

Christian exceptionalism and the response to Covid-19 in Zimbabwe

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Introduction

The chapter explores the discourse of Christian exceptionalism constructed through religious texts circulated through WhatsApp group interactive situations during Zimbabwe Covid-19 necessitated lockdown. Zimbabwe went into a total lockdown on the 30th of March 2020, which then 'eased' into an indefinite partial lockdown since mid-May 2020. This engendered a general sense of helplessness as it suggested a failure on the government's part to decisively deal with the threat posed by the pandemic. Of particular interest to the chapter is the manner in which the discourse constructed through religious texts on Covid-19 engages the predominantly science-led government discourse which constructed the strict measures implemented by the state as the best possible way available to combat the spread of the virus and its possible effects in the country. Government and religion are conceptualised as two formidable forces whose influence on the people is so significant that it can shape their attitudes and behaviours in their response to the threat of the virus in the country. Discourses coming from the two authorities determine the degree of care they take, if at all, in trying to reduce the virus' contagion factor. Thus, in the face of the official state position that the strict measures, which include (partial) lockdowns, social distancing and self-quarantine, among others, religion plays a part in either ensuring the adherence to that regime or in challenging that discourse and therefore embolden people to ignore critical health information and state directives. Thus, religion can push a discourse that either ensures the safety of the people or that significantly increases the risk factor in so far as contagion is concerned. The chapter submits that the Christian text messages circulated via WhatsApp groups during the lockdown period mainly constructed a discourse of Christian exceptionalism which mainly sought to convince people that they are immune to Covid-19. It therefore argues that such a discourse