

COMMENTARY**COVID-19 IN 77 VERSES**

Covid, Covid: Go Away and Never Come Again

My dear African Friend,

I hope you are safe and healthy.

1. I have found it necessary to exchange ideas about the coronavirus pandemic. Originally, I used Swahili to convey a similar message, trusting that one day it would be Africa's common language. Now, I'm switching over to English believing that English is the Swahili of the world. I've chosen to talk about Africa because we have so many things in common. Furthermore, we're very different from the Europeans, Chinese, Americans and others in our ways of living, thinking and dealing with various challenges such as the current coronavirus crisis. My main goal is to share ideas, to encourage us all not to ignore the tragedy or create unnecessary fears, so that in the end we may all be safe.
2. I'll start with one or two small examples of the difference between us and Europeans. Europe is now leaving behind the icy cold winter. Well actually, one of the warmest winters ever -- a grave sign of global warming. Now, if you tell them not to go out because of the coronavirus, you really stress them out. When they see the sun, they are desperate to get out and bask in the sun. When we see the sun, we rush into the shade. They worry about how to walk their dogs as they usually do, so that they can enjoy the sun together. When we see a dog, we throw a stone at him. More often than not, Europeans sit next to you on trains, when that's the only seat available and, of course, remain plugged in to smart phones. Africans will leave all other empty seats in order to sit next to you. Now you can see why teaching us physical distancing is a hard nut to crack, let alone social distancing. When we're told to queue up, we gather together. This is probably the best quality we share with our Chinese friends as

Dambisa Moyo fondly describes them. Please excuse my generalisations. We need each other. I believe variety is the spice of life.

3. I am persuaded to contact you because I've seen and heard so many things in Africa about the coronavirus, which if we ignore, we may be embarrassed, suffer and even get swept away. There're people who say Covid-19 is a Chinese, American and European disease. The largest number of cases is in the USA. Their immune systems are weak and they're bold enough to say they don't believe in God. Which is why they're punished. We Africans are strong and we pray a lot. Maybe that's what John Mbiti means by saying that Africans are notoriously religious. I can tell you, when I learnt of the sudden death of one of my former students a couple of weeks ago, I cried. Please don't ask me the cause of his death. Let the dead bury their own dead.
4. Some testify that the number of affected people in China, Europe and the United States is much greater than in Africa. Therefore, we'll be spared. Still others argue that the coronavirus cannot come to Africa!
5. Certainly, in Africa we've had some good luck. Unlike those who were suddenly struck by the coronavirus, in Africa the virus has come slowly. We witnessed cases abroad through the foreign media. Indeed, the Lord hears the cry of the poor. It's as if God gave us the opportunity to organise ourselves. How did we use this opportunity? Imagine what would have happened had this deadly bug started off in Africa! Alas! You'd tell me touch wood. I'm afraid the wood might have collected viruses from a passer-by.
6. You'll remember that the coronavirus disease or Covid-19 originated in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It killed thousands, and migrated to Europe and the United States, and claimed thousands of souls as well. Luckily, we've not reached that number in Africa but we might get there and beyond. The coronavirus disease is like a bushfire. You watch it burn from afar before it reaches your place.
7. Perhaps for the first time in human history, the whole world is in the same boat. No matter where you are seated, we'll get off the boat together. Well, if we co-operate.

8. We've been advised by experts to take all precautions to protect ourselves from the coronavirus. We have been told Covid-19 is caused by the SARS-Cov2 virus that attacks the lungs and kills people. I repeat, all precautions. This is a global problem. Thus, we need a global solution.

Avoiding Gatherings and Keeping Social Distance

9. I ask you that we avoid public gatherings, stay apart, as four steps between you and me: No matter how much we love each other. We keep social and physical distance, wash our hands thoroughly with soap and running water as often as we can. Do not shake hands or hug one another. Remain at home to protect yourself and to protect others. East or West, home is best. We love guests but they would rather wait for this disaster to pass. Otherwise, while we love them very much, the coronavirus may love them even more.
10. The responsibility to protect ourselves is for all of us. That is, you and I and all people. And if we protect ourselves, we will survive. Protect yourself. Who are you waiting for to protect you? Protect your neighbour. If you love them, you will protect them.
11. The Chinese and Europeans we call weak live up to ninety years. We who are strong, if we turn sixty, that's providence. No wonder, the Greeks say, those whom the gods love, die young.
12. When Europeans and Chinese who make our ventilators, vaccines, medicines, face masks and hand sanitisers, fret; we, you and I, do not make a blessed mask or sanitiser but we laugh in the face of the coronavirus. And when some people see a Chinese person, they dare say look at that little "corona!" Have you tested for the virus? Why show off?
13. The Chinese and Europeans were the first to be affected by the virus and the first to act. It's not that we haven't taken action. Of course, we've taken action! The beloved, Honourable Health Minister, Ummu Mwalimu, has spoken about the coronavirus until she is almost running out of breath. Other government officials, journalists, leaders of political parties,

religious denominations, civil society organisations and others are working hard.

14. What I am telling you, my friend, is that that's not enough. Given the African behaviour I know and the economic and scientific potential that most of us have, we've to take extra steps and take them fully and swiftly. In West Africa there're some people who were put into coronavirus quarantine. Do you know what happened there? A couple of them entered the woods, and made off stealthily. Can you guess where they ended up? I suppose they wended their way homewards to join their kith and kin.
15. Mwalimu Nyerere once said that we Africans should run while others walk. We need to run faster than the coronavirus itself! It starts slowly, usually with one person then it picks up like a bush-fire in the harmattan as Chinua Achebe put it. How so? It's like in taking part in the Olympic torch relay. One holds the torch, then passes it over to the other. The other one receives it and hands it over to yet another. The weaker the person, the more vulnerable they get. No wonder, Tanzania has suspended the Freedom Torch relay for this year. It has also cancelled the Tanganyika-Zanzibar Union as well as May Day celebrations.
16. I'd like to emphasise the issue of public gatherings. Europe, China and others prohibited all these gatherings because they are the main source of the spread of the coronavirus. The UK was too casual at first and allowed a football match between Atletico Madrid and Liverpool to go ahead. Many Spanish fans flew to Liverpool bringing the virus with them, Result: Huge increase of CV19 in Liverpool and many lives lost. Now, many people work from home, others are paid half-wages, thousands have lost their jobs, schools and universities are closed and use of public transport is restricted to essential workers. Bus drivers were not adequately protected at first and some have died from CV19. That is, you stay home, even don't set foot at the next-door neighbour's home. They call it lockdown. It's nearly the same as being in prison.

Coronavirus and Schools

17. You will recall that some countries closed schools immediately, others like England didn't. It dilly-dallied quite a bit. The British government imagined that children home from school would simply visit each other at home during the corona holiday. Children turn a home into a classroom, and a street into a school. The virus remains constant. But European countries are well provided with broadband to stream lessons to maybe 70% of children. Children, for example, get lessons streamed every day and must complete work on-line and return it for marking. There is concern, however, for children from poor homes and the disadvantaged.
18. We also closed some places but to a lesser extent, and a bit too late. Don't we say prevention is better than cure and a stitch in time, saves nine? Now if you have got one case, how would you say you are in time? I remember a few days before the coronavirus was reported in Kenya, a plane landed at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport from China, of all places. People complained, the media criticised the incident. The government defended itself. Is there now a passenger airplane landing there as in the past? Forget it! If Kofi Olomide and his team of dancers entered the city today, would you dare join the dance?
19. Let me continue with schools. Schools were closed to protect our children. At the same time, children are still gathering to play in the neighbourhoods and for religious instructions. They're sent to sell tomatoes, fish, chapatis and other things to help their parents. We get children confused and show them that the coronavirus is a joke. That's why we're reminded this isn't a holiday, it's a coronavirus shift. Probably those are the children I heard say they aren't afraid of the coronavirus. Strike while the iron is hot. If grown-ups are not taking care of themselves, what will children do? Woe to those who will scandalise or lose these little ones. It now appears that there is a dangerous heart condition affecting some children who have been exposed to CV19.
20. Men appear to be tough and aggressive, but they also lead in the number of infections compared to women worldwide. From baby boys to

grandfathers, this sterner sex faces it really rough. This doesn't mean women are not affected. Of course not. Men are worse affected than women. Obesity is a big negative factor. Of those who catch it, their chances are best if they are slim women under 65!

Also, don't say the dark skin is not affected. Look at how our fellow African Americans are suffering worldwide. In Europe, a disproportionately large number of Black and Asian people are dying. We don't know why. It doesn't appear to be related to income or social status.

21. The ones that bother me most are the youngest children. We've many in our neighbourhoods especially in high density townships. They haven't even started going to kindergarten. These are innocent creatures. They gather around like crazy. It's as if parents and guardians are non-existent. Poor little angels of God! Who is protecting them? If you tell them to maintain physical distance, they jump onto each other's backs like kittens who are rehearsing new tricks to catch a mouse.
22. Governments have returned school children to their parents and guardians. Parents are the last resort in the world. Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches. Now, my fellow parent and guardian, if you are shunning your responsibilities, who will take care of your children? But you'll hear some people say children are not infected by Covid-19. And some are planning to name their new-born twins after "Corona" and "Covid". Let me ask you, until you see your child drop dead will you believe the coronavirus is real? This will be too late. My friend, do not cry over spilt milk.
23. Our university students are also out of campus. We haven't planned to teach them by other means. We think they don't have internet packages but they chat a lot on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and so on. They're smart on phones and computer savvy. So, when they don't study, especially at private universities, how will those universities stay afloat? How about salaries? That's when the bursar will say, 'Sorry I'm temporarily not reachable, please try again later.' You'll wait till the cows come home.

24. All students are waiting with bated breath for our response. They don't know their fate. I don't know my fate either. But we cannot remain silent. Let's give them answers as we're the self-proclaimed think-tanks, experts at simplifying complex matters. Some of the students are neither on campus nor at their parents' home. They're somewhere off campus. And this is another problem. What will happen to them there, no one will hold Vice-Chancellors or parents responsible. Let's hope the coronavirus is eliminated soon. It's never too late to mend. However, we can't afford to drag our heels. Otherwise, we might be attempting to shoe a running horse.

Beliefs and Practices

25. Kenya closed schools and colleges. Tanzania followed suit. His Eminence John Cardinal Njue of the Catholic Church in Kenya announced a temporary suspension of public Easter services in churches. In Tanzania, we are told we have to wash our hands before going to church as if Kenyans do not wash their hands. For some parishes we should not go for the Way of the Cross or gather for Small Christian Community prayers but Holy Masses continue as usual, except that four or five people, instead of seven or so, will occupy a pew to observe physical distancing. The same story applies to public buses.

26. The foot washing rite on Maundy Thursday has been discontinued to try and curb the spread of the virus but the Mass will be celebrated as usual. I am trying to figure out the connection between the feet and the coronavirus. In addition, the faithful won't receive the eucharist or holy bread in their mouth but instead in their hand. But is the hand the final destination of the bread? You can't have your bread and not eat it. Priests owe us an explanation. Then, come to think of this: Public gatherings of around ten or twenty people are suspended, but we brag with celebrations of hundreds of believers during Sunday services, simply because these celebrations are obligatory.

How do you explain this sampling method? Wouldn't the celebrations be lovely without the virus? Or you think the faithful are too holy to bring

you viruses? Catholics might note what the Holy Father says and does. He says at this time Catholics should not attend Mass, and he speaks to the world but below is an empty St. Peter's Square. Protestant bishops say the same. The Archbishop of Canterbury led the Easter Eucharist for Anglicans on TV from his house.

27. Each problem must be dealt with according to its gravity. I don't understand why man kills a rat with a gun and an elephant with a catapult. This is being penny wise, pound foolish. Where is my dear brother, Prof. Charles Nyamiti? Where is my neighbour, Prof. Laurenti Magessa? Please help us unpack this theological conundrum. Why should some Bishops close their churches and others open them? Is the virus putting a knife on the things that held us together? My friend, to go, or not to go, that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler to stay and be safe or mix and be sorry.
28. While we are struggling to tease out the rationale for gathering for Sunday services, some pastors have been heard saying that the coronavirus is not in Tanzania and cannot hit Tanzania. Come on! What's so unique about Tanzania? Why has the virus arrived? Four hundred and eighty cases amongst humans, excluding goats and papayas. These are the same pastors who have made us step in basins of holy cooking oil bare foot, trampling one another to death. This is anointing from below. One day, they will tell us to step on fire, because that's precisely where the devil dwells. And we'll set our feet there. Poor things! Some of them claim that they raise the dead but the risen dead are nowhere to be seen. They've never raised anything to life. But we believe they do and proclaim Alleluia, Amen! Aren't these vampires? What are we?
29. This freedom of worship and expression has gone overboard. Remember, your freedom ends where my nose begins. And since your decision may lead to the injury of others, you have to be dealt with accordingly. Now, I believe President John Magufuli is a very lenient person.
30. Encouraging public gatherings of unprotected persons should now be a criminal offence. But these false prophets are terribly irritating. They've turned believers into goldmines. What they are looking for are just offerings.

31. A Kenyan artist once asked if God does not go to the supermarket, and does not pay his angels' salary, where does he spend the money? There is a church now that has offered transportation to gather believers into church. Since people seem to go there on their own volition, it seems not to be a problem. But these people are not islands. Everyone is a complete and connected part of a family, community, nation and world. Few words are usually enough for an intelligent person. Let the one with ears to hear, do so.
32. I think using the name of the Creator for personal gain should be included in the definition of grand corruption.
33. Why haven't we learned from what happened in South Korea? Lee Man-hee, the leader of the Church of Jesus, was charged with causing coronavirus infections originating in his church. Despite kneeling and prostrating himself in public apology, the murder case is still in order. After all, he could have prevented the coronavirus spread but he didn't.
34. If you make a mistake whether intentionally or unintentionally, the laws exist to treat you accordingly. Now you, my friend, when you are called a sheep of God, it doesn't mean you are a real sheep from head to toe. Let's not conflate religion with politics. Nyerere said the government has no religion, its citizens have religions. I'm mystified when a senior government official publicly behaves like a born-again catechist and a senior religious leader like a local government councillor.
35. You are created with an intellect and a will. How do you compare human worth with anything under the sun? Know your worth. Take action now. Protect yourself. Don't behave willy-nilly. Remember, time and tide wait for no man.
36. Some people ask, unless we go to church, what will God's servants eat? It's a fundamental question. It's like asking, if we don't go to work, what are we going to eat when we've been told to work like crazy? After all, he that by the plough would thrive--Himself must either hold or drive. Here, prudence and wisdom should guide us. We should find non-discriminatory solutions. Selfishness amongst humans is not a rare virtue. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. 'The question of bread for myself is

- a material question, but the question of bread for my neighbour is a spiritual question' - Nikoli Berdyaev.
37. My brother, remember the basic human right is the right to live, and in dignity. And no one is more human than another, even if George Orwell tells us some animals are more equal than others. That's why even during the coronavirus pandemic, no one is forbidden to go out for food or medicine. If you do not eat, you will die first of starvation and later perhaps of the virus. This is also the time to eat well to boost immunity. Eat more fruits and vegetables. There are three basic human needs: food, shelter and clothing. The rest are secondary.
 38. Let's pray, then, that we may seek more: to console than to be consoled, to understand than to be understood, to love than to be loved. That's what St. Francis of Assisi taught us and, in this way, there will be peace on earth and glory in heaven now and even after the coronavirus.
 39. Africans have begun to fear each other especially amongst strangers. We're worried about getting infected by foreigners. But for people we are familiar with, life goes on like never before. Amongst friends and relatives, that's even more. We're afraid of being separated and seen as stigmatising each other. Social distancing seems to be too theoretical to comprehend.
 40. Grandparents and their grandchildren are rubbing shoulders intimately. Brothers-in-law and their sisters-in-law hang together like cut and paste. Don't forget that one person can wipe out the entire clan with a virus, in the name of love. Then, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. My friend, don't say you didn't know. Ignorance is no excuse and where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise.
 41. Former President Ali Hassan Mwinyi once said: never argue with a fool. True. But with this coronavirus, if we remain silent, the stones will speak. This is not the time for complacency.

Deception and naivety

42. Now, my friend, be vigilant also with the old man from Loliondo and his crew. That is, the elders of today are not like those of Nyerere's era. This time, Babu, a Tanzanian herbalist, will emerge with a new cup of concoction. He will call it "mcorona" and its effect on the virus will be the magic wand. We will follow it with might and main. We will be told it is a drinking sanitiser. But this time he won't accept peanuts but good money. The coronavirus will be defeated for good. And we'll just believe him. Believing everything without thinking will lead us astray. Some people just copy and paste what others do, without careful reflection. They just jump on the bandwagon. We forget that each one's soul is unique. Shaaban Robert warned us not to act like copycats, without thinking, and as such lower our value. We seem to be swimming against the tide and drifting through.
43. My friend, you will remember that Europe suspended the football tournaments and the various other sports that most Africans like watching. The ones who decided to close the games, I didn't hear being called anti sports or anti Messi and Ronaldo. They blocked public transportation, and I didn't hear them being called anti freedom of movement. They blocked political rallies and other meetings, and I didn't hear them being called anti-democracy. They closed schools and universities and I didn't hear them being called anti-education. They prevented people from going to work, and I didn't hear them being called anti-development. Of course, those who prevented people from going to the factory were never called the devil's workshop.
44. But those who say not to gather together in churches, mosques and synagogues are called mediocre if not atheists. I'm curious to see the discussion between Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Ruwa'Ichi in Tanzania and His Eminence John Cardinal Njue of Kenya regarding church gatherings. Pope Francis has already experienced first-hand what happened to Italy. You see how he celebrated Easter Mass with around twenty people only. It had never happened. Do you think the Pope lacks a

hand-sanitiser? Catholic Bishop Severine Niwemugizi of Rulenge-Ngara has thought outside the box and suspended religious gatherings. Great decision. How I wish he had done so before Easter to save more lives! A governor in Kenya has urged Muslims to stay home on Fridays. Pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina are suspended. The virus has no religion, believers have lungs. The virus might attack them unceremoniously.

45. I know the matters of faith are very complex but also at times very simple. There's a place where Jesus says my burden is light. He also says, 'but when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is in secret'. It's as if he knew human beings would be plagued by the coronavirus and would need to go into self-isolation.
46. Prayers, intercessions or petitions are not limited by space. Even the one we pray to; we don't see Him or touch Him. We can't see Him or touch Him. Not with these eyes or hands of mine or yours. No matter how hard you try. He sees what's hidden. He sees your heart. Believe and think. Faith and reason are not mutually exclusive. Blind faith is no faith. Do your homework and protect yourself. We tend to attribute our own failure to God's will and our success to our own good brains.
47. If you want to see how someone really prays, send him to a coronavirus quarantine! There're people who imprisoned Nelson Mandela and thought they had finished him. Yet, in prison he was a free man in his heart and mind. Prison walls were not an obstacle. He prayed, wrote and eventually emerged as a model leader, respected around the world. Are you going to say that the one who taught us that God is omnipresent, told us a lie?
48. Please help people to have a broad education. Little knowledge is a dangerous big challenge. Selfishness, arrogance and obstinance can also cost thousands of people for personal interest. And if thousands are affected, you can't stay safe. What good will selfishness do? Sadly, people perish because of ignorance. Do you see the consequences of graduating religious education from nursery school? Or has that been a strategy to keep the laity ignorant?

49. Now, if we prove that gatherings are a great source of the coronavirus spread, what should we do? This is a kindergarten question but why does it seem to challenge scholars and academics? What has been the use of studying Logic? We are not told there're public gatherings which can lead to the virus infection and those which cannot. How do you prove a priori and beyond reasonable doubt that this gathering is safe? No one gambles with life. Don't dice with death. Well, you say God exists. Who says he doesn't? And the coronavirus exists too. Still others say that God is the cause of the coronavirus. I don't know which god it is. So, God creates you, then kills you? Goodness me!
50. I know there's a great challenge to ask or even force people to stay home. It's a huge problem. What shall we eat? Maybe some of us in towns should go back to the villages. Let's grow spinach and other vegetables or mushrooms. Let's keep chicken and we'll eat eggs, or maybe plant sweet potatoes, but I don't know if they will grow that quickly. The virus might stay longer: Our crops might be ready before it vanishes. Let's try. For those with the ability to store cereals and other foodstuffs, do so. My friend, also learn how to eat uncommon dishes like flying termites and green hoppers, after all, they are nutritious and delicious, yummy. But they are so capricious. You can hardly predict their arrival. Now, it is not the time to get spoilt. Beggars are not choosers. At any rate, avoid bats like a plague: They are guilty of carrying Covid-19.

Coronavirus and Travel

51. My friend, there is this decision allowing only passengers who are seated 'level seat' to travel on our public means of transport. It really gives me trouble. Standing on buses isn't allowed. However, vehicles are the same, roads are the same and passengers are the same. I know half a loaf is better than no bread. I commend this decision. But it's also not enough. How many metres are there between one passenger and another if we have to observe physical distancing?

52. Travelling with the seated and leaving behind the rest, might suggest that the seated passengers are virus-free and the rest are probably infected. Those in seats continue sneezing and coughing as usual, of course a little more comfortably. About four weeks ago, a guy seated next to me sneezed in a *daladala* minibus in Mwanza. Scared, I said Lord have mercy! I didn't know what to do. Then, he sneezed the second time, and I was about to jump through the window. The *daladala* was full to the brim and no one was wearing a mask of any size, shape or form. The *bodaboda* motorcyclists take as many passengers as the motorcycles can carry. Imagine two metres between passengers on a motorcycle.
53. President Yoweri Museveni has banned such public trips in Uganda. That is, even if you have to accompany a patient to hospital, you must have a permit from a local government authority. President Paul Kagame, with more than 250 cases in Rwanda, calls for continued co-operation to fight the coronavirus. For President Jomo Kenyatta with more than 490 cases, you can go about your business during the day but at night you have to observe the curfew and stay home. In some regions of Kenya and even Congo (DRC), lockdown is in place. It's like a cobweb story: outsiders strive to enter; insiders struggle to exit. In Congo, there have been more than 680 cases. I hope you are connecting the dots like Steve Jobs.
54. Burundi, with 19 coronavirus cases, goes on with their premier football league, and with general elections around the corner, political campaigns are likely to mar the fight against the coronavirus. Let's hope football and elections aren't the launchpad of infection there. Here, we are getting ready to go for a drink or two. Sorry, for an evening discussion. We don't swear, we don't smoke, we don't drink but we leave our bloody cigarettes at the pub. Some say the best cure for Covid-19 is a glass of K/Vant. We are geared up to paint the town red, so we're heading to the salon. But the coronavirus has somehow saved the salon's budget. The devil isn't as black as it's painted. Customers who are afraid to get their heads, eyes and lips touched by hairdressers are no longer visiting salons in the name of beauty. Beauty before age, but health before beauty. Tanzania is a beautiful country and there is no hurry in Africa. Beauty without the virus

is what we need and we need it now. By the way, Tanzania is not only beautiful; it is also peaceful. Former Pope Benedict XVI said, “Tanzania is one of the most peaceful countries in the world, it does not deny sleep to the Vatican”.

55. In South Africa, there are people who disobeyed the order not to assemble. Then they gathered at a wedding party as usual while chanting and dancing the night away. Guess what happened next? The bride and bridegroom, led by the M.C. and their best man and bridesmaid, were rounded up by police officers, swaggering regally, under a haze of twinkling stars. I think the honeymoon took place behind bars, with the brides reminiscing the beauty of their wedding outfits, probably made in Wuhan.
56. Remember, too, that the Americans, Europeans and Chinese with great scientific, technological and economic power are petrified by the virus. Look at how Trump looks. He has even refused to wear a face mask in public despite his wife insisting it is mandatory. The World Health Organisation hasn't given us the latest findings on the effect of Covid-19 on marital relations. I hope one of my students will write a thesis about this effect soon. Heads of state and government amongst the so-called developed countries are affected by the virus.
57. The coronavirus does not respect a President or a King, a Prime Minister or Deputy Minister. If it has shaken the Vatican what will happen to the remotest Catholic outstation? If it has traumatised New York, what will happen to my village? For the rich and famous who have been flying out of Africa to seek first class treatment abroad can't do so now. How can they travel? Who will attend to them? The Rich also Cry. The virus is treating us equitably. Well, up to a point.

Facts, Fiction and Fake News

58. Bad news has never been worse. Gossip and hearsay are at their best. From the genesis of the virus, to the number of cases and exit strategies, everything should be taken with a pinch of salt. Don't listen to everything and believe it at face value. Again, do not spread lies and rumours. Try to

look for reliable sources of information. How will you identify them? I let you solve this puzzle. But if your one and only source of news is WhatsApp, think again. Find people who are a bit educated and exchange ideas with them. Those who have been privileged to have an education, don't be stingy. Do research, share findings, educate society, provide accurate and timely information. This isn't the time to sit on the fence or rest on our oars.

59. We must not pretend we don't see Covid-19. Even if we think it isn't real, the fact is that it will affect us mercilessly. We must take care of ourselves and of others. We shouldn't be worse than Covid-19 itself. Let's not bury our heads in the sand like an ostrich in the Serengeti, while the lion is watching our backsides, salivating with a focus on the tender parts of the anatomy. You can be sure that when you are praying to God to protect you from a roaring hungry lion in front of you, the very lion is praying to the same God to bless him for the delicious gift he is about to receive from His bounty. Are you going to tell me that's the will of God again? It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'. Why is common sense so rare? Truth be told: We need good leadership in this battle. It's time we led by examples. Remember a fish rot starts in the head.
60. I am saying all this in order to start or rather continue a discussion on our response to the coronavirus pandemic and to do a self-assessment of our behaviour towards Covid-19. And if I'm wrong, please correct me. This virus is real. It is dangerous. It is fatal. French President, Emmanuel Macron, says this is a war, a battle. Everyone has to do their part. In short, the catastrophe that afflicts Australia, Canada and Switzerland, might sweep us away. If the virus can destroy a green wood, how about a dry one?
61. They have equipment, and we have none; they have cash reserves, we have none, they have warehouses, we have none. That is, you and I have none. Medical doctors, nurses and other health care workers there are a hundred times more than here. There're so many of them in Europe, America and China but not enough. Hospitals in the US and Russia are overloaded. In

- this situation, the responsibility of governments all of over the world to protect their citizens is huge. And we have to support our governments.
62. Let citizens protect our countries and the faithful protect our religious denominations. Remember, states belong to citizens. Places of worship belong to the faithful. The rest are servants. We are not living in a monarchy or a theocracy. We are living in a democracy. Let's not put the cart before the horse. Many in Europe seem to respect government directives, few reject them. Education and force are used. Here, many of us are less co-operative, brutal force is used. Less education, more punches. I hope you remember what happened in Kenya and Uganda. At any rate, being pig-headed won't do us any good.
 63. Providing education is one thing, internalising knowledge is another thing. We teachers, though we trust that students understand what they learn, we're constantly testing their knowledge by giving them exams, tests and even quizzes. It's similar to teaching a bodaboda motorcyclist to wear a helmet. If you see him still carrying the helmet at the back like a piece of luggage instead of wearing it on his head, know that the lesson hasn't sunk in the head deep enough. I'm surprised to hear someone question if Covid-19 can reach a village.
 64. Which village doesn't receive a visitor or house residents who never leave the village? Another says the coronavirus remedy will be manufactured in Africa, and in Bukoba to be precise. And someone speaks with confidence. Probably, yes. But what is this certainty based on? Yet some say the coronavirus will go away by itself, or let's just get used to it. That's when I feel confused left, right and centre. I grope in the mental dark, simultaneously bamboozled by a combination of what feels like nausea, hiccups and heartburn. It's mindboggling, to say the least. The coronavirus will be eradicated by education, discipline and radical decisions to eradicate it. Let's not deceive one another.
 65. I see three anti-coronavirus tactics. The first is a compromise. For example, to tell a person, please cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze or avoid gatherings. The second is coercion. For example, being punished if you fail to cover your mouth or take part in unnecessary

- gatherings. The third is to willingly co-operate. You will cover your mouth at will and stay home of your own accord.
66. If your house is on fire, you won't be pampered to put the fire out. Nor will you be forced to put it out. You will take action of your own accord. The same for the coronavirus.
67. My friend, we have got one task. It is the eradication of the coronavirus. We must also be united. The words of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere declaring a war against Uganda's Idi Amin in 1978 should also help us win the war with Covid-19. We have the reason to defeat it. We have the ability to defeat it and we have the will to defeat it. The coronavirus will go. Where there is a will, there is a way.

Kudos and Condolences

68. I extend my heartfelt condolences to all those who lost their loved ones to Covid. Those who are ill, I wish them a speedy and complete recovery. May the souls of the departed rest in peace. Amen.
69. I sincerely congratulate those taking care of the people infected with the coronavirus. I call upon governments, the private sector, the civil society and all people of good will to continue providing material and emotional support to health care workers so they can protect themselves and protect others. I dare say that health care workers may be the number one martyrs of the millennium. They're risking their lives. Thumbs up health care workers! There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for the sake of others! Let's protect ourselves, protect others and ask God to remove this scourge. I believe the Almighty God will lead us safely. But don't ignore. President Museveni's words that God is too busy to look after idiots. He has other fish to fry.
70. Africans must not ignore the coronavirus or giggle at its thought. We should not despise the Westerners as weaklings or mock the Chinese by dubbing them "little coronas". Mwalimu Nyerere loathed racism up to the hilt: The sin that is racism doesn't die. Racism is worse than Covid. Ladies and gentlemen never laugh at other people or ridicule them. Mahatma

Gandhi was convinced that handsome is as handsome does. Thank God there are people who have survived the coronavirus. This is very good news indeed. The cup is half-full, not half empty. If you get Covid it doesn't mean that's the end of your life. British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has recovered from Covid. You might be lucky as well, even if Boris may not be your first cousin.

71. I know there're still people angry at those who ruled us, the colonists and colonialists. I hear they want to finish us by exporting the coronavirus to Africa. Isn't this madness? I don't quite believe it. That the Europeans failed and are now trying again. In this second scramble for Africa, as Kofi Annan put it, the Chinese are also trying their luck. But this time round, it is not colonisation but "coronisation" or the combination of the two. Unity is strength. Let's all unite. We shall win. Let's chant together, 'We shall overcome someday'. Remember, the three components of music: harmony, melody and rhythm. Harmony is European, melody is Asian and rhythm is African. Remove Africa and the triad collapses. What God has joined together let no Covid put asunder. The first World War came and passed, the second one came and passed, the third will pass. But this is not the time to put the guns down.
72. My friend, I remember last time we met when I was teaching at St. Michael's Nursery School at Otiende, Nairobi in Kenya and Kibera Slum Primary School also in Nairobi. Then I had taught at Kemono Primary School and Kashozi also known as Katerero Secondary School in Bukoba, Tanzania. I also taught at the Hekima Language Services in Lang'ata-Karen, Nairobi as well as at the Apostles of Jesus Philosophicum Major Seminary in Nairobi. From there I moved to Tanzania and taught at Kashasha Technical College, Bukoba and later on to Bugando University College of Health and Allied Sciences in Mwanza. I led Development Studies Seminars at the University of Dar es Salaam. I now teach at St. Augustine University of Tanzania in Mwanza and sometimes at the University of Vechta in Germany and the University of Innsbruck in Austria.

73. Well, if you are really attached to education you cannot leave her: not in sickness or in health.
74. I was also assigned to serve as Director of International Programmes, Head of Department, Dean of Faculty and for some time as Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs. I currently work as Executive Secretary of the Association of Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes of Africa and Madagascar.
75. Now, the coronavirus has made me stay home, to stay safe. Nevertheless, education must continue to be provided even online. If God is on our side, who can be against us? I hear some people here don't even have a clue about what to do when they're home. Be creative. Try and turn the lockdown into an opportunity.

Conclusion

76. My friend, all isn't gloom and doom. Don't give up. Cheer up. Work hard, exercise, read something useful, maintain communication, but let our mobile phones help us more than our feet. Smile and don't forget to pray. The coronavirus will pass, we shall win.
77. Remember charity begins at home but never ends there. Please, don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth, this is where the virus passes through. Likewise, do not touch your neighbour's eyes, nose, or mouth for the same reason. Finally, please greet our brothers and sisters in Angola, Cameroon, Egypt and Zimbabwe. Do say 'Hi' to the rest in other countries. Please tell them I'm well and I love them so much. I wish you wisdom, courage, peace and good health!
Your brother,

George Mutalemwa

Malimbe, Mwanza, Tanzania
+255 756 058 511
georgemutalemwa4@gmail.com
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