

The Church Response to Issues of National concern : A case study HI V/AIDS

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The church is living in a world that is going through a turbulent time with many problems to manage. The problems such as famine, sicknesses without cure, nuclear weapons, economic crisis, terrorism, rebel wars, human trafficking, women's and children's right, religious conflicts, natural disasters etc. have preoccupied the world. The question many have asked is what is the role of the church in such issues? Many have accused the church of not doing much in contributing to the alleviation of these menaces. Someone has described the church as a "sleeping giant" in the midst of national concerns. Others have described her as "she is so heavenly minded that she is not of any earthly use". If this accusations are true, it means the church have forgotten the cultural mandate of shaping culture. Not only that, the church has failed to know that she is still in the world and her members are part of the society in which she is situated. Christians should not behave like what Paul Borthwick stated "So I have decided that my faith applies to my religious life but not to the world around me" (Borthwick, 1996, 12). Jesus prayer in John 17:15-16 pointed out the church is in the world but not of the world to the extent that Jesus asked the father not to take her from the world but to keep her from the evil one. The solution of the world's problem is in God through the church as agent of change. There is no way the church can fulfill her mandate with a not concern attitude towards problems plaguing the world. To this Femi Adeleye suggested two reasons why the church is not making impact I want to suggest two reasons why our impact in society is not visible. One is the integrity crisis we have as a church in terms of the gap between our beliefs and practices. the second factor is that too many of us who know the truth and whose lives have been transformed remain isolated in our church ghettos, wrapped up in our cozy 'plastic bags', worshipping and praising the Lord while His world is decaying further and is in darkness. We are like the salt that is confined in the salt shaker (Adeleye 1999, 123-124).

This paper is exploring the church response to issues of national concern using HIV/AIDS as a case study

The church response in the advent of HIV/AIDS

The emergence of the HIV virus that has caused untold suffering and death was

greeted with different responses. Nwaigbo (2004) said "when one mentions HIV/AIDS, the idea of threat to life, perilous misfortune, affliction of human beings with suffering, unavoidable danger, disaster and death come to mind" (2). The church and the world were divided on the reality of HIV/AIDS. The church offer some responses as stated below

A Response of Condemnation

At the beginning of the epidemic, HIV/AIDS was regarded as something outside of the church. It was seen as a problem related to immoral practices such as homosexuality and prostitution (Mershak n.d 16). Victims faced condemnation, rejection, stigmatization, and discrimination by the church. Some pastors believed that HIV/AIDS was God's judgment on sinners with scriptural support from Romans 1:18-20.

Defensive stance response

The church tried to explain and formulated a perception towards the disease. AIDS was seen as sin related and that people need to be delivered from it. Pastors see their members as perfect and that they cannot sin. People who became victims were considered sinners and deserved their suffering. The church also criticized preventive strategies especially the safe sex condom use message without given alternative (Mershak n.d, 14).

The silence response

The church refused to speak on the subject HIV/AIDS to its congregation. HIV was seen something far away from them. The infection was only looked at from the angle of sex. The only message was abide by God's command and you will be free from AIDS. No teachings were done on the other methods of contracting the disease, prevention, and caring for victims. The church was seen as too holy to discourse a topic of that nature. Therefore, instead of taking action, the church kept quite.

Theological debate response

For instance in Sierra Leone, in the mid 1990s internal differences came up in the body of Christ concerning the subject of AIDS. Groups of theologians, church leaders, and denominations called for the redefining of the church's mission and ministry in the light of HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, this became quite unpopular within the body of Christ. Those who participated were looked at as extreme liberals. And those who claim to be spiritual use scriptures like Romans 1:18-20, Deuteronomy 28:15-16 (Evangelical

Fellowship of Sierra Leone n.d, 16).

Factors that Led the Church to Respond this Way

The issues of HIV/AIDS brought divided opinion to the epidemic within the body of Christ. Very often we do not want to admit that it is affecting the church. We feel that by discussing HIV/AIDS the church will become polluted. We see those infected as the worst sinners paying for their sinners. To some HIV/AIDS is not real and so why spend time discussing it. However, there are factors that contribute to the way Christian react to issues of national concern.

Ignorance

Most often because of the "I don't care" attitude to issues of national concern is ignorant of the devastating effect of some of those issues like HIV/AIDS. The church never sought for information concerning those issues and therefore lives in the dark. The lack of interest prevented the church from taking both curative and preventive action towards HIV/AIDS. Some years ago I interviewed a pastor on his knowledge about HIV/AIDS. His response was why bothered about AIDS; it is all about money making.

Denial

Another factor that stops the church in the fight against HIV/AIDS and other issues of national concern is denial. In most place the church refuse to face the fact concerning those issues. For instance in the late 1980s a number of church members started to die in Sierra Leone. The church responded with denial. Accepting it to be AIDS, will affect the church negatively and therefore in many instances preferred to look at the cause of the death as relating to different causes rather than to AIDS.

Lack of Finance

The lack of finance is another factor that militated against the Church giving a positive response to issues of national concern or AIDS in particular. The question is, was the church unable to access the millions of dollars poured out to the fight against AIDS in the world? In some countries the answer has been the NGOs and the Governmental Agencies controlling the funds demands a 5% or 10% bribe out of the expected funds before approving a project. The church was caught up between two opinions, whether to accept the money and endangers her integrity or to reject the money and resigned from taking action against the disease. On the other hand others have said, to do evil (that

is to compromise) so that good might come. They will accept to give the bribe in order to save humanity. However, the Bible, the authority of Christians speaks against bribery (Ex. 23:8), Deut. 16:19, 27:25).

Activities Involve (Condom promotion in the case of HIV/AIDS)

Another reason that served as a barrier to active involvement of the church is condom promotion in the case of HIV/AIDS. Some pastors view condom promotion as unethical and a way of promoting promiscuity among young people. They would rather reject any funding that is tied to condom promotion. The issue of condom is a subject of debate amongst Christians. Some hold the view that Christians should talk about condoms in order to give a balance view message on both the positive and the negative aspects of it. It should be strongly promoted amongst married couples and those already infected by the virus. Others have said it is one of the devil's instruments to promote immorality. Therefore, it should not be a topic of discussion amongst Christians.

Statistical Data

In the World Health Organization (WHO) report on HIV/AIDS in 2011, about 34 million people are living with HIV. Out of this number 30.7 million are adult, 16.7 million are women and 3.3 million are children less than 15 years old. The number of newly infected people in 2011 was 2.5 million of which 2.2 million were adults and 330,000 were children. In that same year 1.7 million died of which 1.5 million were adults and 230,000 were children (http://www.who.int/hiv/data/2012_epi_core_en.png). In 2010 there were an estimated number of 22.9 million people living with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa including 1.3 million children. Almost 90% of the 16.6 million children living with HIV are in Sub-Saharan Africa. India has about 2.39 million people living with HIV according to the 2009 report. In the 2011 report, Australia has 24,731 people living with HIV. In the Caribbean 230,000 people living with HIV. In 2010, USA report recorded 1.2 million people living with HIV. At the end of 2010 UNAIDS record 2.3 million were people living with HIV in European region (<http://www.avert.org/aids-statistics.htm>)

The Role of the Church in the Fight against HIV/AIDS

The church is in a unique position to make significant contributions to issues of National concern with special reference to HIV/AIDS. The church has untapped potential to successfully reverse the course of the pandemic. It has as its core values of love, care, support and justice. At the same time the church promotes abstinence, faithfulness in marriage, which can strengthen and is an essential weapon to reduce the spread of

HIV/AIDS. The church is called to be a healing community in the midst of pain and suffering, whatever its nature and source. Martin Luther King stated "The ultimate measure of humanity is not where it stands in time of comfort but where it stands in time of challenge, crisis and tragedy" (Mershak n.d, 5). The church has a mandate to console, to reconcile, to love and to minister to the hurting in this time of crisis. The church is expected to play the following

The Church Role in Education

The prevention of HIV transmission requires first and foremost, that people are properly informed about how the virus can and cannot be transmitted from one person to another. Understanding these facts will enable people to make responsible choices that prevent the transmission of the infection. Many people become victims because they lack the proper information that will put them on guard. The church should integrate the teaching on HIV/AIDS in their education program such as bible studies, Sunday school, and morning services. The church should take advantage of special days like independent day, international peace day, world AIDS day, Valentine's Day to pass the message of HIV/AIDS.

The Church's Role in Advocacy

The church has the responsibility of speaking on behalf of those infected and affected and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. The church can become an effective witness by calling on her members to become healing communities to address the pandemic. The experience of Love, acceptance and support within a community where God's love is made manifest can be a powerful healing force. People living with HIV/AIDS should not be excluded, stigmatized or blamed; instead the church should stand by them and show them love and care for them.

The church should be in a position to call on Government, Organizations, communities and individuals to do something to address the plight of those suffering. The church should put modalities in place to address the needs of the increasing number of orphans in the country. They do not only need physical support but also assistance in facing the trauma of death and struggle of life. They still need to feel as children, free to play, attend school, and find security in concerned community members and extended families. They need the Lord and the opportunity to understand and grow in his word. The church can support extended families caring for the children, encourage church members to adopt and foster children and establish community based centers.

A Biblical View of HIV/AIDS

There is no mention of the word HIV/AIDS in the Bible; only sickness and disease is mentioned. HIV/AIDS as a disease should be look at in the light of the Bible. In the book of Deuteronomy 28:16, when God was warning the Israelites, He promised to bring upon them sickness and diseases that are not mentioned in the Bible if they disobey him. One can deduce that even though HIV/AIDS was not mentioned, it was in the mind of God. The problem of sickness and disease is intertwined with the problem of sin and death that is the consequences of the fall. Whereas medical science views the causes of sickness and disease in a physiological or psychomatic terms, the Bible presents spiritual causes as the underlining or basic problem: sin and Satan.

Let us take a look at some diseases and the way people react to them in the Old Testament. In Lev. 13 God told Moses and Aaron to bring a person who has a skin infection for inspection to Aaron or his son who are priest. If the infection is found to be more a skin deep and has white hair, the priest should pronounce him/her unclean and isolate the individual for seven days. If the infection disappears the priest will pronounce him/her clean and integrated t the society. The person is also pronounce clean if the infection covers the entire body and integrated to society. Today it is not so with HIV/AIDS, victims are isolated, abandon and stigmatized. HIV/AIDS is an infection that affects the whole body not just a part. If this is so there is a need to accept, love and care for them as part of the society. Another is in 2 Kings 5, the story of Naaman. He was a valiant officer and through him the Lord gave victories to the King of Aram. But Naaman had an infectious disease, leprosy. Though Naaman was a leper, he was not isolated nor abandoned by the society; he was accepted and integrated into national service. The prophet Elisha did not reject nor condemned him. The Life in the spirit Bible says "the story of Naaman demonstrate God's providence, His saving power and Grace. God is always ready to save humanity and not to condemn it. Furthermore, Job 2 accounts for Job a blameless an upright man in the land of Uz. Satan obtained permission from God to inflict suffering on him. He suffered innocently without an idea of the source of his suffering. His wife abandoned him and his friends perceived the suffering to be the result of sin. Taking a critical analysis of AIDS, the closest case in the Bible is the suffering of Job. Many people like Job are suffering innocently with the AIDS pandemic. The innocent children, medical doctors working to save lives, live with the disease innocently. The question of looking at AIDS from the angle of sin is common amongst Christians as it is with Job's friends. This calls for proper investigation before making assertion concerning something you don't know about.

There are examples also in the New Testament. In Mark 1:40-44, a man with leprosy met Jesus and ask him for healing. Jesus filled with compassion reach out and touches the man and made him whole. Jesus never condemns or judges him over the cause of his suffering. He went against the notions of the day and showed love and compassion. In this day and age of HIV/AIDS, people need to lay aside all prejudice and care for

the hurting. Again in John 9:1-12, seeing a blind man Jesus' disciples asked whose sin is responsible for his predicament. Is it the man or the sin of his parents? Jesus corrected the erroneous belief of the disciples that every serious affliction is the result of sin. This particular suffering was for God's Glory. This perception of relating all suffering as a result of one's sin is not correct. The AIDS victims are suffering in the hands of many people including Christians with this perception. Many people are living with AIDS not because of any wrong they have done but because of factors beyond their control.

Let us take a moment of reflection on the reaction of Jesus to sinners. Jesus in his interaction with humanity does not focus on the sin but on the solution to the sin. In the healing of the paralytic man, Jesus forgives the sin and heals him (Mk. 2:1-12). The woman caught in adultery was not condemned by him but rather forgave her and caution her not sin again (Jn 8:1-11). The woman at Simon's house referred to as a sinner was also forgiven and love by Jesus (Lk. 7:36-50). In the book of Luke 13:1-3, Jesus was pointed to the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with sacrifices. In response he said "Do you think that this Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent you too will perish. The suffering of a person does not mean he is the worst of all sinners. There are people in society who sin openly but are living better lives by human standards. Therefore, people who suffer from HIV/AIDS are not necessarily the worst sinners.

Recommendation

Accepting the Reality of HIV/AIDS

There has been a denial of the existence of HIV/AIDS amongst Christians. The church should accept that AIDS is real and it is gradually causing harm. The church can only respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic positively when it accepts the reality of the diseases. The church should come out of the denial position and find ways and means of the virus. Any growing church that is seeing people come to faith, have life styles change, is likely to find.

Church Leaders

Church leaders have a major role in mobilizing their members, if the church is to actively involve in the fight against the pandemic. Church leaders can call up a meeting to reflect on the church's identity and mission in the midst of a growing global health crisis that has the potential of destroying humanity. If such awareness is raised among church leaders, it will flow down to the least Christian.

Mobilization of Church Community

The church should mobilize as a team to fight against the dreadful disease. The issue of HIV/AIDS requires the concerted effort of the entire church community. Individual church effort is insufficient to address the numerous challenges of HIV/AIDS. The church today is living in an age of networking in fulfilling the mission of God. Therefore, the church should cease this opportunity to collaborate with other organization that shares the same worldview in the fight against the HIV/AIDS.

Education in the Church

The church is the mother of all believers in Christ. She has responsibility to protect her members against any life threatening situation. It must be effective in carrying out this responsibility. In order to provide factual information about AIDS, the church should make good use of Sunday school, academic programs, and the pulpit to educate and sensitize her members about the role they must play to prevent themselves from contracting the disease and care for those who are already victims.

Solidarity with People Living with AIDS

The love of God demonstrated by the church has a strong magnetic pull that draws the church to solidarity with kits suffering members who are living with HIV/AIDS. The AIDS patient belongs to the society and church. They are our brothers and sisters in health and in sickness and therefore demand our support. Care can be directed to both the infected and the infected and the affected. To the infected the church can provide, food, drugs, meet physical and psychological needs, care for their children, visit them n hospital, and meet their spiritual needs. To the affected (family members and friends), the church can provide physical and spiritual needs. Churches should also think of building orphanages to house children who have lost one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS. Response like this will indentify us with the Matthew 25 passage of scripture

Don't Judge

The church should be quick to judge the victims of HIV/AIDS as people reaping what they sow despite the teachings of Jesus not to judge in Matt. 7 many of us love to judge others. The church should know that the causes of HIV/AIDS are numerous, yet many insist on pointing fingers in every case to one caused by sexual intercourse. The Christian attitude that HIV/AIDS is the consequence of sinful acts should be discouraged because it is false

Conclusion

The church is living in an age when the HIV/AIDS pandemic is equated with death. This paper has highlighted the need for the church to establish her presence in the strategic mission so as to eradicate AIDS. Many people have died because of AIDS and many more are still to go through the traumatic ordeal of the epidemic without receiving any remedy. The case is serious and a time bomb that has exploded and become the greatest concern for governments, humanitarian agencies, scientists, the press and theologians.

Because of these concerns the church has the role of care and support, advocacy, education in order to eradicate the disease. As we continue to live under this terrible killer disease, let us never lose sight of the Christian optimism. AIDS will be defeated both morally and radically. The church only needs to live on despite the challenges, carry out the mission it demands and increase its commitment to the people God created and whose dignity the church must uphold. The concerted effort of the church with the state in the fight against HIV/AIDS is a ray of hope in the devastating era of HIV/AIDS pandemic in the world.

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The Church as a Prophetic Voice in Media Cultures in Korea and Kenya: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Postmodern Korean and Kenyan societies have embraced media technology with a greater focus on the expansion of social economic spheres and with the objectives of playing leadership roles in new digital technology in Asia and Africa respectively. Korea has made significant strides in economic development in the past six decades and is already considered a key player particularly in internet connectivity and smartphone penetration. In that context media production and consumption are plentiful, speedy and innovative. Bearing comparable goal, Kenyans are rapidly embracing new media technology especially internet and online networking. With an elaborate national plan, Kenya's digital technology growth is aimed at achieving Africa's "Silicon Valley" status. In both contexts, information and communication technology has been celebrated as an indicator of or a path to economic success even where palpable negative impacts have been recognized. But the anthropological, epistemological, sociological and economic rationalistic perspectives from which media technology is viewed, are reductionist and leave significant metaphysical gaps.

From the contention that media technology is not neutral, this paper examines media's liturgical nature and their capacities to form culture with an elaborate focus on the place of the church as a prophetic voice. Since human interaction with media is not simply a data transmitting process but an elemental human formative process, a clear understanding of media's social, cultural and spiritual *telos* is essential beyond economic prosperity façade. The church therefore can play a significant role in nurturing congregations with discerning understanding of the relationship between God, technology and humans, and ways of engaging the media redemptively.