9 COVID-19 containment measures and ‘prophecies’ in Kenya

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Introduction

Between 13 March 2020 to 25 April 2020, Kenya had tested a total of 17,492 people out of which 343 had tested positive to coronavirus (COVID-19). The country had also posted 98 recoveries and 14 deaths. Although, this is outside the scope of this chapter, Kenya had posted 177,282 infections out of the 1,887,636 cumulative tests by 17 June 2021. The country had also posted 122,018 total recoveries, out of which 88,479 were from the Home Based Care and Isolation Program while 33,539 were from the various Kenyan Health Facilities. By 17 June 2021, the cumulative fatalities stood at 3,434 (Wako, 2021). In the first two weeks of June 2021 however, the positivity rate in Western Kenya region shot up dramatically and now constituted 60% of the national caseload. The Western Kenya region also posted a positivity rate of 25%, which was against the average national positivity rate of 9%. With the entry of the so-called Indian variant (Delta), the rise in infections, in the Western Kenya region, was bound to move upfront. Following the sudden upsurge of COVID-19 cases in June 2021, the government put a partial lockdown to 13 counties from the region. That is, Kisumu, Siaya, Homa Bay, Migori, Trans Nzoia, Kakamega, Kericho, Bomet, Bungoma, Nyamira, Kisii, Busia, and Vihiga (Oketch, 2021). As noted in Angela Oketch (2021, p. 7),

The surge in infections is higher than in Nairobi and Mombasa, which have been the epicentres of Covid-19 since the first case was announced in Kenya in March last year. Last week, the Lake region recorded 1,320 new cases, with Kisumu taking the lead with 368 cases, followed closely by Siaya (197) and Busia (196). Homa Bay registered 167 new cases, Kericho (102), Kisii (100), Migori (44), Bomet (55), Kakamega (47), Vihiga (27) and Nyamira (17). Kisumu has emerged as Kenya’s new Covid-19 hotspot, overtaking Nairobi, which, due to its huge population, had naturally assumed this position since last year.

Such dramatic shifts were also witnessed by 9 October 2020, six months after the initial March-April 2020 entry of COVID-19 in Kenya, as the figures

shot up considerable. That is, Kenya had 40,620 COVID-19 infections out of the 580,039 cumulative tests (Maombo, 2020). The number of fatalities had risen to 755, while the number of recoveries stood at 30,876. And although the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic had been experienced from March to August 2020, as the locked down country began to open up in September 2020, the second wave had started picking up in early October 2020 as the infections that had flattened began to move upfront. On 9 October 2020, for instance, 442 virus infections were recorded from a sample of 5,327 who were tested (Maombo, 2020). In its highest pick, infection rate would go to about 700 infections, as in the case of 10 July 2020 when 688 infections out of the 4,522 tested cases. By the end of September 2020, daily infections, countrywide, had however gone down to as below 200 infections per day. In my view thus, the second wave appears to have begun in October 2020, as high rate of infections shifted from the traditional bases of Nairobi, Mombasa, Kiambu, Busia, Machakos, and Kajiado to other Kenyan counties which were previously recording lower infections. To this end, Sharon Maombo (2020) has noted thus:

For the first time, Nakuru takes the lead of coronavirus positives in a day recording 94 cases. Other counties with new cases include: Nairobi with 80 cases, Mombasa 47, Embu 20, Kisumu 20, Meru 15, Garissa 12, Kajiado 11, Kericho 10, Kwale 2 and Bungoma 1.

As positivity rate dropped from 9.1% to about 5% by the end of September 2020 (Tanui, 2020), a general feeling that the first wave in Kenya was over could be felt. The second wave, in my view, was less fatal, even though the opening of schools and other elements of Kenyan economy, still posed a challenge, as the six months' campaign to stop its spread had been done spiritedly. The third wave that can be said to have begun in March 2021, in my view, was more fatal, as the fatality rates shot up.

As noted earlier, the first case of COVID-19 was however confirmed in Kenya on 13 March 2020 (Star 2020). Statistically, the pandemic which was first reported in Wuhan, China, on 31 December 2019, and quickly spread across the world, had infected at least 2,744,614 people by 24 April 2020. While Kenya had registered 14 deaths by 24 April 2020, the global context had registered 191,791 deaths; and while Kenya had registered 95 recoveries, the global context had registered 755,443. In the specific African context, the Worldmeter's count showed that there were 28,351 and 1,301 deaths (Menya, 2020).

In the nature of things, the current crisis, where 2020 experienced Coronavirus epidemic from China, almost replicates the 1918 Influenza pandemic that killed over 100 million people (Andayi et al., 2020). The main difference, however, is that COVID-19 was caused by a different virus, and there was very little likelihood that it could kill such a large number of people, as in the case of the 1918 influenza pandemic. The First World War

(hereafter, WWI) was about to end, when the mysterious disease appeared. In order to maintain the morale of soldiers on the battlefield, Britain, Germany and France decided to hide the information. Only the neutral Spain reported about the virus. The constant reports from Spain coupled with the illness of King Alfonso XIII (1886–1941) of Spain finally lifted the lid on the severity of the influenza. This also created the wrong perception that the disease could have originated from Spain; hence the name “Spanish flu.” It is worthwhile, at this stage, to appreciate that Alfonso XIII, also known as El Africano or the African, was King of Spain from 1886 until the proclamation of the Second Republic in 1931. Alfonso was monarch from birth as his father, Alfonso XII, had died the previous year (Andayi et al., 2020; Barry et al. 2008).

Thus, while 1918–1919 brought Spanish Flu, the 2019–2020 ushered in Coronavirus, hence it equally threatened the people’s lives in a novel way. Put differently, the abundance life (John 10:10) that led to the act of incarnation has found itself under test from different historical times. Was there any prophetic signal and/or any ancestral communication? During the 1918–1919 influenza pandemic, otherwise called Spanish Flu, our African ancestors survived despite lacking the genius of science and technology that obtains to date.

COVID-19 in Kenya (March–April 2020)

By the end of March 2020, there was no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Instead Citizens were advised to protect themselves and help prevent spreading the virus to others by: Washing their hands regularly for 20 seconds, with soap and running water or alcohol-based hand rub; Covering their noses and mouths with disposable tissues or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing; Avoiding close contacts (1 meter or 3 feet) with people who are unwell; and were also advised to stay at home and self-isolation from others in the household if one felt unwell. Equally, they were advised not to touch their own eyes, noses, or mouths if their hands were not clean.

Of importance to note is that the first confirmed case of coronavirus in Kenya took place on 13 March 2020 (Star 2020). In this case, a 27-year-old Kenyan woman (by name Ivy Brenda Cherotich) who travelled from the United States via London, was confirmed after three consecutive tests (Corona, 2020c). Subsequently, the Kenyan government identified and isolated a number of people who had come into contact with her. Other cases went as follows:

- On 15 March, Cabinet Secretary for Health, Mutahi Kagwe, announced that two people who had sat next to the initial patient on the aircraft in transit from the United States had also tested positive for the virus (Corona, 2020 b; Corona, 2020d). Schools were closed and public gatherings

were prohibited. Also, as a result, the country's borders were closed to all except Kenyan citizens and legal residents.

- On 16 March, the government through its spokesman Colonel Cyrus Oguna said on an update that there were another three people who were suspected to be carriers of the virus and that their results were to be released soon (Corona, 2020d).
- On 17 March, it was announced by the Health Secretary that a fourth case had been diagnosed. On 18 March, three more cases confirmed were by the Health Secretary, bringing the total confirmed cases in Kenya to seven (Corona 2020a).
- On 22 March, eight more cases were confirmed by the Health Secretary, bringing the total cases confirmed to 15. The government confirmed it was tracing 363 people who are believed to have had contact with the eight new cases.
- On 23 March, another case was confirmed bringing the total confirmed cases to 16.
- On 24 March, nine more cases reported for a total of 25 nationally.
- On 25 March, the first recovery was confirmed, and three more cases were recorded, bringing the total confirmed cases to 28 (Corona, 2020e).
- On 26 March, three more cases were recorded and bringing the total confirmed cases to 31. In addition to Nairobi, the government confirmed that corona virus cases in Kenya are spread among four other counties, namely Kajiado, Mombasa, Kilifi, and Kwale. On the same date, the first death of a person infected with the corona virus was reported in Kenya. The patient was a 66-year-old Kenyan man who had contracted the virus while traveling from South Africa via Eswatini.
- On March 28, the ministry of health confirmed Seven more cases, bringing a total tally of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Kenya to 38. On the same day, the government announced that two patients who had earlier tested positive had tested negative and were awaiting a second test to confirm they had fully recovered.
- On 29 March, four more cases were recorded bringing the total confirmed cases to 42. During a briefing on a Sunday afternoon, the then Health Cabinet Secretary/Minister, Mutahi Kagwe, said of the four, one was a Kenyan, one American, one Cameroonian and one a Burkinabé. Hon. Kagwe said three of the cases were based in Nairobi and one in Mombasa. The CS said of the 42 cases, 24 are male while 18 are females. Nairobi leads with 31 cases followed by Kilifi (six), Mombasa (Three) and Kwale and Kajiado on each. On 30 March 2020, the number of confirmed cases went up to 50.
- On 30 March, eight positive cases were confirmed, making a total of 50; while on 31 March, nine more cases were confirmed, making a total of 59 cases. On 1 April 2020, 22 cases were confirmed, making a total of 81 cases countrywide. The figure went beyond 100 on 2 April 2020 when an additional 29 cases were confirmed. This brought the total number

to 110 nationally. This led President Uhuru Kenyatta to announce a cessation of movement in and out of The Nairobi Metropolitan Area for a containment period of 21 days, on 6 April 2020. Apart from Nairobi, President Kenyatta ordered the cessation of movement to other highly affected areas such Kilifi, Mombasa, and Kwale in the coastal region of Kenya. On 7th and 8 April, a total of 14 cases each were confirmed, making a total of 179 Kenyans; and by 15 April, the country had registered 225 confirmed cases, with a total of ten deaths, and 53 recoveries. Between 24 and 25 April, 23 cases were confirmed as positive making a total of 343 cases in Kenya, and 98 recoveries.

- Additionally, President Kenyatta announced more measures of combating COVID-19 on 25 April 2020 that included: An extension of the nationwide 7pm to 5am curfew by another round of 21 days; and a further extension of the cessation of movement order affecting Nairobi, Mombasa, Kilifi, and Kwale counties by 21 days. He also announced minimal operations at hotels and other eateries in select counties. Most significantly, he announced a rollout of the National Hygiene Programme on 29 April 2020. This initiative was geared towards creating a healthier environment and jobs. The first phase was envisaged to employ 26,148 workers over 30 days, and more than 100,000 youths progressively (Menya, 2020).

Response to COVID-19 pandemic

Admirably, the Kenyan context appears to have learnt from the 1918 Spanish Influenza which was contained belatedly thereby taking a global mortality rate of 2.5%. It was responsible for the death of 0.0052% of the world population at one person out of 18,750 (Burnet and Clark, 1942). Thus, in response to the rise of COVID-19 cases, the Government closed all schools and directed that both private and public sector workers to work from home, wherever possible, from 15 March 2020. Additionally, travel restrictions were imposed (Kenyatta, 2020). This was meant to prevent non-Kenyans from entering the country. The Kenyan nationals were also required to self-quarantine for a minimum of 14 days. By then, Kenya had only three COVID-19 confirmed cases, which shows that the steps were taken early enough.

Following the confirmation of an additional eight cases that brought a total figure to 16 nationally on 22 March 2020, the Kenyan Government suspended all international flights with effect from 25 March 2020. Cargo flights were, however, not suspended. Anyone entering Kenya was henceforth compulsorily made to quarantine for 14 days before being allowed to leave the city of Nairobi or any other entry point, though at one's own cost. Other measures taken on 22 March included: All bars were to remain closed from 22 March, restaurants allowed only for takeaway services, all public vehicles were to adhere to passenger-distancing guidelines, all public

gatherings in churches, mosques, funerals, political rallies, and wedding gatherings of more than 15 people were banned forthwith (Kenyatta, 2020).

Economic response

As noted above, the confirmation of three additional cases of COVID-19, on 25 March 2020, sent national panic, as reports of massive deaths in the western world had already reached the country with equal fears. Hence, President Kenyatta announced a nation-wide curfew, from 7pm to 5am, starting from 27 March 2020 (Kenyatta, 2020). Certainly, all these measures had huge negative impact for a country that was struggling to clear debts with international lenders. It was also huge inconvenience to individuals living in fledgling economy. Nevertheless, saving life became a priority rather than saving an economy as President Kenyatta went on to unveil measures to buffer Kenyans against financial hardships arising from the above measures. Such measures included reduction of Pay As You Earn (PAYE) from a maximum of 30% to 25%, 100% tax relief to Kenyans earning USD 228, reduction of resident income tax to 25%, reduction of turnover tax rate from 3% to 1% for all micro, small and medium enterprises, temporary suspension of loan defaulters whose loan account was in arrears effective 1 April 2020, USD 95 million were set aside for vulnerable groups, and the reduction of Value Added Tax from 16% to 14% with effect from 1 April 2020 (Kenyatta, 2020).

The Kenyan government also increased the allocation of funds for health care, plus other fiscal adjustments to the national economy such as: channelling USD 9.5 million from the Universal Health Coverage kitty to the employment of new health workers to combat COVID-19, slash salaries for both the President and the Deputy President by 80%, pay cut for all Cabinet Ministers by 30%, and the Principal Secretaries by 20%. Other government employees, civil servants, lecturers, teachers and others were requested to voluntarily contribute to COVID-19 kitty via a pay cut. Other measures included, requesting State and public officers aged 50 and above, and who have other pre-existing medical concerns to take leave from work or work from home. Those working in the security department were however excluded. Further, the Central Bank lowered the interest rates from 8.25% to 7.25%. The Central Bank or the National Reserve Bank reduced the Cash Reserve Ratio from 5.25% to 4.25% and increased liquidity of Ksh 35 billion to commercial banks (Kenyatta, 2020). The idea here was to help the latter to be in a position to provide loan services to the ordinary citizens.

Some setbacks

Following the declaration of the national curfew on 25 March 2020, from 7pm to 5am, police brutality akin to the dark days of British colonialism (1920–1963) was witnessed in various parts of Kenya, and especially

Mombasa and Nairobi. In these unfortunate situations, video footages that were disseminated through the social media showed the police giving senseless beatings to people who were unable to get back to their houses by 7pm. In one instance, a truck driver who was caught up with time had his arm broken out of these beatings, after he was accused of daring to fight the police. The police officers who broke his arm were later sacked by the government after both the social and mainstream media exposed the shameful act. The 27 March 2020 clearly contradicted the goal of the curfew especially when the police used teargasses on innocent and oblivious citizens in Mombasa and Nairobi, a phenomenon that caused a huge outcry in Nairobi. As Ferry Services delayed in Mombasa's Likoni area, the innocent people, rather than the Ferry Management, bore the brunt. Equally, the long queues in Nairobi caused delays in getting into the public transport vehicles, yet the police were shown beating huge crowds that were innocently waiting for their turn to get into the public service vehicles.

The 27 March 2020 episode also saw police unnecessarily detaining people who were unable to "obey curfew hours." Worst of all, ordinary people were pushed in crowded areas, contrary to curfew's goals of keeping social distance from one another. Luckily, such brutalities meted across the country were condemned across the political divide, and President Uhuru Kenyatta eventually sacked some of the rogue police officers who treated ordinary men and women with blatant contempt. In the nature of things, Mireri Junior (2020) noted, thus:

Leaders across the political divide have condemned the brutality meted out on Kenyans by police officers who were enforcing a government's curfew to curb the spread of coronavirus. Led by Senate Majority Leader Kipchumba Murkomen, the leaders said the action of the police as was witnessed on Friday evening defeated the very purpose of the curfew. Police and commuters clashed at the Likoni ferry in Mombasa Friday afternoon, a scenario occasioned by overcrowding as residents rushed to beat the curfew deadline. The situation was not different in Kisumu and Eldoret towns as police teargassed Kenyans for flouting the curfew rules. Photos and clips of police beating up Kenyans who allegedly failed to adhere to the curfew emerged online with netizens condemning the police for using excessive force in handling Kenyans. The Elegeyo Marakwet senator said the police action, endangered the lives of many Kenyans, saying lumping people together could have led to more infections if one of them had contracted coronavirus.

Economic impact

Apart from the police brutality, noted above, Kenyans suffered in the economic front. Micro and macro businesses suffered alike. There were reports that a family feasted on its own pet, after losing out their economic

livelihoods. Apart from hawkers and ordinary vendors who lost out as a result of the lockdown, travel restrictions reduced Kenya's hotel, tourism, and flower industries to nothing (Menya, 2020). Some Kenyans were however able to switch from their urban jobs to rural labour, so as to feed their families. The economic impact thus cannot be explained fully at this stage. Concrete figures will however be explained with time. In the author's Emmanuel Anglican Church, Changamwe, Venerable Geoffrey Guyo Dida employed a creative method of sustaining the Church through online services. A Church pay-bill account was also instituted, as weekly reminders to submit membership fees, love offerings, tithes and other things was set up by the end of March 2020. A message of "Stay Safe" would always conclude the reminder.

Impact on stewardship of creation

Stewardship of Creation refers to the theological belief that human beings are managers of what God has put in place in the world, for "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). As such, responsible religious communities, as Kenyans claims to be, will always address environmental challenges in the era of corona virus, the ecological challenges posed by the dumping of plastic masks across Kenya's territorial space, the care of abandoned street children as lockdown denied them 'leftover' food, the rivers that are now left as dumping sites for residues of COVID-19, and animals and birds who relied on human beings and were now affected by the lockdown that had affected various parts of Kenya's territorial space among other concerns (Mugo & Gathogo 2018). Certainly, a lot changed after October 2020 as the national lockdown was being revised, and the economy started to open up.

According to Pkemoi Ng'enhoh (2020), tens of stray Cats living around Nairobi City Hall were left with nothing to eat after several hotels closed down in line with the government directive that the restaurants close until further notice to curb the pandemic. Previously, Cats were feeding from leftovers dumped by the joints before they would disappear to their hideouts around Nairobi City Hall and other places around Central Business District. The same case scenario was also witnessed in other Kenyan cities. James Mulwa (quoted in Ng'enhoh (2020:7), a security guard in Nairobi explained, thus:

The Cats are starving. Before, they would roam around searching for food, but that is not the case today since coronavirus came knocking on our doors. Sometimes, we feed them with bread; not long ago, I found a dead Cat around Nyayo house. I think it died out of starvation. For the first time, a dog was spotted along Moi Avenue. It is starvation.

Such stories are in continuum with an early April 2020 announcement by the Kenya Society for the Protection and Care of Animals (PCA) that some

animals under their care risk starving during the lockdown (Ng’enoh, 2020). The organization cited lack of food donors and minimum movement across the cities as the real challenge. The society which had 170 Dogs, 105 Cats, four Horses, and nine Donkeys by April 2020 (Ng’enoh, 2020) was already overwhelmed and could do little for the roaming domestic animals, some of whom were dying one by one. A similar scenario, where pets and other domestic animals were abandoned, was visible in India, Philippines and other parts of the world, as lockdown continued to affect the theology of stewardship negatively. With reference to India, Niharika Sharma (2020) has noted that,

When they found him in an East Delhi locality, towards the end of February, the tall, dark, and handsome Labrador was hungry, weak, scared, and depressed. Apparently abandoned by his owners in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the well-bred dog had taken shelter inside a building under construction...Noticing his plight, someone called Ummeed Social Welfare Society, an Uttar Pradesh-based NGO that took him in. While the streets of India emptying out over fears of the novel coronavirus and the lockdown announced in its wake, many localities are witnessing the emergence of a new set of residents: stray pedigree pets.... What’s fuelling the fear among the pet owners are news reports of a couple of dogs and a cat being tested positive for the virus in Hong Kong.

As the “creation groans as in the pains of childbirth” (Romans 8:22), in the post COVID-19 Kenya, one wonders how long it would take, and how best it can be handled. Although there were reports from oral sources that pets can contract COVID-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) clarified, in their website that there is no evidence that they can transmit it. Certainly, the care of animals is a religious duty (Genesis 1:28) that cannot be abdicated. In any case, the Psalmist (147:9) is explicit that God “gives to the beast its food; and to the young ravens that cry.” The care for the cosmos is undoubtedly the broader message imbedded in COVID-19 pandemic.

Coronavirus and ‘prophecies’

After Kenya’s Minister Health, Hon Mutahi Kagwe announced the first confirmed case of coronavirus on 13 March 2020, prophets and their prophetic extravaganza began. This went hand-in-hand with biblical insights, mainly from the Afro-Pentecostal wing of the church, some of which were tried to prove that COVID-19 was a biblical fulfilment; others saw it as prophecies come true, while yet others saw it as a punishment for unrepentant Kenyans. The latter failed to appreciate that it was a global challenge where China, Italy, Spanish, and the United States were some of the most affected. Some

of the biblical and/or religious messages that have been circulated through the social media, between March and April 2020, include:

As the world wide quarantine proceeds of Covid-19, even from the Church, the Holy Mountain where we meet our God of mercy, it is now the moment to quarantine from every kind of sin for God to embrace us back. Let us make Church a place of worship, love one another and fear God. Let us make the world a garden of joy. Let us take a moment with our hearts and ask ourselves individually, what is God feeling about us? Jeremiah 7:3, 8–15.

In rephrasing and ‘exegeting’ Jeremiah 7:3 which says, “Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place,” the fulfilment of a prophecy” assumes that COVID-19 was just a punishment from God. In other words, the medical dimension was relegated to the periphery, as the spiritual dimension took a centre stage. The write-up, which was sent to the author via WhatsApp forum, gives a ‘clear’ impression that if Kenya repented her sins, a chance to live now would be guaranteed. This however turned problematic in that Kenya claims to be an 80% Christian. With very committed Christians in Kenya’s territorial space equally bearing the brunt as their businesses were closed down as they obeyed the government imposed curfew and the lockdown that went hand-in-hand, one wondered why they too were under punishment from God. Or was it part of persecutions, martyrdom, and/or trials and temptations that every believer undergoes? Why were the Churches, bars, public gatherings, and schools classed together by the government and were collectively closed down in mid-March 2020? Such happenings did not resonate well with prophet Jeremiah’s call for a reformation of ways, as the Holy shrines were not spared as well.

The above ‘prophetic’ insight that was circulated in Kenya’s social media in March and April 2020 is in tandem with another one which was also sent to the author via WhatsApp forum which said thus:

There is an upcoming disaster worse than COVID-19. Once you are in, you are doomed forever. COVID-19 will soon end, but if you don’t put your ways right, and the rapture takes you unawares or you leave this earth without Christ, then the game is over.

While most of these ‘prophetic’ messages urged revival of the Christians, the pandemic was nevertheless reduced to a mere spiritual (religious) matter without taking cognizance all pillars of culture, that includes economics, politics, kinship, ethics, and aesthetics (Mugambi, 1989). While religion is a critical pillar of culture, working on one pillar alone is inadequate. Further, although the call to wash our hearts, keep a distance from evil, cover oneself with a sneeze of sin, don’t shake hands with abomination, don’t hug a false teaching (heresy), and sanitize one’s life, were some of the ‘prophetic’

insights that were circulated around the country, the danger remained in that it failed to factor in other pillars of culture thereby rendering it theologically impotent.

Another critical dimension is the numerous ‘prophecies’ by various well-known afro-Pentecostal leaderships in Kenya. As Damaris Parsitau (2020) says, the

Self-proclaimed Prophet Owuor has trafficked in fear-mongering threats, and has even claimed that he had prophesied the pandemic. He also said it would kill people in Asia because the continent rejected his prophecy. In Kenya, a section of the public has cajoled him to unleash his “mighty prophetic powers” to fend off the virus. They have also called on him to pray it away.

Parsitau (2020) wonders why there are no spiritual powers to perform miracles and heal coronavirus patients when it is so desperately needed. She goes on to cite some afro-Pentecostal clerics who, in her view, appeared too ignorant of COVID-19; hence they were in a confused state when the government closed the churches. She cites the case of

Apostles James Maina Ng’ang’a’s video on coronavirus – where he is unable to pronounce the word coronavirus – showed not just his sheer ignorance, but also how ill-equipped he and his ilk are when it comes to offering solutions to such complex 21st-century problems.

The ignorance among the afro-Pentecostal leaders was further displayed by Rev. Nathan Kirimi, a Meru-Tigania-based Pastor (Eastern Kenya), of Jesus Winner Ministry, who angered many Kenyans when he dismissed COVID-19 as a global hoax (Muchui, 2020a). He went on to say that God had instructed him not to close his church or terminate services as coronavirus is inexistent and a non-issue. By 18 March 2020 when Pastor Kirimi was dismissing it as a hoax, coronavirus had already claimed 9,800 lives globally. In giving the government directive on banning social gatherings, the Minister for Health, Hon Mutahi Kagwe invoked the Public Health Act (PHA) which gives him broad legal authority to impose various forms of restrictions whenever a public health crisis occurs (Muchui, 2020a).

Nevertheless, Rev. Nathan Kirimi was strongly censured by the main leadership of Jesus Winner Ministry Church who disowned him for misleading the congregants on the coronavirus pandemic (Muchui, 2020b). Kirimi had previously lashed out at Bishops who had suspended worship services by 15 March 2020, as his prophecy had shown that COVID-19 was a hoax. Bishop Edward Mwai, the head of Jesus Winner Ministry, however dismissed Rev. Kirimi’s position as personal opinion, unlawful, and against the Government’s policy of containing the deadly virus. In a statement through the

Church's Media Channels that came after a huge protest by Kenyans in the social media, Bishop Mwai said that the

management, Board and the Secretary of Jesus Winner Ministry wish to inform Kenyans that the statements made by Rev Nathan Kirimi of Meru are his personal opinions and do not reflect the official position of the church. The board has already instituted remedies and summoned the pastor to ensure that such an occurrence won't be repeated now or in the future.

(Muchui, 2020b)

As David Muchui (2020a) has comparatively noted,

The claims by Mr Kirimi come as South Korea's thousands of COVID-19 cases were linked to a religious sect known as Shincheonji Church of Jesus [February 2020]. A new wave of infections in South Korea was also linked to Grace River Church, which had defied calls to suspend services. Media reports indicate that the church finally closed its doors on Sunday after 46 worshippers, including the pastor and his wife, tested positive for coronavirus. South Korea has recorded more than 8,400 cases [by 18 March 2020] with half of them linked to the Shincheonji Church of Jesus.

While Rev Kirimi could be blamed for communicating his "theological" and "prophetic" position openly, he nonetheless spoke for a huge constituency of afro-Pentecostal leaders who did not have the press around them. As noted earlier, various 'prophetic' positions were aired out, some describing COVID-19 as a "non-believer" affair, and others described it as a punishment to "homosexual nations" among other remarks from the leadership that claimed prophetic revelations. Such bizarre positions pointed to an ignorant leadership, especially among the evangelical wing of the Church.

Parsitau (2020) perceptively cautions that "there is a fear that COVID-19 will expose the clergy's dark underbelly and call to question Africa's faith-healing and miracle industry" (Parsitau, 2020). She intuitively cautions that,

the clergy has been averse to scientific discoveries because science makes their miraculous shenanigans questionable. Prayers for healing have not calmed a shocked and scared populace. Many a clergy has frowned on science, medicine and theological education, instead spiritualising even non-spiritual matters as serious as the coronavirus pandemic. Science shakes the foundation of their spiritual teachings. After all, and in the case of this pandemic, science has proved to be more practical and reliable than faith.

Parsitau's radical position on the practicality of science, as opposed to faith, is certainly driven by this unprecedented act where schools, churches and

other social institutions were closed together, globally, following the emergency of the COVID-19. Didn't science appear to be ruling the world as opposed to faith? Or has Goliath won the first battle but lose out to the metaphorical David (faith) in the long run? Has Parsitau failed to be a good judge who listens and observes both the plaintiff and the defendant equally and more keenly? As a good scholar in philosophy and religious studies, Parsitau is partly informed by the global happenings where for instance, the world-renowned Pastor Joel Osteen of Lakewood Church, Houston in the United States had to equally close his church. Osteen Church attracts 50,000 peoples upwards. Additionally, other mega Churches, as in the case of Pastor T. D. Jakes' Potters House also suspended their Church services (Muchui, 2020b) that equally attract thousands of enthusiastic adherents.

Conclusion

The chapter started by addressing the nature of COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya since the first case was reported on 13 March 2020. In this case, a 27-year-old Kenyan woman by name Ivy Brenda Cherotich, who travelled from the United States via London, was confirmed after three consecutive tests. Although the scope of the chapter was religio-social reaction of COVID-19 pandemic in the months of March and April 2020, it was able to clarify that Kenya had posted 177,282 infections out of the 1,887,636 cumulative tests, 122,018 total recoveries, and the cumulative fatalities stood at 3,434 by 17 June 2021 (Wako 2021). The chapter also sought to understand the place of the Kenyan Church in light of all this and explained the dangerous trajectories that were witnessed among some religious leaders who over spiritualised a medical issue.

In its findings, the chapter has ably compared COVID-19 with the Spanish Flu of 1918 which had critical and similar characteristics with COVID-19. The chapter has also underlined the huge fatalities of the 1918, where about 100 million people died. With Kenya responding to COVID-19 without hesitation, the pandemic, may after all not do much damage as envisaged. With good religio-social management, the setbacks noted in this chapter would be eliminated. Likewise, there is need for a sober prophetic voice from religious institutions in delicate matters, as in the case of pandemics. This may drive the religious leaderships to consult experts and professionals in their relevant fields in technical issues such as COVID-19 before making public pronouncements or sending messages.

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