biblical — relies on God’s Spirit-breathed Word; (2) Christ-centered — depends on Jesus’s forgiving and empowering grace; (3) Practical — provides actions, examples, questions, and suggestions to handle situations; (4) Proven — offers methods from a certified Christian conciliator making peace as an experienced pastor and professor.

public during challenging times to glorify him, and the Holy Spirit leads the church to transform.

## **Revival**

The church's revival comes through the power and blessings the Holy Spirit grants, and its ultimate goal is to glorify God.

**Where does revival begin?** Dean Koepke states that true revival begins with true repentance.<sup>46</sup> James Choung and Ryan Pfeiffer point out that revival starts with God but is lived through Christians. They have seen a resurgence in their ministries, with remarkable transformation in individuals and communities.<sup>47</sup>

**Church revival examples.** Donna Claycomb Sokol and L. Roger Owens share a remarkable revival of the urban Church in North America and point out three essential techniques: strategic importance, model ministry on Jesus, and faithful transformation journey.<sup>48</sup> Alton Gansky Gransky highlights thirty significant events that shape the church for revival and reveals how they have continued influencing Christians.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Dean Koepke, *Catch The Fire!: A Guide To Personal Church-Wide and National Revival* (Las Vegas: 2016 Dean Koepke, 2021), 29. God's idea of repentance is as Jesus's words to the church of Ephesus: "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent" (Eph 2:4—5).

<sup>47</sup> James Choung and Ryan Pfeiffer, *Longing for Revival: From Holy Discontent to Breakthrough Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, Press, 2020). The authors unpack what revival looks like, how Christians can anticipate and experience it, and provide a leadership model for Christians with implications for evangelism, mission, and growth.

<sup>48</sup> Donna Claycomb Sokol and L. Roger Owens, *A New Day in the City: Urban Church Revival* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017).

<sup>49</sup> Alton Gansky, *30 Events That Shaped the Church: Learning from Scandal, Intrigue, War, and Revival* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015). Gansky states that people are all historical products. While appreciating history is a nice sentiment, he comments the twenty-first century is a demanding place filled with distractions, challenges, and mentally and physically taxing efforts to get by. He focused on critical historical events, drawn from both the distant past and modern times, as good samples that continue to shape our Christian behavior and thinking. He hopes the book helps the reader understand the people, times, and events that make the church what it is today.

**The symbol of the church declining to awaken and Christian faith.** Sayers discusses church decline that might lead to a reawakening in the church.<sup>50</sup> He provides reasons to be wildly hopeful and a method to prepare Christian readers and their churches to be a part of the renewal. Adam Hamilton defines the Christian faith as Wesley lived it, challenging Christians to rediscover their spiritual passion for moving forward with revival.<sup>51</sup>

**Church needs revival constantly to glorify God.** Dean Koepke states that the Christian Church in America requires a revival, like a pleading with God (Ps 119:126).<sup>52</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones declares that the church needs revival in every era, especially during challenging times.<sup>53</sup> He points out that every committed Christian's heart longs for personal revival. That means knowing the spiritual reality and God's presence in an individual's private life.

**A proven approach and an actual event for the church revival.** Brent Lay focuses on church revival by sharing his twenty-seven years of practice, written using fictional names relating to true stories.<sup>54</sup> It reveals a proven approach that any size church

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<sup>50</sup> Mark Sayers, *Reappearing Church: The Hope for Renewal in the Rise of Our Post-Christian Culture* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019). Turning curses into blessings can create a renewal cell; throughout history that decline periods traditionally precede powerful spiritual renewal and another revival.

<sup>51</sup> Adam Hamilton, *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014). Hamilton connects John Wesley's message and his faith to speak to twenty-one-century Christians—calling for Christians' hearts and souls so that their world might be changing.

<sup>52</sup> Dean Koepke, *Revival In MY Pew: A Mirror's Challenge* (Las Vegas: Dean Koepke, 2020), 1. The author wrote the book for Christians to state that God sends revival; only enough of his people in that area individually decide to want revival and are willing to do the work necessary to prepare themselves for God to visit.

<sup>53</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987). On the back cover, the author states there is a personal revival longing in every committed Christian's heart. That is, knowing the quality and depths of spiritual reality and the presence of God in one's personal life.

<sup>54</sup> Brent Lay, *The Revival and Survival of Stump Creek Baptist Church* (Las Vegas: www.TheAuthorsMentor.com, 2021). In the author's "Introduction: Thriving or Dying," he states the significance of an outreach methodology based on personal visits and interactions with the unchurched in real life instead of focusing on conceptual views via telephone surveys.

may adopt, but it differs radically from the church outreach practice of the past seventy years. Mary K. Crawford describes a missionary's witnessed events of the Holy Spirit outpouring in great power "among the Baptist denomination in China"; that event is the most significant revival in Baptist Church History.<sup>55</sup>

**God's power is revealed for church revival.** Raymond C. Ortlund specifies what sparks revival; learning what God and the church must do may ignite a wildfire of supernatural renewal.<sup>56</sup> Kent R. Hunter advises that Christians must learn strategies for renewal and revival: not "doing" but "being" now and in the future.<sup>57</sup>

### **Method**

The methodology of this thesis uses the Bible, systematic theology, historical background, and practical application to describe and analyze the church's role in a pandemic, using COVID-19 as an example. This research project will divide the resources into three categories, depending on how each resource theme pertains to reflection, response, and revival, to address the church's role in COVID-19. I will analyze all three perspectives based on biblical, theological, historical, and practical criteria to critique and conclude an argument presentation for the church's role in each category.

### **Contents of the Thesis**

This thesis applies biblical-based and Christ-centered messages to assert the

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<sup>55</sup> Mary K. Crawford, *The Shantung Revival (The Greatest Revival in Baptist Church History)* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Global Awakening Mechanicsburg, PA, 2005), 8. The author states God takes over his church in times of revival, but not all are willing to yield his control (11).

<sup>56</sup> Raymond Ortlund, *When God Comes to Church: A Biblical Model for Revival Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). The author states revival as seasonal in church life when God causes the regular ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary spiritual power (9). He outlines what God can do; what Christians must do (return to and seek God; humble themselves).

<sup>57</sup> Kent R Hunter, *Who Broke My Church?: 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival* (New York: FaithWords, 2017). The author identifies seven ceilings while diagnosing the issues Christians and churches face. Those hinder God's intended work (xxiii).

church's role in a pandemic; it elaborates on reflection, response, and revival viewpoints launching the church's role in COVID-19. Although the church building may require closing sometime to meet government regulations for public safety in COVID-19, the living body of Jesus is never closed down. This research project on the church's role in a pandemic, using COVID-19 as an example, comprises five significant components: defining terms, presenting three views, and concluding the arguments.

Starting chapter 2, I will focus on describing the church and pandemics. First, for the church, I will briefly define it by its prescribed role in the Bible as “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit,” including issues surrounding “the Church and Israel” with a discourse conclusion. Then, I will explore the church's identity characterizing the church functions and ministries. Second, regarding the pandemics, I will briefly depict pandemics in general. Then I will center on COVID-19 specifically, containing the biblical implication of pandemics and quarantine from the Hebrew Scriptures to learn God's purpose and plan to fulfill his will.

In chapter 3, I will reflect on the church's role in COVID-19 from biblical, theological, historical, and practical viewpoints. Focusing on God (not the problem itself, such as pathogens) and his purpose and missions for Christ's church are essential to reflect on the church's role in COVID-19. I will analyze community needs and church resources through prayers, meditations, and reviewing faith-based thinking.<sup>58</sup> Presenting the church ministry commitments on biblical and theological grounds, I will argue the church's role in COVID-19 on reflection evidence. Rooted in Bible-based examples, historical views, and practical implementation stories, I will explore potential deviations between the church's current practice and God's plan for salvation to incorporate findings as my critique.

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<sup>58</sup> Refer to the Scriptures: Deut 33:27; Lam 3:55—57; Matt 6:33, 10:29—31, 11:28—29; John 16:33, 20:26; and Rom 8:37—39.

In chapter 4, I will first brief the faith-based principle as the church's strategy to respond to COVID-19, covering the principle concepts (biblical and theological) and their applications (historical examples and practical viewpoints). Secondly, based on the reflection on biblical, theological, historical, and practical prospects elaborated in chapter 3, I will discuss the church's ministries in responding to COVID-19, such as providing resources and how to meet people's general needs as a Bible-based response to support individuals and the community in need. I will summarize the church's role through Bible-based actions in the community: supplying resources to meet people's mental, emotional, and spiritual needs, analyzing resources from the collected references, and incorporating my suggestions. Lastly, I will offer additional considerations for the church's response to COVID-19: teaching Christian Theology, shepherding, and counseling, to help establish spiritual life and grow spiritual maturity.

In chapter 5, I will first discuss the church's role in COVID-19 transforming toward a revival stage—while persistently implementing the committed ministries specified in chapter 4 rooted in biblical (Eccl 7:8), theological, historical, and practical visions. Secondly, I will brief the Holy Spirit's role in the church to revive. I will explore the church's actions in a new era with hope, promise, and enthusiasm through strengthening faith acquired from prayers during COVID-19. Finally, I will analyze resources from the collected references to include my recommended suggestions for God's leading to guide the church's spiritual growth to continue helping the communities toward the church's revival through transformation.

In the final chapter, "Conclusion," I will summarize the church's role in COVID-19 from its reflection and response, then toward its revival, and conclude my academic conversation to practical implementation to prove my thesis statements.

## **Summary of Contribution**

Regarding the church's role in COVID-19, the church is vulnerable as a wounded healer. This widely open discussion has caused many to question the concept's biblical warrant and practical application. Yet, by focusing on the COVID-19 impacts mentioned above and referring to the biblical and theological evidence conveyed in the Bible (Isa 43:19, Jer 29:11, John 16:33), this research project shows that Christians' faith can conquer fear, for there is no fear in God's kingdom. This project will stand on the offers of others who have provided their thoughts or shared their church leadership visions and practices during the dramatic environmental changes.

God's salvation as a spiritual vaccine to the world is the most significant in people's lives. This distinction furthers the conversation about church action during the pandemic by providing a necessary framework that is missing in current research. The three-part framework: reflection, response, and revival, creates a practical plan that can take the conversation from academic to practical. Being the live "body of Christ" and "the temple of the Holy Spirit," the church can reach people, community, and the world for Christ to be "light and salt" to each of them and head toward a revival stage. I will conclude my perception that the church's role in a pandemic can be accomplished by humbly implementing reflection and response toward its revival to glorify the Lord!

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CHURCH AND A PANDEMIC

This chapter discusses terminology and its usage in establishing the foundation for the argument of the church's role in a pandemic in later chapters. The terms church and pandemic must be defined, as well as the relationship between them. I will also discuss the purpose of the church and the threat of COVID-19. This then leads to a discussion of how a Christian with a strong faith in the triune God reacts differently to COVID-19 from a non-Christian or a nominal Christian. Finally, I will explore whether COVID-19 is a punishment from God.

To support my argument for the church's role in a pandemic, this chapter lays the groundwork for knowing and recognizing the church, a pandemic such as COVID-19, and quarantine's spiritual implications. The next three chapters will further comment on the church's role in COVID-19, utilizing reflection, response, and church revival.

#### **The Church**

The church is defined through its role in the Bible as “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit.” After exploring these roles, I will brief the disputed issue, “the Church and Israel.” Finally, I will explore the church's identity to perceive its functions through its ministries.

#### **Definition**

Utilizing metaphorical concepts to describe the church, the church is a re-creation of the Trinity: “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the

Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Gregg R. Allison defines the church accordingly with further elaboration.<sup>2</sup>

The first metaphor, “the people of God,” refers to the human beings created by God in his image (Gen 1:26—27) and redeemed by God (Heb 4:9, 11:25), as the New Testament presents the fulfillment of the promise of redemption through Jesus Christ. He saves believers through the gospel.

The second metaphor, “the body of Christ,” indicates that Christ is the head of the church (Eph 5:23). Jesus once said that he would build his church on the rock (Matt 16:18); the church is Jesus’s, and members of Christ’s body joined Christ in salvation (Eph 4:15—16), follow Christ as their head (Eph 1:22—23). They are the physical representation of Christ in this world.

The third metaphor, “the temple of the Holy Spirit,” points to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came, Apostol Peter’s sermon touched three thousand people’s hearts to accept baptism (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit’s arrival was in the name of Jesus. Jesus asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit as a helper to the believers to teach and remember Jesus’s words (John 14:26). As such, the metaphor applies only to the new covenant people of God.

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<sup>1</sup> The church can be viewed as a family (1 Tim 5:1—2): as it is Christians’ heavenly Father (Eph 3:14); the bride of Christ (Eph 5:32); branches on a vine (John 15:5); “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:12—27); God’s new temple (Eph 2:19—22).

<sup>2</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 29—30. “The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit. It consists of two interrelated elements: the universal church is the fellowship of all Christians that extends from the day of Pentecost until the second coming, incorporating both the deceased believers who are presently in heaven and the living believers from all over the world. This universal church becomes manifested in local churches characterized by being doxological, logocentric, pneumadynamic, covenantal, confessional, missional, and spatio-temporal/ eschatological. Local churches are led by pastors (also called elders) and served by deacons and deaconesses, possess and pursue purity and unity, exercise church discipline, develop strong connections with other churches, and celebrate the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts for ministry, these communities regularly gather to worship the triune God, proclaim his Word, engage non-Christians with the gospel, disciple their members, care for people through prayer and giving, and stand both for and against the world”

## **Biblical Role**

Scripture utilizes metaphors to help people comprehend the church's nature. When Scripture refers to the church as "the body of Christ," it specifies Jesus as the head guiding the church's direction, reminds brothers and sisters of their interdependence, and advises Christians to appreciate the diverse gifts within the body granted by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7, 11). Jesus told his disciple, Peter, that he would build his church on a rock, which means that no one can defeat it and even death cannot overcome it (Matt 16:18). Jesus conveyed this message as he had clarified his plan to the people of God, where the Holy Spirit dwells in them as the temple to remind them of God's plan for the church constantly.

Based on Acts 2:42, the church provides a place for Christians to have fellowship, teach biblical doctrine, observe the Lord's supper, and pray. The church offers functions: worship, teaching, fellowship, evangelism, and serving. By developing Christians' lives to be Christ-like, as the salt and light to transform the community and world, the church's purpose is to manifest its role as preparing for God's kingdom on earth to glorify the Lord.

## **The Church and Israel**

Wayne Grudem defines the church as "the community of all true believers for all time."<sup>3</sup> This statement of all true believers as genuinely saved, making up the church, has raised concerns about Israel being true believers in the Old Testament.

In this thesis, the church fundamentally pertains to Jesus's true believers, as emphasized in the New Testament covenant. Since Jesus promised his disciples to build his church on the rock (Matt 16:18), the church's growth came from the Lord through the Holy Spirit instead of human effort (Acts 2:47). The term "church" comes from the

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<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 853.

Greek word ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), which indicates that “believers convene for a specific nature and purpose.”<sup>4</sup> Biblical roles or ministries of the church are foundational to it. The key to any church is worship, edification, and evangelism. Worship is Lord-centered, and Christian praise glorifies God in worship. The church is visible in local congregations.<sup>5</sup> It is invisible when referring to the church’s “true spiritual reality” as the fellowship of all genuine believers.<sup>6</sup>

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *qahal* often translates into the Greek word *ekklesia*, which appears in Solomon’s blessing of the people at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:14).<sup>7</sup> Yet, this translation of Hebrew *qahal* to the Greek *ekklesia* can be misleading. Steven Wedgworth differentiates this Old Testament notion of gathering from the New Testament idea of the church.<sup>8</sup> This concludes the church only applies to the new covenant people of God, for there is no church in the Old Testament.

### **Church Identity**

Identifying the church as incorporating both Roman Catholic and Protestant requires the early church creeds and the Reformed catechism, “The New City Catechism.”<sup>9</sup> Regarding the identity of the church associated with what all churches believe about and practice, despite the differences between the Roman Catholic and

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes Louw, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction (Short Studies in Systematic Theology)* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021). 46.

<sup>6</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 855.

<sup>7</sup> Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, “There is no singular Old Testament institution which fully encapsulates the church. The church brings together aspects of various Old Testament concepts, and it breaks the rules of several of those concepts along the way. As such, it is not possible to identify any one of Israel’s social or political structures as being ‘the church.’”

<sup>9</sup> Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, 55, 69.

Protestant churches, “The New City Catechism” has one question, “Question 48: What is the church?” The response draws these two under the term church.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the church refers to a community elected for eternal life and united by faith, who love, follow, learn from, and worship God as brothers and sisters in Christ’s family together, including Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.

### **Church Functions and Ministries**

Grounded in the church’s definition and identity, church leaders perform church functions by engaging in ministries in various ways. In principle, all churches engage in Scripture-prescribed ministries, including four church functions through threefold ministries: ministry to God (worship), ministry to members (edification/education, including fellowship), and ministry to the world (evangelism: focusing on proclaiming the gospel, or including serving the public simultaneously, such as the ministry of mercy).

**Ministry to God.** Ministry to God leads church worship function. Worship is Lord-centered and focuses on spiritually benefiting worshipers to know God; it means glorifying God for his holiness and bringing him offerings.<sup>11</sup> This can take the form of community group gatherings or prayer summits. First Corinthians 14:15—17 instructed the congregation to participate in the worship.<sup>12</sup> This worship ministry is oriented toward

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<sup>10</sup> Allison, 69. “God chooses and preserves for himself a community elected for eternal life and united by faith, who love, follow, learn from, and worship together. God sends out this community to proclaim the gospel and prefigure Christ’s kingdom by the quality of their life together and their love for one another.”

<sup>11</sup> First Chronicles 16:29 stated worship the Lord as: “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.”

<sup>12</sup> What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.

God with a purpose to praise and worship him in a heavenly vision to adore him, as portrayed in Hebrews 12:22—24.<sup>13</sup>

In brief, church worship must focus on its relationship with God and his sovereignty to help people build faith in God to face COVID-19.

**Ministry to members.** This ministry focuses on edification (education) needs for members to be enlightened and nurtured to grow their faith into maturity. The purpose of this ministry is to equip the disciples for the ministry work to build up the body of Christ into its unity, maturity, and fullness of Christ.<sup>14</sup> The training must help equip members to build a closer relationship to God, such as in biblical knowledge, spiritual growth, evangelistic outreach, and leadership.

Since education ministry aims to equip believers to grow in maturity to the fullness of Christ, fellowship practice may testify to its effectiveness. This means that the whole body (the church) depends on him (Christ) to be held together; each joint (believer) has its function (spiritual gift). All parts help each other according to their role so that the body (the church) grows and builds itself in love (Eph 4:16). The teaching advises believers to implement what Jesus has commanded (Matt 28:20) and to not let a single filthy word come out of their mouths. Believers only speak good words that edify others so that those who hear it will be benefited (Eph 4:29). Hebrews 10:24—25 discusses the fellowship practice; it can manifest the effectiveness of education ministry from one perspective.

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<sup>13</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

<sup>14</sup> As described in Ephesian 4:12—13: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

In short, through the ministry of discipline, including leadership training, Sunday school classes and seminars, and fellowship practice, church members can use Scripture to learn about God’s will and teach how to win a spiritual battle over COVID-19. This means building a closer relationship with God by offering training to strengthen members' biblical knowledge, spiritual growth, evangelistic outreach, and leadership to help the community overcome anxiety caused by COVID-19.

**Ministry to the world.** Christ calls his followers to serve and transform the world as salt and light to glorify the Lord (Matt 5:13—16). The evangelism ministry is that the church carries out God’s mission to reach the world and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:16—20). This evangelism ministry is twofold: (1) focusing on proclaiming the gospel and (2) serving the public (Matt 22:36—40) simultaneously, such as the ministry of mercy.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in addition to serving believers through church fellowship, Christians must involve in the worldwide redemptive work of the gospel for non-believers by loving, enduring, and persevering to follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Proclaiming the gospel follows Jesus’s Great Commission.<sup>16</sup> The church must obey Jesus’s order because he is the head of the church. Serving the public is believers’ living to be Christ-like to embrace Christ to become incorporated into the church (Mark 12:31); in this way, the church obeys Jesus’s two greatest commandments. Through these functions, the church shows love and mercy to believers and non-believers in the world.

Regarding mercy ministry, it does not mean lacking mercy can make Christians lose their salvation. Still, it means that a genuinely born-again Christian will be merciful toward others, and mercy is one of the marks of a true believer (Mic 6:8).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The main goal is for Christian engagement and dialogue within the church, especially with the larger society. Evangelism, the most fundamental of all gospel work, includes the mercy ministry.

<sup>16</sup> “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

<sup>17</sup> James 2:13 mentions mercy: “For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

While mercy ministry is like caring for the public, it must integrate with biblical justice. Adopting theological concepts from Christian Ethics and Public Theology, the church mercy ministry can be more appropriately formalized to serve the world, engaging in various global and public issues to offer a contemporary vision of the depth and diversity of the faith and its global impact.<sup>18</sup> The church mercy ministry is an example of a church's caring, manifested with God's righteousness and wisdom, for the public community as engaged faith from the Christian community.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, the church's four functions run through all three ministries listed above. Through these functions, the church shows love and mercy to believers and non-believers. This complies with Christ's command to love God and their neighbors as themselves (Luke 10: 27). Likewise, this conforms to Jesus's teaching to his disciples to love enemies with an emphasis, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35—36). This "ministry to the world" is the critical linkage for the church's role in COVID-19 to perform.

### **The COVID-19 Pandemic and Quarantine**

Understanding the purpose of the church on earth, we can discuss the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine to explore God's plan for the church to fulfill its role in this situation. I will review epidemics in the Old Testament and describe God's anger associated with the disasters and his forgiveness after people's repentance. This will affirm God's reign over COVID-19 and the church's role in helping people turn to God as an ultimate solution.

To argue the church's role in COVID-19, I will utilize the biblical and historical base of the pandemic and quarantine. To help the church learn about pandemics

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew Kaemingk, *Reformed Public Theology: A Global Vision for Life in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Brazos Press, 2013). The author highlights what Christians can do to serve the common good.

and quarantine, I will first overview pandemic and quarantine, discuss COVID-19 impacts, review biblical pandemics, and study biblical quarantine.

### **Definition and Regulations**

The church must equip the congregation with a basic knowledge of the pandemic and quarantine to increase their awareness and protect themselves and the community.

The definition of the word “pandemic” is:

an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affects a significant proportion of population; an outbreak or product of sudden rapid spread, growth, or development.<sup>20</sup>

As an infectious disease outbreak spreads across a large region, it affects many people. However, a widespread endemic disease with a stable number of infected people is not a pandemic. Numerous pandemics have occurred throughout human history with different levels of severity.

During COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have published rules for controlling communicable diseases interstate and foreign. Isolation and quarantine help protect the public by preventing exposure to people who have or may have a contagious disease. Isolation separates sick people with a contagious disease from those who are not ill; quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.<sup>21</sup>

### **Impacts and Biblical Implications**

Understanding COVID-19 impacts and biblical pandemics will help determine the church’s role in serving the community through its ministry.

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<sup>20</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary, “pandemic,” last accessed March 15, 2023, pandemics <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pandemic>.

<sup>21</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Quarantine and Isolation,” last accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/index.html>.

**The COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts.** Scientists first identified a human coronavirus in the mid-1960s.<sup>22</sup> Yet, the pathogen of COVID-19 has remained mysterious, and its impacts unfathomable. The effect has exceeded almost all previously known and is incredibly aggressive to humans, including the Delta and Omicron variants. Such an unseen pathogen attacks humans physically, causing death, impacting mental and spiritual health, and causing terror. This disease affects humans on various levels, not only individuals but also families, societies, countries, and the world. COVID-19 is ranked the worst pandemic in America history today because of the deaths.<sup>23</sup>

The church must reflect on its role in COVID-19, as it impacts being inequitable that the shock has affected society's well-being and mental health. This might be Lord's warning sign for humanity to become disciplined to prevent further corruption. COVID-19 might be a turning point for non-believers to seek God's help. The church ministry might be willing to accommodate the community's needs during COVID-19, especially a worldwide public concern about mental and spiritual health being justifiably raised widespread. Managing a crisis may result in a refining opportunity for the church. The global pandemic has been horrific, yet, COVID-19 can also be a turning point for the world to meet God's will.<sup>24</sup> For instance, COVID-19 has allowed the church to learn new methods of worship. God's message may reach people through online worship services in any location or time (realizing previously imagined virtual participation).

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<sup>22</sup> Williams, Shawna "A *Brief History of Human Coronaviruses.*" The Scientist. Last modified June 2, 2020, <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/a-brief-history-of-human-coronaviruses-67600>

<sup>23</sup> Milled, Korin. Medically reviewed by Ken Peterson, MD. "COVID-19 Is the Worst Pandemic in US History," Health, last modified December 27, 2022, <https://www.health.com/condition/infectious-diseases/coronavirus/worst-pandemic-us-history-covid-spanish-flu#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20deaths%20from,nationwide%20as%20of%20September%202022.>

<sup>24</sup> Kay Kotan, *Being the Church in a Post-Pandemic World: Game Changers for the Post-Pandemic Church* (Knoxville, TN: Kevin Slimp, 2021).

Acknowledging limitations in resolving severe issues such as coronavirus attacks, people seek God to surrender under his wisdom and care for the human community. Christians know God has his solution regarding what, when, and how. This faith is Bible-based and expressed by service and obedience to God. Christians have learned God's sovereignty and his plan for the universe he created. Having a heavenly vision as conveyed in Acts 26:19, Christians do not need to be afraid of a pandemic because God's perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Thus, Christians should care about others' safety as loving neighbors and extend loving God to serve the community as God loves his children.<sup>25</sup> I argue the church's role in the pandemic despite, hardship and an environment surrounded by secularism, God has granted his grace for people to come to him for salvation in difficult times, such as amid COVID-19.

**Biblical pandemics.** In the Old Testament, God did utilize the plague as a way to judge people's sins.<sup>26</sup> In the New Testament, the word pestilences and plague appeared three times as warnings (Luke 21:11; Acts 24:5—6; Rev 6:8). Whether God is using COVID-19 to challenge people today, similar to his biblical punishment to warn people, is unknown. Regardless, God reigns over the plague; yet, being merciful, he changed his mind when people repented of their sins (Jonah 3:10). Psalm 90 mentions God's promise of protection against epidemic (Ps 91:1—7) and promises rescue (Ps 91:14—16).

Established on biblical pandemics for application, Christians must grasp God's words of assurance without tempting God and take him as our refuge in COVID-19. Thus, the church must proactively and urgently proclaim the gospel to the world to share the Bible (Mark 16:15—16). Jesus's truth and grace (John 1:17) exceed all other religious

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<sup>25</sup> 1 John 4:19—20: "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen."

<sup>26</sup> I am referring to the Scriptures (Exod 9:3; Num 16:46—50, 25:9; Deut 28:21; 2 Sam 24:15—25; Jer 14:11—12, 21:7, 27:8; Ezek 5:12).

and philosophical practices, and Christ is the only path to eternal salvation (John 14:6). People must know the merciful and mighty God who can rescue people because he reigns the universe he created.

In short, Christians should be humble, righteous, and compassionate (Mic 6:8) and practically fulfill God's will of having human beings "dominion over" the world (Gen 1:26—28) currently out of control during COVID-19. The church's role in COVID-19 is to meet the community's needs to overcome difficulties, which can contribute to God's plan for his solution for COVID-19.

**Biblical quarantine.** One of the fundamental methods of limiting the COVID-19 expansion is social distancing. This means quarantine and radical changes in contact between people. The CDC states quarantine means staying home to help slow the COVID-19 spread.<sup>27</sup> God commanded his people to “hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by” (Isa 26:21—22). God mentioned his believers’ safety in judgment time as abiding in a peaceful habitation, secure dwellings, and quiet resting places (Isa 32:18). Reading these verses about quarantine can help one better understand the biblical stories of disease and their relevance today.

The word “quarantine” means forty days as a yellow flag to segregate patients suffering from skin disease; Leviticus records the earliest mention of the practice of isolating a sick person. God uses numbers as symbols for particular spiritual implications in Scripture, and forty is one of them. Whitney Hopley, a Crosswalk column writer, points out that forty days appears more than twenty times in the Bible.<sup>28</sup> In the Old Testament (Gen 7:4, 7:12, 14, 8:6, etc.) and the New Testament (Mark 1:13, 4:2, Acts 1:3, etc.), a

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<sup>27</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “COVID-19,” Last updated February 10, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/easy-to-read/COVID-19-Quarantine-vs-Isolation.html>

<sup>28</sup> Whitney Hopley is a writer, editor, and website developer. She holds a B.A. in English from George Mason University with honors. She is the author of “Wake Up to Wonder.” She has been an editor of Crosswalk.com and The Salvation Army’s national magazines.

forty-day period implies the time needed to complete a spiritual journey through overcoming obstacles to gain spiritual growth, such as overcoming temptation, meeting with God, regeneration. God might have utilized “quarantine” to remind believers to trust him with their hearts instead of leaning on self-understanding and acknowledging God to make paths (Prov 3:5—6). God is calling to the church to be closer to him and fulfill Jesus’s commandment of proclaiming the gospel to release people’s anxiety because of COVID-19.

In brief, God reigns forever (Exod 15:18; Pss 9:7, 10:16, 46:10), and for those who love God and are called according to God’s purpose, God makes all things work together for good (Rom 8:28). Thus, COVID-19 and quarantine may be God’s purpose to remind the church to reflect on the spiritual implication and perform the church ministries to the world to fulfill God’s will. God will bless the church toward its revival afterward.

### **Conclusion**

The church must help the congregations and serve the community during pandemics such as COVID-19 based on its definition, biblical role, ministry, and implication of the biblical pandemic and quarantine. The church's role in COVID-19 is to fulfill God's purpose and mission for the church, which is equivalent to partaking in God's solution for COVID-19.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN A PANDEMIC: REFLECTION

Unlike other diseases, COVID-19 is rapidly transmissible from people with minor or no symptoms. Observing the worldwide systems crash triggered by COVID-19 at its outset (the end of 2019) and its long-lasting effects, the general public might have hoped for the church's involvement. A research study indicates a societal expectation for the church to exercise care for the community during a crisis. The survey participants were a combination of Christians and non-believers.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, God might have expected the church's ministry to the world (Matt 28:18—20; Mark 12:30—31) to be more engaged in contributing to his planned solution for COVID-19.

This chapter will explore the church's role in COVID-19 from a reflection perspective, including the community's expectations and God's plan for the church. It will discuss differences in reflection methodology between focusing on God and adopting human history to argue why the former is the only way for the church's role in COVID-19. Then, it will emphasize the church ministry with a biblical, theological, historical, and practical view to argue its role in COVID-19.

#### **Focus on God before the Problem**

Focus helps to determine the right direction for moving forward. COVID-19 has impacted church operations, especially for the small churches during the government-

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<sup>1</sup> A new Barna Group study shows that most Americans remain relatively upbeat about local churches' role in their communities. The nationwide study shows that three-quarters of U.S. adults believe the church's presence is "very" (53%) or "somewhat" positive (25%) for their community. <https://www.barna.com/research/do-churches-contribute-to-their-communities/>.

ordered lockdown, including potential membership decline, financial hardship, social connection loss within the congregation, and service cancellation. Yet, focusing on God instead of the COVID-19 crisis problem will help the church obey God to follow his principles, trust him in control, and leave the consequence to him without causing anxiety.

Conversely, lacking focus can cause wrong decisions; misjudging the situation may repeat mistakes due to misidentifying the root causes. Without focusing on God's sovereignty, humans may advocate learning from history and experiences to manage problems brought about by COVID-19. Unlike the omniscient God, humans' capabilities might not have the vision for an integrated solution, including managing anxiety. The church's role is to bring people to God in a catastrophe. Taking COVID-19 as a case study, people realize that reviewing the virus history might be insufficient to unveil the cause of generating pathogens because of unknown factors. They must humbly surrender under God's guidance rendered by the Holy Spirit to have God's vision to comprehend his solution. Thus, I will discuss the church's role in COVID-19 from a reflection viewpoint by focusing on God.

In this chapter, I will reflect on God's purpose and mission for the church. In the meantime, I will explore how humans' efforts without God may lead to suffering due to unknowns to remind the churches to reflect on their ministry to the world during the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Reflect on God's Purpose for the Church**

Rick Warren suggests five balanced core purposes of the church: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism; those purposes are driven by the Great Commandment (Matt 22:36—40) and Great Commission (Matt 28:16—20).<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Every Church Is Big in God's Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

reflecting on God’s purpose for the church, it is to prepare God’s kingdom on earth by developing his people to be Christians (with Christ-like attributes) and serving the community as the salt and light to transform society into a better place of life. Thus, in confronting the COVID-19 threats as a spiritual battle, the church must reflect on its role in God’s vision, wisdom, love, and relationship with God.

### **Reflect on God’s Mission for the Church**

The church is God’s creation; Jesus Christ founded and owned it; the Holy Spirit directed and energized it.<sup>3</sup> The triune God determines the purpose and mission of the church to accomplish in the world.<sup>4</sup> As the gathered body of Christ, the church makes disciples, bears witness to Jesus Christ to glorify him in the Holy Spirit’s power, and builds up the church members.<sup>5</sup> Jesus continues his earthly ministry through the church, his body, guided by the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

God’s mission upon Christ’s church reflects love and fuels servanthood (1 John 4:7—21). Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27); his life and death are for loving and serving people. In the Last Supper, Jesus left his commandments of love and service to encourage his disciples to love and help each other as servants (John 13:14, 34—35). Thus, the church must serve the world with love as a servant. Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). The church’s ministry must restore the destruction caused by COVID-19, principally relieving people’s mental and spiritual concerns to fulfill its mission of caring for the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 20:28; Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 3:9, 10:17, 15:9; Rom 12:4—5.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Pet 3:15; 1 Tim 3:14—16.

<sup>5</sup> Matt 28:19—20; Mark 3:35; John 13:35; 1 Cor 12:25; 2 Cor 6:14—7:1, 13:11; Eph 1:11—12, 2:19—22, 5:23—32; Col 1:13, 18; 1 Thess 5:11, 1 Tim 3:15.

<sup>6</sup> “I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:1—2).

This chapter argues that the church's reflection must focus on God over COVID-19. The church must reflect on its mission responsibility to bring people to God to overcome their anxieties about COVID-19. I will probe essential questions for church ministry to consider about facilitating people's faith-based inner changes to boost the community and the world in confronting COVID-19 challenges and glorify the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

### **Learn from History**

Cholera, bubonic plague, smallpox, and influenza are some of the most brutal killers of pandemics in human history.<sup>8</sup> Erupting at the end of 2019, fear of COVID-19 infection has become a concern. Since it worsens people's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses, COVID-19 causes physical damage and mental health issues. The COVID-19 tension is overwhelming, yet, pandemics have occurred throughout history; those cases did not help people stay calm but were eager to explore solutions.

First, what people have learned from past experiences must be examined as to whether it helps avoid being frightened and losing control of repelling COVID-19. Second, whether people can make a difference by focusing on God or something else when encountering tribulation, such as COVID-19. A comparison between atheistic and theistic can undoubtedly discern a distinction between their responses and must be discussed.

### **Atheistic and Theistic Worldview**

Acknowledging God changes people's worldviews and differentiates their attitudes and approaches toward problems; they entrust mighty God and do not worry about their capability. This argues focusing on God over COVID-19 is how the church

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<sup>7</sup> I am referring to the Scriptures for the faith-based inner changes: Deut 33:27; Lam 3:55—57; Matt 6:33, 10:29—31, 11:28—29; John 16:33, 20:26; Rom 8:37—39.

<sup>8</sup> MPH online, "*Outbreak: 10 of the Worst Pandemics in History*," by staff, last accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.mphonline.org/worst-pandemics-in-history/>.

should reflect on its role in COVID-19. Rooted on three representatives' views elaborated below, I further affirm the church's reflection by focusing on God to reveal its role in COVID-19.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel stated: "We learn from history that we do not learn from history."<sup>9</sup> Premising on people rather than God, Hegel's atheistic worldview disagrees with those of God's believers. However, looking at world history repeats, Hegel's statement reveals a worrying thought as capturing nothing for the future to be better off. A theistic Arnold Toynbee presented his worldview: "History provides a vision of God's creation on the move."<sup>10</sup> He emphasized God's creation moving forward and recognized God as the premise and lead. Another theist Nahum Mattathias Sarna says: "History is not just a series of events without cause and effect, direction, and meaningful."<sup>11</sup> Drawing a high-level comparative analysis of these three historians, theism unveils God's believers appearing to be more humble, positive, hopeful, and optimistic in their spiritual lives because they trust God's sovereignty and protection of his believers to not live in anxiety since he is faithful to his promises.

In summary, Christians claim God's intervening and sustaining history so that they can fight in spiritual warfare; the Holy Spirit guides them against temptation and accusation and fills their hearts with God's promises and truth. The Bible equips Christians for spiritual combat, for instance, Matthew 6:13, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Galatians 5:17, Colossians 1:13—14, 2:15, James 4:7, and 1 Peter 5:7—9. Christ is the only way to connect people with God, for he is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); his church is God's purpose to bridge the crack for people to be saved in this world full of disruption, such as COVID-19, to have peace and away from anxiety. This

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<sup>9</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) is a German philosopher and historian.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) is a United Kingdom historian.

<sup>11</sup> Nahum Mattathias Sarna (1923—2005) is a Jewish biblical scholar.

confirms that history is God’s plan, and the church should focus on God when reflecting on its role in COVID-19.

### **Church to Bridging the Gap**

God instructed prophets to intercede so that he would not destroy his people (Ezek 22:30). Whether COVID-19 is the result of God’s anger at the world, God might employ Christ’s church to intercede for restoration, especially for non-believers to accept him as a savior with faith and to relieve fear caused by COVID-19. A crisis may create an opportunity; COVID-19 may accelerate the church’s growth when adopting alternatives such as previously imagined virtual worship to reach non-believers worldwide. Utilizing digital technology, the church can connect non-believers to God anywhere, anytime.

God is faithful, and Christians know that he is omniscient and omnipotent. He can provide the perfect solution to any complications in the world, as 1 Corinthians 10:13 declares.<sup>12</sup> This message is critical to the world, and the church must reflect on its role in calming people’s depressed and weary minds. Thus, I will depict the church’s reflection on its ministry during COVID-19. The church must explore the privilege God grants to serve the community to glorify him—for example, bridging non-believers to know God for proper mind-setting toward COVID-19.

### **Church Reflection on its Ministry**

To meet the community’s expectations and God’s plan for the church during COVID-19, this segment elaborates on church reflection on its ministry to argue the church’s role in COVID-19. Focusing on God to discuss the church’s position in COVID-19, the church must reflect on its ministry serving God, its members, and the world. The church must initiate the worldview reality to advance to God’s vision; it must submit to

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<sup>12</sup> “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide a way of escape that you may be able to endure.”

the Holy Spirit's supervision to gain spiritual inspiration associated with the biblical, technical, historical, and practical aspects to ensure its role in COVID-19 by reflection.

### **Biblical Vision**

To affirm the church's role in COVID-19, church ministry must reflect on focusing on God—seeking his kingdom and his righteousness first (Matt 6:33) and be willing to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord (Mic 6:8). Although fright is the most common reaction while encountering turmoil such as the COVID-19, church ministry must follow the Lord's saying, "in returning and rest, you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength" (Isa 30:15). Thus, while looking for rescue, church ministry should not look for its way through self-wisdom and capability because this deviates from what the Bible teaches: "trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your understanding" (Prov 3:5). COVID-19 may be God's wake up call to the world, as "God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>13</sup>

In the Bible, God communicates with his people about faith to gain strength during difficult times.<sup>14</sup> The church ministry must help Christians and reach the community to rely on God to overcome stress through constant reminders by the Holy Spirit. Thus, I argue to consider facilitating people's faith-based inner changes to conquer their fear as the church's reflection on its ministry in COVID-19. The goal is practicing spiritual discipline to deepen faith to line hearts with Christ's. The ministry must emphasize those faith-relevant passages for people's relationship with the Lord in

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<sup>13</sup> Clive Staples Lewis (C.S. Lewis), FBA (1898—1963) was a British writer and Anglican lay theologian.

<sup>14</sup> I suggest referring to the Scriptures (Deut 31:6; Ps 22:19; Isa 12:2, 40:29, 41:10; Mark 12:29—31; John 16:33; Phil 4:6, 12—13).

worship, bible study classes, and proclamation of the gospels to boost the community and the world in confronting COVID-19 challenges and glorifying the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

### **Theological Sight**

When COVID-19 changes the world so dramatically, it leads people to fear and anxiety, which affects their lives and causes them to be irritable, distracted, nonproductive, and destructive. The Bible advises believers to stop worrying, for nothing can separate them from God (Rom 8:38—39). While trusting God is challenging during uncertain times (2 Cor 5:7), Christians know that God’s ways are above people’s (Isa 55:8—9), and God ultimately works all things for good (Rom 8:28). Theologically, trusting God allows believers find peace in God’s presence and can stop worrying.<sup>16</sup> Scripture encourages Christians to pray and supplicate with thanksgiving to let their requests be known to God and not be anxious about anything (Phil 4:6), free from anxieties (1 Cor 7:32) and cast all anxieties on Jesus (1 Pet 5:7). The church ministry must reflect on utilizing Scriptures to help congregations and communities to trust God and not worrying.

Since anxiety is internal and the symptoms are global, regardless of the affected person’s ethnic boundaries, living standards, and cultural upbringing, this problem affects all humankind, including Christians and non-Christians. While people seek hope, peace, and love, the church ministry must help them to start faith-based

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<sup>15</sup> The Scriptures impart faith-based thinking for inner changes: Deuteronomy 33:27; Lamentations 3:55—57; Matthew 6:33, 10:29—31, 11:28—29; John 16:33, 20:26; and Rome 8:37—39.

<sup>16</sup> In Christians' relationship with God, trusting God is the continual practice to make not worrying. Bible verses about trusting God include: Psalm 37:5—6, 118:8; Proverbs 3:5—6, Isaiah 26:3—4; and Jeremiah 17:7—8. The examples of not worrying in Bible verses are Psalm 55:22, 56:3; Matthew 6:33—34; Philippians 4:6—7; and 1 Peter 5:7.

thinking to grasp God's promises.<sup>17</sup> The church ministry must reflect on utilizing theological sight to bring the community to God during COVID-19.

**Peace.** The Bible explains how to gain true peace not affected by the external environment (John 14:27; Phil 4:6—7). Compared to peace in Christ, peace in the world cannot speak to people's souls and spirits. There is no peace for the wicked (Isa 48:22, 57:21), and all people have sinned (Rom 3:23); thus, no one has true peace. This means the lacking true peace is because of people's separation from God (Isa 59:2) resulting from people's iniquities, uncleanness, and unrighteousness (Isa 64:6) unless God's salvation grants peace (Rom 5:1).

Only peace in Christ is the true peace, helping people conquer fear and anxiety while encountering tribulation, for Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). Anyone who eagers for peace in Christ must become his disciple and be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and obey Jesus's teaching and commandments, then Jesus will be with them (Matt 28:19—20); the Holy Spirit will guide them into all truth (John 16:13). The church must reflect on fulfilling the great commission as its role to serve the community for true peace during COVID-19.

**Hope.** People are afraid of death because it is unknown. Yet, it is not the end for Christians, for genuine believers have hope of resurrection since Jesus defeated death. Throughout Scripture, God brings new life out of death, which becomes central faith to Christians' hope. Resurrection hope helps Christians gain confidence because they trust God's faithfulness and look forward to eternal life.<sup>18</sup> The Bible elaborates on the

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<sup>17</sup> Jesus told his followers to have his peace as he has overcome the world (John 16:33). His peace to them is to not trouble hearts and not be afraid (John 14:27). Believers can have the hope of eternal life through Christ (1 John 5:13—14), and his love for those love him (John 14:21).

<sup>18</sup> "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:11).

resurrection hope in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the hope after death resides in resurrection hope in Jesus Christ. Thus, the church's reflection role in COVID-19 must emphasize this truth to help people overcome anxiety.

**Love.** As depression has resulted from COVID-19, sufferers can gain God's wisdom from the revelation of his love for people: by sending his only Son into the world so that people might live through him (1 John 4:9). God's perfect love for believers in Jesus casts out fear (1 John 14—18). Jesus set an example for people as the Bible records his close relationship with the Father: Jesus's perfect obedience to his Father and the Father's love for his Son Jesus (John 17:20—26). Likewise, the Bible notes Christ's adoption of his believers to be united into his family as God's children, sending the Holy Spirit to dwell inside his believers (Acts 2). His sacrificial love for people is full of grace and salvation.

The Holy Spirit, as a helper and comforter to believers, enables them to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22—23) and works to sanctify them to be Christ-like. Among Christians' faith, hope, and love, the greatest is love (1 Cor 13:13). God's love is steadfast, encompassing, and sacrificial, and his vision differs from that of humans in the secular world (1 Cor 13:4—7). People love God because he loved them first. His commandment is that people who love God must also love their brother (1 John 4:19—21). The church's role in COVID-19 must reflect on focusing on God's love to relieve people's worries.

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<sup>19</sup> Mitchell L. Chase, *Resurrection Hope and the Death of Death*, ed. Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022). The Bible elaborates on the resurrection hope in the Law, Prophets, Writings, Gospels, Acts, the Letters, and Revelation

## **Historical Aspect**

The church's role in reflection should focus on biblical stories to respond to COVID-19. The following are three events associated with resource scarcity, patience required in tribulation, and repentance to transform believers' souls recorded in the Bible.

**Resource scarcity.** Jesus used five loaves and two fish supplied by a boy to feed the multitude (Matt 14). Jesus teaches the concept of sharing and making the most of what a person has. Christians must have faith and trust in God to share resources despite their scarcity during the COVID-19 hardship. The church must reflect on resource sharing to serve the community as its role in COVID-19.

**Patience in tribulation.** Paul told the Corinthian church about the affliction he and his coworkers experienced in Asia. They were so utterly burdened beyond their strength that they despaired of life itself (2 Cor 1:8). Yet, they behaved by God's grace, not earthly wisdom, and relied on God's promises for God's glory.

Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and is of great use in the Christian's life, especially in bearing afflictions. This makes people humble, meek, and quiet, which God highly esteems. "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit" (Ecc 7:8). In the hope of victory to win a spiritual battle against COVID-19, it is necessary to be patient in tribulation (John 16:33). The church must reflect on this concept to help believers continue doing God's will and be patient in tribulation to receive God's promise (Heb 10:36). At the meant time, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation (COVID-19), and be constant in prayer (Rom 12:12).

**Repentance to transform.** God might use COVID-19 to call people to repair and restore the world to its goodness. The Bible says that those who did reforming work are equivalent to rebuilding the ancient ruins.<sup>20</sup> When a Christian, under the Holy Spirit's

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<sup>20</sup> Those who come out of you will build up places that abandoned long ago. You will build the foundations of generations. You will be called the mend of gaps and the one who restores paths and dwellings (Isa 58:12). And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none (Ezek 22:30).

influence, genuinely repents becoming more like Christ, it is called repentance to transform. Unlike worldly grief produces death, Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation that has to be eager, clear, indignity, fearful, long for, zeal, and justice (2 Cor 7:10—11). Paul wrote to the Corinthian church to challenge their committed sins by comparing Godly and worldly sorrow. The former expresses sadness coming from displeasing God, and the latter shows to appease people.

In brief, the church ministry must reflect on serving the community and helping congregations to comprehend the concept of “repentance to transform” as discipleship during COVID-19. Through the Holy Spirit’s lead for “repentance to transformation,” God grants his grace to help believers win the spiritual battle over COVID-19.

### **Practical Worldview**

The church ministries’ reflection on COVID-19 should practically cover health safety, financial support, environmental instability, and future direction.

**Members’ health safety.** Following the US government regulations to manage COVID-19, churches were in a physical lockdown state for months with only virtual and online services. As restrictions were lifted, they resumed in-person and virtual services.<sup>21</sup> Presently, many churches accommodate the online audience while meeting in person. Yet, the church should strategically guide and encourage members to trust the church’s safe arrangement, so they can be enthusiastic about rejoining the church for services. The church’s role in responding to COVID-19 must consider setting safety regulations and respecting the church members’ seating, interface, and contacts seriously.

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<sup>21</sup> Returning to in-person worship, the church may find the attendance rate different, for some people are cautious of gatherings at risk of contracting COVID-19. Hybrid worship, a blended in-person and online ministry approach has effectively reached both audiences. Yet, this stretches church leaders beyond their pre-pandemic role.

**Financial support.** The church should consider supporting each other, as the small churches might not survive the COVID-19 attack financially. The church must reflect on meeting financial needs during the COVID-19 crisis, such as sustaining its ministry, helping its congregations, and preparing to serve the community.<sup>22</sup> The tasks may include: adopting the online offering to the church, setting up a COVID-19 assistance fund, providing digital giving to income-impacted members, and encouraging the community with hopeful and sharing messages.

**Environmental instability.** The church must reflect on what COVID-19 teaches about global health's relationship to environmental destruction.<sup>23</sup> In reflection on responding to the pandemic and ecological instability, the church may consider offering Christian Ethics and Public Theology seminars to help congregations and the community learn the responsibility of practical support in reshaping communities. This means influencing individuals and the government to adopt environmentally sustainable concepts and practices.

**Future of the church.** The church must reflect on the consequence of the technological revolution in churches, such as live streaming sermons and seminars, digital giving, and online church (like a church in the air). The church may be anywhere, anytime, and not limited to a building.<sup>24</sup> The church must reflect on moving into the community instead of just getting or inviting the community to the church for activities, including worship and fellowship meetings.

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<sup>22</sup> Church ministry must reflect on helping those facing job-searching hardship: newly graduated members, recently unemployed, or constantly coming to the church but with thoughts of supporting their families occupying their minds.

<sup>23</sup> The church should help the members to manage political opposition, conflict, discrimination, cruelty, and competition with scarce resources in the economic market during COVID-19 and still claim to preserve their faith in God.

<sup>24</sup> Christ is the church's head, with the Holy Spirit guiding its ministries. Whether the church remains unchanged in accepting the COVID-19 pandemic confrontation and uncertainty, its future development must be faith-based and further inscribed from a biblical, theological, historical, and outlook.

## Conclusion

The church must reflect on its role in COVID-19 to respond accordingly. The church must “pray as if everything depends on God, and work as if everything depends on you,” attributed to St. Ignatius’ spirit, which conforms with Scripture that faith without works is dead (James 2 2:14—26).<sup>25</sup> When reflecting on the church’s role in COVID-19, prayer and meditation for God’s peace, hope, and love are necessary, as they are faith-based.<sup>26</sup> The church ministry must focus on proclaiming the gospel and serving the community with a merciful-justice-balanced base to help the world explore fundamental issues and God’s solution. The church must reflect on its willingness to transform with a layout that complies with God’s will to win spiritual warfare to glorify God.

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<sup>25</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, S.J. (1491—1556), revered as Saint Ignatius of Loyola, was a Spanish Catholic priest and theologian. He, with Peter Faber and Francis Xavier, founded the religious order of the Society of Jesus.

<sup>26</sup> “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:1—5).

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN A PANDEMIC: RESPONSE

COVID-19 has brought the globalized and highly mobilized world to a halt. Inevitably, it strikes people's sense of security and causes a series of reactions, such as countries' border closings, working remotely and meeting virtually, praying for the end of COVID-19 instead of focusing on the vision of Christ's return, and emphasizing Ecclesiology rather than Christology.<sup>1</sup> A virus invisible to the human eye has caused people to be terrified, shocked, and greatly distressed. God might utilize the pandemic to warn the church to reflect and repent as God's people, Christ's body, and the Holy Spirit's temple. This might be the time for the church to facilitate ministries to react to COVID-19 appropriately; the church must intimately submit to the Holy Spirit's direction for betterment as light and salt to the world.

This chapter will address the church's response to COVID-19. Building upon the church's reflection discussed in the previous chapter, the church's response applies biblical, theological, historical, and practical viewpoints of its role (what), reason (why), and foundation (how) in response to COVID-19. Targeting the COVID-19 turmoil, I will explore the church's response to meet the needs of congregations, communities, and the world. The church must guide people out of angst, as its primary response to COVID-19, by helping them know the triune God's love of rendering salvation, consolidate faith in God's peace in Christ, and have God's vision for eternal hope. First, I will brief the church's strategy to prepare for its response to COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21), Jesus narrated adversity signs and his second coming.

## **The Church's Strategy for Response**

Christ is the head of the church, and all things in the world were created by him, through him, and for him (Col 1:16). Consequently, this chapter will elaborate on God's solution through Christ's church as Christ invites people to yoke with him to not trouble the heart (Matt 11:28—30).

How the church makes decisions responding to COVID-19 will affect the church, its ministries, and the communities. The foundation for the church to make those decisions must be principle-based over preference-chosen. Strategically, the church's decision must be faith-based by principle; ministries must exclusively and comprehensively enhance the church's relationship with God to assume its role in responding to COVID-19. First, I will introduce "principle over preference" and then explain the significance of the faith-based concept from biblical and theological aspects. Finally, I will elaborate on faith-based application from historical and practical viewpoints.

## **Focusing on Principle over Preference**

The church must differentiate principles from preferences by making proper decisions in response to COVID-19. I will elaborate on the meaning and implication by applying the word definitions of "principle" and "preference" from the Merriam dictionary.<sup>2</sup>

Focusing on the relationship with God, Christ's church must adopt a faith-based principle rather than preferences to ensure Godly decision-making in response to

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<sup>2</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary, "principle," last accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/principle>; a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption; a rule or code of conduct; habitual devotion to correct principles; the laws or facts of nature underlying the working of an artificial device.

Merriam Webster Dictionary, "preference," last accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/preference>; the act of preferring, the state of being preferred, the power of opportunity of choosing; one that is preferred; the act, fact, or principle of giving advantages to some over others; priority in the right to demand and receive the satisfaction of an obligation.

COVID-19. Charles Frazier Stanley expresses “principle and preference” as two fundamental bases for making decisions.<sup>3</sup> In his sermon, he pointed out that “principle” is a moral rule based on the Word of God or a predetermined mode of conduct. He specified that Christians should live by convictions grounded in God’s Word. He defines “preferences” as decisions and moral choices based on decision makers’ likes, dislikes, and desires, whatever seems best during decision-making. In brief, the church must apply principles to make wise decisions when responding to COVID-19, and those principles must be God-centered, meaning faith-based. With faith-based concepts captured biblically and theologically and faith-based applications taken historically and to be taken practically, the church must respond to COVID-19 accordingly.

### **Faith-Based Concept**

The church must have a clear conceptual view of the “faith-based” principle to make decisions for the congregation and community responding to COVID-19. A Christian must have confidence in the triune God that he always fulfills his promise. The church must emphasize faith to the congregation and community to be exempt from their fear and apply it to make God-centered decisions in response to COVID-19.

**Biblical faith-based principle.** Biblical faith is revealed by confidence and trust, defined as “the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). God and his promise are the objects of faith in the Bible. Centered on a biblical faith base, the church must respond to COVID-19 to glorify the Lord by helping the congregations and serving the community to know and love God to meet their spiritual needs for not worrying.

**Theological faith-based insight.** As COVID-19 has provoked mixed reactions in the church, its concern and response must be rooted in its theological foundation. God

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<sup>3</sup> In Touch Ministries, “Making Wise Decision,” Last modified March 5, 2022, <https://www.intouch.org/watch/sermons/making-wise-decisions>.

is faithful and always keeps his promises (1 Cor 1:9); he remains steadfast and cannot deny himself, even though people are faithless (2 Tim 2:13). The church must respond to COVID-19 by encouraging the congregations and the community to know God's peace, love, and hope, that the Bible conveys through the Old and New Testaments, to build faith in him with promises of God's words.

In brief, rooted in biblical and theological faith-based concepts, the church must apply it to respond to COVID-19 by learning from historical examples and practicing it from a practical viewpoint.

### **Faith-Based Applications**

In responding to COVID-19, the church should emphasize these faith-based insights to assist the congregation and community, meaning to comprehend faith to overcome anxiety. God might have planned to grant any opportunities to people to discipline them as blessings for them to grow while facing obstacles. God intends for people's welfare, not for evil, and his objective is to give people a future and hope (Jer 29:11). This may have explained that God's permission for COVID-19 occurrence is of his love granted in his sovereignty and wisdom. The Lord might allow COVID-19 to cause people grief, but he has compassion based on his abundant and steadfast love (Lam 3:32), and he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men (Lam 3:33) but rescues people out of trouble in his time (Ps 139).

God has made everything in his time to heal, build up, love, war, and peace (Eccl 3:1—8). In addition, God's way of rescuing people from trouble is for people to recognize his power (omnipotent). By God's way, he has made everything beautiful in its time. In the meantime, God has put eternity into human hearts, yet, humans cannot discover what God has done from the beginning to the end (Eccl 3:11). From the historical examples in the Bible, Christians can learn to discipline in a faith-based mind; the church can apply it to respond to COVID-19 practically.

**Historical faith-based examples.** While faith is demonstrated in a desperate situation, there are historical examples in the Bible. For instance, Abraham believed in the Lord and was justified by faith (Gen 15:6), Joshua led the destruction of Jericho in God's instructions (Josh 6), and Paul had faith in God's promise and gave glory to God (Rom 4:20—21). The Lord declares his thoughts and ways above people's (Isa 55:8-9), which means that God's intentions suit the people (Jer 29:11; Rom 8:28; Phil 2:13). The church must respond to COVID-19 with faith to glorify the Lord!

**Practical viewpoints of faith-based.** Rooted in Jesus Christ, who never changes (Heb 13:8), Christians can stand on him being a foundation and cornerstone (Eph 2:20; 1 Cor 3:11; 1 Pet 2:6) to face their circumstances with joy and deal with their environment with peace of mind. The church must respond to COVID-19 to help people out of fear (like one mental vaccine), as faith in God helps the church comprehend three aspects of whatever it has encountered to summarize them: God's solution is of his love, in his time, and by his way.

In summary, God helps people experience his faithfulness during challenging times, such as COVID-19. His solution will be granted by his love, in his time, and by his way. The church must respond to COVID-19 to contribute to God's solution by bringing people to build a close relationship with him to be patient in tribulation to transform spiritually to glorify God. In addition to having a strategy to sustain the church's response to COVID-19, the church must plan for its ministry to implement its response.

### **Church Response by its Ministry**

To respond to COVID-19, the church must plan for its ministry's implementation, such as training coworkers to handle live streaming utilizing digital technology, providing Christian Ethics or Public Theology seminars to build teams to care for the community, and setting up pandemic funds to support families in need. The church must visit the community to provide services to meet their spiritual needs to win a

battle responding to COVID-19. I will elaborate on the categories and methods for the church ministries to respond to COVID-19.

In the previous chapter, reflection on the church's role in COVID-19 was anchored in the church's relationship with the triune God. Being God's people, Christ's body, and the Holy Spirit's temple, the church must comprehend critical aspects: (1) God's plan to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance toward God's vision for COVID-19; (2) Christ's assessment of the church's fulfillment of his commandments and the great commission; and (3) God's words biblically, theologically, historically, and practically to bridge the world to know his sovereignty. This chapter will consider the church's ministry-centered response to COVID-19. These presented scenarios require attention to categorize them into the relevant church ministry and depict the proposed answer. Again, the church must commit to establishing a closer relationship with God. All ministry tasks must be principle-oriented, God-centered, and entirely focused on faith in God.

### **Church Ministries to God**

This section will define worship services and specify their goal for the congregation to be disciplined in following the church principles focusing on God. The church then can respond to disasters, such as COVID-19, appropriately.

**The definition of worship services.** J.I. Packer declares the basis of worship as “the covenant relationship whereby God has bound himself to those whom he has saved and claimed.”<sup>4</sup> His worship definition is the due response to God.<sup>5</sup> D.A. Carson

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<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer (1926—2020) is an English-born Canadian evangelical theologian, known for his best-selling book, “*Knowing God*,” declared the basis of worship as “the *covenant* relationship whereby God has bound himself to those whom he has saved and claimed.”

<sup>5</sup> Worship in the Bible is the due response of rational creatures to the self-revelation of their Creator. It is the honoring and glorifying of God by gratefully offering back to him all the good gifts, and all the knowledge of his greatness and graciousness, that he has given.

defines the worship services as well.<sup>6</sup> He defines worship services as the proper response to God.<sup>7</sup>

**The goal of worship services.** Worship services are God-focused, including prayer, praise by singing, and a sermon rendered following the Holy Spirit's guidance (1 Cor 14:15—17) to praise, thank, desire, and trust the triune God. While worship must be conducted in submission and wisdom (Lev 10), the congregation must focus on their relationship with God and how to respond to God spiritually. This ministry is oriented toward God, and “the church's purpose is to worship him,” as portrayed in this vision of heavenly adoration. (Rev 4). The church must disciple the congregation to understand the definition and goal of worship services to devote their hearts to the Lord's messages to prepare for responding to COVID-19.

In summary, worship services are the due response, proper response, and conscious response to God. When people do not worship God appropriately, it could be caused by sin (Lev 10:1—2; Rom 1:25). True worship is believing that God is worthy and recognizing him as the creator. It must be done in submission and wisdom (Lev 10), consciously (Rom 1:18), submissively (Ps 24:3), exclusively (Deut 6), comprehensively (Ps 95), and humbly (Ps 42). The church must respond to COVID-19 with a solid relationship with God, established through worshipping him by following the Holy Spirit's

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<sup>6</sup> Donald Arthur Carson (known as D.A. Carson (1946—)) is an evangelical biblical scholar, a Distinguished Emeritus Professor of the New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and president and co-founder of the Gospel Coalition.

<sup>7</sup> Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so. On this side of the Fall, human worship of God properly responds to the redemptive provisions that God has graciously made. While all true worship is God-centered, Christian worship is no less Christ-centered. Empowered by the Spirit and in line with the stipulations of the new covenant, it manifests itself in all our living, finding its impulse in the gospel, which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers. Such worship, therefore, manifests itself both in adoration and in action, both in the individual believer and in corporate worship, which worships offered up in the context of the body of believers, who strive to align all the forms of their devout ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples that bring to fulfillment the glories of antecedent revelation and anticipate the consummation.

guidance to have God's vision (strive to understand his plan to participate in his solution) for COVID-19.

### **Church Ministries to Members**

Ministry to members is for the church to fulfill the obligation to nurture those who are already believers, build them up to maturity in the faith, attain unity in the faith, and manifest the knowledge of the Son of God to the fullness of Christ ( Eph 4:12—13).

**The goal of the church membership ministry.** Membership ministry intends to educate the church members to equip them to perform ministry work and build up the body of Christ in love (Eph 4:12–16). This ministry provides training in various forms, for instance, Sunday School classes, communion gatherings, spiritual formation, and seminars. To equip the church to respond to COVID-19, membership ministry may focus on prayer, meditation, and biblical and theological subjects to balance members' development in intellectual (knowing God), mental (listening to God), and spiritual (experiencing God's presence).

The Bible study fellowship meetings, Sunday School classes, and seminars center on members' acquisition of intellectual knowledge about God. Prayer, meditation, and spiritual formation are essential for members to grow spiritual maturity; these discipline methods must be understood and practiced to help members be closer to God.

**Prayer.** Prayer is the communication of the human soul with the Lord; it's believers' primary way to communicate their emotions, desires, and fellowship with God. The church must build a prayer team and take the initiative to pray for the church, community, and country, especially for people in need, such as those who suffer from COVID-19 physically, mentally, spiritually, and financially. The prayer team can visit and pray with people to gain strength from God and grow spiritually. They can share celebrations and struggles and engage with the team members.

**Meditation.** The Bible uses meditation as deep contemplation to gain greater understanding and be changed by God’s truth and grace. The church should use it with care, biblical interpretation, and respect. Meditation is listening to God in his presence to know and feel his love and peace in hearts. God brings calmness, wisdom, power, light, faith, joy, thanksgiving, and love through meditation (Pss 1, 119; Rom 8:5—7; Phil 4:4—9; Col 3:1—3; Heb 12:2). It is an effective way to connect and communicate with God to overcome fears such as those encountered by COVID-19.

**Spiritual formation.** Spiritual formation is the process of conforming to the image of Jesus Christ for the glory of God (2 Cor 3:17-18) and bearing the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22-23) to benefit others. Spiritual formation focuses on the Holy Spirit, who guides the journey toward union with God to glorify him.

In summary, the church must develop members’ intellectual, mental, and spiritual capabilities to support the community. Prayer, meditation, and spiritual formation are for experiencing God, and they help the church respond to COVID-19 with Christ’s vision. Meeting God is a practical example of fulfilling the church’s ministries to its members. The church can respond to COVID-19 by helping the community build a relationship with God to win the spiritual battle to overcome anxiety.

### **Church Ministries to the World**

Evangelism ministry contains two components: proclaiming the gospel and serving the public (caring for the community) to glorify the Lord (Matt 22:36—40).

While they are crucial for the church to respond to COVID-19, the church ministry must focus on proclaiming the gospel, with serving the public as consideration.<sup>8</sup> Meeting

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<sup>8</sup>As Mark 1:14–15 states, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” Also, Isaiah 61:1—2 claims: The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

spiritual needs is above worldly needs; the former is for salvation to build people's faith in God on an eternal base.

**Proclaiming gospel.** The gospel helps the community know and accept God's salvation. With Jesus's teaching and the Holy Spirit's seal, the church can help believers win spiritual warfare against anxiety and fear. This action can fulfill the church's role in COVID-19 to make a better society.

**Serving the public ministry (with mercy and justice).** The relationship between church and society is debated; the former focuses on God's kingdom, and the latter refers to the secular world. Although, from a practical standpoint, the purpose of the church's existence is to care for the human community and transform society, the church does not solely exist for this purpose.<sup>9</sup> Still, it mainly brings people to the savior for eternal hope. To prevent the church from becoming secular, serving public ministry focuses on proclaiming the gospel with considering practicing Jesus's mercy and justice. The church must teach a vision of God's kingdom and righteousness, as people's life on earth is like sojourning. Instead of fearing death or worrying about economic impacts, the church can provide the gospel as a "spiritual vaccine" for non-believers to gain faith, hope, and love from God's words through the Holy Spirit's guidance.

In summary, Jesus is the way to God; Scriptures show that God initiated restoring people's relationship with him when he sent Jesus as savior—sacrificing for saving believers' spiritual life with truth and grace rendered (Rom 5, Col 1, 1 John 4). Christ's church must follow Jesus's example to build a close relationship with God. God granted the church with COVID-19 opportunity for the church's response to prove its relationship with him. When Christ's church responds to COVID-19 through the ministry

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<sup>9</sup> God's purpose for the church is to prepare God's kingdom on earth by developing his people to be Christians (with Christ-like attributes) and serving the community as the salt of light to transform society into a better place of life. Jesus's purposes in building his church on earth is revealed in Acts 2:42: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

work described above, the church glorifies the Lord, for the church fulfills its purpose: being faithful in sharing the gospel through God's word and deed, serving as a lighthouse in the community, making disciples, and helping the congregation to grow spiritually as Christlike to win the spiritual battle in COVID-19.

To equip the church for future growth, the church must consider additional resources to respond to COVID-19 to meet congregations' and community's needs in transforming individuals and society to glorify the Lord, such as exploring Christian theology, furnishing shepherding, and providing counseling.

### **Additional Consideration**

As stated in this chapter, the church must apply a principle-based approach to make wise decisions to respond to COVID-19, and the principles should be faith-based. Adopting the faith-based concept, the church must establish regulations as principles to enhance its relationship with God and have God's vision for COVID-19. Developing the congregation's faith in God to win the spiritual battle to serve the community is like trials. In meeting these trials, faith-testing produces steadfastness to become perfect without lacking anything (James 1:1—5). Practicing faith-based applications, such as exploring Christian theology, shepherding, and counseling, can contribute to the church's role in responding to COVID-19.

### **Christian Theology**

How the church views COVID-19 from a theological perspective determines how it identifies its role in responding to COVID-19. When crying out in mourning, do people interpret the encounter as hopeless or an opportunity to seek God's mercy? While human views tend to be negatively oriented because of sinful minds, God's vision leads people upward. Job 10:1—3 gives an example that a human might associate trouble with God's condemnation to contend against. Yet, C.S. Lewis argues that human experiences

of despair and anxiety can lead to a life full of faith.<sup>10</sup> Faith guides people to trust God’s sovereignty, work, and comfort. While God is fully aware of people’s suffering, he “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps 147:3). Christians learn to entrust God by faith to not lose heart, for their inner self is renewed daily despite the outer self wasting away. Since the momentary affliction prepares for eternal glory, people must look to unseen, eternal realities, not transient ones (2 Cor 4:16—18).

How Christians view crises changing their lives spiritually impacts how the church recognizes its role in reacting to COVID-19. The Bible teaches people to build confidence in God, neither self nor hope, for trust is found in God. The heart and soul will explode with joy when sensing God's presence, and the body will rest confidently and securely (Ps 16:8—9). The Lord's steadfast love never ceases (Lam 3:22); God grants hope to fill his children with joy and peace (Rom 15:13). This helps to see the light momentary affliction, which is preparing for an eternal weight of glory (1 Cor 4:17). With hope and confidence developed through spiritual discipline, Christians can live out love and empathy, feel the needs of others, and take practical actions to serve the community, for there is no fear when transformed by the love of Christ (1 John 4:18—19).

In short, the church must support the community to build faith in God to overcome anxiety over COVID-19, as God comforts his children during the affliction (2 Cor 1:4—5). The church must respond to COVID-19 by biblically serving the community.<sup>11</sup> In managing people’s anxieties and spiritual warfare, the church must assist them in meeting God to gain confidence and hope through salvation so that their inner changes transform their lives. The church can prepare ministries to learn Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Clive Staples Lewis (C.S. Lewis), FBA (1898—1963) was a British writer and Anglican lay theologian.

<sup>11</sup> Like Jesus’s example of a Samaritan’s rescuing the injured with compassion (Luke 10:25—37).

theology.<sup>12</sup> An integrated view of a given subject through the Bible can equip Christians with a solid foundation to serve the church ministry, such as proclaiming the gospel and serving the community in need.

### **Shepherding**

How pastors help direct the church members to face tragedies will influence how the church acknowledges its role in replying to COVID-19. COVID-19 has globally altered people's lifestyles, for example, their sense of belonging and value from emotion, safety, and spirituality. The church must evaluate these areas to make a strategic plan for prioritizing their actions in response to COVID-19, such as working collectively with other churches and faith-oriented organizations to support the communities in need during difficult times such as COVID-19.

In Matthew 5:13—16, Jesus teaches disciples to be the light of the word and the salt on the earth. Salt heals and disinfects; Christians should play a role in preventing corruption, cleansing sins, and healing wounds in this generation.<sup>13</sup> The Lord is the source of light, and those of us who follow him receive the light of life from him (John 8:12). The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; those who live in the land of the shadow of death have light shining on them (Isa 9:2). Thus, Christians must become the light of the world. The church leaders must be like shepherds to help the church respond to COVID-19.

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<sup>12</sup> Got Questions, "Christian Theology," Last accessed on March 15, 2023. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-theology.html>. Understanding what the Bible says about the various areas of Christian theology is key to spiritual growth and effectiveness in the Christian life.

<sup>13</sup> You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

In brief, the church is like a light and salt in the city-like community. The church must guide society's spiritual, moral, and ethical direction, meaning it must be shepherding the community as it responds to COVID-19.

### **Counseling**

How the church counsels and comforts people affected by COVID-19 will guide the church in responding to COVID-19. COVID-19 may pass, but the trauma of being isolated, seeing people die, dealing with economic stress, and surviving the anxiety of loss and uncertainty might linger for a long time. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from the summer of 2020 to the spring of 2021, the rate of new symptoms of anxiety and depression among adults in the United States increased by more than five percent. One in ten people reports that their mental health care needs are unmet. Robert L. Briggs said, "As America moves through this mental health crisis, studies show the importance of faith-sensitive care for traumatized populations with potential benefits. The Bible is an excellent source of emotional, spiritual, physical, and psychological healing."<sup>14</sup>

The gospel can give people the hope of eternal life despite suffering (Rom 5:2). The life of Jesus shows suffering, but he overcame suffering and death. Therefore, we can also overcome and finally join him in paradise. Although we cannot change the environment, reading the gospel can help change our state of mind. There are difficulties in the world, but Christians have peace in Jesus, and the gospel reminds God's children to not be concerned about the visible, for it is temporary. Still, the unseen is eternal (1 Cor 4:18). The church must be Christ-reflecting and gospel-fueled to care for the community and visit the needy people to comfort them. When the church cares for the community, they feel God's presence and are not alone.

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<sup>14</sup> Robert L. Briggs was the President and CEO of the American Bible Society for two years (June 2020 – 2023). The American Bible Society was founded in 1816 to bring God's Word to people.

In summary, the church must equip volunteers to care for the community through professional training in Christian Theology, shepherding, and counseling. The church must visit the community in need to provide consulting and counseling services in response to COVID-19. The church may consider categorizing this type of service into church ministries to respond to COVID-19.

### **Conclusion**

The church must respond to COVID-19 to help the congregations and serve the community in need. By focusing on God and applying the faith-based principle to ensure wise decision-making to react to COVID-19, the church ministry must emphasize biblical vision and theological sight on the faith-based concept and utilize historical aspects and practical view on the faith-based application. While the church's primary responsibility is providing needed people with a “spiritual vaccine” to win spiritual warfare, the ministry must help the congregation to have spiritual disciple through prayers, meditations, and spiritual formation. The church must proclaim the gospel to the community to know God about his peace, love, and hope to stop anxiety; the church can consider teaching Christian Theology and offering shepherding and counseling services to help people build a close relationship with God, not dwell on fear in challenging times.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN A PANDEMIC: REVIVAL

Turmoil, such as COVID-19, can occur to anyone at any time. Yet, overcoming challenges can be a blessing. For Christians and the church, managing hardship is pivotal to accomplishing self-spiritual growth to glorify the Lord. Through affliction, Christians' trust in God's love and faithfulness, patience in God's timing, and their value of being God's children are tested. If the church equips the congregation to respond to the community's needs in overcoming anxiety caused by COVID-19, God might allow the church to transform into the revival stage.

This chapter will explore the church's transformation while responding to COVID-19 and the Holy Spirit's role in the church leading it to its revival.

#### **Church Transformation to Revival through Response**

Church revival is a sovereign act of God, a divine intervention revealing God's power and presence in church congregations and ministry.<sup>1</sup> Following the Holy Spirit's guidance to respond to COVID-19, the church will have spiritual growth to revival. This chapter focuses on three factors contributing to church transformation: trust, patience, and value.

#### **Trust in God's Love and Faithfulness**

The church can educate the congregation to reflect their faith in God and his blessing (Job 1:8—11). Having trust in God, Christians can win the spiritual battle over

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Wallis, *In the Day of Thy Power* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 2010).

Satan's traps because the Lord is good and steadfast in his love and faithfulness (Ps 100:5). Satan utilizes tribulation (such as COVID-19) to hurt people. Still, God applies it to guide people for advancement. Without storms, there will be no rainbow; this signifies the affliction value to people's experiencing God: to know, appreciate, and love him to glory. In Matthew 8:25—27, Jesus's followers witnessed his power to stop the stormy sea and wind. Peter then built his trust in Jesus and was willing to walk over the water (Matt 14:22—33). In Ephesians 3:14—19, Paul's prayer indicates through the Holy Spirit to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge.

In brief, faith in God's love and faithfulness is crucial for Christians to perceive the valuable experience of facing tribulation (Rom 8:35—37) to win spiritual battles, which can facilitate church revival.

### **Patience in God's Timing**

God intends to utilize hardships to discipline his people for their spiritual growth; they must rely on him to gain strength and wisdom to manage disasters. To conquer difficulties with God's solution, Christians must trust God to grow spiritually in challenging times (Ps 37:7), such as COVID-19. God's timing in resolving problems might depend on the church's spiritual maturity to fulfill its mission to the world. A biblical example of patience in God's timing is that Moses took forty years to complete God's mission on him to lead the Hebrews from Egypt's slavery.<sup>2</sup>

In short, the church should patiently wait for God's solution instead of worrying about his timing to end COVID-19. God intends to discipline the church to be humble and learn the value of tribulation in his timing. Patience in God's timing indicates

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<sup>2</sup> Being patient in God's timing, Moses pleased God for his growth; he was very meek, more than all people on the face of the earth (Num 12:3).

faith in God which helps to build a closer relationship with God leading to church transformation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Value of Being God's Children**

People's views on COVID-19 deviate due to their knowledge about God. Jesus told his believers they may have peace, regardless of the tribulation they might encounter, because he has overcome the world (John 16:33). Thus, true peace is with Jesus and sealed by the Holy Spirit. While the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8), like COVID-19, Christians can pray for Jesus's peace to defeat fear: "As your days, so shall your strength be" (Deut 33:25). Being God's children, Christians can face challenges to win the spiritual warfare because of Jesus's presence and his encouragement to take his yoke upon believers to reduce their burdens (Matt 11:28—30).

In brief, as God's children, Christians can invite Jesus to support them in disasters. Yet, they must trust God's vision for solution in his love, way, and timing. The church can learn about God's mighty power and wisdom to accomplish his will over COVID-19. This transformation can facilitate the church's move toward its revival with the Holy Spirit's direction.

### **The Holy Spirit's Role in the Church to Revive**

As Christians surrender to the Holy Spirit's promptings, they are transformed spiritually (Eph 5:18—21). The COVID-19 crisis might reshape the churches for good, for the Holy Spirit's presence and empowerment are essential for church revival. As stated, church revival always begins with the Holy Spirit's work in the church. The Holy Spirit empowers church leaders and guides them to renew and revive the believers'

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<sup>3</sup> "Endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Rom 5:4—5).

community. This chapter will conceptually elaborate on the Spirit's role in church revival: definition, principle, method, and evidence.

### **Definition**

Charles Spurgeon's foundational conviction was "God brings revival."<sup>4</sup> He stated: "Revival begins by Christians getting right first and then spills over into the world." In Revelation 2:5, the Lord told churches that the key to churches revival was to repent and do the works you did initially." A church revival involves its state being revived as faithful preaching of God's words and Christians praying and seeking the Holy Spirit's presence together while rejoicing over renewed spiritual vitality. The purpose of church revival is to allow the Holy Spirit's presence and power to transform believers and non-believers spiritually. People sense God's presence, power, and calling to pray and repent in revival meetings.

### **Principle**

Six church revival principles observed in the Scripture and the church history.<sup>5</sup> Acts 4:23—31 provides a principle example that church leaders cannot give new life or produce a revival but work and pray in faith. The believers pray for the power to do what God has commanded; church leaders pray for God's will to conduct activities in God's grace, strength, and courage, which might lead to a church revival.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834—1892) was a British pastor and an author. He remains influential among Christians of various denominations and is known as the "Prince of Preachers."

<sup>5</sup> Africa International University, "*Principles of Revival in the Bible and Church History*," last dated April 2, 2014, <https://dlibrary.aiu.ac.ke/>. The observed principles are 1) recognition of the revival need of and God's Willingness to revive, (2) repentance as an essential revival condition, (3) God's words preaching, (4) intercession, (5) spiritual leadership, and (6) examination of the Holy Spirit's activity in comparison with biblical revivals using two criteria: God's restoration of his church and sinners' salvation; cooperation between God and man.

## **Method**

How do the church's revival principles correlate with the Holy Spirit's divine work in a pandemic? The Holy Spirit is the church revival's primary agent; church leaders should follow the Holy Spirit's empowerment while responding to congregations' and communities' needs to face the COVID-19 challenges. The church can examine the underlying empowerment principles for its leaders to understand the church revival methodology through biblical examples.

Awesomeness is one of God's characteristics; he insists on being the Lord, and Christians are his humble servants. This warns the church leaders and congregations who like controlling. Amid revival, God takes control over his church; regardless, some might not be willing to yield.<sup>6</sup>

## **Evidence**

The church leaders are not made competent by their abilities or success in ministry but by God's Spirit within them (2 Cor 3:4-6). The Holy Spirit guide and empower them (Eph 1:18; Acts 4:13), empower them with evangelistic efforts (Acts 8:26—29), and provides them with spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:11). The Bible presents examples of God's revelation on his empowerment of leaders to others through prophecy, such as David (1 Sam 16:1) and Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1). In the New Testament, a revival can be seen in the local church, as described in the book of Acts. Pentecost marked the beginning of a new body designated by Paul "as the church" (Eph 1:22—23). The Scriptures in Acts 2:41—47, 4:33, 5:11—14 provide an overview of the revival church as prayerful (Acts 6:4) and doctrinal (Eph 2:20).

In the history of church revivals in America, the evidence includes people's hearts being touched by God and the Christian community's faith being raised by God.

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<sup>6</sup> Mary K. Crawford, *The Shantung Revival (The Greatest Revival in Baptist Church History)* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Global Awakening Mechanicsburg, PA, 2005), 11.

This leads to influence the society as an awakening. The most recent church revival occurred on February 8, 2023, and a post-chapel service at Asbury University attracted people nationwide.<sup>7</sup> The university chapel experienced several weeks (February 8—23 ) of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring to lead to spiritual renewal, church revival, and awakening.<sup>8</sup>

In brief, the fundamental base of the church revival is for God to awaken preachers to the glories of the gospel, awake Christians to holiness and prayer, convict sinners and bring them to saving faith in Christ, and raise church ministries (such as respond to COVID-19 to meet the congregation and community needs) to glorify God.

### **A New Era through a Strategic Reform**

God might have planned for the church to create “a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isa 43:19). COVID-19 has encouraged the church to thrive rather than survive. It is time for the church to explore a new era with hope, promise, and enthusiasm in faith acquired through prayers. By analyzing the collected resources, I affirm that the church can find innovative vitality with the Holy Spirit’s guidance to lead people to glorify the Lord.

In brief, an emerging church will be presented in a new form for a new era as the church form is remodeled. With unique technology reaching the world, the church can bridge non-believers to God anywhere, anytime. When the church helps congregations and serves the community to win the spiritual battle in response to

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<sup>7</sup> Asbury University is a Christian university in Wilmore, Kentucky.

<sup>8</sup> Asbury University, “Statement from Asbury President Dr. Kevin Brown,” dated February 24, 2023, <https://www.asbury.edu/outpouring/>. On February 8, 2023, Asbury University’s regularly scheduled chapel service never ended. Beginning that day, Asbury University students, faculty, staff, administrators, local community members, and visitors from the out-of-town gathered in Hughes Auditorium for spiritual renewal. Since then, experiencing God spreading this move worldwide has been a current of immeasurable goodness, flooding the university community and quickly moving into other regions. Words fail any effort to communicate the abundance of experiences and stories that will leave the university forever changed. Thursday, February 23, marked the end of this historic multi-week gathering at Asbury University and Asbury Theological Seminary with the National Collegiate Day of Prayer broadcast hosted on the university campus.

COVID-19, the Holy Spirit will guide the church toward its revival stage with God's blessings.

In summary, God helps people to understand him by experiencing his presence and power through the Holy Spirit during the COVID-19 hardship. Starting in a shocking state, Christians learn to grow spiritually. The church has gone through technical and financial changes. Yet, the church's relationship with God is enhanced. God's grace allows Christians to recognize the church's role in COVID-19 through reflection and response to serve the community to win the spiritual war; perceive the church heading toward revival due to spiritual growth to maturity.

### **Conclusion**

God helps people to understand him by experiencing his presence and power through the Holy Spirit during the COVID-19 hardship. Starting in a shocking state, Christians learn to rely on God to grow spiritually. The church has gone through technical and financial changes. Yet, the church's relationship with God is enhanced. God's grace allows Christians to recognize the church's role in COVID-19 through reflection and response to serve the community to win the spiritual war, then perceive the church heading toward revival due to its spiritual growth to maturity to glorify the Lord.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, the church can serve the community and help them learn to rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and constantly pray so that they can overcome anxiety and fears in challenging times (Rom 12:12). The church must obey God’s mission and outreach the community to gain knowledge about God’s salvation (Rom 5:1; 1 Tim 2:4). To assist them in building faith in God, the church must share all the Scriptures describing God as omnipotent (Matt 19:26), omnipresent (Jer 23:23—24), omniscient (Ps 147:4—5), holy (Exod 15:11), righteous (Ps 7:9—12), faithful (Num 23:19), everlasting (Ps 90:2), loving (John 3:16), ruling over all (Isa 46:10), never changing (Jas 1:17), and goodness (Ps 34:8). By leading them to experience God through prayers, meditations, and worship and further developing Christians’ spiritual maturity to follow the Holy Spirit’s direction, the church continues its “salt and light” role to glorify the Lord!

Utilizing COVID-19 as an example, I summarize the church’s essential role in a pandemic as guiding the people to trust God’s sovereignty in his love, timeframe, and method to resolve difficulties. To emphasize the church’s role in winning the spiritual battle against COVID-19 for the community, I analyze from the reflection, response, and revival perspectives to conclude my academic conversation biblically, theologically, and historically with practical implementation to glorify the Lord!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A nonstop Kentucky prayer “revival” is vital; people travel thousands of miles to participate. Revival Underway at Asbury University in Kentucky: ‘The Holy Spirit Was Tangible in the Room.’ <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnne> dated 02-13-2023 by Benjamin Gill and Steve Warren.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN A PANDEMIC: REFLECTION, RESPONSE, AND REVIVAL

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In this thesis, I argue that the church should commit to its essential role as “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit” to serve the community and world while facing a global pandemic, using COVID-19 as an example. The church should glorify the Lord in this turbulent time through a humble reflection and vigorous response to begin a gradual revival process with the Lord’s blessings. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to this study. In chapter 2, I summarize COVID-19 and quarantine as God’s purpose to remind the church to reflect on the spiritual implication and perform its ministries to serve the world to fulfill God’s will and be blessed with its revival. In chapter 3, I present the reflection on the church’s role in COVID-19. In addition to praying and meditation for God’s peace, hope, and love, I focused on proclaiming the gospel and performing public care to help the world to comply with God’s will. The church must “pray as if everything depends on God, and work as if everything depends on you,” attributed to St. Ignatius’ spirit (James 2 2:14—26). In chapter 4, I argue that the church must establish a closer relationship with God by responding to COVID-19 as God’s alert for the church to bridge people to God. In chapter 5, I summarize that the triune God helps people to know him by experiencing his presence during the COVID-19 challenges; Christ’s church relationship with God is enhanced to glorify him. It is God’s grace for the church’s role in COVID-19 to reflect and respond to serve the community. Chapter 6 concludes this study.

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