

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THEOLOGY

THE RESPONSE OF THE KEIYO PEOPLE TO
CHRISTIANITY AT KESUP AIM MISSION
STATION FROM 1937-1958

BY

Rev. DAVID KIPKOGEI SAWE

*A Thesis to the Graduate School in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Church History*

JUNE 2003

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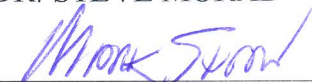
A THESIS TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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HISTORY

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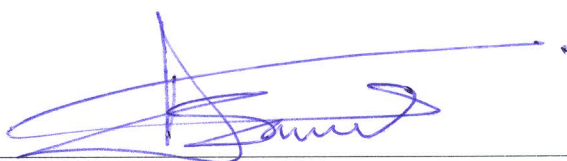
Student's Declaration

THE RESPONSE OF THE KEIYO PEOPLE TO CHRISTIANITY AT KESUP AIM
MISSION STATION FROM 1937-1958.

I declare that this is my original work and has not be submitted to any other college or
university for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of Nairobi Evangelical Graduate
School of Theology or the Examiners.

Signed



REV. DAVID KIPKOGEI SAWE

June 2003

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the growth of the first African Inland Mission Station in Keiyo District since its establishment at Kesup in 1937. This paper attempts also to highlight on the response of the Keiyo people to the Gospel.

The author starts by telling the history of the Keiyo people, their origin, the colonial rule, their religious beliefs and worship and their traditional social structure.

Next he describes the background of the AIM, its founder Mr. Peter Cameron Scott the first missionary team to Kenya in 1895, the Keswick influence on AIM, the missionary attitudes and the growth of the mission church.

Then he highlights the AIM work at Kesup Mission Station, its beginning, the first African pioneers, the out stations, and education.

Finally He highlights the Keiyo response to the Gospel, how the first Africans were prepared for the work of evangelism, the training of pastors, the opening of the out churches/cum schools, and the role of the church in education.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother Christine Jepkoech Sawe who took me to school and encouraged me in the ministry of the Lord and to further my studies.

Also to my dear wife Leah Jeptarus Sawe and my children Lydia Jepchurchir Tarus, Caroline Jepkosgei Rop, Reuben Kipngetich Sawe, Irene Jebet Sawe and Bethwel Kimutai Sawe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincere thanks goes to God the Almighty who called me into his vineyard. He is the one who has enabled me to come this far spiritually and academically. He has also enabled me to complete my studies at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST).

Special thanks to my personal adviser Dr. Steve Morad for inspiring me to press on despite the hardships I went through, and to Mrs Sandy Morad for the support and encouragement she gave me.

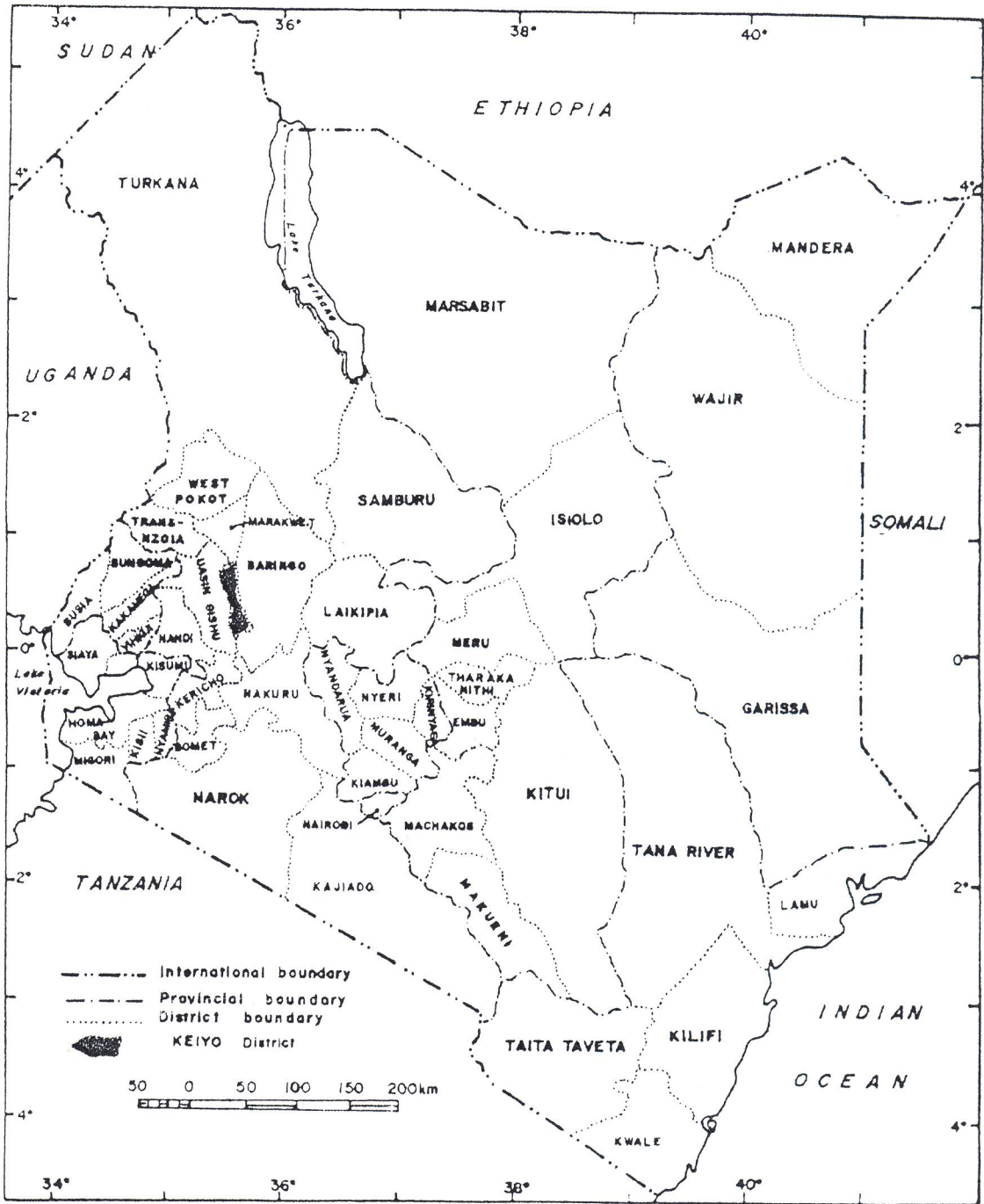
Above all, my appreciation goes to my dear wife Leah J. Sawe for standing with me in every situation.

To others also who contributed in one way or another to my success, thank you.

ABBREVIATIONS

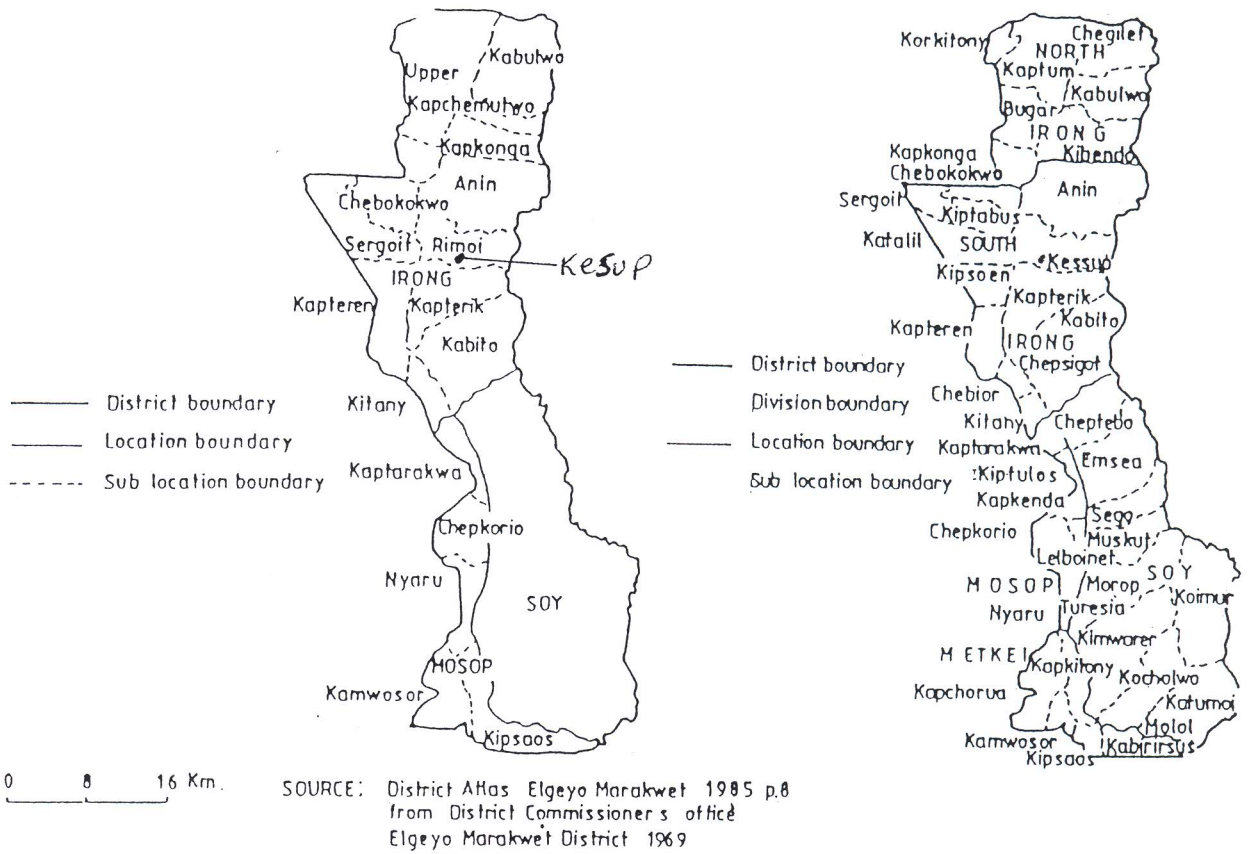
AIM	Africa Inland Mission
AIC	Africa Inland Church
RCM	Roman Catholic Mission
DC	District Commissioner
PC	Provincial Commissioner
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner
LNC	Local Native Council
KBA	AIM Kenya Branch Archives
AAC	African Anglican Church
CMS	Church Missionary Society
E-M	Elgeyo Marakwet

MAP OF KENYA SHOWING THE LOCATION OF KEIYO DISTRICT



SOURCE - DISTRICT SURVEY OFFICE - ITEN
 KEIYO DISTRICT HEAD QUARTERS

KEIYO DISTRICT MAP



Maps 1.1: Administrative Divisions

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that led to the reception of the Gospel by the Keiyo people when the first AIM mission station was built in their district in 1937. The mission station had something attractive to offer to the young people who came to it. The mission station became a refuge for those who were running away from the negative traditional practices of the Keiyo people. The practices that made the young boys and girls to find refuge at the station were such like circumcision, forced marriages and several others that made people to be declared outcasts. The other very important factor that attracted young people to the mission station was the Western form of education.

Most of the young men who were attracted to the station because of western education had interacted with educated people in the settler farms in Uasin-Gishu near Eldoret. They desired to learn the white man's magic of how to read and write. The young men eventually became Christians in the process of learning the Western education. They later became a new society because of their marriages to Christian young women they found through the mission station.

This study is important because it highlights the beginning of Protestant Christianity in Keiyo District. Before the coming of the Protestant church, the Catholic Church had already established stations in the district a year before which

were managed from Eldoret in Uasin-Gishu and Kapsabet in Nandi District.¹ The obstacles to a positive response to the Gospel are also addressed.

The study is also important because it shows how the missionaries prepared the Africans for the ministry and puts on record the activities of some of the key African church pioneers in Keiyo District. It also seeks to offer an African perspective on the endeavors of the missionary enterprise in Kesup that led to the founding of an African faith. It examines the working relationships and the attitudes between the Africans who came to Kesup and the missionaries, whether they were ones of antagonism and suspicion, or genuine and unreserved acceptance. Therefore the study is very significant because it opens up an area that nobody has specifically written about.

The proposed study was achieved primarily through the use of literature sources from various libraries and archives. Letters, logbooks, biographies, records of minute books which are mainly found in the AIM Archives were used by the researcher as the primary sources of information as well as the relevant secondary sources. The researcher also utilized the rich resources of oral history. To achieve this, the researcher visited Kesup AIC station and interviewed the pioneer Christians who were still alive and also some of the second generation Christians.

Nothing has been written on Christianity among the Keiyo. The only books that have been written about the Keiyo were written by the secular historians some of whom were against the missionaries. Susan Chebet and Ton Dietz in their book *Climbing the Cliff: A History of the Keiyo People* does not mention anything

¹ Susan Chebet and Ton Dietz, *Climbing the Cliff. A History of the Keiyo* (Eldoret: Moi University Press, 2000), 147.

concerning the Christians except when they criticize the missionaries for confusing the people's culture in Keiyo.

The author took into consideration the several approaches that historians have taken in writing their works. C. P. Groves used the missionary historiographical approach in writing his book *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* and John V. Taylor in writing his book *The Growth of the Church in Buganda*. Both of them are missionary-centered. They were writing to acknowledge the work that was done by the missionaries in Africa. They see the missionary as playing the central role in bringing the gospel to Africa and some of them miss the crucial role played by Africans themselves. Taylor is a missionary historiographer, but he does mention the role played by Africans. The missionaries are good for they are the enablers of all that has happened in Africa concerning the spreading of the Gospel.

The other approach is the nationalistic historiographical approach. This is the approach taken by Terrace O. Ranger in writing his book, *The Churches of Tanzania*. And A. J. Temu in writing his book *The British Protestant Missions*. Both of these historians also center on the missionaries but this time on the negative side. Theirs is to blame the missionaries claiming that they were imperial representatives. The missionaries were accused of denying the Africans the right education and only encouraging them to learn how to read and write. Such writers tend to favor the African Independent Churches for they were a reaction to the mission church.

The author of this research is using the new historiography approach which is used by John Karanja in writing his book, *Founding an African Faith: Kikuyu Anglican Christianity 1900 - 1945*. The author is influenced by this approach because it appreciates the work done by both the Africans and the missionaries. The missionaries are seen preparing the Africans in education and on spiritual matters so

that they may take over the church responsibilities later. The following is Karanja's observation in his book,

The church made a positive progress during the pioneering period. The out stations founded by the missionaries were run by Africans themselves who were willing to take a bold stand against Kikuyu customs which seemed incompatible with missionary teaching. Out of this, Christian influence slowly permeated through the society as the *athomi* (the educated) began to hold positions of responsibility.²

This approach is not anti-missionary but it is realistic to point out the short falls that came along the way. It appreciates also the work done by the Africans by highlighting their successes and failures in receiving the Gospel. There was a willingness among the Africans to receive the Gospel and to adopt it to be their own.

Karanja points out that there were positive and negative factors concerning the attraction of the Kikuyu people to the mission stations. The first factor is the acephalous nature of the society. This made individuals to decide on their own to go to the mission without restraint from the society. The second one was the benefit of western education. Both of these were positive factors and the following two are negative. The first one is that many parents were reluctant to send their children to school because schooling conflicted with the latter's role in the society and the mission adherence seemed to foster a spirit of rebellion against traditional authority. The second one was that, since many early mission adherents were marginal people, sending one's children to school was seen as an admission of poverty shunned by those more fortunate.³

² John Karanja, Founding an African Faith: Kikuyu Anglican Christianity 1900-1945 (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1999), 64.

³ Ibid., 49-50.

Opposition to the mission station and the missionaries from the society differed from place to place. It was also distinct from particular individuals and took different forms. Medicine men opposed missionary work because it posed a serious threat to their profession. A chief in Kabare refused to permit the establishment of a mission station in his area because he feared that missionaries would act as spies for the government. Though he refused, the mission station was built because it was sanctioned by the government. Later on, the same chief attempted to prevent boys from going to school and girls from going to the mission station. He gave two reasons for this, he feared that it might undermine young people's loyalty to their chiefs and parents. The second reason is that school attendance hindered labor recruitment.⁴

Eventually on a gradual basis, the Kikuyu became Christians and came to love the mission stations for they were the source of fortunes. The missionaries assisted by the Government Administration continued persistently to present the Gospel to such communities despite the opposition. The Africans also joined hands with the missionaries after receiving Christianity to spread the gospel and to fight off any resistance.

The essay by Anza A. Lema in *East African Expressions of Christianity* served as the second model to this research. Lema wrote that, the Chaga people responded to Christianity but not as the entire society at once. Reactions varied from place to place, each community having their reasons to why they were accepting Christianity, ignoring it or vehemently opposing missionary teachings. Those who rejected it accused the missionaries for their failure to appreciate the Chaga way of life and feared that, if the younger generation accepted it, their authority would be greatly undermined and the ties of family and community would be greatly severed.

⁴ Ibid., 60-61.

