mountainside terrain.

Continuous cultivation without adequate fallow disease cycles have become impractical for farmers with very limited land.

cial fabric of rural communities.

It is probably not too late to reverse the decline

Dr. Mulera is a paediatrician and neonatologist.

A leopard, a shepherd, and bleating sheep

It was plainly spoken by the ninth Archbishop of the Church of Uganda and Bishop of Kampala, the Most Reverend Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu Mbowa.

To those who beseech religious leaders to use their good offices and privileged positions in life to speak out against the NRM government's excesses, especially abduction and imprisonment of opponents for long periods without trial, this is what he had to say.

That he is a person with a family who also fears being killed. Dying for speaking truth to power in a confrontational manner like the late Archbishop Janani Luwuum did, does not have a lot of impact as it ends one's mission. He would rather do so privately with love than go telling it on the mountain.

This was as honest and realistic as they get and quite revealing too. For instance, by stating his fear of death, he equates the powers that be to Idi Amin, a man who President Museveni loathes and denigrates as a murderous buffoon. Also, the confession that he is not a saviour but a fallible human being disabuses Ugandans of the notion that they should just stand by and wait for redemption caused by the Church.

But much as high office and leadership come with rewards and privileges, there are concomitant risks. The mark of good leaders is the way they face challenges as opposed to self-preservation.

Suffice to say that the Church of Christ is strengthened by martyrdom and sacrifice, right from St Stephen to John the Baptiser to the Uganda Martyrs to Janani Luwuum, and that is why they are celebrated. In the Bible, there is no record of Jesus belittling John for what led to his beheading.

Ironically, on June 3, the bishops implore the faithful to emulate the martyrs. Of course, they don't mean copying their mundane hairstyles or dress codes. It is a reference to dying, literally or figuratively, for their faith.

One may fault the archbishop on many fronts. For instance, when the Church is in need of funding its activities, it does not take it to the cross like the archbishop tells the faithful to do with the cries against injustice. Instead, it preaches the gospel of 'the importance of giving'. It looks towards the pockets of the faithful, who also have lives to live and families to feed.

Secondly, clerics don't necessarily need to speak. Their actions may be louder and more impactful. Globally, the Church creates awareness by dedicating, say one Sunday in every month to the cause of social justice for those suffering specific injustices like abduction and imprisonment. They may call for donations to help the families of such victims and go to prison to pray with them. On February 23, prayers were scheduled for Dr Kizza Besigye, all political prisoners, and the sick. The State stopped them, meaning it got the message. Thirdly, not every cleric who has spoken truth to power ends up being killed. But they are terribly inconvenienced, like it happened to Archbishop Desmond Tutu in apartheid South Africa, who was banned from travelling for campaigning against apartheid.

More than the death of clerics, the 'inconvenience' of being at odds with the government is the most existential threat Ugandans and the Church face today. It is common with media houses being barred from State functions, to the revoking of civil society organisation licenses, to Opposition parties being stopped from campaigning.

Uganda, as most have come to learn, is increasingly about the President's family and the circle that surrounds them. Their favour brings fortune,

...the 'inconvenience' of being at odds with the government is the most existential threat Ugandans and the Church face today.



Nicholas Sengoba
Plainly speaking

while the consequences of their displeasure are gravely ruinous.

Yet in this ecosystem, the Church in Africa and Uganda today has a major challenge of funding following the disagreements with the global north, which is mainly the wealthy Western countries. The majority of prelates in poor countries in the global south under the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) have issues with the liberal attitude towards same sex marriages and, in some cases, the ordination of women. They are for upholding conservative Anglican tradition and teaching.

Increasingly, the benefactor of the Church is the government. President Museveni, in particular, has been very magnanimous in this regard. Every newly consecrated bishop walks away with a brand-new four-wheel drive vehicle and a cash gift. Most Church development projects like schools and hospitals, are similarly gifted. The Church House that risked being auctioned by the bank was financially salvaged partly by President Museveni.

Where the Church has had challenges with, say, squatters on its land, the President's orders carry more weight than a supreme court judgement. Antagonising such deep pockets is like poking the back side of a leopard. The numbers may dwindle in the CoU, which already is under pressure from conversions to the Pentecostal movement. In fact, bishops and priests may rebel against their shepherd, the archbishop.

Religion plays a very important role for believers in Uganda's identity politics. During the religious wars between 1888 and 1892, Muslims, Protestants, and Catholic factions competed for political power. It brewed and spilt over to the pre-independence contention between the predominantly Catholic Democratic Party (DP) of Benedicto Kiwanuka and the Protestant leaning Uganda People's Congress (UPC) of Milton Obote. The British fought to create an 'Anglican Presidency' by manipulating the electoral system. This, together with the alliance between UPC and Kabaka Yekka, brought Obote to the apex. A parishioner as president means a lot to a religious sect.

Whatever is said about Amin, Muslims relish the period he ruled between 1971-1979. Several were catapulted into the high echelons of power, the economy, and in social standing.

Because Museveni is an Anglican, it is unlikely that the CoU would come down hard on one of their own even if the faithful feel a soft approach to the excesses of power is ineffective and leaves the sheep bleating on their own.

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