

Recommendations on the Management of Religious Fraud and Doomsday Cults in Kenya

By Reuben Kigame

“Do you not know that the Saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!” (1 Corinthians 6:2-3)

It is time for the Church in Kenya to put its foot down and save lives and loss of property by innocent Kenyans. It is time to be ruthless with fraud in the name of God, Christ, Church, Ministry, Christian organization, etc. If we are strict with all kinds of crime, we should be even stricter with crimes in the name of religion.

In July 1994, I resigned from the TSC to establish Word of Truth Ministries, an apologetics organization that explains biblical Christianity and defends it from its unwarranted critics. This has taken me to many countries for speaking engagements, training programs as well as one-on-one counseling with victims of cultic and occultic deception and exploitation. But what prompted me to go into this area? The sort of thing that has recently occurred in Shakahola, Malindi, Kenya. I was deeply concerned by the 1993 Waco, Texas, FBI siege of David Koresh of the Branch Davidians movement which used the book of Revelation to teach that the end of the world was coming and that people needed to arm themselves for the final “Armageddon.” In 1978, Jim Jones from Guyana, South America, had led more than 900 people to drink poison believing that Jesus was coming in a spaceship to pick them and they needed to have the last “holy communion”, which was a poisonous drink given to them by Jim Jones.

As we operated as an apologetics organization, six years after establishment, two huge events occurred around us. In March 2000, in neighbouring Uganda, Joseph Kibwetere of the Church of the Ten Commandments burned over one thousand people in a wooden church structure in Kanungu, Western Uganda. Ugandan journalists have checked the incident closely and indicated that Kibwetere had first received lots of money and properties before killing the members. Again, in April of that year, Benny Hinn visited Nairobi and lied to a huge throng of Christian faithfuls that miracles were taking place enabled by Jesus' personal physical appearance at the meeting. I wrote a 28-page circular to the Kenya churches which landed me into deep soup as many pastors pronounced me an "enemy of the Church." I have equally been accused of being an enemy by warning against the "House of Yahweh" cult from Nyandarua, the university don that was starving his family in Nairobi in the name of fasting, speaking against the erroneous teaching of David Owuor and his cultic separation of families, property issues and idolatry through human worship. Recently the Kenya church has not liked me for saying that statehouse was overdoing religion, polarizing and dividing Christians in Kenya. In fact, when I came out supporting Attorney General Githu Muigai's call for the regulation of churches in 2016, the evangelical church castigated me. Last year, when I publicly indicated that I supported what Mama Ida Odinga was asking for with regard to the regulation of churches, I was deemed a member of Azimio, even though I was an independent presidential aspirant.

So, here I am again. Following what has happened in Shakahola, what might be my recommendation to minimize religious fraud in Kenya, since deception will be with us till the very end?

1. The Evangelical Alliance of Kenya, the National Council of Churches of Kenya and the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, and any other officially-registered religious body in Kenya should come together and establish something like the "Kenya Religious Institutions Regulatory Authority" (KRIRA) which should be tasked with vetting all registered church bodies that wish to operate as a church, ministry or organization. The body should also conduct regular monitoring of what is taught in churches, on radio and television, in market centers, town halls and public transport. Perhaps a license can be obtained from KRIRA before being forwarded to the government for registration the same way the church cooperates with government in the registration of marriages. This body should also have powers to deregister.
2. The Communications Authority, the Kenya Films Classification Board, the Kenya Union of Journalists, the Media Council of Kenya, the Media Owners Association, etc. should come together and agree on the qualifications a media house must meet in order to be registered or deregistered. Clearly, a lot of religious broadcasts are not being monitored. By the time Paul Mackenzie is teaching that Kenyans should not go to hospital, or quit school, or reject the Huduma Number, etc, this should have been picked up as tell-tell signs of danger. Why such preachers have continued to operate without regulation, I don't know. By the time religious broadcasters are showing vomit, blood and violent handling of congregants on the screen or the abuse of women by pastors touching them inappropriately in the name of prayer and deliverance (and that on the screen for public broadcast), someone is sleeping on his/her job.
3. The DCI and entire police department need to be more vigilant when communities or individuals begin to exhibit unusual behavior. If a group goes to fast in a forest or cave for three days, seven days or twenty-one days, forty days or longer and it does not catch the attention of the security forces, something is

wrong. I am not saying we should stop Christians or Muslims from fasting, but if ten of us isolate ourselves with no parent or family member knowing, something is wrong. People have blamed the national government for the Shakahola incidents, but I ask, where is the county government of Kilifi? Where is the governor? Where is the Senator? Where is the Women Rep? Where is the MCA for Shakahola? Is it imaginable that for years, even after the flagging of the cult by Dr. Ezekiel Mutua and his KFCB team in 2017-18, none of these leaders have known anything about Paul Mackenzie's activities in Shakahola? Honestly? They should resign and the people of Kilifi elect a more caring team.

4. It is time for banks to be a little more patriotic. Banks should help flag unusual financial and property activities. If I have been banking 5000, 10000, 1000,000 shillings a week or per month and then, all of a sudden, I bring to the bank a big cheque or make an unusual bank transfer, say, of 20 million shillings, the way Paul Mackenzie happened to receive such a large sum, if I don't flag this activity, then I am contributing to fraud as a bank manager or cashier. Where have financial institutions and the government been as some preachers gain insane wealth instantly? I am not saying it is wrong to receive gifts. But what about these sudden insane economic operations that may have no clear explanation? What about lawyers and the transfer of parcels of land without sufficient support or family consent? This needs to be revisited.
5. Another word to church leaders. Every time there is a financial scandal such as that of Kanyari swindling congregants and the public through "miracle" feats like "310", religious leaders come out and argue that such should be allowed to continue because "we should never stop the move of God." They also fear the government cracking down on churches. But, may it not actually be time for such a crack-down? Can we really stop the genuine move of God? But if we are complacent with fraud, then we are included in it. The Church should come out

stronger in castigating the “panda mbegu” prosperity madness and protect innocent seekers of God in this country and around the continent. If a lame man walks, or a blind man sees, or someone receives a financial miracle, nobody can really stop that. We would all celebrate if cancer disappeared from someone’s body or if a person rose from the dead. But we must stop fakery, fraud and exploitation by putting litter where it should be. Fake is just fake, and we don’t need any defense. Miracles will always glorify God but fakery is not just disgusting. It must stop.

6. Lastly, we need to review Article 8 of our 2010 Constitution. When the team was receiving recommendations that year, I wrote requesting that two clauses be included in that article to state that religious freedom does not extend to the use of religion to maim, kill someone or fraudulently acquire property. That freedom of religion should not take away the rights of people, etc. I still think it needs to be revised.