

Is Kaziimba paying the price for his recent comments?

The barrage of insults hurled at the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda Stephen Kaziimba, at a church service in Boston, Massachusetts, leaves no one in doubt that some Ugandans are very angry with him. The Church tried to play down the incident, calling it a "brief disruption... caused by a small group of individuals who have not yet been identified".

But the insults are not surprising. On social media, it is common to find memes and crude jokes targeting Archbishop Kaziimba. Rightly or wrongly, many Ugandans view him as an extension of the ruling elite that is blamed for repression.

Matters are not helped by the fact that when he tried to respond to his critics on social media, he said in no uncertain terms that it is not his job to speak out for the victims of repression. In fact, he cited the famous example of former Archbishop Janani Luwum, who was murdered by Idi Amin's government for condemning human rights violations — and said he did not want his life to end the same way.

Many expect religious leaders to speak out when people are suffering, when politicians are jailing innocent men and women for their political views or affiliations.

Archbishop Kaziimba has not been completely silent. A quick search shows he has, at times, condemned rights violations.

But few people know this, and many will remember religious leaders who have spoken out the most such as Archbishop Paul Ssemogerere of Kampala Archdiocese.

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expectations. As he rightly said: "I am a person. I need life also. I have life to live. I am not your saviour to carry all your problems. You take them to the cross."

These words are pregnant with meaning. Religious people have high expectations of religious leaders, and sometimes this leads to disappointment.

Religion, it should be noted, works in strikingly similar ways to politics. In politics, interests are pretty much everything. If a religious leader knows that working closely with a government that has been widely criticised for human rights violations will further his interests, he will not say what needs to be said. He does not want to rock the boat, as they say.

That is how most people behave. They focus on the practical side of their interests.

Here's another example to drive my point home. On March 15, *Daily Monitor* published a story with this headline: 'Clergy appeal to Museveni for special government support to improve their livelihoods'.

It quoted Dr Girado Olukol, the chairperson of the Bukedi Council of Bishops, as saying: "We are not opposed to the saying that our rewards await us in Heaven, but we also want to enjoy the blessing on earth..."

The bishops were asking the government to consider them for poverty-alleviation programmes. It contributed Shs50m to organise the event. This suggests that even if Uganda's human rights record deteriorated further, some religious leaders would be less inclined to speak out.

Perhaps religious leaders would behave differently if all their material needs were taken care of by God. But He does not.

If the clergy do not get money from people they serve or politicians, God does not provide it. If they criticise an authoritarian government and it retaliates, God cannot provide any real protection.

That is why Archbishop Kaziimba said he does not want to go the Luwum way. Religious leaders fear death just like the people they lead.

So while many Opposition supporters, especially those of the National Unity Platform, continue to languish in prison, some religious leaders will continue to ignore their plight.

They know that innocent people are suffering. They know who is detaining them. And they know that the rights of those illegally incarcerated are being violated. But they will continue to pretend that all is well.

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