

GEORGE NJENGA,

% M. C. Co. Ltd.,  
(DANDORA)

P.O. Box 78, Nairobi,  
KENYA

22<sup>nd</sup> March 1955



Dear Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo,

Many thanks for wishing me merry Xmas and happy new year. I wish I could do the same! Excuse me the delay due to our College Long Vacation (Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> - March 19<sup>th</sup>) for your letter remained many days undelivered.

Thank you for reading my name in the "African Newsletter" (I also did the same with yours in Pax Romana Literature), and the interest that you took in the life and problems of University Students in Africa. Though somewhat unqualified, I am greatly honoured by your request. By your leave, I shall bind myself within Makerere College, with which I am more familiar than any other African University.

Makerere College is young and only recently affiliated to the University of London, and hence raised to the status of University College. It serves, mainly at present, the East African Territories: Kenya Colony, Protectorate (British), Uganda Protectorate (British) and Tanganyika Territory (British Mandate). It receives a smaller contribution of students from Nyasaland, North & South Rhodesias, India and Europe. So, the student body is almost wholly African.

The University confers: General Degrees B.A.s & B.Sc., Subjects being 3 subjects from: English, History, Geography, Maths. Political Sciences, Economics and Sociology for B.A. and, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Maths. and Geography for B.Sc. (4 year course)  
Diplomas in Education (for Graduates and non-graduates) (1 & 2 years - respectively)  
Diplomas in Agriculture (Degrees are due to start soon) (5 yrs)  
Diplomas in Veterinary Science (6 years)  
Diplomas in Fine Art (5 years)  
Licenciates in Medicine & Surgery (7 years)

The Lecturing Staff is mainly European and only 4 Africans out of 70 members of the staff. Most of these are non-Catholics, 20 is the Principal. There are only 2 Chaplains, 5 lecturers and 2 Women Secretaries, Catholic members of the staff. Out of 15 lecturers in the Faculty of Science, there is not a single Catholic, nor in the Faculty of Medicine. Some Protestant lecturers are very enthusiastic evangelists and work through their student followers. Others change their religion several times a year.

Makerere has St. Augustine Chapel for Catholics, St. Francis of Assisi Chapel for Protestants and a mosque for Muslims.

The College in principle recognises each individual's beliefs and the Authorities make any possible arrangements to suit each denomination; e.g. Supply of midnight meals for Muslims during their Ramadhan and supply of fish on Fridays for Catholics, and Divinity courses for students.

Students enter the College from Territorial High Schools; very few of these High Schools are Catholics. So the number of Catholic Students is small (1954 — 105 Catholics out of 400 students).

The College is not wholly autonomous; the Government have so great a say on its running and maintenance. e.g. Certain subjects cannot be taught because the Government refuse or the Government refuse to assist such graduates as have studied such subjects to get employment. (Social Subjects in particular)

The College cannot launch any student representative who is not recommended by his home Government, no matter what his merits.

East Africa is in a great political unrest; the white man is not at home with the natives. It is often said that the latter is offered the last place in his own country. An African is convinced that academic education is vitally important for his success, yet, in spite of his efforts, he is often made to feel the very importance of his colour.

Though the College in principle grants freedom of worship, it is a common feeling in Catholic High Schools that the tendency is to populate the College with Protestants.

Such is Makerere College, that a Catholic freshman enters. Formerly used to the discipline of Catholic Schools, he/she was just himself in a place so foreign and unusual in behaviour and manner; there is nothing very rigid but the exams; it is freedom and search of knowledge — sometimes knowledge withheld from him/her. He daily listens to people very much unlike the priests he was used to — people who honour and believe in "personal opinions" in matters even outside their spheres. To the young students, these people look successful at least materially — and yet they are not very strict about their 10 commandments. Their personal opinion on his/her, is of great importance to his/her academic success — e.g. top-level contradiction in matters of deep conviction is often not a very "wise" thing to do with them.

He/she may have a political mind. He/she may often be set at doubt to hear one thing taught by the European lecturers and quite practised by their brothers and sisters in the colonies, and another

It is a pity that Makerere climate is equatorial and perhaps does not offer the most suitable circumstances to the foreign Catholic members of the staff. I feel, but greatly hope it is not so, that climatic hardships adds on to them a religious difficulty. Perhaps a time will come when at the morning masses, Benedictions and Sunday Masses, the Catholic students will be following an example from their Catholic members of the staff. I also hope that Catholic students will once find great apostolic encouragement in their Chaplains and the Catholic Staff. I also hope that the distance that does or may exist, - in feelings at least between the Chaplain and the students because of colour differences, will once be unknown and not thought of.

Historically, there has been a lack of co-operation between the missionaries and the natives towards launching social leaders. To my mind the missionaries (Catholic) have been very reluctant, if not unwilling to encourage and recruit Catholic African leaders on proper Christian principles. On the other hand, the Protestants enjoy such a wide scope in leadership. Any Catholic African who might have been so minded has had two alternatives: to sacrifice his religion or forsake his social ambition.

It can be said that most of the foreigners in East Africa are non-Catholics; and in such circumstances one often finds Catholic young men and students wondering whether Catholicism is compatible with Intellectualism.



Yet, the whole project - (to form an organisation of Catholic students on the lines of Pax Romana Movement), I dare say, is not just abandoned. A great move is set up and with God's good help we all hope for a day when Catholic students in Makerere University College will join the great march that their brethren are enjoying elsewhere.

Such difficulties, I think, are some of them that confront the formation of a Catholic Students' Organisation in Makerere College. Any group of good-willed students will have to persuade their fellow students over their difficulties and doubts before anything will be done. So far, I'm not conscious of any Catholic groups formed, apart from the Society as a whole, to meet social interests of Catholics in the college. Such groups as the Legion of Mary, the Rosary Group do exist, but I feel that their work is yet to be of note. So, it has also been very difficult to contact other African Universities and Institutions.

The number of Catholic Women Students has been so discouragingly small (4 - 1954!) - I hope it will increase, - and no wonder that somebody unfairly would have said that they were unco-operative. Anyway I shall contact those whom I think will be of help to you.

I would kindly beseech you to write in English (Reading your letter I did not think that you are less fluent in English than in your mother tongue!) because French would cause such a commotion and would demand a special study of the language — We are hard up here!

Maria, I am greatly conscious of inadequacy of this note, but I remain,

Your sincerely in Christ,

George Mjenga

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro



Next to what project - (is from an organization of Catholic students in the East African Movement) I have said "not found" - A great wave is set up and with your good help we will hope for a day when Catholic students in African universities will join the great march for their brethren and enjoying themselves.

Such difficulties I think, arise from the fact that the formation of a Catholic student organization in African universities is a long and difficult process. It is not only a matter of financial support but also of the social and cultural environment. The Catholic Church in Africa has been very active in the past but it is now facing new challenges. The number of Catholic students in African universities has been increasing rapidly in the last few years. This is a good sign but it also means that the Church must be prepared to meet the needs of these students. This will require a special study of the language and culture of the students. We are hard up here!