**Who knows where the time goes?**

[**Atle Hetland**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/atle-hetland)

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As a calendar year ends and a new year arrives, we often take time to reflect on the past, what we did and didn’t do, and what will be different and hopefully better in the coming year. In my article today, on the doorstep of 2021, I shall reflect on some philosophical and other issues, small things and big things. But first, let me look at the calendar we use, making the administrative change from one year to the next happen at the same for people all over the world; yes, in all computers and mobile phones, smart ones or those ‘ancient’ ones that we used in a more innocent time a decade ago, before anyone bothered to worry too much about worldwide pandemics, in spite of just having seen SARS and Ebola, and the financial crisis, showing how interwoven and unequal the world is.

The Gregorian calendar was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, being a modification of the Julian calendar, and it is today used in most countries of the world. Greek mathematicians helped the Catholic Christian Church correct some of the inaccuracies in the earlier solar year calendar. It is interesting that it was the clergy, otherwise more concerned about eternity, who decided on such a worldly issue as time and calendar. When I earlier worked closely with Catholic priests in education and development in some poor areas of East Africa, in Turkana especially, we sometimes said about the priests that ‘they have their own time’. That actually meant that it is not time that is important, but it is what we do in the time God has given us, and the time that comes hereafter.

[China approves first vaccine for market rollout](https://nation.com.pk/31-Dec-2020/china-approves-1st-vaccine-for-market-rollout)

Interesting, too, in the common language of East Africa, Swahili or Kiswahili, a new day doesn’t start at midnight as we are used to; it starts at daybreak at six in the morning. So when they say, ‘saa moja asubuhi’, it means it is seven o’clock in the morning; a new day has begun and there will be about twelve hours daylight till dusk at six or seven p.m., ‘saa kumi na mibili jioni’, and ‘saa moja usiku’. This is certainly logical and practical, so, let us not think that it is only what the Westerners say and think that is logical, be they clergy or capitalists.

It was the Industrial Revolution, beginning in England and the USA from about 1760 that made time and precision essential, even more so than what the generals and sea captains ever did. People could no longer just operate in seasons and follow nature’s cycles. These things were quite unpredictable and nobody could forecast the exact time of rain and sun, heat and cold, and other things that guided planting, weeding and harvesting.

[TV stars Aiman, Minal Khan's father passes away](https://nation.com.pk/31-Dec-2020/aiman-minal-khan-s-father-passes-away)

The new factories operated on day and night shifts, and till our time, using sirens to inform the workers when shifts close and new ones begin. Rigorous procedures for how to operate machines came—till our time, in the fourth industrial revolution, when we have begun believing that robots and computers are more accurate than people. Along with the beginning of the industrialisation, they installed school bells, splitting the children’s learning days in quite illogically lesson periods, ignoring that children and youth learn at different paces and that contents of lesson demand different times to teach and learn. But the important thing was that students should be prepared for the new working life in factories and industry, in towns and cities, not on rural farms.

When we talk about New Year, turning from one year to the next, it is more like an administrative agreement or convention; the first day of 2021 is not really different from the last day of 2020. Religions are conservative organisations and many keep their traditional New Year timings. The Church’s New Year begins with advent four weeks before Christmas. In the Christian Orthodox tradition, the New Year begins a bit later, on 14 January, a week after Christmas on 7 January. In Russia and Central Asia, they follow these timings. Some histories say that the birth of Jesus/Issa was probably not on 24 December, but more likely in January or perhaps later in spring. In Islam, the New Year begins at the first sighting of the lunar crescent after the new moon in the month of Muharram, falling eleven days earlier every year. And then there is Nowruz, the Persian New Year, which begins on or about 21 March.

[PTI to discuss census issue with MQM-P leadership today](https://nation.com.pk/31-Dec-2020/pti-to-meet-mqm-p-leadership-today)

The Bible’s Old Testament is the foundation for the world’s largest religions, Christianity and Islam. Together, the two sister religions have close to 4.5 billion faithful in a world with about 7.5 billion people. Related to time, there are some old verses in the Old Testament which are frequently cited till this day, notably the verses that say that ‘There is a time for everything’ (Ecclesiastes 3), reminding us of sun and calm in our lives, and of rain and storm, of beginning and end.

The retired Stockholm’s Bishop Caroline Krook (76) shared some thoughtful words about time in two short weekend prayers on Swedish TV on 14 November and 5 December 2020. She reminded us that we must use the time right, fill it with the content that is good for ourselves and others. The important things are the small things, she said, and the ‘Kingdom of God’, as the Bible terms it, or, the ‘Kingdom of the heavens’, as the Quran writes, is everywhere where love is strongest. But Bishop Krook said that we must take time to discover and see it, and not be too busy with less important things.

[CJP takes sou motu notice of burning temple in KP](https://nation.com.pk/31-Dec-2020/cjp-takes-sou-mnotice-of-burning-temple-in-kp)

She told a story about a woman who was so busy with her household chores that she couldn’t join her husband in the garden to marvel at the short blossom hours of the bird cherry trees, which only blossom for some hours or days. When she came out, it was too late; the withered trees were barren and the flowers lay on the ground. None of us know how much time we have at our disposal on this earth, together with our loved ones and those who love us, those who need us, and those that we need. There is an old saying that we all know: plan as you will live forever; live as today is your last day.

Finally, when I still have time, and I still have some little space left in my article, let me draw attention to the title of the article, “Who knows where the time goes?”. I have borrowed the line from a poem by the British rock singer Sandy Denny, written in 1967 and released as a song in 1973. In the poem, she begins with wondering how the migratory birds know that now is the time to leave the winter and fly to warmer lands. She reflects on sitting at the fireplace with loved ones, not having to worry about time and place. But then she experiences loss, and the good time is gone. She lives in memories. She wonders where the good time has gone, why she lost it, and if she can ever find it again. Philosophers have reminded us that this is the only time we are here. This is our time on earth—and it is God’s time with us.