

In search for peace amidst COVID-19: Reimagining politics, religion, and culture in Africa

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Abstract

The Covid-19 crisis has destabilised global peace and attracted various global and local responses towards its containment. However, varied responses to the crisis have had either positive or negative effects to the people, the economy and the environment (United Nations, 2020a & 2020b). Numerous publications have dealt with the responses from various perspectives. One of such publications was “Covid-19 in 77 Verses” which interrogated the logic behind the responses in Africa. This article analyses the main issues raised in the Verses as a contribution to the literature on Covid-19 from an African and multidisciplinary perspective. This work has identified politics, religion and culture as the fundamental building blocks for responding to the pandemic that can either stifle peace or sustain it. The author of the Verses argues that a conversation between leaders and the rest is vitally important in responding to Covid-19 and other crises. It is equally important for peacebuilding and development. The author concludes that in a democracy, leaders are representatives of the masses who share the same culture and are accountable to them. Thus, any action by the leaders should reflect this representation for the common good, namely global health. In addition, religious leaders are not representatives of the faithful but are accountable to the Creator. Thus, a conversation with the masses may not be natural but optional. The masses and faithful are accountable to their leaders and often pay allegiance to them. The paper recommends that in times of natural crises such as Covid-19, professionalism through science, education and communication should guide leaders and people’s responses. Finally, whereas local remedies are encouraged, international efforts should not be downplayed.

Keywords: Covid-19, 77 Verses, good leadership, peacebuilding, African cultures

Introduction and background

This paper discusses the main issues raised in Covid-19 in 77 Verses. Covid-19 in 77 Verses, henceforth the Verses, is a work of art that provides a rather

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comprehensive analysis on the response to the coronavirus crisis in Africa (Mutalemwa, 2020). The author highlighted the socio-economic as well as cultural-political milieu in which Covid-19 has had a significant impact. The author calls into question the response of leaders, specifically political and religious leaders amid the vulnerability of the population in responding to the pandemic (World Bank, 2020). It has employed an interdisciplinary approach making it comprehensible to various social strata, thus departing from what Bryman refers to as the ghetto-isation of knowledge particularly the dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative researchers (Bryman, 2006).

In the Verses, the author brought together the arts, humanities and social sciences with a tinge on the natural sciences with more than 20 academic disciplines. The author built upon public health, English literature influenced by the likes of Shakespeare and Chinua Achebe, logic, philosophy and theology influenced by Greek and African philosophers, political science, development studies, economics, peace studies, intercultural and religious studies, sociology, gender studies, gerontology, social work, journalism, cultural anthropology, human rights, law, education, research methods and international relations.

Whereas it is a common phenomenon to write from a particular field of study, it is not improbable or unacceptable to have a combination of fields where fields enrich and complement one another rather than contradict or debase one another. Indeed, when confronted with a pandemic such as Covid-19 what matters most is life *qua* life rather than a question of philosophising for its own sake. That is also why the Verses eschewed from conventional writing styles typical of scholarly literature. It is in the Verses that the author manages to spice up the literature on Covid-19 with a sense of humour which would otherwise have been dimmed impossible in the context of a fatal virus, feeding facts with wise words and punctuated with proverbs from Shakespeare to the Scriptures and dotted with rhetorical questions typical of the Socratic irony (Wolfsdorf, 2007) thus exposing fallacies related to the response to the pandemic.

Covid-19 in 77 Verses is a piece of literature that consists of seventy-seven paragraphs, each one treating a specific issue or at best adding an emphasis to a previous one. It is that issue that constitutes a verse. The Verses stemmed from the author's reflection on the rapid spread of the virus, the varied responses of various countries worldwide, the resilience and vulnerability of the healthcare services including physicians, the faith vis-à-vis science debate as well as the attitude and behaviour of the masses. The Verses is a result of observation, and engagement in discussion with people about the pandemic in Africa particularly in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda as well as local and international mainstream media including

social media. The purpose of employing various sources of data is to generate a well-grounded and a representation of facts which can explain the response to the current crisis while imagining a scenario of future pandemics so that ultimately the world may respond efficiently and effectively to such pandemics.

The fact that Covid-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China and then spread to Europe and the Americas before winding its way to Africa, the crisis was not treated as a pandemic or an epidemic but a flu (Solomon, D, Sherman, A. & Kanjilal, S (2020) that affects some people in some region and therefore some regions may be spared as other flu cases. Thus, the crisis created the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' and the cultural othering that comes with that (Rodin, 2017). It is against this cultural backdrop, that the first two verses touch upon the cultural differences between Africa on the one hand and China and the West on the other.

By using examples of the differences in climate, transportation culture and treatment of animals, the author argued that as Africa differs from the rest in several actions and behaviours, it might also differ in the response to Covid-19. The difference has consequences which might be positive or negative. For instance, while Westerners cherish individualism, Africans embrace collectivism and this makes it easier for the former to respond almost naturally to social distancing measures than the latter.

The third verse tackles the consequences of a weak response to Covid-19. A weak response refers to reasoning, action and behaviour that are uninformed by science and have no proof of containing the spread of the virus. An example of this weakness is the argument that Africans have a stronger immunity than Westerners and Asians and as such Covid-19 has a more severe impact on the latter. This means that Africans can afford to relax their measures of confronting the virus while Westerners and Asians must pull up their socks. A similar argument advanced is that Covid-19 is something of a curse. Africans are 'notoriously religious' and Westerners and Asians have turned their backs to God. Therefore, Africans are more likely to survive the curse than their counterparts. The author borrows Mbiti's statement that Africans are notoriously religious (Mbiti, 1969) to support the argument. While this religiosity seems to favour Africa in dealing with Covid-19 when compared to the Western world, significant differences in cases across Africa beg the question whether different countries are differently religious. If this is true, then it might be a generalisation to blanket the whole of Africa as notoriously religious. If it is not true, then we need a different argument to explain the variety of cases among African countries other than the

religious one unless one wants to argue that Africans are religious but with different degrees of notoriety.

As an example of the alleged uniqueness of Africa, some people have compared the number of cases in Africa and in the West particularly Italy, Spain, UK and US and concluded that Covid-19 is not a threat to Africa. In fact, Verse four indicates that the virus cannot attack Africa. While some people make this argument, some African countries report Covid-19 cases. Part of the explanation to this is the relatively slow and late entry of the virus in Africa. In Verse five, the author of the Verses posits that Africa was in the best position to respond to the virus having learnt from what happened to China, Europe and the US. He challenges the level of preparedness put in place by African leaders. As a result, the situation might become worse in Africa given the economic and technological power in the continent as Verse six elucidates.

Verse seven shows the similarity amongst global citizens demonstrated by Covid-19. The author shows that probably in the history of humankind, the whole world is in the same boat. This reality has socio-economic, geopolitical, ecological and ethical ramifications. The virus has blurred the north-south divide, the rich-poor division, the strong-weak state borders and demarcations between environmentally friendly citizens and their counterparts and that humanity share core values and needs. No country, region or people are condemned to be perpetually, inherently or exclusively sick, poor, ignorant or backward.

The nature of Covid-19 as a global problem is captured in Verse eight. This is because the virus has not spared any country. Now, if this is a global problem, the world needs a global solution. Since this virus is highly contagious, even an area that has not yet been affected needs to stay alert. Therefore, containing the disease in one country, may not be sustainable in this increasingly integrated, interconnected and globalising world. Nevertheless, a global solution does not exclude local solutions but the latter should support the greater good which is sound global health. Covid-19 has divided people between those who advocate for traditional and local means of dealing with health issues and international measures advocated by international organisations such as the WHO.

Social distancing measures

Verse Nine deals with the avoidance of non-essential public gatherings. It advocates for social distancing measures as the means to contain the spread of the virus. Although the WHO and most governments emphasised the need to observe a one to two metre distance rule between persons, the response has been less

uniform with some people and even governments paying lip service to the rule. It is against this backdrop that the author of the verses resorted to calling upon people to take personal initiative as probably the best response that can guarantee one's safety as well as the safety of others as described in Verse Ten. In Verse Eleven, the author points out the unfounded claim that, in comparison with Africans, Westerners have a weaker body immunity and interrogates why the latter have a longer life expectancy than the former (Worldometers, 2020).

The logic seems to be that since Africans have supposedly a stronger body immunity, they can safely ignore social distancing and other measures against Covid-19. In Verse Twelve, some people support the claim that Westerners who have observed the rules have been much more infected than Africans. Therefore, the rules are ineffective. The author challenges this argument by pointing out measures taken in the West in Verse Thirteen and calls upon Africans to take extra steps to protect themselves given the unique socio-economic circumstances in Africa.

For example, in Verse Fourteen, some people are known to have fled a coronavirus quarantine in some African countries. This is a dangerous act especially if one is coronavirus positive. Fleeing back to society which is already challenged by the lack of social services is unprecedented. The author builds upon Nyerere's conviction that Africans must run while others walk (Eckert, 2014). This is because he is aware of the socio-economic and technological variations particularly between the so-called global south and global north. Different responses in different countries are inevitable as pointed out in Verse Sixteen. However, the differences should be such that they contribute to saving lives.

In Verses fifty-one and fifty-two, the author pointed out the absurdity of the social distancing rhetoric by exposing the impossibility of maintaining a two-metre distance in public minibuses or worse on motorcycles which would carry even four passengers. For example, while Tanzania and Burundi relaxed their social distancing measures as shown in Verse fifty-four, their East African counterparts imposed curfews and lockdowns. While the East African Community is touted for its strong unity, lack of common approaches to curbing the spread of Covid-19 strained international relations between Tanzania and Rwanda, Uganda as well as Kenya. Truck drivers from Tanzania to those countries experienced this strain first-hand. Verse fifty-three explains this incongruity in the response to Covid-19 in East Africa.

Matters got even more complicated as the government of Tanzania abruptly stopped providing statistics of cases and deaths due to Covid-19. It is important to keep in mind that in Tanzania, it was exclusively the role of the

government to provide data on Covid-19. Then, there was a week of complete silence on the number of cases (Hourel & Lewis, 2020). This was followed by a critique of the Covid-19 testing machines, the sacking of the Deputy Minister for Health and the drastic if miraculous reduction of cases and eventually the official end of Covid-19 in Tanzania. However, the author could not connect the dots from the situation in neighbouring countries to fill the gap of the unprecedented lack of information. Even so, facts and figures remain fluid and complex as some countries are supposedly inflating number of cases and deaths to win international aid (Adesoji & Asongu 2020). It should also be remembered that 2020 is election year for both Burundi and Tanzania, which may have influenced the response to the pandemic.

Challenges to learning and education

Pupils and students were among the first group of people to be considered for protection against Covid-19 although countries acted differently. While some countries acted rather swiftly others did not do so. This has had consequences accordingly. Verse Seventeen points out the UK as having ‘dilly-dallied quite a bit’ for example when compared to Germany. The US and Sweden also were not as keen to act. The British government challenged the logic of closing schools while children are left to roam in the neighbourhood visiting friends. Verse Eighteen shows that Kenya was too lax to let a passenger plane from Kenya land at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and the same could be said of Tanzania which let a Congolese musician Kofi Olomide and his team perform live music dances in Dar es Salaam. This can be equated with England that allowed a football match with fans arriving from Spain.

The above examples of laxity may suffice to show the difficulty underlying the containment of the spread of the virus in the world and in Africa. Countries were so porous and fragile to respond to the virus. Closing schools and suspending lectures were cosmetic given other avenues through which the virus could easily percolate. Verse Nineteen shows that in Africa the situation was more precarious given living conditions and housing facilities where it is almost impossible to observe social distancing. To make matters worse, some parents were sending their children to sell foodstuffs in neighbouring trading centres for economic purposes. In Verse Twenty-one this was a failure of some parents to take care of their own children and protect them from Covid-19. These were the same children who were made to stay home hoping for safer conditions away from school. One of the pretexts or justification for sending children hawking stuff as

pointed out in Verse twenty-two was that children are not infected by Covid-19 and or that the dark skin is not infected by the virus as Verse twenty shows.

Staying home was equally challenging for university students particularly for those who could not follow online courses. Students had many questions regarding their fate and university leadership did not seem to have ready answers as pointed out in Verse Twenty-four. The challenge was probably more severe for private universities struggling to keep the universities afloat as shown in Verse Twenty-three. While it is true that the pandemic was unforeseen, Covid-19 has been a wake-up call particularly for academics and university administration to stay alert and be prepared for similar scenarios.

Religious beliefs and politics

Covid-19 has definitely shaken some people's faiths as well as the faith of some religious leaders. The uniformity observed in the Catholic church for one was at stake. Verse twenty-five pointed out two distinct approaches to public services. For example, whereas in Kenya such services were suspended, in Tanzania they were not. The argument in Kenya was that public gatherings were the main conduit for the spread of the virus. In Tanzania the argument was that religious gatherings were obligatory and hence essential services. The argument by the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) was different from the one offered by the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. This is unprecedented in the Catholic church. As the number of infections were rising in Tanzania, one of the Catholic Bishops suspended public gatherings in Rulenge-Ngara Diocese contrary to the stand of the TEC which had opted for minor changes in the manner of executing services (Nakkazi, 2020). The author of the verses called for a theological justification informing the decisions made in Verse twenty-seven.

As the author strives to unpack the theological conundrum regarding suspension of public gatherings or otherwise, some leaders in other Christian churches are stating categorically that Covid-19 cannot afflict Tanzania because faith is so powerful. The author highlighted this in Verse twenty-eight. Such pronouncements gained traction and helped fill churches with uncritical worshippers in the name of freedom of worship, assembly and expression. This behaviour prompted reference to the statement that "the right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins" (Holmes, 1930) hinting at the limitation of freedom in verse twenty-nine. In verse thirty, the author suggested the criminalisation of the promotion of gatherings of unprotected people and in verse thirty-one added the (mis)use of the name of the Creator for personal gain to the

features of grand corruption. Reference to Lee Man-hee, the leader of the church of Jesus in Verse thirty-three was meant to drive the point home that faith that does not protect life is questionable (Wildman et al., 2020).

Although the literature is awash with the incompatibility between religion and politics (ibid.), the former seems to inform the latter and vice versa regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, Verse thirty-four demonstrates the conflation of religion with politics. Some religious leaders toe the line of politics by supporting government decisions even if they appeared unjustifiable as if they had political interest to protect. Similarly, some political leaders resorted to religious practices as the surest remedy to Covid-19. Both politics and religion decided against science and research as offering plausible explanation of this public health concern. Given a poor scientific base of the vast majority of the population in Africa, faith rather than reason had an upper hand. For countries such as Burundi and Tanzania whose general elections were around the corner, Covid-19 could not be allowed to stand in the way to State House.

One of the tactics to continue with business as usual was to downplay the severity of COVID-19. It was often regarded as another flu, which would either die a natural death, or killed by local germs and disappear through the power of prayers. The other popular tactic was to relate Covid-19 with economic challenges. Since it is natural for people to work for income, they readily accepted the idea to get out and work rather than stay home. However, some politicians and people did not seem to ask the logical question about their safety as they go about economic activities.

Justice, peace and human rights

While both politics and religion claim and play a natural role to promote justice, peace and human rights, they do not have the exclusive monopoly to do so. This is because as pointed out above, religion and politics may have goals which do not necessarily promote human life such as the protection of masses against Covid-19. The human worth as explained in verse thirty-five can be philosophically deduced without necessarily resorting to religion or politics as it is predicated to and belongs to human qua human. The human worth is intricately connected to human rights. All rights and freedoms exist to promote this worth and as this worth is promoted a human being experiences wellbeing and love which means peace. Verse thirty-six touches upon equality as an essential element of justice whereby Nicoli Berdyaev argues that all people need bread as bread: “The question of bread

for myself is a material question, but the question of bread for my neighbour is a spiritual question” (Linde, 2010:53).

The rationalisation of spiritual and material bread smacks of injustice. The same applies to George Orwell’s famous statement that some animals are more equal than others. In verse thirty-seven the author questions the tendency to prioritise the material needs for church leaders and ignoring the needs of the faithful including many among them who are economically poor who are likely to be made poorer by Covid-19 especially due to lockdown measures.

The author sums up the origin and preconditions of peace in St. Francis of Assisi’s famous prayer of peace. In Verse thirty-eight peace is the result of selflessness or the concern for others. For example, St. Francis says that it is in giving that we receive. However, in reality humans including religious leaders tend to be more of receivers than givers at best exchanging goods with blessings similar to the practice during colonial days when explorers exchanged pieces of land with a bottle of wine. The author stresses the need for action to contain the spread of Covid-19. Indeed, in Verse Forty, he challenges complacency and lip service amongst some religious leaders.

Building a knowledgeable society

The principle that whatever is received, is received according to the manner and condition of the receiver also makes sense in the context of the response to Covid-19. Society with a few critical people can easily be swayed around by political and religious platitudes or statements hyped by the media that are barely supported by evidence. Such society does not even demand evidence because it is such that it is receptive and unquestioning, which are characterised by naivety. For example, people are socialised to believe that faith is the solution to all problems and whatever happens is the will of God or if one prays, Covid-19 will simply vanish or as verse forty-five puts it going to church is not the only way of relating to God. Indeed, in such society faith cannot be questioned. However, the author argues that faith and reason are not mutually exclusive. The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (John Paul II 1998) is dedicated to the relationship between faith and reason. The two words constitute the ACUHIAM’s motto. ACUHIAM being the Association of Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes of Africa and Madagascar (ACUHIAM Statutes, 2010).

As political and religious leaders target such vulnerable society, some members of the very society create means to take advantage of people’s vulnerability by improvising concoctions as medicine for acute health conditions

such as HIV and Covid-19. The concoction is for sale at the price fixed by the manufacturer even if no one knows their effectiveness or side-effects. In fact, one could safely conclude that the medication is made for profit, especially when it turns out that it does not cure the condition it claims to cure. A typical case is the concoction by Babu the herbalist in Loliondo, Tanzania to treat HIV/AIDS and other chronic diseases as addressed in Verse forty-two.

The conviction these concoctions bring and the lack of alternative cure makes masses even more vulnerable. Even higher level political and religious leaders as well as academics and businesspeople fall in this trap. In this situation, none is left to question the capacity of the concoctions to treat for example Covid-19 patients. In Tanzania, for instance, it was Honourable Prof. Dr. Palamagamba Kabudi, Minister for International Relations and East African Corporation who was commissioned by President Dr. John Pombe Joseph Magufuli to import a Covid-19 remedy from Madagascar. Its effectiveness has not been established to-date.

At that time there was hardly a Covid-19 case in Madagascar, which in itself made some people believe the absence of cases was due to the remedy (organics). The mere idea that there was a remedy in Madagascar was enough conclusion for the uncritical mind that Covid-19 has been defeated and therefore life could and should get back to normal. It only took a few weeks after the so-called cure was imported that cases of Covid-19 increased in number in Madagascar. This is just one case that made the author in Verse forty-eight call upon various actors in development to work towards the provision of and accessibility to broader education for all people, particularly Africans. It is education that will make people separate facts from fiction and give them confidence to tell the difference.

Facts, fiction and fake news

Covid-19 has attracted people's attention more than anything else in recent history. Its novelty and impact have been the main news values that have given Covid-19 this publicity. In verse fifty-eight, the author argues that from the genesis of the virus to the numbers of cases as well as the exit strategies in place should be taken with a pinch of salt. For example, while the virus is said to have originated in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and dubbed the "Chinese virus", particularly by President Donald Trump, China refutes the authenticity of originating in China. Instead, China accepts the fact that the virus was first detected in China which

means it could have originated somewhere else and then reported in China. Hence, the origin of Covid-19 remains a question for research rather than its conclusion.

It has been impossible to ascertain the number of Covid-19 cases in any country in Africa. In fact, even in developing countries the capacity to test was very low and therefore hard to tell the numbers with any degree of certainty. The challenge for them has been how to scale up testing capacities and capabilities. In Africa, the glaring inadequacy in the testing capacity would account for a deceptively low number of infections. Therefore, a qualitative analysis is absolutely necessary to explain the data on cases and deaths due to Covid-19. Given very similar socio-economic and cultural conditions in East Africa, for example, one would expect a similar pattern on the impact of Covid-19 on East Africans. How would one explain the 509 cases in Tanzania vis-a-vis 41,937 in Kenya (Worldometers, 2020) both being lower middle-income countries and sharing similar climatic conditions?

Similar variations have been noted in Scandinavian or Nordic countries. Whereas Norway, Denmark and Finland went into lockdown, Sweden took a different approach, which explains the rise in infections in Sweden in comparison to her neighbours. The same argument is true for countries such as the US and UK when compared to Germany which acted more swiftly to contain the spread of Covid-19. Now, while some countries decided to ease restrictions imposed due to the pandemic because of the decrease in infections, some other countries opted to ease these restrictions despite the increase in the number of infections in those countries particularly in order to save their ailing economies. The debate between protecting lives and saving livelihoods or between health and economy is likely to interest scholars for a long time.

A related debate amongst more open societies and its absence in some other societies has focused on the easing of restrictions or maintaining and extending lockdowns where applicable. It should be recalled that some countries did not go into lockdown for reasons best known to them. One of the reasons has been attributed to faith. In this case, the author has called upon leaders to exercise good leadership by guiding the people to appreciate the role of common sense as they discern the will of God in Verse fifty-nine. This discernment calls for a serious discussion on the pandemic as stated in Verse sixty. In this regard, the responsibility of the governments is enormous as pointed out in Verse sixty-one. This responsibility stems from the primacy of the citizens for which government exists in a democracy. This is in contradistinction with other forms of government such as monarchy or theocracy as the author argues in Verse Sixty-two.

Education on Covid-19 and public health

Covid-19 being a novel virus, the world needs to learn about it and do so urgently. The author makes a distinction between passive knowledge and active knowledge. The former consists in getting information on the pandemic and the latter consists in internalising knowledge on the same. The author makes an analogy between education on Covid-19 and that provided to local motorcyclists regarding wearing of helmets. He concludes that since some motorcyclists have turned a deaf ear to wearing helmets, some members of the population may do the same regarding wearing face masks, for example. The author has explained this in Verse sixty-three, citing scepticism amongst some people whether Covid-19 could reach villages. The author concludes that the best response to Covid-19 depends on education, discipline and decision to combat the pandemic.

In Verse Sixty-five, the author advances three tactics to respond to Covid-19, namely compromise, coercion and co-operation also known as the 3Cs. In compromise, the author identifies the inability amongst some people to deal with the pandemic. They see neither prevention nor cure in sight. Therefore, they decide not to take any action to protect themselves. For some, their very survival and livelihoods depends on the environment that exposes them to contracting the virus. Therefore, they have little choice between starvation and Covid-19. In coercion, the author analysed the use of force in some countries to make people stay home and observe social distancing and hygiene. This happened because some people had limited knowledge on the impact of Covid-19 or they had to go about their life despite the pandemic. Hence, some authorities resorted to brutal force sometimes causing violence and thus destabilising peace.

Besides compromise and coercion, which would have a negative impact on the people due to increased vulnerability coupled with the spread of the infection, the author identified co-operation as the suitable approach to respond to Covid-19. Co-operation consists in dialogue for the entire population, developed nations and developing ones, governments and citizens, healthcare workers and states, religious leaders and the faithful. Since Covid-19 has proved not to respect borders, it would be counterproductive to act in isolation imposed by geopolitical fragmentation. The war of words between China and the WHO on the one hand and the US on the other is likely to stifle the efforts to contain Covid-19. No wonder, the literature has emphasised ‘interconnectedness’ (Ashworth, 2020) and ‘interdependence’ (Mabille, 2020) as the way for the future of peace.

Indeed, while the author in Verse Sixty-six recognises the need for taking personal responsibility especially in the situation where co-operation is

compromised, the author emphasises unity and courage in fighting Covid-19. He borrows words used by Julius Nyerere when declaring a war against Former Ugandan President Idd Amin Dada in 1978: reason, ability and will to fight him. Short of those, Covid-19 might as well win against people.

Motivation for healthcare workers and general encouragement

Supporting health care workers is probably the best response towards the containment of Covid-19. This is true because healthcare workers are directly working to protect life. This is life of the entire population and life of their own. That is why the author uses Verse sixty-eight and sixty-nine explaining the importance healthcare workers and precarious nature of their service. The author comforts the bereaved and wishes the deceased eternal peace. In Verse seventy, the author reassures the population that Covid-19 is not a death warrant, indicating that some people contracted the virus and still recovered.

The author insisted, however, that the virus should be taken seriously regardless of one's race or other socio-economic, cultural and geopolitical differences. Differences are welcome as long as they promote sustainable peace and development. The war of words between US and China and the subsequent lack of a concerted effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus, have sparked a debate over the commitment to international co-operation. For some analysts (Mohammad 2020 and Khurshid 2020), the virus has been used as another weapon of mass destruction, targeting some parts of the population.

Some analysts argue that Covid-19 is a strategy to destabilise African population whose natural resources are unmatched by the local capacity to harness them. It is for this reason; the author refers to Kofi Annan's second scramble for Africa in Verse seventy-one (Franke, 2001). The author further refers to this scramble as colonisation or even '*coronisation*' as a deliberate tactic to affect the population through the coronavirus. As such, the natural resources would be left at the mercy of the foreign forces as it was done during the European colonisation. Rather unexpectedly, the author provides a summary of his own profile in Verse seventy-two as an attempt to show why providing public health education on Covid-19 is a logical thing to do. He stresses lifelong learning in Verse seventy-three with a focus on Africa in verse seventy-three. The author reiterates his commitment for Africa's holistic development in verse seventy-four. He shows that staying home or working from home, for those who can, is an opportunity to do things whose time was otherwise limited as pointed out in Verse seventy-five. In Verse seventy-six, the author encourages people to keep communication lines

open, particularly through mobile phones and other online services. Verse seventy-seven ends the analysis with the call to observe precautions as advised by qualified health experts.

Conclusion

Arguably, Covid-19 attracted global solidarity more than anything else in recent history. It brought together families and communities and even put a truce on warring sides, including terrorists. It brought about environmental conservation and reduced overpopulation as people kept off beaches and congested cities. However, the pandemic revealed a discrepancy in state and church priorities, pitting health against the economy and life against faith. The imposition of curfews and lockdowns or lack of the same was not only meant to protect life but it was informed by economic and political considerations. A culture of silence especially in some African societies left the masses at the mercy of the pandemic. In this culture questioning the authority, whether state or church, is unacceptable. As such, a precarious society is recreated that lives and acts in fear led by people who would otherwise speak for them. Such people include journalists, academics, NGOs and religious leaders. It is through the eradication of fear, a commitment to the promotion of the common good and, above all, empowerment through a broad-based education for all that peace would reign supreme. The questions remain, namely how far is the state working for its people and how far is the church committed to serving or even saving the people? In short, the response to Covid-19 in Africa was less international and less scientific. However, it reminded Africans to go back to the roots: use traditional medicine, be more hygienic and eat more fruits and vegetables than ever before.

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