

Church Leaders' Role in Influencing Health Services: A Sub-Saharan African Perspective

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Abstract: In Sub-Saharan Africa of the twenty first century many nations are still challenged by the existence of poor health service systems where majority of the people cannot access preventive and curative health services. Church leaders have played a very crucial role in influencing the health services through the establishment of facilities that promote physical, emotional, spiritual health care and health of the soul. The paper highlights some initiatives taken by church leaders in providing health care and empowering communities to take responsibility for their own health. The paper further examines the role of the church leaders in providing spiritual and psychological healing of the Christian faithful. Church leaders have potentials to enhance public health services. The paper discussed some of the conflicts regarding the beliefs on health services as emphasized by various church leaders. Some of the conflicts are associated with globalization and world view regarding the human suffering in our time. The paper highpoints some issues of compassion, justice and ethical principles applied in medical field which strengthen or weaken the health services in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. The question is how do church leaders handle some of the sociocultural matters that affect individual's health today? Pope Francis says "health service is a right not a business", also in *pacem in terris* health care is a right, so human dignity should be given priority. The paper will end up with recommendations and conclusion.

Keywords: Health services, Church Leaders, Human dignity, Compassion, socio-cultural practices, healing ministries. Hope for vulnerable poor.

INTRODUCTION

Health systems are critical in all nations of the world to achieve development and the Church has made tremendous contributions on such services in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Church is concerned with physical, spiritual, mental and psychological wellbeing of the people. Many Christian denominations and Faith Based Organizations have empowered communities through provision of health services either by giving them free medical services or helping the community members acquire services with very low costs. In this way people from all walks of life, the poor and rich, Christians and non-Christians have all benefited from Church health services. The Church focuses on enhancing a wholistic human health including the healing of the body, mental, spirit and soul. In this case, the church leaders have played a role in ensuring that quality health services are provided to the people they minister, due to the fact that human dignity and wellbeing is always valued and at the center in Church plans. An individual's health is a precious asset to himself, Church, society and the nation as well.

The church leaders realize that inequality in health services around the world and especially in sub-Saharan Africa is a major concern. Some health facilities that provide medical care like hospitals, health centers or dispensaries are turned into business, making it difficult for the poor to access the services. Driven by the spirit of compassion and Justice for the sick the Church emulates Jesus Christ who had compassion for the sick, for instance in Matthew 8:14-16, mother in law of Peter was healed from fever. Also Jesus drove the evil spirits out of those who were possessed and restored the health of all the sick. In this case Jesus was a compassionate healer who valued human dignity at all levels. Michael Lang, 2004¹ opines that "Some scholars believe that Jesus spent one third of his time in healing ministries" The need for good health is a critical priority in human life, hence, the church and her leaders are called to heal, care and teach about health wholeness.

Despite many Church and Public health centers in Sub-Sahara Africa, the provision of quality and safe health services has been a challenge. This is due to lack of enough staff, medicine, and medical equipment. Multitudes of people depend on the inadequate biomedicine services from government hospitals and also from private and faith Based

¹Lang,, M. "The Church's Role in Health and Wholeness" in *Health Communication*, 16 (1), 129-130, 2004.

Organizations. However, others go to traditional healers and spiritual healers or charismatic healing ministries. This makes health system in Sub-Saharan Africa pluralistic. The article explores the role of the Church leaders in fostering the provision of health services, spiritual and psychological healing. It further discusses about Church leaders' potentiality in enhancing public health services, helping to get solutions regarding the conflicts involved, putting emphasis on compassion, justice and ethical principles in the provision of health services in Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally the paper ends up with recommendations and conclusion.

CHURCH LEADERS' ROLE IN PROVIDING HEALTH SERVICES

There has been a great initiative by the church leaders in providing quality health services through organizations that are under churches such as Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterian just to mention a few. They have been very keen in ensuring that justice is done by international and national governments in order to establish health care policies that can benefit the rich and the poor as well. For instance the Catholic Church through pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care, manages 26 percent of health care facilities in the world. The Church has more than 117,000 health care facilities, including hospitals, clinics, orphanages, as well as 18,000 pharmacies and 512 centers for the care of those with leprosy²

Unequivocally, different Catholic Church leaders have also written documents that put emphasis on quality health services to the people of God. John Paul II for instance in his Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, talks about sanctity of life, where he says that human life cannot be tampered with. He states that unborn human life has a right to be protected and that no one has a right to end other person's life since life is a gift to all human beings. He writes about "the incomparable worth of the human person" that human life is sacred from the beginning to the end, hence should be respected to the highest degree (no., 2). It is the teaching of the Church that human beings should receive health services and care whether unborn, sick or at old age, hence protecting life.

Pope Benedict XVI and other church leaders from other Christian denominations talked about the moral responsibility of nations to guarantee access to health care for all their citizens, regardless of social and economic status or their ability to pay for medical services. The pope had a concern about the war of interest between pharmaceutical companies and developing nations who have little access to medicines because they can't pay for them. He said that those manufacturers should not be driven by "profit as the only objective" in the creation and distribution of medicines³. Indeed many pharmaceutical companies produce costly drugs; hence acquire a lot of profit. A good example is GlaxoSmithKline which paid \$ 3 billion to US department of justice in 2012 to settle civil and criminal charges related to its misbranding of the drugs Paxil and Wellbutrin and its failure to disclose the safety information about diabetes drug Avandia. It is said that, this was the largest fine ever levied against the company, but still this was just a drop in the bucket, since in one year the profit is more than \$ 27.5 billion⁴

In a similar perspective, costly medication is a challenge that scares and threatens the health services many people in poor nations mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa. When the rich nations like USA, England, Netherlands and many others complain about the high prices of drugs, one can imagine what happens in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report given by one of the Economist on 21st of May, 2019 states that:

In England, the government is fighting Vertex, a drug company, over the cost of a drug for cystic fibrosis, Orkambi. In America, diabetics have died because of the high cost of insulin. In the Netherlands, the government for a time stopped buying the immuno-oncology drug, Keytruda, because it was too expensive—even though it had helped to develop it. The list price of Orkambi is about \$23,000 a month in America, and Keytruda is about \$13,600 a month (for as long as

²Flynn JD, 2010. "Catholic Hospitals Comprise one Quarter of World's Healthcare Council Reports" in Catholic News Agency. Retrieved 12/09/2019 from https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/catholic_hospitals_represent_26_percent_of_worlds_health_facilities_reports_pontifical_council

³Delaney, S. Pope Calls for Guaranteed Health Care for all people in National Catholic Reporter, 2010
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/pope-calls-guaranteed-health-care-all-people>

⁴<https://www.andruswagstaff.com/blog/big-pharma-has-higher-profit-margins-than-any-other-industry/> Retrieved June 2019.

treatment continues). It has taken such rich-world dramas to force the unaffordability of medicines to the top of the global health agenda, even though poorer countries have complained about it for decades⁵.

In such a situation the church leaders challenge the world leaders and international organizations to put more effort on helping to control the prices of drugs, particularly cancer drugs, diabetes and many others in pharmaceutical companies. According to the Research carried out in Lutheran Hospitals in Tanzania⁶ in 2009, hospitals are the largest and most costly health care institutions, hence require more human and financial resources than any other institution. The Christian Churches in Tanzania have provided hospital services for many decades. In 1995, 80 of the 195 hospitals in Tanzania were run by the Church. About 11,644 of the 25, 834 hospital beds were owned by the Church. Recently, the financial and managerial situation has become difficult to some hospitals especially when the government promises to support but does not fulfill its financial pledge⁷.

Unequivocally, Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) have always expressed their concern as regards to the action that has been taken by the WTO in relation to TRIPS and Medicines. Their concern is the effect on the poor, regarding the affordable access of medicine to all. It is well known that the poorest in developing countries are unable to access affordable medicine because members have failed to clarify ambiguities between the need for governments to protect public health on one hand and on the other to protect the intellectual property rights of pharmaceutical companies⁸. In relation to this the Church makes efforts in many ways to reduce the sufferings caused by poor health services, hence demands for the fundamental reform regarding public health and access to affordable medicines. Consequently, the Church joined the many NGOs in the third world countries to ask for reform in the TRIPS. In their Ecumenical statement to WTO, Cancun in September 2003, several Church leaders from different Christian denominations wrote a statement "...we therefore call for radical changes of the trade regime concerning intellectual property rights and recognition of the rights of developing countries to produce and import generic drugs in quantities and at the prices that serve the needs of their people"⁹.

Notwithstanding, the impact of climate change is obvious, it is accompanied with health hazards due to the outbreak of different types of illnesses. This is due to the rise of temperatures caused by global warming. The situation is made worse by climate, cost of treatment is high especially for the poor in Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance bird flu, dengue fever, cholera, Ebola, plague, tuberculosis and many other diseases are likely to spread and get worse as global warming increases year after year. A disease like Babesiosis is malaria like illness carried by ticks and is endemic in the tropics. It is becoming complicated even with antibiotic treatment because of climate change. Also cholera viruses thrive in warmer waters, so without improved sanitation, with the rising of temperature there is a possibility of many

⁵The Economist. The Global Battle Over high Drug Prices , 2019, Retrieved June 2019

<https://www.economist.com/business/2019/05/21/the-global-battle-over-high-drug-prices>

⁶FleBa, S. (ed.) Costing of Health Care Services in Developing Countries: A Prerequisite for Affordability, Sustainability and Efficiency, 2009.

<https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=yqmwrwonJgAC&pg=PA55&lpg=PA55&dq=research+in+lutheran+church+shows+health+services+are+costly+in+tanzania&source=bl&ots=2TamzmGMR&sig=ACfU3U0WcKMLvielkO22BkoCrHO8COw5A&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi7xZDw37DpAhUbiFwKHWPtCfiQ6AEwAnoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=research%20in%20lutheran%20church%20shows%20health%20services%20are%20costly%20in%20tanzania&f=false>

⁷The health care system is very costly leading to severe health crisis. Problems of financing health services lead to high patient fees which also makes the Church institutional care unaffordable for the majority of the poor. However, the Church still gives many poor people health services even when they are not able to pay.

⁸The Guardian, The WTO has Failed developing nations, 2011 Retrieved August 2019
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/nov/14/wto-fails-developing-countries>

⁹World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Statement to WTO, Cancun , 2003 , Retrieved June 2019
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/trade/ecumenical-statement-to-wto-cancun>

diseases outbreak in several place. Similarly, many parasites spread between human beings, livestock and wildlife due to higher temperatures, hence increasing the risk for the thriving of viruses and bacteria that cause deadly diseases¹⁰

Obviously, the Church has shown a concern about the deteriorating situation of the planet earth, hence, the Church leaders have raised awareness. They have shown a serious concern and so urged the people of the world to take urgent measures. For instance, Daniel J. Misleh, Daniel R. Dileo & Laura Anderko argue that Pope Francis' has taken initiative through encyclical '*Laudato SI*', where he explains the meaning of being fully human¹¹. He raises a concern about the degradation of the environment which is manifested in human failure to make the earth a healthy place for people to live. Similarly, there is a big relationship between the health of the earth and that of human beings. This is precisely because human beings are part of the planetary ecosystem¹². So the degradation of environment compromises human health, life and dignity especially for the poor, vulnerable and future generations. Notwithstanding, the current socio-ecological challenges caused by pollution and climate change, unavailability of enough clean water and clean air, the loss of biodiversity and the decline of quality of human life just to mention a few make health services more complex. Moreover, Care and empowerment of Communities to take responsibility of their health through care for environment is crucial.

On one hand the Lutheran Church has contributed a lot of resources to improve health services in many countries in the world including Sub-Saharan Africa. Organizations like Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Global health have made various efforts to help build hospitals and equip them with medicine and doctors. On the other hand, the Lutheran Church recruits short term skilled and self-supported health care volunteers who have worked in health ministries like doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, dentists, hospital health educators, medical record librarians, information technology specialists and many others. For instance the Lutheran church has 17 hospitals in Tanzania, is a major provider of health services for the last 100 years. These hospitals have training in medical surgery which admits students from all over East and Central African regions¹³.

Explicitly, it can be argued that majority of the Christian Faith based Organizations promote health beyond boundaries; they build bridges by spiritually grounded rituals to bring communities together in celebration and healing of body and soul. They command community respect and therefore can communicate with moral authority; they have spirituality that emphasizes peace, fellowship healing of the broken communities that heals bodies in addition to broken souls. They are agents of social change, committed to serve the afflicted, the sick, the lonely, and the poor. They contribute to moral values that inspire action and organizational structures able to convene sanctuary, and nurture new ideals for health improvement¹⁴

CHURCH LEADER'S PROVISION OF SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALING

Church leaders play a crucial role in influencing their congregants' health both psychologically and spiritually. This can be through writing, preaching, and interpretation of the scripture, pastoral visit in hospitals or at home, prayer services, social forums and role model. Some documents written by church leaders have been a great help in promoting health education to the faithful Christians and people of other faith traditions. The Church meets people in their suffering situations where illnesses cause much pain, for instance, old age come with health deterioration. On this account, Church leaders encourage the sick to unite their own suffering with that of Christ's passion as stated in 2 Cor. 4:10-11 "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so the life of Jesus may be also manifested in our body...".

In *Salvifici Doloris*, Pope John Paul 11¹⁵ gives insights about Christian suffering, that the Church meets people in their path of suffering. From the person who is suffering the Church encourages believers to have the spirit of compassion

¹⁰David Biello, Deadly by the Dozen: 12 Diseases Climate Change May Worsen, 2003.,mRetrieved May 2019 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/twelve-diseases-climate-change-may-make-worse/>

¹¹ Daniel J., Dileo D.R., & Anderko, L. *Laudato Si'* and Catholic Health Care, 2016, Retrieved May 2019. <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/article/may-june-2016/laudato-si%27-and-catholic-health-care>

¹²Ibid.

¹³Olivia Collins & William V. Kennedy, The Absence of –and Need for – a Trans boundary Environmental Impact: Assessment between the United States and Canada,, pp 72-73, 2017

¹⁴Dan C.O. Kaseje, Harrison C. Spencer & Esther K. N. Sembebwa. Characteristics and Functions of Community Health Workers in Saradidi, Kenya, pp. 56-66, 2016

¹⁵John Paul 11., *Salvifici Doloris*, The Christian Meaning of Suffering, February 11, 1984.

manifested by the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:32-34). It is in this kind of situation where the Church's nearness, presence, fostering attention and dialogue is important. Sharing and helping the individuals in moments of sickness and suffering, is a way to demonstrate the love of God. In this case there is much to do with Good Samaritan in profession of medical doctors, nurses and many related professions that give similar health services. Moreover, it is about the deepest need of the heart and deep imperative faith (nos. 4, 28) which drives people to give donations for hospital facilities, volunteer to construct hospitals, health center and dispensaries just to mention a few.

The Church has put into practice the Good Samaritan Gospel teaching through provision of spiritual and psychological treatment to multitude of Christians and non-Christians. In relation to that, there are people who take part in the healing process of the sick due to their persistent visit and the love they show to them, encouragement they give through prayers and moral support. This has proved to be very helpful to patients admitted in hospitals, even those bedridden in their homes. Research shows that sick people who are not often visited by friends or relatives feel isolated and can sink into depression making the sickness worse. Those who are visited take interest in life and their health improves dramatically¹⁶.

It must be noted that health integrates our spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional and social life. In this perspective, the church leaders have shown a great concern as regards to health wholeness which helps proper psychological and physical function of an individual. A Greek philosopher, Plato writing about health once said "it is best to cure the soul before curing the body, since health and happiness ultimately depend on the state of the soul." He said that mental and physical health is the foundation of health mindedness¹⁷.

Church leaders make efforts and speak to rescue their faithful as regards to economic difficulties that have affected the people's health. A good example is Zimbabwe 2008, when there was a serious shortage of food which also threatened the provision of health services. Inflation was at 231 million percent. At this rate of inflation 300,000 Zimbabwean dollars was not enough for one family meal a day. Pregnant women were not sure how to deliver and in some schools some pupils collapsed because of food shortage. Lutheran leaders urged the Zimbabweans who were outside the country to intervene through donations. In addition, the Lutheran Church leaders asked some donations from the international Lutheran federation and Lutheran Relief Services organization so that the local leaders could be able to help people who were in desperate situations¹⁸.

CONFLICT IN PROVISION OF HEALTH SERVICES AND COMPASSION FOR THE SUFFERING

Health services accompanied with compassion is vital to the patients experiencing the illness for a long time. Regarding the issue of HIV/AIDS several Church leaders reacted differently, Basil Zion in his article on the Orthodox Church and AIDS crisis opine that unconditional compassion is the most fitting way of responding to people infected and affected by AIDS¹⁹. The deep care of love for the sick is an emphasis to help psychological healing of the patient. Pope Benedict XVI²⁰ in his encyclical letter 'God Loves' *Deus Caritas Est*, asserts that the Church's deepest nature and responsibility is expressed in exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). Therefore, charity through health services, loving, caring and giving moral and spiritual support to the patients are crucial. As the family of God the Church cannot let one go without the necessities of life which include health services.

¹⁶Boniface, A. (2016). Visiting the Sick can ease pain and suffering" in Catholic Herald, Retrieved April 2019
<https://catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2016/09/21/visiting-the-sick-can-ease-pain-and-suffering/>

¹⁷Burton, N. Plato and Aristotle on Health and Disease, 2002 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/hidden-and-seek/201203/plato-and-aristotle-health-and-disease>, Retrived August 2019

¹⁸Eric Young.. Church Leaders: Zimbabwe Health Services, People Collapsing, 2008
<https://www.christianpost.com/amp/church-leaders-zimbabwe-health-services-people-collapsing.html> Retrieved June 2019

¹⁹B. Zion, "The Orthodox Church and the AIDS Crisis" in AIDS Ethics and Religion: Embracing a World of Suffering . Kenneth R. Overberg (ed) Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994

²⁰Pope Benedict XVI, God is love Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 2005, no. 25.

Clearly, the pope is calling for Christians to take the leading example of Good Samaritan, to love and help other people in need, especially the sick (Lk. 10:31). Doing good or loving the sick demonstrates compassion and can psychologically heal them. Sometimes loneliness and rejection can increase the level of sickness and even earlier death. It is in the Spirit of compassion and doing good that has moved the African bishops in their synod to raise their concern about the inadequate medical services in Sub-Saharan Africa. Due to this reality many people continue to suffer and die of diseases that can be treated especially in the rural and poor urban areas. They warn the irresponsible sexual behavior that spread AIDS, hence recommend the tireless reminder to married couples to be faithful to each other and for the youth to learn the importance of fidelity and chastity. The synod document further advocates for good health, that everyone's efforts to live a true Gospel teaching is important as stated by Pope John Paul II.

The battle against AIDS ought to be everyone's battle. Echoing the voice of the Synod Fathers, I too ask pastoral workers to bring to their brothers and sisters affected by AIDS all possible material, moral and spiritual comfort. I urgently ask the world's scientists and political leaders, moved by the love and respect due to every human person, to use every means available in order to put an end to this scourge²¹

Nevertheless, some faith-healing events are believed to be miracles by God through the pastor who is believed to have direct communication with the Divine. It must be noted that some ministries of healing and deliverance have become the most important expressions of Christianity in Africa. Consequently, due to such beliefs pastors claim to perform miracles which are not genuine. Such pastors lack compassion towards the care of the sick, since they mainly look for fame and money which lead to more suffering on the part of the sick. It is very amazing the way some religious leaders can manipulate their Church members to the extent of cheating them that they can cure Ebola by holy water. TB Joshua sent holy water to Sierra Leone and claimed to have cured Ebola and that he had ability to cure incurable illnesses like HIV AIDS and cancer, as a result patients took the holy water from the pastor and stopped taking their drugs, consequently, they died²².

In a different occasion prophet Panuel Mngunus of end time disciple ministries in Pretoria, South Africa ate part of a snake and also urged the members of his church to eat believing that it would become chocolate²³. This kind of faith healing is questionable; and in conflict with Christian faith, medical ethics, health services and human dignity. Additionally, "pastor Lesego Daniel from Nigeria made his congregants eat grass, drink petrol, and eat flowers", a sign of manipulation because miracles according to the law of nature should be in the mind and harmony with Christ. Other people exposed their nakedness in front of the audiences to prove their health status, or vomiting and urinating blood in front of the masses, one wonders about the chastity and authenticity of these events²⁴.

In Northern Tanzania drinking the cup of medicine from the retired Lutheran pastor attracted many sick people from different parts of East Africa and beyond to travel to Loliondo, Arusha. Unfortunately, many of them were seriously sick and some had been removed from the hospitals. Consequently, majority of the patients did not even reach the place to take the medicine, they died on the way, and others died after they arrived, while others died later especially those who abandoned their ARV, for the HIV/AIDs patients. Some diabetic patients also did not take their medicine because the pastor gave them hope that after praying for them and taking the medicine they would be fine. The pastor prayed for the medicine and then gave it to the patients urging them to have faith because God is the one who heals. Some hospitals had warned patients especially those with serious conditions not to abandon their medicine because they had seen the risk, but some did not listen. This was a serious conflict between biomedicine and the belief in Spiritual powers which is currently a real challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa²⁵.

²¹John Paul II Evangelium Vitae, 25 March 1995, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html, Retrieved June 2019

²²Hameno, N. Prophetic churches in Zimbabwe, 2014a. <https://www.kas.de/web/simbabwe/laenderberichte/detail/-/content/prophetic-churches-in-zimbabwe> , Retrieved July 2019

²³Kalebongile Resane,, Miracle in the Neo-charismatic, 2017.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵Ubwani, Z. Loliondo PilgrimageMarred by Deaths and Accidents <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Loliondo-pilgrimage-marred-by-deaths-and-accidents----/1056-1133624-fgx12bz/index.html> from Daily Nation, Saturday March 26, 2011, Retrieved June 2019.

On a similar note, majority of Pentecostal Churches put emphasis on faith healing during their sermons. They encourage the sick people to attend mass gatherings in the hope of being healed. Mayrargue²⁶ argues that miracle campaigns, special healing programs and vigil prayers for deliverance are common slogans in Sub-Saharan African towns and cities. Banners and posters are found almost everywhere in city walls all pointing to the healing services. Thus, faith healing is overemphasized, and at times seriously sick patients ignore their medication and go for such mass gatherings where at times it is in the open place with scorching sun, making the patient's condition worse. Faith healing has proved to be dangerous because the healer tells the patients that they have been healed and hence stop taking their medications. God wants his people to be in good health always, but people need to follow the doctor's advices. Some call themselves prophets and do advertisements that they can heal cancer, leprosy, HIV/AIDS, and blindness. Prophets in the Scriptures do what God tells them to do, to enable blinds see, deaf to hear, the mute to speak and cripples to walk. However, one may ask why are there many contradictions that accompany the miracles performed by the so called prophets in our time?

Many patients go for healing due to conflicts between the affordability of the official health care system which challenges both local decision makers and health management consultants. Some have beliefs in witchcraft; demonic activities and possession hence, conceive the situation as spiritual warfare. Several pastors believe and tell their followers that they have been endowed by God to bring physical healing to their followers as a proof of validity of their preaching. Healing and deliverance is highly advocated in some churches²⁷. In several churches people give testimonies on how they suffered going to the traditional healers and hospitals, but now they are healed due to prayers of certain pastors.

Kagwa²⁸ opines that majority of Pentecostal pastors preach about prosperity and good health, but insist that sickness or misfortune comes as a punishment due to sinful life situations while good health is attributed to living righteous life and obedience to God. However, in reality, hostility in the world, violence, conflicts, wars, global warming make people worried and feel uncertain about their future lives. They feel powerless, helpless and hopeless, insecure; they search for physical and mind good health plus peace. The Church seems to have an ability to offer some psychological and spiritual solution. Ibrahim²⁹ says that the modern psychology and science lack any solution for such an existential crisis; as a result, people usually turn to a spiritual quest. Some of the healing ministries have not been a priority in the mainline churches. However, Charismatic movements contribute to healing ministries like exorcism of the evil spirits that bring illness to people, hence, giving the healing event a sense of completeness and wholeness³⁰.

Undoubtedly, spiritual exercises like fasting, praying, meditation, casting out demons are important aspect of African spirituality, and that is the way several independent churches confront sicknesses. Fasting is a noble Christian spiritual exercise but some go to the extreme, especially when certain church leaders urge the sick to fast, hence a conflict, because, fasting while taking medication is quite difficult and dangerous for health. However, fasting can also be of health benefit as reported by Sarr KO, Tzanakis NE, Linardakis MK, Mamalakakis GD & Kafotos A.G³¹ in their research in Crete, Greece. Accordingly, positives of fasting include blood sugar control, reducing insulin resistance, fighting

²⁶Mayrargue, C. The Paradoxes of Pentecostalism in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2008.. <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/enotes/notes-de-lifri/paradoxal-dynamics-pentecostalism-sub-saharan-africa>

²⁷ A. Uka, African Christianities: Features, Promises and Problems: Department of Anthropology and African Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany, 2007.

²⁸J. Kagwa., The Role of the Theology of retribution in the growth of Pentecostal Charismatic Churches in Africa', Verbum et Ecclesia 37 (1), a1542. United Church of Zambia, 2016.

²⁹Ibrahim, M.. The Rise and Proliferation of new Religious movements (NRMs) in Nigeria. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 3 No. 15, 2013.

³⁰Majawa, C.C.A. The Holy Spirit and the Charismatic renewal in Africa and Beyond. Nairobi: Creations Enterprises, 2007.

³¹Sarr KO, Tzanakis NE, Linardakis MK, Mamalakakis GD, Kafotos AG , "Effects of Greek Orthodox Christian Church Fasting on Serum Lipids and Obesity" in BMC Public Health, 2003 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12753698>. Retrieved June 2019

inflammation, improving blood pressure, triglycerides and cholesterol levels, boosting brain function, as well as, preventing neurodegenerative disorders. However, health experts say that some negatives that occur during and after fasting need to be watched³².

In Zambia a pastor died for malnutrition while trying to complete 30 days of fasting. This pastor wanted to set an example to his Christians, so at one time he fasted for 90 days eating only one meal a day. It is clear that fasting is recommended for spiritual nourishment, repentance, humility, for devotion and worship³³. By doing the fasting one crucifies the body, hence the practice becomes a source of spiritual power. However as it is stated in Mathew 6:16 pastors encourage their flock to fast but majority neglect nutritious food when they break the fast or they over eat, hence, potential weight gain resulting to health problems and even death. Additionally, when one breaks the fast without healthy diet, it can cause liver and kidney problem. Due to such negative effects the government of Rwanda adopted a law that prohibits church leaders from urging Christians to fast for length period in order to secure God's blessings³⁴.

Church leaders preach in the open air, this is done many times by Pentecostal and other new movement's preachers. Some people attend these big evangelical gatherings because they are sick, they are looking for miracle healing, some stay in the sun for many hours, consequently, their situation becomes worse, even others die in such situation. Recently two people died and many others were taken to the hospital in critical condition after attending a mass open air faith healing session in north eastern Sri Lanka. About 10,000 people attended this gathering majority of them seriously ill³⁵. This type of gathering is also very common in Sub-Saharan Africa where similar incidents of sick people fainting occur.

Pastors in the new religious movements want to prove that they are able to perform healing miracles, hence go as far as faking them. A good example is prophet Kanyari who was caught on camera coaching someone to cheat and give false testimonies. It is unfortunate that a church leader can cheat about someone's health in order to get money³⁶. Instead, the church should help the faithful to understand the meaning of illness, suffering and death. One can be prayed for, treated by biomedicine or even given counseling. Praying for a sick helps one to accept the situation, because some illnesses are long-lasting. Medicine is to bring the healing, to ease the suffering where they could and make spiritual meaning of it where they could not. When healing happens, the hand of God got the credit, and when healing fails one should still keep faith due to the fact that God is still in control.

It is unfortunate that some government leaders dispute the health services given by religious leaders to help people. Church health services are just for helping the needy people not for profit. So the governments that do not have interest in promoting health services for their people are a hindrance to development in that field. Similarly, for a nation to develop, it needs healthy people in all dimensions, that is why the government and church work together to ensure that citizens have good health services. When the government does not want to cooperate with faith organizations to enable the provision of this service easier then people suffer. A good example is the government of Eritrea that seized Catholic Church health centers recently for no good reason. Patients were found in those health centers when soldiers closed them. They were told to go home without any treatment; this is unfair to the sick people. The Catholic Church was running 20 health centers in the country; many of them are the property of the monasteries. The church's main concern

³²Tripanowski JF and Bloomer RJ, "The Impact of Religious Fasting on human Health" in Nutrition Journal 2010 Nov. , 9, 57, 2010 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2995774/>, Retrieved August 2019

³³Dokosi, M.E. Zambian Pastor Dies of Malnutrition while trying to Complete 30 Days Fasting, 2019 <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/zambian-pastor-dies-of-malnutrition-while-trying-to-complete-30-days-fasting> , Retrieved August 2019

³⁴Ssuuna, I. (2019). Rwanda Restricts Fasting as 8000 Churches closed <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/august/rwanda-churches-closed-fasting-restricted>

³⁵People Daily, Two die, 13 Critical after faith Session, Monday, September 9, 2019, pg. 15

³⁶Namu, J,A (2015). Prayer Predators. Nairobi: Kenya Television Network, 2015.

is service to people not opposing the government³⁷. This is very unfortunate in Eritrea because in many parts of the world and even Sub-Saharan African countries, the government work with the religious institutions in order to improve the health services of their people. Contrary to what is happening in Eritrea, governments are obligated to adopt the proper legislative, administrative and financial measures to provide health care along with other basic conditions that promote good health, such as food security, water and housing. Private health insurance companies also should conform to human rights legislation and see to it that privatization does not become a threat to the accessibility, availability and quality of health care, goods and services.

SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES AND PROVISION OF HEALTH SERVICES IN SUB-SAHARAN.

It is a common understanding that many situations and practices that affect the provision of health services in human life exist. In sub-Saharan Africa, several beliefs and practices affect individuals' health positively or negatively. Taking health services from East African socio-cultural perspective, the majority are Christians but also believe that some people have ability to use evil powers to make someone sick or even cause death through witchcraft. Such practices cause physical harm to human beings, animals or even crops. On this account healing may be through some traditional medicine and cleansing rituals³⁸. In a similar perspective, "Fr. Patrick Lafon, former secretary general of the bishops' conference in Cameroon, said that many Catholics may show up for Mass on Sunday, but if there's sickness in the family, they'll also consult their tribal medicine man to find out who placed the curse and what they need to do to lift it"³⁹.

Explicitly, Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa take issues of health very seriously, so sickness is a blow to families, communities and society as a whole. They look forward to be liberated from powers of witchcraft or curses⁴⁰. Sickness brings a lot of challenges to families and individuals due to high cost of health services, so majority of the sick go for divine healing even when they are not sure because they are just told to have faith, but also go for biomedicine when traditional healers fail.

Several people also have a belief that curses, breaking taboos, or ancestral spirits can cause trouble in families or even cause illnesses. Such health problems cannot be treated in the hospital; they need some special experts called diviners for helping such sick people to identify the problem then treat it. They break the negative force that affects individuals through rituals⁴¹. This has proved to be effective in some parts of Africa, where biomedicine has failed to respond to the sickness. However, most of these beliefs conflict with the Christian teaching and faith as stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that revelation is in God's own time and choice⁴², so all forms of divination that involves conjuring up of the dead or other ways used to unveil future or involving resource mediums all conceal a desire for power over time and History. So believing in witchcraft and consulting the diviners contradicts the Christian faith especially lack of faith in the power of God to restore health. The Catholic Church encourages people "to foster the assimilation of positive values such as belief in a Supreme Being who is Eternal, Creator, Provident and Just Judge, values which are readily harmonized with the content of the faith"⁴³.

Notwithstanding, some views from West Africa reveal that the hospitals can be there, but some sick people can only be helped by traditional healers or be prayed for, keeping in mind that the gift of biomedicine is also from God. That God

³⁷Njuguna, F. "East African Bishops Condemn Eritrea Seizure of Church Health Centers" in Catholic News Services, 2019 <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2019/06/26/east-african-bishops-condemn-eritrea-seizure-of-church-health-centers/> Retrieved July 2019

³⁸Mbula, J. Our Religious Heritage. Hong Kong, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1982.

³⁹Allen, J. L. "Condemned by Pope, Witchcraft a reality in Africa" in National Catholic Reporter, 2009 <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/condemned-pope-witchcraft-reality-africa> Retrieved June 2019

⁴⁰Mbiti, J.S. Bible and Theology in African Christianity, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1992, pg. 72.

⁴¹Ndeti, J. The Akamba Mirror, Kijabe, Kesho Publications, 1979, pg. 16

⁴²Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995, no. 2116.

⁴³Jean-Baptiste, "African Traditional Religion and the Catholic Church in Light of the Synods for Africa" in African Human Rights Law Journal, Vol. 14 no. 1, January, 2014.

has all the power to do what he wills and at certain situations human beings have to accept God's Will. Ludovic Lado⁴⁴ carried out a research in Côte d'Ivoire, hence states:

....although biomedicine and spiritual therapy are perceived as complementary, spiritual therapy is considered superior to biomedicine for the following reason: biomedicine only covers a category of disease—physical illness—while spiritual therapy would deal effectively with all diseases. In other words, the first one is limited while the second is not, because God is not limited. At the same time, in the management of a therapeutic itinerary, priority is given to the hospital in cases of physical illness. It is when the hospital is not proving effective that recourse is made to religious practitioners. But how can we reconcile the belief that the therapeutic power of God is not limited when there are many cases where, despite the intervention of religious therapists, the death of the patient may ensue? A religious therapist says: "My wife had cancer. We prayed for her and that cancer disappeared. Three to four months after, there were ganglions on her body. We did everything in cancerology. We did a lot of medical examinations: 18 scans. Still, we could not find the disease. She was bound to use tablets, sedatives, but finally she died.

In all the efforts made to bring good health to patients, it is imperative that people acknowledge the power of God who works on his own way. When a Christian believer gets sick, he/she is advised to look for treatment depending on the type of sickness, one can get biomedicine or traditional treatment by using herbs. Moreover, in these entire treatments one is encouraged to put the trust in God who is the source of life and good health. One is encouraged to look for treatment but also to surrender to the creator who is the Alpha and Omega of all that lives on earth. It is unfortunate that some people take advantage to manipulate the sick in order to get money or demonstrate their spiritual powers to the point of violating their human dignity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Church leaders should advocate for health systems that can easily reach the poor especially in our time when the gap between the rich and poor is widening. This can be done by constantly urging the national and world leaders to put in place policies that will help to control the prices of drugs in pharmaceutical companies.
- Government policies should help to control the church leaders that cause suffering to the sick, especially those who use illness as a way to manipulate the sick and harvest money from families by promoting fake healing.
- The church leaders should advocate for the reduction or elimination of the use of persistent bio-accumulative toxicants, carcinogens or other high hazard chemicals that pollute the Planet Earth and can lead to a wide range of diseases
- Church leaders should continue to encourage the increasing use of sustainable energy-efficient, renewable energy and materials and "climate-friendly" operations that can help create green and healthy jobs and mitigate the adverse health effects of climate change.
- The Church should also encourage the private health insurance companies to conform to human rights legislation and see to it that privatization does not become a threat to the accessibility, availability and quality of health care and good services to all.
- Church leaders should encourage Christian health care professionals to take the lead in helping to improve societal structures as well as to eliminate some of their own in-house causes of ecological problems. This should include institutional sustainability assessment and benchmarking, revising hospital and system policies and procedures to improve sustainability and reduce carbon footprint, and advocating in support of ecologically minded public policies

CONCLUSION

Church leaders are instrumental in promoting health services in sub-Saharan Africa. There is enough witness that without Church health services the situation would have been unbearable in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Some hospitals and other institutions that provide health services have existed even before political independence of many African countries. For many years the Church has struggles in many ways to finance the health services in many places where people are poor. So the Church has continued to look for financial resources that help to construct new hospitals

⁴⁴ Lado, L. Perspectives of Christian Healers on Biomedicine in sub-Saharan Africa, 2018
<https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/perspectives-of-christian-healers-on-biomedicine-in-sub-saharan-africa/> Retrieved 10/09/2019

and their maintenances in order to ensure that many people are able to access biomedicine together with all the other spiritual and psychological services needed to help the sick. This helps the Church to provide holistic health services while trying to curb some challenges that come along the way. In a nut shell the Church continues to be explicitly an important partner in the delivery of health services in Sub-Saharan Africa; which includes the establishment of new hospitals, health centers and dispensaries, training of doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, and many others that work in hospitals to save the lives of people. At the moment the Church health facilities work in partnership with the government to help bridge major gaps in rural poor areas.

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