

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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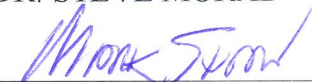
A THESIS TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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APPROVED

SUPERVISOR


DR. STEVE MORAD

SECOND READER


DR. MARK SHAW

EXTERNAL READER



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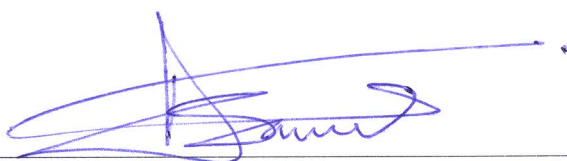
Student's Declaration

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.

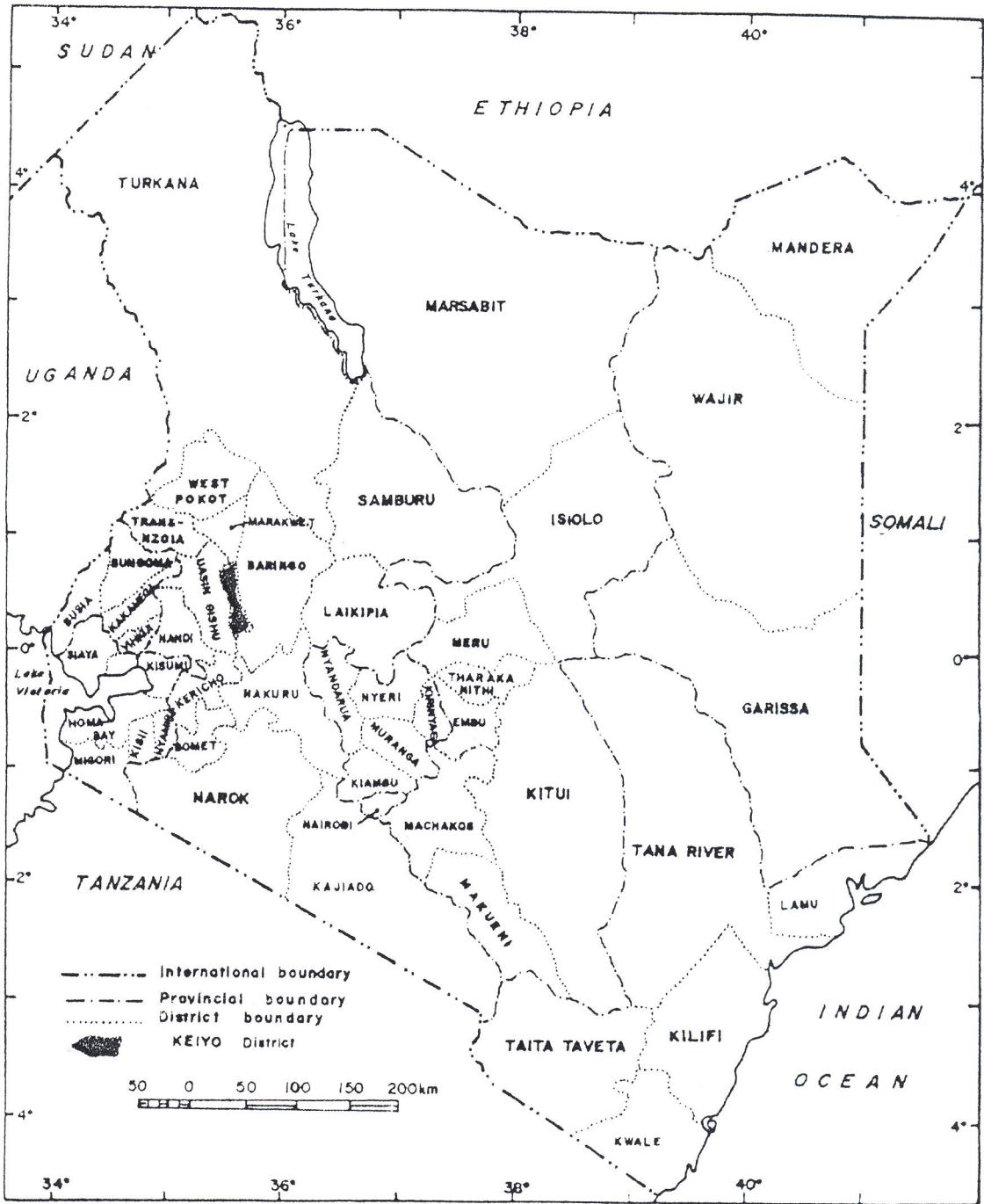
Above all, my appreciation goes to my dear wife Leah J. Sawe for standing with me in every situation.

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

ABBREVIATIONS

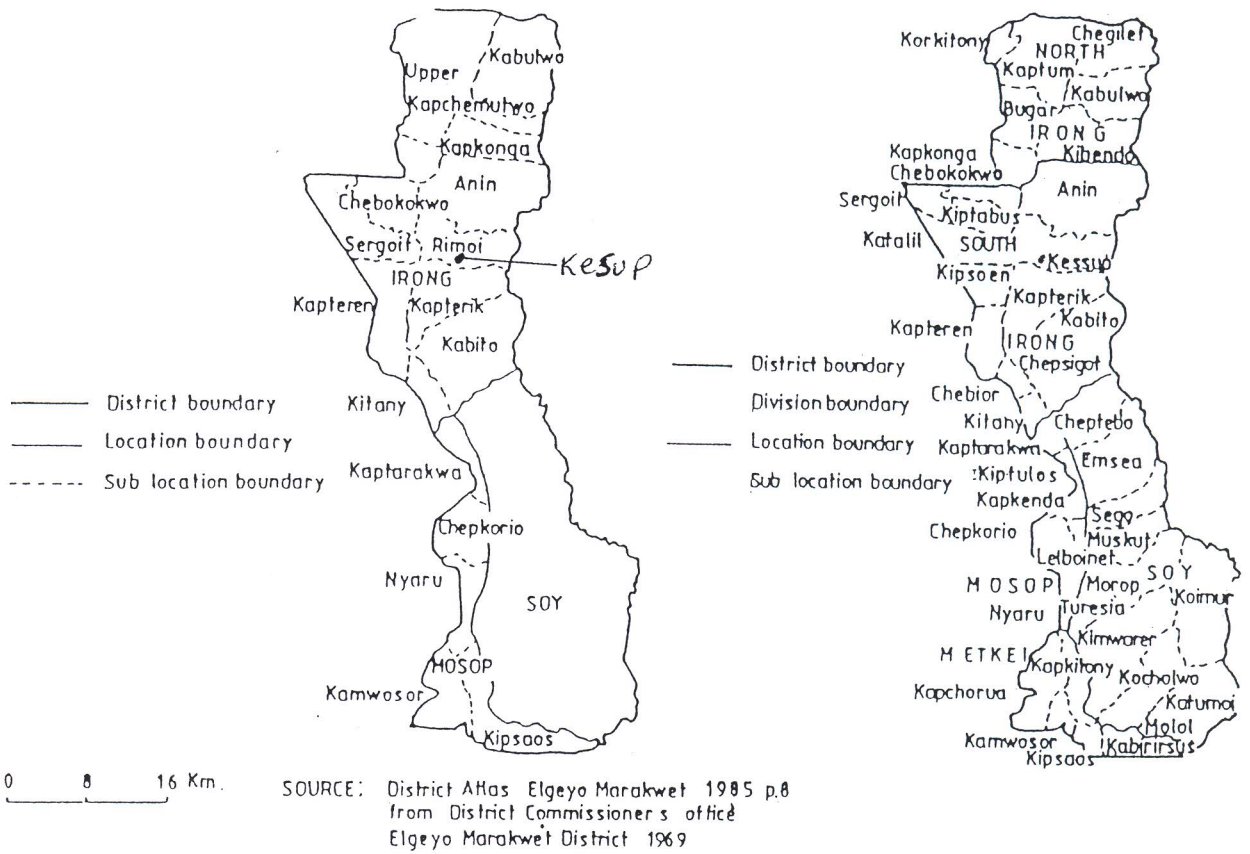
AIM	Africa Inland Mission
AIC	Africa Inland Church
RCM	Roman Catholic Mission
DC	District Commissioner
PC	Provincial Commissioner
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner
LNC	Local Native Council
KBA	AIM Kenya Branch Archives
AAC	African Anglican Church
CMS	Church Missionary Society
E-M	Elgeyo Marakwet

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.

The community elders sternly warned those who went to the missionaries for instruction in the new faith of the consequence that would befall them if they did not stop. The medicine men attributed the calamities that befell the community to the white missionaries.⁵

To some, however, the mission station became a refuge and a home. The people who found refuge at the missionary station were especially the poor and the outcast. At first, it was not because of Christianity that the common people went to the mission station but it was because of the work done by the missionaries to help improve the living conditions of the ordinary Chaga. The gifts of food and clothes that missionaries offered to those who came empty-handed to live around the camp made many Chaga people to eventually become Christians.⁶

Following the above models, the researcher attempted to understand the introduction of the gospel to the Keiyo. The researcher appreciated the work that was done by the missionaries in collaboration with the pioneer Africans at Kesup pointing out also it there was any short comings from the same. The approach to this study takes the approach that Karanja and Lema took in showing how the Keiyo people were attracted to the mission station at Kesup and how they eventually responded to Christianity.

⁵ Anza A Lema, "Chaga Religion and Missionary Christianity on Kilimanjaro: The Initial Phase, 1893-1916" in *East African Expressions of Christianity*, ed. Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1999), 55.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

CHAPTER 2

THE BACKGROUND OF THE KEIYO PEOPLE

The Keiyo people are also referred to as the Elgeyo. The word Elgeyo is the corruption of the term Keiyo which means for or from Keiyo land. During pre-colonial days, the Keiyo occupied the valley whose name is almost synonymous with the people. When colonialists asked a Keiyo where he came from the reply was *Oleb Keiyo* and it was shortened to mean Elgeyo. The two terms the *Elgeyo* and the *Keiyo* will be used interchangeably in this text although it should be born in mind that the genuine name of these people and their land is Keiyo.¹

The first District Commissioner of Elgeyo Marakwet, J. A. Massam, wrote a book about the Keiyo in 1927. He referred to the Keiyo people as the Elgeyo. The following description is what he wrote,

The Elgeyo is a mixture of people who came to the area from all directions and divided the land between them in sections extending from the highlands, down the escapement and into the valley. Originally there were sixteen sections, inhabited by patrilineal clans divided into several exogamic totem groups. The Elgeyo had eight age-sets of half a generation each.²

The Keiyo people belong to the so-called Kalenjin cluster which descends from the highland Nilotes. The Kalenjin divided further, for purposes of classification, into eight sub-groups (1) the Pokot, (2) the Saboat, (3) the Tugen, (4) the Nandi, (5) the Keiyo, (6) the Kipsigis, (7) the Marakwet and (8) the Terik. Each

¹ Susan Chebet and Ton Dietz, Climbing the Cliff. A History of the Keiyo (Eldoret: Moi University Press, 2000), 20.

² J. A. Massam, The Cliff Dwellers of Kenya (London: Frank Class & Co. Ltd., 1927), 10.

of these groups is divided into several principal political groups yet all share a common cultural and linguistic heritage.

The Keiyo sub-tribe is divided into political groups called *pororiosiek* (plural). One *pororiet* (singular) is made up of several clans identified by their totems. The clan is made up of several families. Refugees and strangers were accommodated ceremonially into the *pororiet* and given their own totems so as to begin their clan buildings.

The clan is and was a cluster of several kinship-related families which resembled kinship in structure, but was much larger in size and wider in diversity. Each clan recognized a locality which was regarded as its original “home” in which it originated and developed, sometimes with a myth or legend connected with explaining its formation and existence. Clans were traced to remote founding ancestors whose remoteness restricted only clan elders to remember any details, leaving out the young generation who would later take their turn in learning the genealogies of the clan. Earlier ancestors of no particular significance constantly vanish from memory to be replaced by more recent ones, though in the same lineage. The children born were named after the *sasa* or the recent ancestors.³

The young generations are socialized into this art of reciting genealogical names and tracing the ancestry and keeping oral tradition in their minds to be reproduced as required so that eventually they took over role after the older generation died off. Clans used to own and administer communal land through clan elders. The land ran from the highlands (*mosop*) through the escarpment into Kerio Valley floor. The Keiyo communal land was divided by the elders to each family for farming using stones (*koiwek*). No one could move the stone from its place for it was fixed ritually. Anybody who dared to move the stones that made the boundary of each plot received a curse and died if she/he did not confess to the elders. This type

³ Chebet and Dietz, 20

of demarcation provided permanent boundaries to both clan and family land and to shrines and thickets for performing initiation ceremonies.⁴

The present day Keiyo District borders with Baringo District to the East, Marakwet District to the North, Uasin-Gishu District to the West and Koibatek and Nandi Districts to the South. The Kerio Valley is generally dry, like most parts of the Rift Valley. Its floor is rough and arid. The valley is extremely fertile when irrigated, but it is subject to considerable erosion during rainy season. The Endo River floods during the rainy season, and the same applies to the seasonal rivers that feeds it.

The title *Climbing the Cliff*, in the book Written by Susan Chebet and Ton Dietz is quite in conformity with the Keiyo lifestyle which is characterized by constant struggles; punctuated by series of movements stretching back to the migration period. This title symbolizes the physical ascending of the Keiyo from the valley to the highlands. The harsh climate in the valley made the Keiyo people to gradually migrate to the highlands and to the settler farms in the Uasin-Gishu District. Hence the Keiyo have constantly been on the move in search of more economically viable activities. The migration continued from 1920's uphill over the Elgeiyo escarpment into the highlands, commonly known as *tengunin*. *Tengunin* is the Keiyo name given to the forest land along the western escarpment highland. It is at this forest land that the Keiyo people climbed the cliff to settle on.

Origin of the Keiyo

The origin of the Keiyo people is not well known because it is only through oral history that the story is told. The Keiyo people possess a strong sense of history and tradition coupled with the ability to recite detailed genealogies dating back to

⁴ Ibid., 35

several generations, using their age-set circles, adverse weather conditions and wars as reference points.⁵ Oral traditions tell of how the Kalenjin community dispersed at Mt. Elgon (*Tulwop Kony*) and every group among the eight sub tribes moved to their present day settlement. The Keiyo consider the Sabaot (*Konyek*) as the ancestral trunk of the dispersal tree. They also consider the area around Mt. Elgon as the territory which belongs to their great forefathers.⁶

After the Keiyo had settled in Keiyo land, they put in place the rules to govern themselves. They put in place a strongly knit social system which catered for their welfare of its people. The sense of belonging was so great that one persons' problem was seen as a problem for the whole community. Individuals were conditioned by the norms in the society which acted as a common bond for everybody. These norms though not written but given as instructions verbally, were very real and yet invisible but they had a lot of impact in the way members of the society related to each other, the environment and the Supreme Being.

Religious Beliefs and Worship

The Keiyo people had their traditional way of worship before the coming of Christianity. Religion for them dealt with both the earth and heaven. Religion sought not only to integrate men with God, but also to integrate men with men and each man with himself.

The Keiyo religion is best understood in the context of the environment in which the particular inhabitants lived and the physical and natural manifestations they experienced during the course of their habitation. Their concept of deity also could

⁵ Ibid., 22

⁶ Ibid.

have been influenced by their interaction with other people. The Keiyo people realized that there was a sense of dependence on a power outside of themselves, a power of which we may speak of as a spiritual or moral power. The dependency on supernatural powers is expressed in the importance of religious rituals.

When they were in prayer, special requests were made such as asking for direction, forgiveness, blessing, protection from the enemy, blessing or vengeance. Prayers, which also became rituals, were important in both reinforcing and expressing the solidarity of beliefs and establishing a distinction between what was to be treated as secret as opposed to the everyday earthly concerns. Prayers were performed for specific needs and situations, but if conducted regularly in a routine manner, they became rituals. Religious practices express and preserve the human relationship to the world. In their prescriptions and prohibitions, their definitions of what was lawful or forbidden, these practices concretized the values and counter values of African society.⁷

Religion among the Keiyo people included the several schools of training. Such training was provided to all the people. The schools consists of what is generally called initiation which constituted a vital institution for teaching and training the citizens. The Keiyo did not have a terminology for religion in their vocabulary. Religion for them was a way of life with no difference between secular and sacred. Any reference made to the sun, *asis*, high up in the sky or the ancestral spirits, *oiik*, below the earth was made through descriptive activities dictated by specific situations. The Keiyo observed the beliefs and regulations that governed the social and cultural aspects of the people such as the taboos, *kigirei* and *etan* (*kigirel* and *etan* are prohibitions .

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⁷ Ibid., 96

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There were sanctions imposed on food. You could not eat meat and at the same time drink milk. Sanctions also governed inter-personal relationships between relatives, personal property, communal property, initiation ceremonies and those which relate to the relationship of people and *Asis*, and the personal or family relationship with *oiik*, the ancestral spirits.⁸

If a member of the community broke one of the rules set by the society through tradition, a rite was performed on the victim for the restoration of normal life, otherwise misfortune was expected to befall not only the victim but the consequences could be born by the community as well. Thus a Keiyo is religious by birth, socialized into the system through all the stages of life as demanded by customs. It is through this that religion is part and parcel of a Keiyo life. Socialization on the social norms and cultural expressions is deeply ingrained in the lives of the people and this explains the absence of a deity or a god among the Keiyo. This, however does not mean that the Keiyo were atheists, the supernatural being in the form of *Asis* and the respect accorded to the ancestral spirits *oiik*, was the farthest the Keiyo could go in search of a supernatural being to cater for their aspirations including both material and spiritual matters. It was for this reason that the Keiyo were perplexed when Christianity advocated salvation through the son of God who died for everybody. To the Keiyo the God preached by the Christians lived in heaven; high up just as *Asis* was and there was no problem in accepting the existence of God as they had always expressed through their supplications.⁹

The religious beliefs of the Keiyo were not well formulated. The supreme deity was “*Asis*” a deity equated with the sun but beyond the sun. The word *Asis* means the sun. *Asis* dwells in the sky. Prayers were addressed to him in moments of crisis or national disaster such as an epidemic or famine. He was acknowledged to be a benefactor and giver of all good things. As Kipkorir and Welbourne note: “He is supreme, omnipotent, the omniscient arbiter of all things and the guarantor of right.

⁸ Ibid., 97

⁹ Ibid.

He is known as *Chebet* (the one whom the day belongs). As the sun shines on all people and all things, so *Asis* sees everything that is right and good for all men.”¹⁰

According to Chebet and Dietz, the Keiyo people are a people of great worship.

Religion for them had a basic function, that bestow on the society an internal coherence. Thus there was no clear cut line between the religious and the rest of the activities in the society. The Keiyo possessed a belief in the presence of a high supernatural being whom they referred to as the creator of all things on earth. The idea of an omnipresent being made the Keiyo to refer to their creator in a descriptive way, without necessarily attributing a name to it. They resorted to manifestations of nature, such as the sun, *Asis* also known by other descriptive names, which denote a feminine identity such as the one liable for people’s well being.

<i>Chebo-Kipkoiyo</i>	-	The provider.
<i>Chaptail</i>	-	The one who shines.
<i>Chebet</i>	-	The provider of light.
<i>Chepkongen</i>	-	The one who knows
<i>Chepkochor</i>	-	The one who rises.
<i>Yainted</i>	-	The creator.
<i>Ne Toror</i>	-	The one high up. ¹¹

The use of the name *Asis* (sun) for God does not mean that the sun was worshipped. God who was far away in heaven according to the Keiyo community lived in heaven beyond the sun and was at the same time able to help in time of need through his agents who were in charge of bad and good omens in the society or even at an individual level. The agents of *Asis* are believed to be thunder, and wind of which the former is considered to be the errant for death through lightning, although thunder is also the provider of rain, hence *Toyoi*, is used as a totem name for one of the clans, as an appreciation for this positive effect.

¹⁰ B E Kipkorir and F B Welbourn, *The Marakwet of Kenya; a Preliminary Study* (Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, 1973), 14.

¹¹ Chebet and Dietz, 98.

Prayers and Worship

The Keiyo word *saet* means prayer or worship. It is to request, to ask for, to beseech or to intercede. There were personal and communal prayers. People prayed *Asis* to guarantee safety or to provide assistance. *Tisiik* or traditional priests were involved in these prayers. The Keiyo *tisiik* bore the title *kiborennot*. A man went through the process of *bore* for initiation so that when he came out of seclusion after six months, he took up the duty of a priest. The initiates took on new names beginning with *Bar* e.g. *Bargutwo*, *Barseguton*, *Bargoria*, *Bargoiyet*. A man qualified for this noble task if he was blameless, had a wife with children of both sexes and was wealthy. A young man was not allowed to go to this initiation ceremony. It was only for those above 50 years of age and chosen by the community. After the initiates came out of their seclusion, they could hold community prayer or be invited by an individual person for prayers in their home.

With the guidance of the priests, the Keiyo offered prayers to the supernatural, omnipresent being whom they gave the name *Asis* as mentioned above. These prayers were accompanied by an offering of burnt incense in the form of meat from a spotless lamb *mengit*, and in the form of first fruits of the land *Tongoanik*, at a place called *kaptkoros* which was always a thicket set aside as a sacred place situated on top of a hill. For a family offering, the sacrifice took place at the gate of the compound (*kirat*) or at the foot of the center post in the house (*toloch*).¹²

When smoke rose up to the sky from the place where the sacrifice was offered, it was believed that the offering had been accepted by *Asis* or God. On the other hand, libations using milk, honey beer and blood from the ram was expected to be drunk by the ancestors down below, in *kamweny*. The libation was meant to appease

¹² Ibid., 99

oiik, the ancestral spirits. Nobody else offered the prayers except the elders who were ordained to the priesthood through *bore*. At the family level the ritual was allowed to be conducted by the eldest male member of the household if the *kiborenot* was unable to come. The elders always prayed asking for blessings, good health, good harvest, peace and tranquility on the land.¹³

Other than *Asis* (Supreme being), there were concepts of the ancestral spirits. The benevolent *oiik* (ancestral spirits) and the malevolent *chesawilok* (evil spirits). Before *Asis* is invoked, the ancestral spirits were first appealed to by the family or community. *Oiik* are believed to be communicating with their family members through dreams. The spirits warn the living and punish any that do not follow their instructions. On the opposite, the evil spirits, *chesawilok*, are also there and they are dealt with by exorcism when they attack a family or community. Such spirits bring disaster and they are not associated with the good intentions of the ancestral spirits. The living consult their *oiik* because they believe that they are much wiser and so would be able to help them out of their current predicament – somehow. The living assume that the living dead, *oiik*, are always seeing them wherever they go or in whatever they do. A man usually spits or pours down beer before he drinks and by doing this, he feeds them. The ancestors have to be remembered always through the naming of children and feeding them through libation.

The Process of Worship

According to Chebet and Dietz;

Worship and sacrificial rituals were performed by *tisiik*, priests in a very solemn manner, usually in a temporarily constructed shrine called *kapkoros*. This was an arch made of secret plants and trees

¹³ Ibid.

like *sinented*, or *periploca*, *tegat* or *arundinaria*, *tarakwet*, or cedar. *simotwet* or fig tree etc. Beneath the structure was *eleusine* millet grain, representing agriculture, *labotik*, sodom apples representing livestock, *chego*, milk and *kumik*, traditional brew including *kipketimik*, honey beer were poured on the ground. A spotless lamb was killed and placed on the temporary hut to burn. The smoke went up to *Asis* and the blood was spilled on the ground for *oiik* to drink.¹⁴

As the lamb burnt, *nyamtutik* or incense was also burnt to provide a sweet smell. This was done to appease *Asis*, God, *oiik*, ancestors, *ilat*, thunder or rain to induce them to guarantee good health for the people and livestock and a bumper harvest by providing rain. The process of worship was participatory in nature since the audience joined in the procession to the altar chanting words cited by the priest (*kiborenót*). Apart from leading the community in prayer and worship, the priest, *kiborenin* performed judicial duties in the community. He reconciled people, he judged the wrong doer, he cursed, he blessed and performed rituals.

The women in the community were not left behind. They had their own prayers to make called *imwochet* or built archways at cross roads for the whole community. All the women participate with mature girls. The ceremony was done at night when there was moon light. The women sang up and down the paths in their village and it was so in all the villages that night. One could hear the *imwochet* song all over the nearby villages. This prayer by the women was for protection against any evil or calamity through an epidemic or any other natural hazard like flood or drought.

Apart from the above, *kigirel* taboos acted as a social control between men and women, children and adults and mankind to ancestors together with the cosmos, represented by *oiik* and *Asis* respectively.

¹⁴ Ibid., 100

The naming ceremony among the Keiyo people was very important. There was a belief that a child could bear the characteristics both physical and behavioral of an ancestor and this could prompt and even influence the naming. Any ancestor who did not live up to the expectation of the community e.g. a witch, a sorcerer or any that committed suicide by hanging were not considered good ancestors. A child could not be named after them unless the child was born with the same physical characteristics. The practice of naming of the children by the Keiyo people was misunderstood by the missionaries who condemned it saying that it was a religion of ancestors' worship. In essence this is not ancestor worship but respect for their dead as though they were still alive since they see them in the form of their children is a kind of reincarnation.

The coming of the missionaries to Kesup in 1937 found the people of Keiyo not void in terms of religion. The first Christians who came to the station were full of the above and for the missionaries to clean it off like cleaning the blackboard was so hard. Eventually many came to know the Lord despite all these.

CHAPTER 3

THE BACKGROUND OF AIM

The founder of AIM (Africa Inland Mission) was Peter Cameron Scott. This was in the year 1895 at Philadelphia in America. In the same year, he came to Mombasa with the first eight missionaries, three women and five men including himself. Back home in Philadelphia, a council by the name of the Philadelphia Missionary Council was formed, and its work was to pray and to inform others about the work that was done by the missionaries in Africa. The council also received funds to help the missionaries in Africa and also welcomed those who received the calling to come to Africa to preach the Good News. Whatever money that the council received was donated by people willingly without being asked to give. It was by faith that they received any money to support the missionaries in Africa.

The Philadelphia Missionary Council used a magazine called *Hearing and Doing* to spread the information about the missionaries in Africa. The missionaries led by Scott traveled from Mombasa to Kambaland and put up their first mission station.¹ The first station in Ukambani was at a place called Nzau, where a dispensary and the first AIM school was established. Other stations included Sakal (March 1896), Kilungu (April 1896) and Kangundo (September 1896). Scott would walk in a day a distance of 45 miles between Kangundo and Nzau and walked a total of “two thousand six hundred miles on foot travel in his one year of service.”² On

¹ W. E. Mulwa, *Sura Mpya Ya Kanisa. Historia ya Africa Inland Church* (Nairobi: Kijabe Printers Press, n.d.), 8-10.

² *Hearing and Doing II* (Nairobi: K. B. A., 1897), 3-4.

December 4, 1896 he died because of fever after being sick for several months. The vacant position of a leader to the missionary team in Africa needed to be filled and the council asked its president Mr. Charles E. Hurburt to replace Peter Cameron Scott. In the year 1901, Hurburt resigned from the Bible Institute in Philadelphia to work fulltime in the mission work. In the same year, Hurburt had recruited seven people who were willing to be missionaries. Among the seven was Mr. Lee H. Downing who became a prominent leader and Dr. Henderson who became the first doctor to this mission. The mission work spread from then on and the AIM was the first protestant mission to bring the Good News to the Kamba, Masai, Keiyo (Kesup), Tugen, Marakwet, Pokot, Turkana, Rendile and Orma.³

The founder of AIM had a conviction to bring the Good News to the Dark Continent of Africa. At one point in his life while he was sick, he promised God that, if his life was spared, he would dedicate it to the Lord for his service. An inner struggle from this time on regarding his musical career resulted in a complete dedication of himself to God. Out of his conviction, he joined the International Missionary Alliance, and he with his brother were sent to Congo where he stayed for two years and his brother died. Peter went back very sick to Scotland where he recovered and did not forget the urge to return to Africa.⁴ While in England, Scott had his second spiritual crisis. Kneeling on the grave of David Livingstone in Westminster Abbey, he was gripped by the inscription, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring” (John 10:16). In that same moment Scott envisioned a chain of mission stations stretching westward from Mombasa on the east coast to Lake Chad in the very heart of Africa. This has been truly realized since his

³ Mulwa, 10-14

⁴ Ibid, 8

death in 1896. The AIC Church has spread to Congo from Mombasa along with other protestant churches right to Chad.⁵

AIM being one of the religious organizations under the Philadelphia Missionary Council was founded on five principles. It was to be an ecumenical mission and accept as missionaries Christians from any evangelical denomination and cooperate with all evangelical missionary societies on the field. It was to be an evangelistic mission that emphasized methods of direct evangelism in preference to promoting commerce or civilization. AIM would also be a lay mission; seeking to mobilize the vast body of pious; Christian laymen who did not have the opportunity for theological education. It would be a faith mission and rely upon God alone through prayer for its finances, rather than upon human fund raising techniques. And finally it would be a field governed mission run by the missionaries themselves on the field rather than by a committee in the homeland.⁶

AIM aimed at mobilizing pious laymen for missionary work in Africa. The mission sought to empower economically and educationally disadvantaged yet pious Christians for the evangelization of Africa. Thus lay men as well as clergy had to be used to complete the task. The perception of the African context also contributed to such a kind of decision. Africa was illiterate and therefore the founders thought that broad educational and intellectual qualifications were not needed. Piety and the ability to live in a harsh environment and confront a culture seen to be repulsive were the only qualifications deemed to be necessary. After all, AIM conceived its task almost exclusively as one of evangelism and denied that educating or civilizing Africa

⁵ John Alexander Gratton "The Relationship of AIM and its National Church in Kenya Between 1895-1971" (Ph. D. Dissertation, New York University, 1974), 17-18.

⁶ Stephen Daniel Morad. "The Founding Principles of the African Inland Mission and their Interaction with the African Context in Kenya from 1895-1939" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1997), 14-15.

was part of that work. This being the case, well educated teachers would not necessarily have to be part of AIM's Missionary force.⁷

The mission's overemphasis on evangelism caused some of the missionaries who had desired to introduce practical training, for example teaching men to be carpenters, brick makers, and farmers to leave the mission. Mr. Hotchkiss who resigned from AIM went back to America and returned six years later to Kaimosi with the Friends Africa Industrial Mission, for he had come to believe that evangelism alone was not enough. A CMS Missionary in Maseno introduced a level of education beyond standard 3 called elite and invited Luo chiefs to send their sons to the new school but only the unwanted children were sent. The unwanted educated children later displaced the traditional chiefs and from then, Western education turned out to be the most popular missionary method, especially when combined with medicine and evangelism.⁸

Social concern was not originally part of the AIM purpose, but a the famine of 1898-1899 forced them into this work. Hotchkiss wrote "Tell me what is the use of preaching the gospel to people who are gripped with the awful pain of hunger? How can they gasp it? How can the poor deluded minds take it in? They want bread, and a fearful account will be laid to the charge of a self-satisfied church, unless this pitiful cry of heathendom is healed." During the three years of famine in Ukambani it was reported that half the people of the district had died.⁹

⁷ Morad, 28.

⁸ David Barrett ed. Kenya Churches Handbook (Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House, 1973), 33.

⁹ Gratton, 39.

AIM Keswick Piety

The AIM'S evangelistic principles to the mission field were influenced by the Keswick movement. The Keswick movement was part of a broad, Anglo-American holiness movement in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It emphasized a deep piety and warm devotion to God, the avoidance of personal sin and sinful influences, and active Christian service. It advocated a second experience after conversion that would result in inner peace, victory over sin and power in Christian service, especially in evangelism.¹⁰ What was needed for a Christian to attain this was an act of the will, a radical turning by faith from the old nature and a yielding or surrender to the authority and power of the Holy Spirit. The believer's act of surrender was to be a final, a once and for all act. The AIM missionary, then believed that his missionary service to God and to the African people was not only his own work, but that it was also the work of God with the Holy Spirit actively working through him to make the service effective. The believer was to depend on Christ alone in everything he was to do.¹¹

Out of this understanding, Stephen Morad wrote,

In order to understand the Bible and to receive from its pages a message from God, the believer had to have faith in the Holy Spirit and depend upon him to illuminate the scripture. And, as the believer depended upon the Holy Spirit to understand the Bible, so he had to depend on Him to give his message the power to touch the hearts of his listeners. AIM did not disparage education or scholarship as such. Rather it saw piety as far more significant and effective at helping people deal with life than education or scholarship alone. Because the power to correctly understand and effectively apply the scriptures was dependent upon the believer's piety, and thus available to all pious believers to one degree or another, AIM believed that it could confidently depend upon

¹⁰ Morad, 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31-38.

relatively uneducated and theologically untrained missionaries to be its religious teachers in Africa.¹²

Out of this Keswick influence, the AIM missionaries in Kenya behaved the way they behaved. Their negative response towards social concerns was due in part to their Keswick background. Education was not advocated by the AIM missionaries in the early years but it was only later that they allowed it because it was done by other mission agencies in Kenya. The missionaries who came to Kenya had that in mind and those who did not accept the system like Hotchkiss left AIM and joined other mission agencies.

The missionary who came to Kesup AIM Mission Station in 1937 knew of all the above requirements and he came only to evangelize and nothing else. The kind of education offered was only for one to be able to read the Bible and be able to write a letter and fill the log book. The Girls Secondary School at Kesup was started in 1969 after the policy had changed.

Missionary Attitudes

The missionaries had a lot of work to do when they first came to Kenya. They found the African world view different from their own. The missionaries work was mainly to create the middle way so that they could be able to understand the African world view and for the Africans to understand their world view also. It was easier for them to come to the middle way than it was for the Africans. The slow learning of the Africans was understood by most of the missionaries, but the ones who did not understand them, acted in a superior manner.

¹² Ibid., 39

Such kind of prejudice is seen in the letter that C. F. Johnson wrote concerning the natives and said, "It was discouraging to use the natives in building an animal stockade for they (natives) are so stupid and indescribably lazy. If one is set to work, no matter what the work is, he must be watched, or he will either go to sleep or to picking jiggers out of his feet."¹³

It is obvious that the Africans were being viewed and judged from the perspective of western civilization and culture. But those who come later found out that: "Intellectually they (Africans) are above what we are apt to consider the heathen to be, as shown by their hand work."¹⁴ It is possible that some of the missionaries were biased in their judgements. These misjudgments to some extent affected the witness of the early missionaries.

The Growth of the Mission Church

According to John Gratton,

The first decade of mission work in Kenya 1895-1904, was largely one of the pioneering. At this period, there were only a few African professing Christians and they were ignorant of Christian truth. During the next two decades 1905-1924 ten new stations reported considerable growth as African evangelists joined the missionaries in proclaiming the Christian message."¹⁵

It is during this period that Kapropita AIM Station was opened in 1913 and Kapsabet AIM Station in 1917. These two mission stations were instrumental in helping open up Kesup AIM mission station. Kapropita is in Baringo District and Kapsabet is in Nandi District.

¹³ Hearing and Doing Vol. IV, 2 (Nairobi: KBA, 1900), 5.

¹⁴ Quoted by Gratton, 37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 229-230.

The period between 1925-1934 experienced mass movements towards Christianity. The mission stations became district centers for the many out post churches that surrounded them. A Bible school was opened among the Kamba people in 1928. Shortly afterwards the present day Moffat College of the Bible was opened at Kijabe among the Kikuyu people.¹⁶

The graduates of these Bible Schools did a remarkable outreach ministry. A number of them were later licensed to baptize and administer Holy Communion. It was unfortunate that since 1928 when the first Bible school was begun, it took the missionaries 17 years to ordain an African pastor on April 19, 1945. He was Rev. B. N. Watuma. Two others were ordained the same year on October 14, 1945. They were Rev. S. M. Nzyoki and Rev. S. M. Soo. From then on, many other pastors were ordained.¹⁷ The first Kalenjin to be ordained from Kapsabet was Rev. Samuel Arap Gimnyige. He was ordained on September 10, 1952. Rev. Gimnyige helped Stuart Bryson in translating the Bible into Nandi and finished in 1939. The Nandi Bible was used among the Kalenjin communities until it was retranslated into Kalenjin a few years ago.¹⁸ It was also during this period between 1925-1934 that Kabartonjo AIM Station was opened in Baringo and Kapsowar in Marakwet. Both of them were opened in 1926 and 1933 respectively. The two stations were instrumental in the opening of Kesup AIM in 1937.

Eldoret, Kapsowar and Kabratonjo contributed tremendously in the opening of Kesup. The first missionary to come to Kesup was Mr. Edgar Bryson and his wife Nancy. They were joined by the Keiyo boys from Kapsowar AIM Station and the

¹⁶ Ibid., 230.

¹⁷ Mulwa, 21.

¹⁸ Dick Anderson, We Felt like Grasshoppers: The Study of the Africa Inland Mission (Nottingham: Crossway Books, 1994), 148-150.

girls from Kabartonjo AIM Station. Together in one accord they built Kesup AIM Station and Christianity.

CHAPTER 4

AIM WORK AT KESUP

The Beginning

Kesup AIM Station was started in January 1937. Its establishment was through the efforts of the AIM stations in Marakwet, Baringo, Uasin-Gishu and Nandi. The colonial rule in Keiyo laid the ground for the coming of the missionaries. Among the Kalenjin groups, the Nandi's and the Kipsigis were the first to fall under the colonial rule followed later by the Tugen, Marakwet, Pokot and finally the Keiyo.¹ The delay by the colonialists to come and rule Keiyo is attributed to the fact that the Keiyo area was so remote because of the escarpment that did not allow easy passage. The Keiyo people were also very few in number and were almost the last to be incorporated in the colonial system of British East Africa.

The British used the station at Eldama Ravine to enter Keiyo. The Eldama Ravine District Commissioner tried to enter Keiyo in 1902 but they were pushed back by the fierce fighting of the Keiyo people who referred to the war as *Borietab Kipkoimat* or the war of long fire because of the use of the guns by the British to kill the Keiyo. On the same day, the British camp was hit by lightning forcing the British and their Tugen allies to flee back to Eldama Ravine leaving behind all the cattle they had confiscated from the Keiyo in an attempt to force their rule over them.²

When they failed to enter Keiyo from the south, the British decided to use the Marakwet in the north to enter because they had already established themselves at

¹ Chebet & Dicz, 135.

² Ibid., 136.

Kapsowar. This attempt also failed, and it was not until 1909 when a very thorough tour was organized through Keiyo land for the possible establishment of colonial rule by officials from Eldama Ravine.³

Keiyo for sometime was ruled by the Eldama Ravine DC using an invented position of a paramount chief because the Keiyo did not have an overall ruler. A monetary economy was introduced to the Keiyo people instead of barter trade to get the Keiyo people out to work as laborers for the whites who had come to settle in Uasin-Gishu and acquired huge farms that needed to be cleared. The Keiyo people were confined to the valley and were not allowed to climb the cliff to settle on the highlands.⁴

The administration of the Keiyo land was transferred from Ravine to Eldoret in 1913. The Keiyo census was done and collection of taxes begun. The Taxes collected were used in 1917 to construct a road that runs from the southern part of Keiyo to the border with Marakwet. Many Keiyo men were opened to the outside and they went as far as Eldoret to work in order to get money to pay tax and for their living. Some men were taken to the army to serve in the Carrier Corps against the Germans in the First World War.⁵

The meeting with other people by the Keiyo in the settler farms changed their world view. They met with Africans who knew how to read and write and this motivated some Keiyo people to want to learn the magic. Mzee Elijah Chemweno remembers a Kikuyu who was called Reuben whom they met when they were working for a white man in Uasin-Gishu. Reuben knew how to read and write, and he

³ Ibid., 136.

⁴ Ibid., 136-137.

⁵ Ibid., 137.

taught them the Word of God. Chemweno said they were not very much interested with the Word of God but wanted to know how to write and read so that they could know the language of the white man. This desire made several Keiyo men to look for a place called *sukul* (school) to study. The arrival of the white man actually brought a lot of changes to the Keiyo people which greatly affected their life style. One of the changes brought by the white man was the introduction in 1917 of the Local Native Council (LNC) to deal with minor judicial matters. This replaced the Keiyo form of settling disputes by the elders.

The Keiyo were governed by the colonial administration through their own people. The first Administration Station was built at Kamariny in 1921. But it was moved to Tambach soon after because the administration wanted to be closer to the majority of the people. Tambach became the headquarters of the New Elgeyo District in 1922 and this separated it from Marakwet District which had its headquarters at Kapsowar. The two districts were merged again in 1927 to form Elgeyo and Marakwet District and with its headquarters in Tambach. It remained so until 1994 when they were separated again.⁶

The Keiyo District was regarded by the British colonial officers as a natural labor supply area. There were no development projects planned for the people. In 1923, the District Officer Uasin-Gishu counted more than 1,200 Keiyos as laborers on white farms and on the Uasin-Gishu railway project.⁷ But by 1928, the participation of the Keiyo in the labor market was below that of the Kikuyu, the Nandi, the Luyha,

⁶ Ibid., 142.

⁷ Ibid., 144.

the Kipsigis and the Marakwet. In 1939, the Keiyo District reported that more than 3,000 men worked outside the District.⁸

The colonialists prepared the Keiyo people for the Gospel. The Keiyo men who worked in Uasin-Gishu like Elijah Chemweno, Job Katam, Daniel Yab, Jeremiah Yab, Andreah Maiyo, Samuel Kokoi and Laban Chelashew had the chance to interact with men from other tribes like Reuben who was a Kikuyu and knew how to read and write.

The people in the settler farms in Uasin-Gishu came from districts where missionaries and colonialists were. Therefore, they had an idea of Christianity and the much admired magic of *kusoma* (reading). Reading was to be found in the mission station and many men and women went to the mission station only to learn how to read and write but in the process some came to know the Lord as their savior.

Missionary Work in Keiyo

According to Susan Chebet an Ton Dietz,

The settlers' activities in Uasin-Gishu and related areas were followed by some missionaries whose main agenda was to open up the dark continent of Africa in response to reports from explorers and travelers about heathen people who needed salvation through the preachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, serious missionary work among the Keiyo did not start until the late 1930's. The Roman Catholic mission established some outpost cum-schools in the highland parts of the Keiyo area, from 1936 onwards, which were managed from Eldoret in Uasin Gishu and from Kapsabet in Nandi District. The USA – backed Africa Inland Mission (AIM) started a school at Kesup between the highlands and Tambach in 1938, from where some missionary activities spread to other parts of the area.⁹

⁸ Ibid., 145.

⁹ Ibid., 147.

It was not possible to start mission work before 1930 because the colonial power was suspicious of the missionaries who came from countries other than England. It was in 1918 that the central colonial government in Nairobi wrote a confidential letter to all the government officers in the native reserves in which it was regretted that, “we have considerably more aliens carrying out mission work amongst the natives than we have British subjects. This is undoubtedly undesirable if we wish to bring up the native population to British ideals.” This implied that only the British missionaries were welcomed. The Assistant District Commissioner of Marakwet in reply to the letter wrote, “in Elgeyo reserve, an uneducated American missionary is working here, he is not the right sort of person to install British ideals into the natives of Elgeyo.” He recommended only the well educated British or French missionaries.¹⁰ this is the period when the first AIM missionary tried to put up a mission station in Keiyo. He was discontinued.

As mentioned above, Kapsowar AIM mission station was opened in 1933, Kapsabet in 1917 and Kabartonjo in 1926. The Keiyo men and women who had by chance heard about the Word of God and education decided to go to these mission stations in search of it. The ladies went to Kabartonjo and the men went to Kapsowar. Each group did what they did without the knowledge of the other. The men each on his own found his way to Kapsowar. Several of those people who went to the mission stations were outcasts. They are the people who refused to follow the customs and traditions as required. They either refused to get married or refused to be circumcised. Some ran away from their husbands who brutally mistreated them.

Mrs. Martha Kokoi was one of the first girls to go to the mission station in Kapsowar. She was born in Chebororwo in Uasin Gishu District. Her parents had

¹⁰ Ibid.

gone there to work for the white settlers. Her uncle went to request that she be allowed to go and stay with him in Kapsowar. At her uncle's home in Kapsowar, she received salvation in the mission station. She then moved from the house of her uncle to stay with other girls at the mission station. She narrated how difficult it was to live at the mission station as girls, because their parents usually came to threaten the missionaries so that they may allow their daughters to accompany them to go back home. The missionaries refused to let their parents take them, and the girls also refused to leave the mission station because of Christ. A girl's father and relatives came with bows and arrows to threaten the missionaries if they would not allow their daughter to accompany them back home. Her mother also came to persuade her and when she refused, her mother threatened to go and curse her by wrapping ashes on her breasts which she sucked and her thighs which she sat on. Because of her strong faith, she told her mother that "such curses have no power over her again. The one who is in her is stronger even than the curses." She was later married to a Christian young man and has since been one of the key women leaders in the Marakwet church.¹¹

On the other missions station at Kabartonjo, four girls from Keiyo secretly left their home to go and hear the Word of God. One of the girls was somebody's wife and had one child, but she decided to leave her husband, who mistreated her, and joined her friends to go and hear the word of God. The lady later went to officially divorce her former husband and continued to stay in the mission station. It was unheard of for a wife not to brew beer for her husband and when her former husband heard that she could not come and brew beer for him, he immediately sanctioned the divorce. The lady was later remarried to a Christian husband. Most of the mission

¹¹ Martha Kokoi of AIC Anin, interview by author, 2 January 2003, Tamach.

girls were not circumcised and a non-Christian could not marry them at all. There was a belief that an uncircumcised woman could not bear children and if she did, they died. The non-Christians also believed that such a woman could not cook sweet food. She would always be serving uncooked food and this was a disgrace to her husband who normally comes home with his friends.

The education for girls in mission stations was basically to prepare them for marriage. The mission felt that the Christian African home was the corner stone of Christian civilization in Africa. Because of this, the mission sought to teach and train the girls so that they could build Christian homes as the wives of their evangelists and Christian men. The mission took this challenge and paid special attention to the winning and training of women and girls through village work and girls' schools. The girls were taught dressmaking, spinning, weaving and home management.

Mzee Elijah Chemweno first heard about the Word of God in 1927 through a Kikuyu called Reuben. Reuben invited Chemweno and his friend Jeremiah Yab to his house every evening so that he could teach them the Word of God. The two were amazed to see Reuben reading and writing and wanted to know how to read and write. Both of them resigned their jobs to go back to Keiyo from Uasin-Gishu District for circumcision in 1932. They came out of initiation seclusion in 1933. Jeremiah Yab got married the same year and stayed with his wife for three years. In 1936, he discovered that there was a mission station at Kapsowar in Marakwet land where he could go and learn how to read and write. His priority was not Christianity but to know how to read and write like their friend in Uasin Gishu District. He left his wife secretly to go to Kapsowar in June 1936. The wife later decided to go back to her

father's home and they never joined in marriage again. The lady was given to another man by his father and this was fine with Jeremiah Yab.¹²

When Elijah Chemweno heard of what his friend had done secretly, he inquired also and followed him in September the same year to Kapsowar. They met there with Samuel Kokoi who had gone to Kapsowar before them. At the station were now three Keiyo men. Their teacher was Reuben Seronei an evangelist from Nandi. Reuben Seronei was sent by the church in Nandi as a missionary in Marakwet. Reuben Seronei was there with his wife Rebecca who helped also in training the girls.¹³

At school in Kapsowar, the time table ran from 1.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.. The subjects taught were reading and writing, a little history, geography and gardening. Reuben later developed some problems and misunderstandings with the missionaries at Kapsowar. The Nandi church discontinued him from working with the mission because of fighting with all the missionaries at Kapsowar and refusing to say sorry. Secondly for supporting those who wanted to break away from AIM in Nandi. It is true that Reuben Seronei was one of those who encouraged the establishment of the Anglican Church in Nandi citing that the AIM missionaries did not offer education for the Africans beyond the elementary level. He later became the first Anglican priest in Nandi after receiving theological training in St. Paul's Limuru.¹⁴

Elijah Chemweno said that, though their aim was to know how to read and write, they got converted in the process and received salvation. He testifies of the salvation he received in Kapsowar up to this day at age 99. Apart from studying in the

¹² Elijah Chemweno of AIC Sitotwo, interview by author, 3 January 2003, Chepkorio.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

afternoon, they had to do cleanliness in the morning, fetch firewood and the look for their food.¹⁵

Kesup AIM Mission Station

The time came for the mission station to be opened in Keiyo. Many obstacles had always blocked the way but it was on February 11, 1936 when the secretary to the council at AIM mission at Kapsowar applied for the plot at Kesup. The permission for the plot at Kesup was granted by Esq. A. R. Cornor who was the District Commissioner Tambach District. The secretary to the council at AIM mission at Kapsowar who applied for the plot was Dr. Leigh Ashton. Dr. Ashton and his wife were both doctors and they came to Kapsowar in 1934. He applied for permission for the Kesup plot from the Chief Native Commissioner in Nairobi on October 8th, 1936. This was the first Protestant mission station in Keiyo District.¹⁶

AIM work at Kesup started on January 1937. Under the leadership of Bwana Edgar Bryson and his wife Nancy Bryson (Bot Jemutai). The boys from Keiyo who were in Kapsowar were recalled back to come and pioneer the mission work in their District. These were Samuel Kokoi, Elijah Chemweno, Jeremiah Yab, Joshua Cheptum, Paulo Koiser and Job Katam.¹⁷ The number had grown since the 3 went in the previous years.

Bwana Bryson pitched a tent for himself as the work started. The six Africans started to build their own grass house with the guidance of Bwana Bryson. When they had finished building theirs, they started putting up a house that was both used as

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Leigh Ashton, to D. C. Tambach, February 1936 (Letter KBA).

¹⁷ Martha Kokoi.

the church and a classrooms. The Sunday service started at Kesup from February the same year of 1937.¹⁸

Nancy Bryson started teaching the boys (men) in the afternoons after their morning chores. Two other Keiyo men joined, and they were Andrea Maiyo and Laban Chelashew with his wife. By the end of 1937, there were 11 members in the church and 25 catechumens. Six baptisms were done and Sunday service attendance was an average of 30 people.¹⁹

The station started growing and by 1938 the six African boys had matured physically and spiritually. The boys school enrolled up to 17 boys. The others came from their homes as day scholars. The September - December report of 1938 recorded that there were 16 church members 17 catechumens and an average Sunday attendance of 35 people.²⁰

In 1939, Samuel Kokoi was ready to get married. He went to Kapsowar home for the girls to ask for one. He was accepted by Martha and he got married to her. After they were married, they went to Kapsabet Bible school for Samuel Kokoi to train as a pastor. He went back to Kesup after his training and found Bwana Bryson and his wife Nancy still serving in the station. They joined them in the service of the Lord. Job Katam, Elijah Chemweno and Jeremiah Yab were also still firm in the Lord going out for evangelism as far as Metkei in the Southern part of Keiyo District.²¹

¹⁸ Log book 1937 (KBA).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Pastor David Tanui of Kesup AIC, interview by author, 4 January 2003.

In 1939, also the Keiyo girls who were in Kabartonjo were transferred to Kapsabet, because there was no place for them at Kesup. A house for the girls was built and in 1941 the girls were recalled back. The men who were at Kesup married all the girls who came from Kapsabet. Those who were not able to get their partners went as far as Kapsabet to look for one. The purpose for the homes for the girls was to provide wives for the evangelists and Christian young men and the intended goal was realized. 14 girls began the home in 1941.²²

The work continued to grow gradually and steadily. The boys went out to do evangelism near and far. Two boys went to Metkei the home of Laban Chelashew, to start a church and a school at a place called Kipsaos in 1938. Kipsaos today is well advanced with a secondary school, primary school and the church. Mzee Laban Chelashew did not become a pastor but he became a teacher and taught in several schools in the area until recently when he retired.²³

Lelboinet in central Keiyo was the next target in the same year. Kipsaos is in the south. The evangelists started in the morning by evangelizing the people around Lelboinet. Classes for teaching were scheduled for the evening. This is the home of Job Katam, Jeremiah Yab, Elijah Chemweno and Daniel Yab. The evangelists who went out to plant churches and to introduce education were supposed to go back to Kesup for more instructions and refilling.²⁴ The boys and girls were truly committed to the Word of God. The boys and girls who came to the mission station uncircumcised did not go back for circumcision because they believed that one should

²² Martha Kokoi.

²³ Laban Chelashew of Kapngetuny Village, interview by author, 1 January 2003.

²⁴ Ibid.

remain the way she or he is especially after receiving salvation. The missionaries did not have an alternative to circumcision.²⁵

By the year 1946, the station report said that 27 Christians had been baptized in the station. Baptismal candidates had to be taught for a minimum period of two years before he or she was baptized. “We pray that, with teaching and prayer, they may go on to know the Lord in all his fullness and be stewards in the work in the troubles and vicissitudes which will beset the church here in East Africa in the years ahead” the reporter wrote.²⁶

In the same year 1946, Bwana Edgar Bryson and his wife Nancy left and the 22 girls were moved to Kapsowar because there was nobody to take care of them. The Brysons were replaced by Mr. Tom Collins. The boys boarding school at Kesup carried on and increased in number reaching over 50 boys at one time. A church and an out school were started at Anin in 1946. This became also the home of Samuel Kokoi since then, until a few years ago when he went to be with the Lord. It is about 10 km from Kesup. The rest of the escarpment was without any witness except for Kipsaos in Metkei and Lelboinet in Marichor which were evangelized by African evangelists.²⁷

Two other evangelists went to Kapsabet Bible school for training and they were Jeremiah Yab and Job Katam. Samuel Kokoi was licensed to be a pastor in 1950, followed by Jeremiah Yab in 1951 and Job Katam in 1952. They were given the authority to bless the children and baptize.²⁸ The African evangelists helped Mr.

²⁵ Elijah Chemweno.

²⁶ Kesup report of 1946 (KBA).

²⁷ Ibid. (KBA).

²⁸ Elijah Chemweno.

Edgar Bryson in the work of evangelism at Kesup mission station. Bryson's report of 1944 estimated the population of Keiyo to be 21,000 people. He put the church membership at 30, church catechumens and school enrolment to 150, 8 African staff members and the two missionaries.²⁹ Kesup AIM became instrumental in helping other Protestant churches to establish churches in Keiyo District. The only church that was treated with suspicion was the Catholic church. From the Keswick background of the AIM, the missionaries were not comfortable with the compromises the Catholics made. On the other hand Protestants were not welcomed warmly by the people who were influenced by the Catholics because of their strictness in discipline and their stand against alcohol and other traditional customs and practices.

The African Anglican Church was able to open churches at Mwachet in Metkel and Koptega in Merichor because of the recommendation by H. A. Lunn of AIM Kesup on May 26, 1952. The District Commissioner gave the approval to Rev. Oswald Wigram of CMS.³⁰

Therefore the church grew in Keiyo to what it is today largely because of the pioneering work done by the AIM missionaries at Kesup. The training they gave to the Africans was enough for them to evangelize at that time and many souls were brought to Christ.

²⁹ Edgar Bryson to Mr. D. Miller (KBA).

³⁰ Kesup records in (KBA).

CHAPTER 5

THE KEIYO RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

The religious consciousness of the Keiyo has a background of a very personal religious experience. This personal relationship with the spiritual is however communal. The sacred is not experienced in separation or isolation, rather it is in the community. The whole is therefore holy. This whole is found in the community where the individual finds his fulfillment as he participates in a family.¹

The concept of the community and integration in one bigger whole is founded on strong relationships in the extended family. In answer to the question of one's identity, it was possible to simply recite one's genealogy (ancestors). This kind of identification placed a great significance on one's clan. The community therefore transcends time and offers a fulfillment in the realm of personal identity. Taboos, rites and rituals were put in place to enforce this sense of community and to govern relationships, chain of command as well as obligations to other members of the society. The community was therefore a complexity of well-articulated mutual relationships and graded obligations. Mutual respect was expected and lack of it was punishable by any means. The perceived family extensions and relationships also regulated the marriage institution. This means that the idea of a church as a community of believers, or body of Christ is not foreign but a concept that already formed the backbone of relationship within the people of Keiyo.²

¹ David Bett.

² Ibid.

The above is the kind of people that Kesup AIM mission station was build among. It was very hard for the missionaries on their own to break into such a community. A community in which decision making was not individual but communal. It was also very hard for the loyal community members to break away from the system to join Christianity. That is why in many places, we hear the outcasts and disobedient children being sent to the mission stations to learn. “The first beneficiaries of western education among the Keiyo during this period, apart from the children of colonial workers, were society’s outcasts, who were taken to separate boarding schools in various mission stations, where they received both formal and religious education.”³

It is evident that the boys and girls who first went to Kapsowar and Kabartonjo were disobedient and naughty outcasts. The story of Jeremiah Yab who left his wife after staying with her for 3 yeas to go to Kapsowar qualified him to be declared an outcast in the Keiyo community. Elijah Chemweno who followed Jeremiah Yab after 3 months was disobedient, because he was expected traditionally to get married after circumcision and raise up a family. The lady who abandoned her husband and child to go to Kabartonjo qualified her to be declared an outcast. Several other boys and girls who went to Kesup when it was built refused to be circumcised, and to make the matters worse, they married each other the way they were without being circumcised and going through other Keiyo rituals.

For a while, such acts made the normal Keiyo men and women to disassociate themselves from the mission station. But later on, when the benefits of education were realized, every good Keiyo parent wanted to send their children to school, this time not the naughty ones, but the best and preferably boys who would gain better

³ Chebet and Dietz, 151.

prospects or work in missionary schools and hospitals. Children could withstand the long distance, harsh terrain and climatic conditions, some times through thick forests to go to schools. The benefits seemed to have outweighed the problems because the demand for education by Africans became even greater as confirmed by Susan Chebet and Ton Dietz when they quoted W. Rodney who wrote,

If education is anything glorious about the history of African colonial education, it lies not in the crumbs which were dropped by European exploiters, but in the tremendous vigor displayed by Africans in mastering the principles of the system that had mastered them. In most colonies, there was an initial period of indifference towards school education but once it was understood that schooling presented one of the few avenues of advance within colonial society, it became a question of Africans clamoring and pushing the colonialists much further than they intended to go.⁴

This positive response was as a result of missionaries who launched a village to village campaign with the hope to recruiting boys and girls to attend school when they realized that the community had a negative attitude towards it. The African evangelists who received the missionary education impressed many boys and girls who desired to join school so that they may also learn how to read and write and when they got the chance to go to mission schools, they eventually received salvation also. Slowly in a small way, the word of God started penetrating from Kesup to the entire Keiyo land. Because of this, Keiyo converts did not believe that the missionaries were colonial collaborators. Christianity and education went hand in hand. When a school plot was requested from the community, they were also required to set a site a plot for the church also.

The only problem that was faced by the missionaries was that the Keiyo religious and socio-cultural practices were not compatible with the principles of the

⁴ Ibid.

new faith so that in some cases converts were torn between Christianity and the Keiyo way of life. Certain customary and social norms could not be compromised by the local people. The issue of polygamy and female circumcision put the new faith to the test, as both were ingrained in the Keiyo way of life.⁵

Polygamy was associated with high social status and prestige for men, while female circumcision elevated women from childhood to adulthood and was considered a prerequisite to matrimonial status. In spite of the struggle by missionaries to eradicate these socio-cultural practices, the Keiyo practiced the rituals underground, a practice that has survived until today.⁶

For the boys, the missionaries modernized the initiation ceremonies by using health workers to perform the operation for boys and the use of sheets instead of skins that were worn by the initiates during seclusion period. Although this was the case, many Keiyo people were converted to the new faith and they adopted its teachings.

The only government school was started in 1927 in Tambach. There is no way it could serve the whole District. The missionary schools meant a lot then, because they were begun in the villages near the people. Any community that needed a school invited the church also because by then the evangelist was also the teacher of the school.

The two decades covered by this study saw the Protestant Christianity grow from one mission station in Kesup to more than ten. AIC churches were, (1) Kesup, (2) Anin, (3) Kipsoas, (4) Kamwosor, (5) Lelboinet, (6) Kapkenda, (7) Simtwo, and (8) Kapchorwa. The Anglican churches were only two (1) Chepkorio and (2)

⁵ Ibid., 155

⁶ Ibid.

Mwochet. As of 2003 there were more than 500 congregations in the District and many primary and secondary schools sponsored by the church.⁷

The resistance that was there was only on socio-cultural practices as mentioned above. The missionaries stayed with the Africans at Kesup as brothers and sisters in the Lord. The Africans looked to the missionaries for guidance in the work of Evangelism and when Samuel Kokoi, Jeremiah Yab and Job Katam were licensed to be pastors, they had more authority to steer the church to greater heights

Despite much resistance to the new faith, Christianity thrived due to the benefits associated with it, like the introduction of health care facilities sponsored and managed through mission hospitals. The introduction of modern education resulted in the production of the first Keiyo educated elite. Teachers, clerks, administrators; police officers and later politicians were direct products of missionary work, without which the Keiyo could not have achieved the current level of socio-economic and political development. These achievements became even more pronounced during the post-independence period.”⁸

⁷ Elijah Chemweno.

⁸ Chebet & Dietz, 156.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The planting and the growth of the protestant church in Keiyo was similar in many ways to that of mission founded churches else where in Africa. This was mainly because the Keiyo people shared many common features with other African communities such as the traditional beliefs of a supreme being and others customs. The only difference was that the experience of Christianity varied from community to community.¹

This can be explained by looking on how the Maasai as a community with a leader received Christianity and how the Keiyo people as an acephalous community accepted Christianity. The structures of the above two societies were different and this had important implications for the spread of the Gospel. M. P. K. Sorrenson noted such a difference between the Ganda and the Kikuyu.

Unlike the Ganda, the Kikuyu were an extremely segmented society, with no centralized political institutions. There was no Kikuyu Constantine or Kabaka to capture and thus no possibility of conversion from the top. In the Kikuyu country and else where in the (British East Africa) Protectorate the missionaries had to start from the bottom.²

This quotation can be applied to fit the Keiyo and the Maasai communities. The Ganda are like the Maasai and the Kikuyu are like the Keiyo in the way they were structured. The Maasai received Christianity when Olonana who was their leader

¹ Karanja, 263.

² Ibid.

accepted the missionary into their community. If Olonana had refused to allow the missionary to come into their land, there was no way the message could have been taken to the Maasai in 1904.³ On the other hand among the Keiyo people, it was on individual basis that people came to the mission station. The people did not wait to get permission from any leader except their parents or relatives. Therefore the first pioneers to Kesup came on their own volition to the mission station.

This study has constantly emphasized the tension between individual Christian commitment and the demands of the society. This tension assumed different forms at different phases of church growth among the Keiyo people and even among other societies in Africa.⁴ The Keiyo Christians struggled for sometime on how to behave as a Keiyo Christian was it right for a man to get circumcised? And if it was right, how can the operation be done? If the answer was yes, the only way then to get circumcised was traditional, because the missionaries did not provide the option. Some boys chose to go and get circumcised and others chose not and remained uncircumcised for life. On the side of marriage, how could they go about it? There were many struggles for both the Christians and the missionaries on how to handle such issues. This means that the African communities already had a way of life that conflict with the missionary teaching at times as John Gration writes,

The entrance of the mission into East Africa represented not only part of the political expansion of this period but in reality was also a cultural invasion. A cultural conflict to some degree was inevitable unless the African population had acceded completely and without struggle to all the forms of western culture imposed upon it, especially those aspects that found their roots in the judo-Christian tradition. The process of acculturation was doubtless accelerated by the establishment of mission stations that became cultural enclaves for Africa's 'new elite'. This cultural dynamic,

³ Richard Walter, "They do the dictating and we must submit: The African Inland Mission in Maasailand," in Spear and Kimambo, 88.

⁴ Karanja, 265

however, could not be contained in a geographic location; such as a mission station, nor could its explosive potential be defused when it became joined to the dynamic of nationalism. The mission learned this, at great price, in the controversy over female circumcision. When the explosion came, the church among both the Kikuyu and the Masai felt its shattering effect. The mission's encounter with African culture was therefore a significant factor in mission/church relations.⁵

The Keiyo slowly accepted change. The traditions which used to be observed at every stage of life, social, cultural, religious, political and behavioral norms were gradually discarded and replaced by modern foreign values. Christians accepted Christianity with good moral values that affected also the non-Christians gradually. The importance they had attached to certain values and virtues changed in both meaning and application due to the introduction of new approaches to life and the acquisition of new resources. This has continued to the present day. A notable change among the Keiyo since then is the fact that people have adopted an individualistic approach in the issues that affected them issues like the economy.

In former days the society practiced the communal ownership of resources. However, after the introduction of Christianity, the community of believers recognized the right of an individual and a nuclear family exercising its freedom within the Christian community. Each individual family goes on to plan for its economic development having in mind the communal work done by all the Christians in the church. Evangelism is continued by individual Christians under the guidance of the church pastors.

The AIM Kesup mission station will remain in the minds of the Keiyo people as the pioneer Protestant mission station that brought the light of salvation and education into the district. We acknowledge also the work done by the African

⁵ Gration, 345.

evangelists who were faithful to the word of God despite all the ridicule they received from the non-Christians. In the year 2007, the Keiyo church will be celebrating 70 years since the coming of the Protestant mission station in Keiyo. Glory to God for the work of evangelism among the Keiyo people. More than ten Protestant denominations trace their origin or support to the mission station at Kesup.

The education of the Keiyo people could not have been what it is today if it were not for the AIM mission station. Education that was introduced by the missionaries to teach their converts how to read the Bible eventually spread to non-Christians. Kesup mission station later opened a full girls secondary school. Kipsaos, Kamwosor, Simotwo are some of the schools that were started and sponsored by the AIM missionaries, and which the AIC church operate today. We thank God for the Missionaries for the love they had for Africa.

It is evident from the study that the church planting involves social activities. In most of the communities that the missionaries went to evangelize, the people were attracted first to the mission station because of the social actions like the provision of food and clothing. The station became a refuge to the outcasts and social misfits. They were also attracted because of the western education. Salvation was not the first priority, but it eventually came when the Africans realized there was something beyond the kindness of the missionaries. Therefore evangelism has to be accompanied by the provision of education, health facilities, income generating activities initiated by the church and many other activities that will improve the living standard of the people. The people will be attracted by these physical activities and eventually come to know the Lord as the savior of their souls. The missionaries opened a churches with a schools, and this brought many people to the station. Some of them received salvation as they were learning and became the agents of spreading

the good news to their people. We thank God for the missionaries and the love they had for Africa.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Data

Name: David Kipkogei Sawe
Date of Birth: 1955
Gender: Male
Marital Status: Married
Religion Affiliation: Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK)
Nationality: Kenyan

Educational Background

NEGST:	Master of Arts (MACH)	2001 - 2003
SPUTC:	Bachelor of Divinity (BD)	1994 - 1997
SPUTC:	Diploma in Theology (Dip.Th)	1991 - 1992
SPSDK:	Provincial Certificate in Theology	1988 - 1990
Arnasens High School:	Kenya Certificate of Education	1975-1978
Plateau Pri. School:	Certificate of Primary Education	1965-1974

Professional Experience

Forest Guard:	Cengalo Forest	1978 - 1988
Rural Dean:	Kapenguria Deanery	1992 - 1994
Chairman:	SPUTC Anglican Community	1995 - 1996
Chairman:	SPUTC Single Students	1996 - 1997
Member:	NCKK North Rift Peace Committee	1997 - 2000
Education Secretary:	ACK Eldoret Diocese	2000 - 2001