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## EDITORIAL

## HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR 2021

We are launching our first Newsletter in the context of celebration of Christmas, closing the year of 2020 and entering to a new year of 2021. Probably, the year 2021 will not bring extraordinary surprises as we could expect. However, from the above we can be assured of God's grace and strength.

But, for it to be manifest, let us not forget God needs our cooperation and our willingness to actively respond to his call for "the change we want to see in the world". Therefore, we enter the year 2021 filled with hope that from different learning experiences throughout 2020 we will be able to stand before the challenges and find adequate methods to overcome them.

We acknowledge the challenging moments we went through as whole world. Due to COVID-19 we easily noticed that the way of living was not as we were used to:

We lost lives of our beloved ones; we saw others struggling in the hospitals and homes; we witnessed travel bans and other restrictions, businesses being shut down, and the sources of income being as well defied; we faced the closure of schools; we are aware of crises within families (parents, youth and children standing with challenged focus); and our missionary presence among those to whom we render service has been unstable. These are just few challenges we experienced throughout the year.

Nevertheless, the year 2020 has also been a great learning experience: finding the meaning of our lives, valuing the closeness of family, friends and relatives, as well as setting priorities; reflecting on the deteriorated social values; understanding our social, cultural, political, economic and religious status in need to be restructured, in order to adjust them and enable them to respond to the basic needs of the society, protecting life first.

It has been an opportunity to create an environment that allows us to come out from the comfort of our selfishness and to throw ourselves into a culture of sharing, love and care for one another; an opportunity for us to become more conscious of our interconnectedness. Hence, the chance of destroying "the culture of indifference" and building up a culture of tender love, togetherness, and integral promotion of human being, empowering everyone and promoting an effective realization of everyone's potentials.

We wish you all a Happy and Prosperous year 2021 filled with joy and love.

*Sch. Jamito Paulino*

## This Issue:

In this Newsletter, we will share different experiences and enlighten them with the message of hope in the Savior who has come to dwell among us, and to present to us the beginning of a new life where values such as peace, justice, love, mercy, care and reconciliation are realities possible to be built and lived.

These experiences are for families (parents, guardians, children and the youth) and everyone in the society, calling for a new perspective, through which we are to respond to the call to love and care. It is the call for a new mission approach that will help us to restore our broken hopes in this coming year 2021, turning therefore the challenges into opportunities, and finding our relevance in this world where we live as a family.

# Christmas 2020 wishes and greetings for Happy New Year 2021

By: Fr. Sylvester Hategek'Imana, Mccj



***“For this is how God loved the world: He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16)***

Dear friends, confreres and all of you who in one way or another have been part and parcel of my journey in Life.

We have just celebrated Christmas and we are on the last lap of 2020 remaining with some few hours to say good bye to this year and welcome 2021.

Allow me to share with you my heartfelt greetings, best wishes and the blessings of God in this not so best moment worldwide but especially where you and I are.

It is good to be alive, and this has been due to the goodness of God, this is the moment to say thank you God.

During the course of this year 2020 you and I have passed through many situations of life, some of us have felt challenged, confronted with fear, uncertainty even sometimes hopeless.

But this has never extinguished the certainty that God incarnate in Jesus Christ is part of it and has come to shade light over it and give us a new opening of hope and meaningful life.

Thank you, Jesus, for showing us once more that for God humanity and its goodness is a priority and not an option.

Being children of hope, we pray for a 2021 filled with the blessings of god in our lives, in our midst and in the society and history.

He shares with us the fullness of life as a light that illumines human misery, suffering, hopelessness, confusion, conflict, abject poverty, all forms of injustices, social and economic inequalities, but above all a fair minimum dignified life.

*Happy new year to you all and best wishes and blessings for 2021.*

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“At a time dominated by a culture of waste, faced with growing inequalities both within and between nations, I urge government leaders and those of international organizations, business leaders, scientists, communicators and educators, to take up these principles as a “compass” capable of pointing out a *common direction* and ensuring a more humane future in the process of globalization. This will enable us to esteem the value and dignity of every person, to act together in solidarity for the common good, and to bring relief to those suffering from poverty, disease, slavery, armed conflicts, and discrimination. I ask everyone to take this compass in hand and to become a prophetic witness of the culture of care, working to overcome the many existing social inequalities. This can only come about through a widespread and meaningful involvement on the part of women, in the family and in every social, political and institutional sphere.”

*Message of his holiness Pope Francis for the celebration of the 54<sup>th</sup> World Day of Peace (1<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2021)*

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# A Christmas not like others

By: Sch. Jean-Paul Muhandiro)



“The angel said to them ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.’ (Luke 2,10-11)

Christmas is well known as a time of joy, of great celebrations lived usually in a family context. Although it is fundamentally religious, the feast of the Nativity touches all spheres of life, even secular, because of its “commercialization”.

Indeed, a Savior is born to all. A part from its spiritual meaning, Christmas time is also a time for vacation, time when many who have been away from their families go back to be together with their beloved ones.

However, this year, things are different. The pandemic COVID-19 has compelled us to live it in a different way. The second wave is affecting and threatening many parts of the world. There is uncertainty. Though the vaccine seems to have been found, there are still controversies and speculations around it. The current feeling in the world is without doubt of fear. There is fear, there is anxiety. Humanity is facing its fragility. It is my hope that this tragic situation helps us to understand that we are not the most powerful of creation; we do not have full control on everything even if we may think so because of our technological development.

The message of the angels to the shepherd sounds in the ears of the faithful as an encouragement, and it is my wish it brings serenity in us. Do not be afraid! There is great joy

that is coming, that great joy is incarnate. This joy is a Person. He seeks a dwelling and wherever he is welcomed, he brings GREAT JOY.

With my humble understanding, this joy does not mean zero suffering, does not mean no more struggle. This Great Joy is found and discovered in taking the path of Jesus which is nothing else than the path of the Cross.

May we welcome the Incarnated Word in us and our families and allow ourselves to be immersed in the Christmas Joy even in this period of despair.

*Merry Christmas and Happy New year to all!*

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*The message of the angels to the shepherd sounds in the ears of the faithful as an encouragement, and it is my wish it brings serenity in us. Do not be afraid! There is great joy that is coming, that great joy is incarnate.*

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# My COVID-19 experience in light of my faith

By: Sch. Mapenzi Kahongya



It is beyond happiness to share with you my experience that I have gone through during this time of COVID 19. I consider this an experience of Paschal Mystery, meaning an experience of death and life in all events, having my eyes fixed on Jesus Christ our Lord. My reflection will refer to the time Kenya declared lock down and

curfew, to the period of waiting for new perspectives of facing the pandemic, presenting how I learnt from my ups and down moments and suggesting to you in a short conclusion one of the ways to keep yourself mentally, spiritually, and socially present and hopeful.

To start with, COVID-19 has been for me not only a challenge, but also an opportunity to grow and to open my mind and heart to newness. When the lockdown and curfew were declared, I was astonished because it broke the normal way of living and the constitutive elements of our being social people, created to live in relation not only with

oneself but also with others. Many projects were shut down. Life became chaos because of thinking about how to figure out a new way of living. It was indeed an experience never had before in my life.

Life became more about questioning than answering, preventing than providing, distancing than meeting, worrying than enjoying, being stuck than moving, since people were not prepared for that economically, politically, spiritually, socially, and intellectually. Nevertheless, I had to welcome the reality hoping that the situation was not going to last more than one month. Later on, hours, days and months went without any sign of good news of coming back to normal life.

What happened that time? Keeping myself very busy, so that I may avoid the heaviness and tiredness of the situation, therefore, I had to read books, play music, do sport, chat on phone with friends, work hard, watch movies. While doing so, I was still feeling in need of something more to lead me with steadfastness throughout this lockdown. That period was very challenging to the point that even life was little by little losing its true meaning, for despite being in the same community we had to comply with the recommendations of keeping social distance while participating in the community activities like prayer, meals, and recreation. The pastoral ministry also experienced a break. Life at that moment became strongly under my responsibility in making it vividly meaningful.

This was the beginning of experiencing the Paschal Mystery and changing of perspective, of reading surprising experiences of solitude, even if solitude was still embracing the community life.

Paschal Mystery in prayer became a way for me to figure out ways to keep myself present in the lockdown period because I was now reading the experience with faith, which for sure kept me joyful even when things were appearing awkward. I had to look at everything with a positive mind. Where I was running the risk of pessimism, optimism overcame; weakness, courage came up; crying, laughter covered my lips; missing friends, became an opportunity to have them present in my prayer more than before. The experience of each brother as having personal story of life made me to enter a deep personal discovery of their life because it was an occasion of sharing our experiences of life with much time and sincerity than before.

Dying to some ordinary hobbies to which I was used to as mentioned above, brought me to develop a focus on my interiority. Therefore deepening in assimilating my experiences of life helped me once more to have a good approach to

others. Life came then from where I was seeing kind of death, I learnt to do small things with great love, as well as find greatness in small attitudes.

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*To open our horizon, we may ask ourselves: Is death and life part of your daily experiences of life? How do you experience them in other moment of trials?*

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I came to realize that life is beyond what it appears sometimes. There may be great source of life in our daily events, which may be either struggles or joy when we are able to be present in them as we live not only for ourselves but also for others. The more we encounter ourselves, the more our relationship with others becomes nourishing and authentic; the more we enter into life situations, the more our heart is thirsty of being strengthened and nourished by God. Therefore, no need to panic when challenges knock at our door.

To conclude, I thank the Lord Jesus for this experience I am having during this time of the pandemic COVID-19, an experience that has been roses and thorns. In all moments of facing difficulties, I have tried to keep my eyes fixed on the Lord whose Paschal Mystery has inspired me a lot as it was nourishing my hope. Through a daily death to what I thought was making me living previously, I got into life where I tried to look at all situations of joy, suffering, doubt, success, mistakes with faith and positive mind. That is how I experienced the time of corona not losing hope, but nourishing it every day with as well the support of my community. Therefore, as we continue this time, I would like to encourage all of us to keep strong supporting one another in not losing hope, kindness, charity, faith and other human values of promoting life.

To open our horizon, we may ask ourselves: are death and life part of your daily experiences of life? How do you experience them in other moments of trials?

“At this moment in history, marked by the ecological crisis and grave economic and social imbalances only worsened by the coronavirus pandemic, it is all the more important for us to acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters. God has made this fraternal unity possible, by giving us his Son Jesus. The fraternity he offers us has nothing to do with fine words, abstract ideals or vague sentiments. It is a fraternity grounded in genuine love, making it possible for me to encounter others different from myself, feeling compassion for their sufferings, drawing near to them and caring for them even though they do not belong to my family, my ethnic group or my religion. For all their differences, they are still my brothers and sisters. The same thing is true of relationships between peoples and nations: brothers and sisters all!”

*Pope Francis, Christmas  
Message 2020*

# OSER MISER SUR DIEU (Dare to trust in God)

By: Sch. Elisée Ocloo



## *“Here I am: Send me”*

The month of October is a missionary month, which is at the same time the month of the rosary. We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He who has blessed and filled us with the blessings of the Spirit, in heaven, in Christ.

We continue the missionary journey of the whole Church by renewing our response to the Lord, making our own the response of the prophet Isaiah: “Here I am: send me” (Is 6,8). We have witnessed the pain and death of our brothers and sisters due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have experienced our human fragility. “But at the same time, we recognize that we all have a deep desire for life and for freedom from evil. In this context, the call to mission, the invitation to go out of oneself for love of God and neighbor, is presented as an opportunity for sharing, service, intercession. The mission, which God entrusts to each one, makes pass from the fearful and closed self to the self-found and renewed by the gift of oneself” (Pope Francis – Message for world mission Day 2020).

The Lord asks us to look ahead with faith and hope. In his mercy, He gives us the honor to trust each other and calls us to work for evangelization. This is not a call reserved for a few, but a call addressed to each and every one in their own state of life. It is a missionary call, which cannot be reserved for a group of “specialists”, but which must engage the responsibility of all the members of the Church. For he who has truly encountered

Christ cannot keep it for himself, he must proclaim it. Christ’s proposal must be made to all with confidence. We will address adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the Gospel message, but going ahead of everyone’s demands with regard to sensitivity and language, according to the example of Paul who affirmed: “I made myself all to all to save some at all costs” (1 Cor 9:22).

However, faced with the evidence of our fragility, our insufficiency, and human temptation, let us turn to the Lord, because without Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15,5). Aware of this inevitable fragility that marks us deeply, we feel the need to give thanks to him for what he has accomplished through us and for what he will accomplish through his grace. Yes, dear brothers and sisters, we cannot be silent since we have seen and heard (cf. Acts 4:20). We have seen the work of the Spirit and the glory of God manifest in our lives.

## *They make resound the Gospel through their words and their lives*

Even today, a considerable number of men and women, through their dedication and sacrifice, are for us the eloquent sign of the love of God. How can we not recall, in this circumstance, all the missionaries, priests, nuns, men and women religious and faithful who have made evangelization the reason for their existence? They proclaim, through their life, “the grace of the Lord without end” (Ps 89). Often this “endless” has reached the point of bloodshed: many have been “witnesses of the faith”! Our gratitude and our prayers go out to them. Their examples represent a stimulus and a support for all the faithful who can take courage in seeing themselves “enveloped in so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12: 1), who, through their life and their word, have made and keep making the Gospel resound on every continent.

We have to go! We must set out without delay, like Mary, the Mother of Jesus; like the pastors who arose at the first proclamation of the Angel; like Mary Magdalene at the sight of the Risen One. Our march must be more alert by traversing the roads of the world again. The Risen Christ returns to meet us in the Upper Room, where, on the evening of the “first day of the week” (Jn 20:19), he presents himself before his family to “breathe” on them the vivifying gift of the Spirit and launch them into the great adventure of evangelization. Dear brothers and sisters! It requires prayer and concrete commitment. Are we ready?

It is the life in the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people – often forgotten people – who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but who without any doubt are in these very days writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests, religious men and women and so very many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by themselves.”

*Homily “Urbi et Orbi” Blessing  
presided over by Pope Francis  
(27.03.2020)*

### *Interior availability*

“Are we ready to welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life, to listen to the call to mission, either through the path of marriage, or through that of consecrated virginity or the ordained priesthood, and to any way of everyday ordinary life? Are we ready to be sent everywhere, to bear witness to our faith in the merciful God the Father, to proclaim the Gospel of the salvation of Jesus Christ, to share the divine life of the Holy Spirit by building up the Church? Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, are we ready to be unreservedly at the service of the will of God (cf. Lk 1:38)? This interior availability is very important in responding to God: Here I am, Lord: send me! (cf. Is 6, 8). And this not in the

abstract, but in the present day of the Church and of history “.<sup>1</sup>

### *Starting afresh from Christ*

In the homily for the Mass of January 2001, Pope John Paul II said, “We must start afresh from Christ with the momentum of Pentecost, with renewed enthusiasm. Start again from him above all through daily efforts at holiness, putting ourselves in an attitude of prayer and listening to his word.

To start again from him also to testify to his Love”. So let us stand up and do not forget our brothers and sisters who are starving, who are abandoned, who have lost their jobs and their wages, who have no home and no food. Let us open up

to their needs for love, dignity and freedom.

May Saint Teresa of the child Jesus continue to intercede for each of us, with the Lord, so that He may fill us with necessary graces to continue with the same love and the same zeal, the mission that He has entrusted to us.

Let us turn to the Lord with confidence to grant us the gift of perseverance in our commitment of evangelization. May Christ our model in evangelization sustain us. May He accompany us on this path as He remained with the disciples. Amen!

## SPECIAL

By: Brenda Kirimi

# SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND LEGAL PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN SEXUALITY IN KENYA: THE CONVERSATION AROUND SEXUAL ORIENTATION



Brenda Kirimi is a fourth year student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) School of Law, Karen Campus. She attended the Youth gathering organized by the Scholasticate in January 2020 discussing the theme of Sexuality. It is from this experience she wrote the article.

### *Human sexuality defined*

The World Health Organization views sexuality as a central aspect of being human throughout life encompassing sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, erotism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction.

Sexuality underlies important behaviors and outcomes related to sexual health. Appreciating diversity in how different individuals express themselves sexually results into improved sexual and reproductive health. Human sexuality includes many forms of expression and behavior which the society ought to embrace.

### *On what is Natural: Sex, Gender and Sexual Orientation*

What we mean by the terms sex, gender and sexual orientation is germane for the purposes of our discussion. Sex refers to the biologically determined characteristics of whether one is male or female such as genitalia, while gender is used to describe characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed such as gender roles.

Sex is sometimes defined to include intersex who are individuals born with a reproductive anatomy that does not seem to fit the traditional definition of male or female. This is usually a case of biological incongruence. Some scholars have defined gender to include self-definition, that is to say, what a person recognizes

himself to be. From this we have transgender persons who despite being born with anatomy of one sex have an unshakeable feeling or belief that they belong to the opposite sex. Transgender persons suffer from a psychological disorder commonly referred to as gender dysphoria or Gender Identity Disorder (GID).

Sexual orientation refers to the attraction towards another person emotionally, romantically, sexually, and affectionately. From sexual orientation we get the concepts of heterosexual, lesbians, gays and bisexual. Heterosexual is used to refer to a person attracted to the opposite sex and this is considered as the norm. While lesbian refers to women attracted to other women, gay refers to men attracted to other men. Bisexual on the other hand is used to refer to one who

is attracted to both men and women. These three are viewed by the majority in the society to be a moral decadence and as such are condemned. From the above concepts we have the acronym LGBTI (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) which was coined to enable activists lobby for the rights of these marginalized groups. Though the groups are different, the activists felt they were experiencing similar challenges in the society at the time. The discussion in this article is limited to LGB which depicts sexual orientation. The remaining two TI are concerned with gender identity, an interesting conversation for another day article.

### *Back to July 2015*

We live in an era whereby sex, gender and sexual orientation are controversial religious and political issues. Some nations have laws against homosexuality, while others have laws protecting same-sex marriages. This takes us back to July 2015 when the then President of the United States of America Barrack Obama visited Kenya. On the second day of his visit he publicly criticized African governments for discriminating against law abiding citizens on the ground of their sexual orientation. The host President Uhuru Kenyatta did not hesitate in response as he dismissed and rebuked President Obama's gay rights message as a non-issue asserting that homosexuality is

alien to the Kenyan Culture. At a time when there seems to be little or no consensus among religious and political groups it makes sense for us to wonder "what is normal?" and "who decides?"

### *Kenyan Legislation, Church's position and Human Rights*

The position of the law on homosexuality in Kenya is however clear. Article 45(2) of the constitution is categorical that every adult has the right to marry a person of the opposite sex. This clearly outlaws the possibility of homosexual marriages in the country. Sections 162 and 165 of the Penal Code criminalize same sex conduct. Following a petition challenging the constitutionality of the provisions last year, the court held that the impugned provisions of the Penal Code were not vague as the claimants alleged and that they disclosed an offence. The petitioners had failed to prove that the provisions were discriminatory and as a result they continue to be law in Kenya.

The position of the church on the issue has always been clear. Before the above ruling, in his Easter address last year, the Anglican Archbishop of Nairobi one Jackson Ole Sapit was quoted stating that "to grant rights and freedom regardless of God's will is to condone chaos and destruction. Human sexual orientation is a biological condition, while conduct is a moral choice.

Likewise, African culture forbids homosexual conduct."

Despite the above positions, I subscribe to the school of thought that the moral failure in the society lies in the society's unwillingness to contain or embrace different sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and not in the homosexuality. A Kenyan film maker, Wanuri Kahiu is often quoted stating that it is not homosexuality that is un-African but homophobia<sup>2</sup>. The Constitution of Kenya affirms that human rights belong to each individual and are not granted by the state. This means they are entitlements that accrue to each and every individual by virtue of being human. Every person

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***...the moral failure in the society lies in the society's unwillingness to contain or embrace different sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and not in the homosexuality!***

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regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity is entitled to enjoy the same rights free from violence and discrimination. Every person has inherent dignity and the right to have that dignity respected and protected.

At this point, I find a middle ground between the church, the law and my personal opinion as chapter three of the

"Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" envisages the church's position on the human person and human rights. Number 132 of the compendium specifically states that a just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person. Every political, economic, social, scientific and cultural programme must be inspired by the awareness of the primacy of each human being over the society.

### *Fostering freedom and tolerance*

While there may be compelling moral grounds for criminalizing same sex conduct, there can never be equally compelling ground for discriminating against homosexual persons and even violating their human rights. A state that recognizes differences does not mean a state without morality or one without a point of view. In a liberal, multicultural and multi-religious society like ours, we must avoid undue legal paternalism and instead foster freedom and tolerance of divergent moral viewpoints. The moral, social, cultural and religious codes of a people will never be sufficient justification for discriminating against law abiding citizens on the basis of their sexual orientation.

