

A Critical Evaluation of the Realities of COVID-19 and A Quest to Restore the Broken Lives Rooted on Mission and Theology

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Abstract

As this paper is being written in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it sympathetically points out that the pandemic has brought enormous trauma, horrifying, scaring, disrupted economies, disrupted social life and unemployment. Generally, everything has been negatively affected locally and globally. Perhaps, people need to flush back with the same scaring interpretations people had during the beginning of HIV and AIDS in the past. Some of the scary words used were shuramantongo (mysterious), kambezo (small axe), mukondombera (outbreak), etc. HIV and AIDS had become the talk of the day, particularly in Africa. It had become the pulse of social media. Sadly, the infected and affected suffered stigmatization, discrimination, blame, rejection, etc. However, they overcome it in the end and today we are living with this disease that came to stay. Perhaps it could be the same with COVID-19.

Keywords: Attitude, Mission, Theology, Church, churches, HIV and AIDS and COVID-19

Introduction

There is no joke that the rising death toll caused by COVID-19 across the world is a reality and is instilling fear and panic in most if not all people (African Union 2020). The demands of living with, managing, and preventing this pandemic seem to be increasing fear, panic, and suffering on vulnerable groups such as women, children, poor households, people living with disability, the aged, and people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) (African Union 2020). The past has shown us how the Roman Catholic Church and many other churches worked very hard on trying to break the issues of stigmatization and discrimination through home-based care, awareness, and advocacy on HIV and AIDS interventions and prevention rooted in the mission of theology and lessons got from the sacredness of a person.¹ Owing to the involvement of the Healing Church and its bringing awareness and advocacy on the HIV and AIDS

pandemic up to date some people are living with HIV and AIDS and they are still hopeful and happy.²

A Theological Lesson from COVID -19 Pandemic

The article would like to point out that it is a sign of desperation when people question God's existence and His love in line with their suffering due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this scenario, God seems to be far away and not caring. Indeed, this is a visible sign that shows how people's faith has been shaken and this even caused doubt in the love of God. The paper would like to point out that individuals who are suffering or infected by COVID-19 are likened to be imitating the suffering of Christ. In other words, it is "Christ who is infected by COVID-19". In the Christian world, we are all called to be partakers in Christ's suffering, thus by assisting the individual people in their families, communities, societies and nation at large.

Working from Home Owing to COVID-19

COVID-19 has made some homes unsafe places to live and work whilst for others, homes have become the best workplaces.³ Chicken rearing, gardening, and other possible income-generating projects have been done successfully at home as one would have enough time to work on these as they will be working from home. In short, such people have been able to do charity work, loving and caring for others. They have been able to strengthen family bonds through praying and sharing together. Unfortunately, it has been the opposite of some families whose homes have become the devil's workshops. The effects of COVID-19 remind us that we are all vulnerable to infection and can easily get sick and that we are not separated from each other but dependent on each other rooted on God.⁴

Churches have been closed down due to COVID -19

It should be noted that the closing of Churches because of COVID-19 has made humanity understand that God is not only found in the Church buildings but rather He is found everywhere even in our homes. Our homes are places of worship too and have automatically become churches,

meaning, 'Churches have multiplied enormously'.

The era of COVID -19 calls mainly for resilience and adaptation and embracing new strategies on this pandemic (Smith et al. 2020). It is high time the Church has to step outside the box and respond urgently to serve lives, basing on the mission theology. Church leaders have to increasingly encourage prayer meetings, works of mercy, forgiveness, love, charity, and hospitality through the use of simple social media platforms such as WhatsApp, which is afforded by the majority. History has taught us that the world and the Church have undergone very difficult times in the past and overcame them through God's grace. Consequently, the article emphasizes the need to realize that this is not a new thing as it has happened in the past and urges humanity to accept it with hope.

Educational Institutions closed up due to COVID-19

The convention on the rights of Children emphasizes that education is one of the rights of the children. Unfortunately, this right is not spared by COVID-19. Schools and universities were closed in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19.⁵ This has made many parts of the world resort to distance learning, through the use of information and communications technologies. Sadly, in most parts of Africa, this option is not very viable.⁶ Experience has shown that the impact of any crisis in all spheres of life has always been found affecting the girl child mostly.⁷ The Church is to step outside the box, in collaboration with the government and well-wishers like UNICEF, UNESCO, etc, and ensure that children from marginalized families are also receiving online lessons.

Social life is now out of reach owing to COVID-19

As the families are forced to stay indoors parenting is negatively affected. Parenting when not properly done results in unending conflicts. This could also be a breeding ground for domestic violence and many other forms of child abuse. Responding to the above-revealed problems rooted in the theological perspective as Christians one asks a question; what are our obligations toward one another? Thus, like what was demanded in the era of HIV and AIDS that demanded mission dimension to be carried out working rooted on collaboration to be applied on

COVID-19 interventions. The paper would like to emphasize that the disruption of everyone's lives has led people to make discoveries about themselves, their neighbors, nationally, and globally. Meaning that one's problem is the global problem.

Conclusion

The paper concludes by saying that God is in control of this world and is able to bring good out of a terrible situation. Possibly what we need is to assist each other in this dark moment as much as we can in helping them to accept the situation in which we are, rooted in the body of Christ. It is through our action rooted in Christ that hope is given to the hopeless individuals and God's presents if fully experienced. The paper agrees that the Roman Catholic Church and many other Churches that use buildings during their worshipping times concerning their theology rooted in communal prayers were challenged with the ban on Sunday Masses and services. Consequently, COVID-19 pandemic revolutionized worship globally. In addition, it should be noted that as much as the Church was affected religious communities have not been spared by this pandemic. Their way of life has been severely affected, communal life in particular as they adhere to COVID-19 regulations keeping social distance and other observances. Therefore, we are all urgently called to pay more attention to the vulnerable, infected, and affected making them have their rights and freedom upheld and this is where God's call will be fully answered in this era of COVID-19.

¹ Kelly, Michael J. HIV and AIDS, A Social Justice Perspective. Pauline Publications, 2020. P.7

² Vitilo, Robert J. Pastoral Training for Responding to HIV and AIDS. Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2007. P 27.

³ Bohoslavsky, J. P. Covid-19: Urgent appeal for a human rights response to the economic recession. United Nations Humana Special Procedures. 2021.

⁴ European Centre for Disease and Prevention and Control, 2020

⁵ African Union, 2020; UNECA, 2020

⁶ AFP 2020

⁷ Armstrong Associates Consulting 2012