
Filename: SIMON 020605
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5th June 2002

I met with my friend, we had not seen each other for a long time. My friend is called Bright Petro. He is now doing a diploma at D___ Education Institute, he came home with the intention of seeing me and we chatted and I escorted him (this is his second time coming to see me this year). We didn't talk about girls this time, but when I was coming back from escorting him I met a certain friend who lives far in the hills and we took the same direction, chatting. I asked him where he was coming from and he said he was coming from N___ village, for he was making arrangements to marry a certain girl there. I asked him where is N___ village specifically? And he said it is a part of a village within C___ village. Before reaching the boundary between M___ and C___ village, there's a concrete depression bridge built by the MASAF¹ project marking the boundary.

And I asked him why he wants to marry? (He is my age). And my friend answered saying that this will be a second one if everything goes well, and proceeded saying that he is used to being married rather than just being staying as a bachelor (He said that word bachelor in English). And I asked him 'Why? What is wrong with a bachelor?' My friend said 'I am used to it because the fact is God made us to live 'two-two' (He said 'two-two' in English meaning living a man and a woman as a couple). And I asked: 'Is there any advantage for this factor you are saying?' My friend said, 'Indeed there are several factors for which living a married life is extremely important', and he went on saying that 'The first thing is that God's blessings come, because God himself said through the Bible that blessed are those who are married, and the second thing is that you are really protected from the diseases of nowadays.' And I asked him what kind of diseases he was referring to when he said the diseases of nowadays? My friend said 'These include AIDS, which is very dangerous, it attacks those who are fond of moving around without getting married.' And I asked 'Are there other diseases as well?' My friend said, 'Yes, there are some other serious diseases like *chitayo* – a lot of young men are dying because of *chitayo* and this is because of moving around. They meet with bar girls and other partners and unfortunately he may happen to meet with someone who has just aborted, but she never says anything to the partner she is about to sleep with, because she wants money. But when you are married you are totally protected because you may be thinking of your wife and children and because you may not have opportunities to meet girlfriends or rather partners because you may be afraid of your wife, and that even girls you propose, when they happen to learn that you are married they rebuff you, hence you are protected from catching AIDS.' I said 'It is true, but in the case of AIDS it is very difficult, my friend, because even married people are contracting the disease.' My friend said 'Indeed it's true but only those who are childish and unfaithful and as for me, I am faithful whenever I am married.'

And I asked, 'What happened, you said you are coming from N___ village wanting to marry someone, but what happened for you to separate or rather divorce?' (I said *Chinakulekanitsa ni neli chiyani*) My friend answered that, 'Because of her parents, her parents were the ones who didn't want their daughter to be staying with me at my real home², even though they could well know that no-one [else] was capable of taking control of my household in terms of caring my parents and nephews, but rather they insisted I stay with her at her home.' And I asked: 'And you refused?' He said, 'Yes I refused because at her home there are a lot of people and very many young children living only with their mothers who had been married, some because they had divorces with their husbands, some because the husband had died. And no adult man, only an old mother and her [the intended wife], these children and nephews. All her adult sons are just staying in towns, working there but never assisting at home, leaving the parents behind suffering. So I was afraid to take the responsibility of caring for them and maybe leaving my parents' home suffering because I can't combine supporting them both.' I agreed with him and I asked whether the girl loved him? He said 'Indeed we loved each other and she was not such a talkative woman and I liked her, but you know

¹ Malawi Social Action Fund, a World Bank project.

² Balaka District is largely matrilineal and matrilocal.

sometimes stupid girls who follow their parents' decisions are like that! And she listened [to her parents], and we divorced because I knew I was living with a human being who is their daughter, she might become sick, I will not have anywhere to present the problem because they will refuse saying they don't know anything because their daughter stays with them (while not) and I will be confused. Then we separated. I have 2 children with her but I don't mind. I do go sometimes to assist my children.'

Indeed the chatting this time was good as we were walking, ascending. I asked him, 'When you first wanted to take the wife, you didn't agree on which side you as the couple would be staying?' My friend said, 'It was one of those marriages that result from impregnating a girl and her parents come and give you the responsibility bring the girl to the boy's home. The same applies to what happened to me. After her delivery we began staying [living together] until the first child was born. We did everything about *chinkhowse* and the like, and I was still staying with her at my home until the second child. After the second child then they told me to go there! I refused and refused.' And he concluded saying, 'Maybe they wanted their daughter to marry a rich person and not a poor man like me, a farmer.' And I said 'Okay! You did well.' He asked whether I am married. And I said 'Indeed, friend, and now two children as well. He said, 'Ooh! Yes, I remember, you told me one day!' Indeed he recalled I had told him.

My friend is a C.C.A.P. Christian [Presbyterian] and it is because of choir that we knew each other. He prays at M___ C.C.A.P. church and was singing in the choir there when I was singing in the M___ C.C.A.P. choir, we happened to meet. Our choir was called to their church, and that's when we knew each other. We talked a lot about our times in the choir and the like, about church issues and much more, about the poverty striking Malawi and the influence parents have upon their daughters which leads to breaking his and other marriages and we said indeed [it's not good] to stay unmarried], [better to marry to] avoid contracting AIDS. We talked about how he selected [a wife] this time and he said this time he has selected a very fat woman and she is white in complexion and she has great love. Every time he goes to her, even just to chat few minutes with her, 'she forces me to eat *nsima* there and cooks very fast.' We chatted and laughed.

And I asked him, 'You said you are faithful whenever you are married, what about when you are not married?' My friend said, 'For instance when I am not married I try to be living and not moving around because of AIDS, until I find someone whom I should marry.' And I asked, 'You just go straight proposing her to be married with you ...', when he interrupted with me before I could finish saying he just goes straight to her parents home, not starting first as just a love relationship. And I congratulated him for this and I asked him why he is faithful both in marriage and even when unmarried? My friend said, 'Only because I have seen for myself, some of my friends as I am speaking have died because of this disease AIDS, and I do care for my life. AIDS troubles a lot!' I didn't say anything. He kept on, saying, 'For example in my village many will die, because if you remember (reminding me now) there was a certain army pensioner who was living up there, the owner of the good corrugated sheet house.³ He came to stay there when he was given his pension because he was always weak and frequently sick, and he had a lot of partners before he passed last year December. He was very sick indeed, going to the hospital, no treatment, private hospitals – just wasting money and then came home and was sick until he became like a very little young child. I was going to see him with the wife from the marriage just ended, during the whole course of his suffering. You could liken him like a two-year old son when he lay down sick. I laughed. And he said 'You can laugh because you didn't see him suffering, if you had seen him you would have felt pity and no laughter'. I agreed with him and he said, 'And the way I had seen him suffering, that's why and it's when I came to my senses, that indeed AIDS troubles a great deal before one dies.' And he said it was when he really knew that if you had partners while you had a wife, sometimes God becomes angry and wants to show you on the surface about your hidden attires [desires?]. I agreed with him. And I asked, 'Before seeing him suffering you were having partners, not so?' My friend denied it and said 'No! The time we were singing choir, I only had one partner and after that another one and then I got married and since that marriage has ended I want to get married again.' (NB And indeed my friend-- I can comment here without bias – the way I look or see him indeed he is now a man of responsibility and faith – spiritually bonded I believe.)

³ Probably a corrugated metal roof, a sign of wealth; it would be very unusual for a whole house to be built of metal sheeting.

Now I reached my junction to home but I decided to continue escorting him. And this time I said to him that I had the aim of having a partner at the far hilly side, 'like the site where you stay!' My friend said I should forget that idea, better I should be faithful and obedient to my wife because I chose her myself and nobody forced me to marry her. I agreed with him and said mine was like the way he got married to his first wife, I told him that I first impregnated her then married her. And he said that it's better for us young men to trust God and love praying and hate going around with partners but rather love being married.

Then I asked him, 'Is there another goodness of getting married?' My friend said 'Yes there is, apart from avoiding contracting AIDS you are also respected by people and considered an adult, even your parents begin trusting you [when you are married] rather than just staying and troubling your parents in terms of washing clothes, or when you are sick, for example, or cooking for you whatever time you may wish without her [wife] questioning anything.' Then I said, 'But my friend, when I was staying, I was wishing indeed to have a partner, especially your side' (where he stays cheating). My friend said that was no good for I will die fast, I shouldn't just trust and believe by faces alone. 'In the hills there are a lot of girls and they don't move around, they move only if they want to visit M___ Trading Center because of the grain mills and maybe for groceries. But as I told you already, in the hills there is now prevailing an exchange of AIDS because of the soldier who died of this disease and spread it greatly, especially to young schoolgirls who were only looking for money. I heard that before he had begun to show signs and symptoms of this disease AIDS, he was giving them a lot of money to sleep with him, and indeed he had even been sleeping with the married ones.' And I exclaimed and said 'even the married ones?'

My friend said 'Indeed the married ones also, some women are very unfaithful that's why AIDS is going to kill a lot of people, especially those who don't have faith in their marriages.' And I asked him whether people in his village know that he is indeed faithful? My friend said he is indeed faithful, 'a lot of people in my area know that I am faithful.' And I said, 'And do these people admire your faithfulness?' My friend said 'Indeed, people in my area admire me greatly and especially old people. They speak to me and encourage me to remain faithful and not to be cheated by my friends who might influence me to indulge in banned and unfaithful behaviour and to die rapidly of AIDS without growing white hairs on my head as they have done.' I asked him how long he had been faithful. He said it was a long time ago, just after he got married soon after his first sexual partnership ended, 'when I personally saw for myself the pensioner soldier who died of AIDS, the way he just wasted money in an attempt to cure the disease but it was in vain, and after a long time indeed he died, then I decided to be faithful.' And I asked him whether he knows someone such as a friend or an acquaintance who is also faithful. My friend said only one, one of his best friends who he chats with almost every day. I asked him why his friend was faithful. My friend said: 'My friend is faithful now because he said he has seen his friend die because he caught [AIDS] from a sexual partner he had who was living in town. He said the girl probably had other partners in town who infected her with AIDS and gave it to her partner' (in this case the friend of my friend). And my friend really came to understand that going with partners, whether you are married or not, may lead one's death and he begun to change his old wicked ways of going with sexual partners as other young men like him do. And I asked the age of his friend and he said his friend is about his age also – I assume the friend is 20 -something years of age. I asked about his friend's denomination. My friend said it was C.C.A.P like his own, both of them pray at M___ C.C.A.P. church.

And I asked him whether his friend doesn't have partners? My friend said his friend doesn't have any other sexual partner apart from his spouse for the reason mentioned, he is afraid of catching AIDS as his late friend had. And I said, 'But do people admire him for his faithfulness?' My friend said, 'There are some people who admire him, but he has never told me even once about this.' I asked how close they live to each other. My friend said he lives in the next village, not very far. And I asked if his friend had sexual partners before he married and become faithful. My friend said, 'My friend had a lot of partners and even when he first got married, frankly speaking. I was advising him, but he appeared not to understand, maybe he was thinking that I was just mocking him or being jealous, I think, until he himself came to see for himself what had happened to his friend.' I asked where. He said, 'My friend had been to Mulanje and stayed there for several years working on the tea estates there. When he came back here he reported that he had married there as well, to avoid the chance of catching the disease.'

I asked whether his friend was using condoms when sleeping with his partners after becoming faithful? My friend said, 'That is very difficult to say because he never told me that.' Then I said, 'I thought you would know, you said you were friends.' My friend said, 'Indeed he is a friend, but he never said anything concerning a condom.' I asked, 'You don't discuss condoms with each other?' My friend said 'We don't.' I asked him why not? And he said it was because he had no use for condoms, he never thinks of using them for it is a sin. He said the Bible has appointed that people using condoms are cursed, they are killing the generation of tomorrow. Fancy--he might not have been born himself! We laughed and I agreed with him. And he then concluded by saying, 'Those who are unfaithful are the ones using [condoms]. And if you know that you are faithful, why use the condoms, it's not appropriate to use them with a wife, that's killing!' I corrected him saying, 'Some men use condoms with their spouses.' My friend asked me, 'Do you?' Then I said 'Indeed I do.' My friend said 'Yes, you do because you don't trust your spouse or rather your spouse doesn't [trust you]. That's foolish and you are just sinning for nothing and I advise you [it is] better that you should stop. You are giving your wife an impression that you go for other sexual partners besides her and the end result is that she may be tempted by Satan and have another sexual partner also so that she can differentiate [see the difference between one partner and another]. Another partner who doesn't use [condoms] and [she will] contract AIDS, which is not good – you should treat her [well] because you like her. But therefore trust each other and love each other as well as both of you remaining faithful.' And I said, 'No! Some use condoms for child spacing, if you sometimes happen to listen to the radio.' My friend said 'I have a radio, two radios for your information! I hate those messages because it really [betrays] the world and that's why a lot are dying of AIDS, because of those condoms.'

And I asked him: 'What can you do if you feel threatened to contract AIDS?' He said he doesn't seem threatened and believes he doesn't have the disease because he doesn't often get sick as others do – he is healthy and said even though he never went for blood test [he is healthy] because he doesn't go for other partners, only his wife. And I said, 'Suppose your wife seemed to develop [the disease], perhaps you notice certain signs?' My friend said, 'If that was the case then I would know that I probably married her while she already had AIDS, and not me [wife would have been the carrier].' Then I asked, 'So what can you do then after knowing say about this?' My friend said, 'There is nothing I can do but just stay with her until God takes the first one of us.' And I asked him, 'But you will start using condoms?' He refused and said no way [he would] use [condoms]. When I asked why not, he said he didn't want to, nor was he interested in, using the "rubber" (he said rubber in English) for he can't feel anything because of the "rubber", and it's a sin, [he would be] troubled in heaven after life! And I asked him, 'But you can now go for other sexual partners who are healthy, not so?' My friend said no, he would not go for other partners while he was with his wife. And I asked, 'Suppose your wife dies, for we know that AIDS kills, what will you do? Will you marry again, a healthy person?' My friend said 'Yes, I can marry another one and live with her.' And I asked 'Where would you live?' He said, 'Anywhere I may be. You now nowadays, when people in your village know that your wife died because of AIDS, there is no chance for you to marry again in the same or neighboring villages. Rather, I will then move into a town or somewhere else, say Taydo, Mulanje or Mwanza, to work and marry there, where no-one knows about my reputation.' Then I laughed and he laughed.

We chatted and chatted until I felt that I had accumulated enough information and I finally said, 'Friend, I have indeed escorted you enough and therefore I am turning back for it will get dark soon.' My friend thanked me for escorting him. And I thanked him as well for our having met each other and chatted a long time. Neither of us wore a watch, but I believe it was past 5 p.m. when we separated, we had been walking moderately from around 2 p.m. I wished him good luck for a wife to be!

Comments: The respondent is my age, charming and not educated. In my view he is not healthier [unhealthier?] now than he was before. He knows how to chat in the same way as I do with my other friend, Roben Zulu, with whom I have long discussions and conversations. I produced this long diary because my friend was open to chatting, even though he doesn't know anything about my aim in firing questions, as others don't seem to know as well. It's the same as when I am chatting with Zulu. Then we separated.

6th June 2002

Situation: Today on the 6th of June I was listening to the radio, Malawi Broadcasting Cooperation Radio One. It was 9 o'clock in the evening when I heard the programme called Zam'maboma, (it's a program with amazing stories).

I heard that in Blantyre a certain lady ran away from her husband's house and divorced him, because she was afraid of the *fisi* system. The program said that a woman was living with her husband in Blantyre where he owned a barbershop where several young men were having their hair cut. They had been living together for many years but they had no child. The husband felt shy, and then talked with his best friend about having sex with his wife, as in the *fisi* system. The aim of the husband was that the *fisi* would impregnate his wife so that they could have a child. The news said that at the appointed time the *fisi* arrived at night and entered the house. The woman sensed [someone there] and before the *fisi* could sleep with the wife, she was clever enough to wake up. She challenged both the *fisi* and her husband, saying they were too young for that! And the news said the woman divorced the husband because she was very afraid of getting AIDS anytime if she chose to remain with him. And the news said that the man was left deliberately, the marriage ended.

And my wife said, 'But that woman, indeed I congratulate her courage!' And I said, 'Not many women could manage [to do that] because they would want to have a child so as to get rid of the mocking and teasing by people, especially her friends.' My wife said, 'That's considering one's life. It's better indeed not to have a child than die with AIDS.' And I said, 'Men are very stupid, they don't even consider this dangerous disease, why?' My wife said, 'Some people know that they have the disease so they don't care, they live knowing that they have died even though they are still alive, and they behave badly because they want to spread the disease to healthy ones.' We laughed and laughed.

7th June 2002

Today on 7th/06/2002. I was again listening to Malawi Broadcasting Cooperation Radio One. It was past 9 o'clock p.m. when I heard a certain story on the Zam'maboma programme. The news said there was a certain lady in Ntcheu District. A married one but a great prostitute at the same time. She used to challenge men, saying that even 20 men cannot manage to quench her sexual desire, no one can outlast her sexual desire. The news said the woman had been saying this often, especially when she is drunk, and she rolls up her dress and becomes naked and beckons men to come over and have sex with her. Even if as many as 20 come, they are incapable of making her weak, she is always saying she is still strong. 'Men could only be running away! Leaving her.' The news said she used to do this system wherever her husband was away as a watchman. And the news went on to say that and today (meaning today on 7th/06/2002) that the lady was drunk again, and as usual she naked, right there at the *kachaso* brew place, and beckoning men to have sex with her. The news said, '*Ndipo azibambo ena wotopa okwana aathana noi kuchita naye*. In English this means: And six men did with her (meaning had sex with her) and it was a public sex, until the six of them finished. And the news ended saying that the rumor was circulated to the husband and the husband has divorced her already, saying that the woman might have contracted the HIV/AIDS disease and that he was not sure that all of the six men who slept with her were free from this epidemic disease AIDS.' Lastly, the announcer said 'In the mean time the boasting and prostitute wife is at the hospital!' (*mkazi wothimbwizika noi wa-chisembwele* – Chichewa.) The news said she was admitted because she was greatly weakened and because men really meant for that [?]. The news ended.