

A Short History of the Anglican Church in Meru, Kenya (1969-2009)

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Abstract

This paper traces the history of the Anglican Church (AC) in Meru since its inception in 1969 to 2009, forty years of evangelization. Although the AC is the oldest Christian denomination in Kenya having been started in 1844 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS(Anglican)), where it was able to reach to most parts of Kenya, it took a long time (125 years) to reach Meru region(What is today Meru and Tharaka Nithi Counties). During the subdivision of Kenya into ‘missionary spheres of influence’ this region had been given to CMS but for various reasons the CMS failed to occupy it prompting the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) (Presbyterian), Consolata Catholic Mission (CCM)(Roman Catholic), United Free Methodist Churches (UFMC) and others to desire to evangelize there. Thus by the time the AC was introduced in Meru from Embu after independence, other denominations including the Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church and Pentecostals were already thriving in Meru where they had many followers. The AC began in Southern Meru in 1969 and within a short time it was able to spread to almost all parts of Meru region. This paper looks at its history and development for the first forty years. In these years, this Church experienced a tremendous numerical growth but not without challenges which have sometimes been very detrimental to evangelization. The paper concludes that the AC has a promising future in Meru if priorities are set right especially in the area of leadership and pastoral care.

Key Words: Anglican Church, History, Kenya, Meru.

INTRODUCTION

The Anglican Church (AC), which is the largest protestant denomination in Kenya (Nkonge, 2012), was started in Kenya in 1844 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), London missionaries, notably Johann Ludwig Krapf, his wife Rosine and their baby girl (Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK), 1994, p. 1).² Krapf had possibly married before starting his mission in East Africa to avoid the earlier mistakes by the Portuguese of the sixteenth century whom Mugambi (1989), Nthamburi (1991) and Nkonge (2011) inform that they lost the opportunity to evangelize the Africans due to their hysterical desire for African women and other decadent acts. Hundred years later, by 1950, the Anglican Church had reached most parts of Kenya, with its effect being felt in Coast, Nairobi, Central, Nyanza, Western, Rift Valley and Eastern Provinces (Karanja, 1999). According to the study conducted by Nkonge (2008), since 1900 the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) has been experiencing a tremendous numerical growth, growing at an annual rate of 6.7%. His statistics show that by 2009, the ACK had a membership of about 3, 711, 890 constituting about 10.6% of Kenya’s population. Interestingly, although the AC had reached many parts of Kenya in the first decades of its establishment, it had not reached Meru in Eastern part of Kenya where it arrived in 1969, 125 years later. This article traces the historical development of the AC in Meru since 1969 to 2009, a period of forty years of mission work.

METHODOLOGY

This is a historical research and depended mainly on primary sources of information. The work arose from the demand of many Anglican Christians and church leaders in the Diocese of Meru who have been asking me to write about their history. Most of the information used in this article was derived using oral interviews. Respondents perceived to have relevant information were purposely selected and interviewed. In some cases snowballing method was employed where respondents referred me to other informants whom they knew had relevant information pertaining how the AC began in Meru and how it developed in successive years. Respondents who were there in 1960s when the AC was introduced in Meru were particularly instrumental.

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² It is interesting that nobody has referred to Rosine and her daughter as missionaries, yet in fact they were ‘martyrs’. I feel that Rosine was a missionary because if she was not, why did she accept to follow her husband to East Africa? It is unfortunate that together with her daughter, they died from malaria and fever only two months after their arrival and as such

had no remarkable impact.

The Ameru are a Bantu people and live in the eastern slopes of Mount Kenya which they consider as their original abode, although there is a strong belief that the place from which they moved was called Mbwa (Bernadi, 1959, p.2). The Meru consists of nine sub-tribal groups namely Chuka, Muthambi, Mwimbi, Igoji, Miutini, Imenti, Tigania, Igembe and Tharaka (Amin, 1983, p. 108). At independence, the whole of Meru was one district, but today the region is divided into Meru and Tharaka Nithi Counties. The Ameru number about 1,721, 330 according to 2009 Population Census Results.

CHRISTIANIZATION OF MERU

Prior to the introduction of Christianity in Meru in the early twentieth century, the culture of the Ameru was intact and traditional religion guided all their social, political and economic life (Nkonge, 1998). The Mugwe (The Ameru prophet) was for example, both a religious and political leader of the Ameru (Bernadi, 1959). His role was thus to bless the people, to protect the country, to protect the seeds and to help people live well (Bernadi, 1959). During this time, the religious beliefs of the Ameru were based on God (Ngai or Murungu), ancestral spirits (Nkoma jia ba juju), and a system of supernatural rituals. These controlled the affairs and destiny of the Ameru. Although God was considered the more important, the presence of ancestral spirits, who were both bad and good, was also an important feature of daily life. The system of supernatural rituals included prophecy, cursing, curse detection, curse removal, and divination. Witchcraft (Urogi), used to cause illness or death was practiced and remains prevalent in many parts of the region (Dolan, 2002). It is this religious atmosphere that shaped their approach to social, political and economic life (Murianki, 2015). Things however commenced to change with the arrival of the expatriates in Meru in the late nineteenth century.

The first Europeans arrived in Meru at the end of the nineteenth century as part of Arab trading caravans, and the region was designated an administrative district of the British colonial government in 1910 (Dolan, 2002). Christianity was introduced in Meru afterwards as different mission stations namely the Church of Scotland Mission (SCM) (Presbyterian), the United Methodist Free Churches (UMFC) (Methodist), Consolata Catholic Mission (CCM) (Roman Catholic) and others were struggling to reach and establish themselves at the interior of Kenya (Nthamburi, 1982), soon after the completion of Kenya-Uganda railway which had reached Nairobi in 1899 (Nthamburi, 1991). The Colonial government had assigned the region to the CMS (Anglican mission) but it never occupied it.

The first Christian missionaries to reach Meru were from the United Methodist Free Churches (UMFC). Although Chuka was long regarded as a Church Missionary Society (CMS) (Anglican) sphere, the CMS did not occupy it due to lack of personnel and insecurity (Knighton, 2015). The Methodists had wanted to settle at Embu which had been offered to them by the Governor, but unfortunately this area had already been offered to the Anglicans by the Land Commissioner, Colonel Montgomery who was a member of the local governing council of CMS. It is important to note that the Anglican Church (otherwise referred to as the Church of England) was a state Church in England and by extension in the colonial government in Kenya, and so there was no way in which the CMS would have competed for land and influence with any other mission group. It was thus resolved that the Methodists occupy Central Meru which had not been given to any missionary society (Nthamburi, 1991). In 1910, the UMFC missionaries, Griffiths, Bassett and Java travelled from Ribe, at the Coast to Central Meru for the initial survey of the mission. The mission was later opened at Kaaga (in Meru Central) by Rev. R.T. Worthington in 1912 (Nthamburi, 1982). Since then, Methodism has grown rapidly in Meru region where it has 4 synods and 198 circuits (MCK, 2014). Sincerely speaking Meru is the base of the Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK).

The Catholic Church was started in Meru by the Consolata Fathers in 1911. Bishop Perlo had approached British authorities with a request to open missions at Embu and Meru. The Anglicans and Methodists pleaded with the Government to have Catholics excluded from the area since they had already been given a greater part of the area. Bishop Perlo insisted on the basic right of freedom of religion and was granted permission to open two stations in Meru, that is, Mujwa (in Imenti) and Kariakomo (in Mwimbi). Two missionaries arrived for each station in December 1911. In 1913, CCM opened new stations in Meru North at Tigania and Amung'enti followed by many other stations in the entire Meru region (Baur, 1990). In 1926, Meru was split from Nyeri and was made an Apostolic Prefecture. Since then the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Meru has grown to what is today Meru Diocese with 55 Parishes and 7 Deaneries (Catholic Diocese of Meru, 2014).

Plans by the Presbyterians (SCM) to occupy Meru were first made by Dr. J.W. Arthur nicknamed 'Rigitari'(Doctor) because of his profession, who in 1913 surveyed Mwimbi-Chuka area and in 1915 organized its missionary occupation. In September 1913, he talked to the CMS (Anglican) which had been allocated the area but had not occupied it and was granted permission by the Protectorate Government to open a mission

station there. The following month he and Tait visited the area and found it favourable for mission work. In 1915, Daudi Makumi and Samsoni (some of the first African converts in Kikuyu land) went to Chuka and opened a mission station there. Thus the Presbyterian Church of East Africa's mission work in Meru was begun by the Africans. In 1921, arrangements were made to post the first European missionary to Chuka-Mwimbi, and on 9th October 1922, Dr. A.C. Irvine arrived at Chogoria to build up the station and begin systematic medical work (Macpherson, 1970). Since the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) became autonomous in 1961 with the election of Charles Muhoro as its first moderator (Nthamburi, 1991), the Church has experienced tremendous numerical growth in Meru especially in Southern Meru where it is dominant. Out of the 49 PCEA Presbyteries, 8 are found in Meru (PCEA, 2015).

Although traditional beliefs are still evident in many parts of Meru, the area is predominantly Christian. Finke (2003) confirms that majority of the Ameru are now Christians, a view shared by Muriuki (2015) who says that 97% of Meru people are confessing Christians. The dominant denominations in Meru are RCC, MCK and PCEA, but there many other churches including the Pentecostals, African Instituted (Independent) Churches and New Religious Movements which are growing at an ever increasing speed. For instance, East African Pentecostal Church (EAPC) arrived in Meru in early 1970s, soon after the introduction of Pentecostalism in Kenya in 1968 by Evangelist Oral Roberts from the United States of America, and has its national head quarters in Meru town. According Kithinji (2014), currently, there are over 469 denominations in Meru ranging from mainstream churches to lesser-known evangelicals and gospel offshoots.

BEGINNING OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN MERU

The birth of the AC in Meru is attributed to the late Eunasio Riungu, a staunch Catholic from Kiriribu in Meru South Sub County. In August 1968, Eunasio went to Kigari, in Embu to seek employment as a casual labourer in order to secure funds to educate his children. Eunasio's children were very bright and since Kiriribu is a semi-arid area, he had no other source of income to pay for their education (Muriuki, 2015). He was employed by the late Timothy Kanyua, the father of Prof. J.N.K Mugambi, who was a devoted Anglican lay leader at Kigari (Mutiria, 2015).³ Kigari mission had been started by CMS in 1910 when this Anglican mission first went to Embu from Murang'a (Nthamburi, 1991). While there, Eunasio began attending Sunday services at Kigari AC since there was no Catholic congregation around. He became so attracted to the Anglican form of worship, its concern for the welfare its members and the value of the laity (Mutiria, 2015). For example, he felt that back at home, the mass in the Catholic Church was only led by the priest while at Kigari AC even lay people were allowed to lead services and even preach. He was surprised that the Vicar of Kigari AC at that time, Rev. Canon Daudi Petro went visiting his Christians in their homes, something that the Catholic priest at home was not doing (Kaburu, 2015).

The other thing was that although the Catholic Church was the dominant denomination in Kiriribu, Eunasio felt that it was doing little to assist people there attain spiritual growth. For example, there was too much drinking of Karubu (illicit local brew) by most of the people, many of whom were devoted Catholics, yet the Church did not condemn this practice. There were also other problems such as immorality, poverty, illiteracy, diseases, unemployment and others which Eunasio felt the CC was not addressing. For instance, while education had become an inevitable need after independence, the Church was so reluctant to set up any school at Kiriribu. Mbwiru Primary School which had been started by the CC was a bit far and so many people preferred not to go there (Mutiria, 2015). Conversely, the AC at Kigari was so much concerned with the physical and spiritual development of the people. It had already started several schools including Kigari Teachers College where many teachers are trained to date (Mwendwa, 2015). Because of its unique approach to mission, Eunasio decided to take the AC to Kiriribu. In February, 1969, he requested the Parish Council of Kigari to start a congregation at Kiriribu and this request was approved by all the members. The Council then resolved to send four members led by Canon Daudi Petro and Timothy Kanyua to survey the area (Kigari Parish Council Minutes, Feb, 1969, Feb).

In March, 1969, the four messengers went to Kiriribu to meet a group of people whom Eunasio had arranged to wait for them. What was very interesting was that Eunasio's wife had prepared Marwa (A local brew traditionally used in Meru) for the visitors. Culturally this was the best drink for respected guests (Mutiria, 2015). A meeting was held between the people of Kiriribu and the four messengers from Kigari. After a lengthy discussion it was resolved that an Anglican congregation be started at Kiriribu. Eunasio gave them a piece of land and the date for opening the first Anglican congregation in Meru was set on 12th June 1969. Some of the members in that meeting including Karuga Miti, Eunasio, Maugu, Rubindu and Ciambere accepted to become

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Anglicans. These were formally Catholics except Karuga Miti who was a Mau Mau fighter during the struggle for independence opting to remain a traditionalist after Kenya gained its independence in 1963 (Muriuki, 2015). The idea of starting a new congregation at Meru was well received by members of Kigari Karish who donated money, food and clothes to support it (Kaburu, 2015).

On 12th June 1969, the first Anglican congregation in Meru was started at Kiriribu and on that day, Canon Petro admitted 76 people to Anglicanism (Kiriribu Parish File (KPF), 1969). Within a short time the AC attracted many followers from the Catholic Church and other small denominations such as PCEA which was struggling to survive at Kaanwa, a few Kilometers from Kiriribu (Kaari, 2015). Four years later, in 1974, the AC opened three Primary Schools namely Kiegumo, Kanoro and Kithinge. Shortly, a village polytechnic and a dispensary were started, thus greatly increasing the popularity of the AC (Mutiria, 2015). Within a year, the AC had grown to overcome all the other denominations (Muriuki, 2015). Several other congregations were started at Kiegumo, Kithinge, Kanoro (in Meru South), and Ntitu (in Meru Central) as we shall see in the next section.

ANGLICAN EVANGELIZATION OF MERU (1969-2009)

Evangelization of Meru by the Anglican Church took place in three phases during which it experienced tremendous growth in almost all regions. These were Kiriribu, Mitunguu and Mutindwa.

Phase one: Kiriribu Mission

In early 1970, Kigari Parish employed Mr. Jamlick Mugo from Embu to work as an evangelist at Kiriribu. At the end of 1970, the Diocese of Mount Kenya under which Kiriribu fell employed Mr. Amos Karani from Kirinyaga to work under Canon Petro as an evangelist. The diocese was then headed by Bishop Obadiah Kariuki. In 1971, Rev Sospeter Njeru from the then Mbeere district was posted to Kiriribu to cater for the growing number of Anglican Christians who were now about 296 (KPF, 1971).

In 1973, a new congregation was started at Kiegumo, a few kilometers below Kiriribu. This congregation got many members from the CC who had been led to mass defection by Benson Ncunge accusing the CC of moral laxity and lack of seriousness in maintaining Church discipline. For instance, Ncunge was unhappy with the customary practice of female circumcision and excessive use of alcohol which the CC did not condemn. The people felt the AC was a better option as it was against these retrogressive practices (Ncunge, 2015). In 1974, another congregation was opened at Kanoro in Muthambi Division. It had 71 members. A Primary School was also started there. In the same year another congregation of about 59 members and a Primary school were started at Kithinge in Tharaka (KPF, 1974). In 1975, a Primary school and congregation were started at Twamikua, just across Kithinge. This congregation had 68 members (KPF, 1975). In the same year, the Diocese Mount Kenya was subdivided into the Dioceses of Mount Kenya East and Mount Kenya South. Bishop David Gitari (later the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya {ACK}) became the bishop of the former, while the later remained under the headship of Bishop Kariuki until he retired a year later (Nkonge, 2008). Kiriribu fell under the Diocese of Mount Kenya East. Kiriribu parish was then formed and Rev. Sospeter Njeru became its first Vicar. It had five congregations namely Kiriribu, Kiegumo, Kanoro, Kithinge and Twamikua. By this time (1975), the parish had a membership of about 583.

In 1976, Rev. Njeru was transferred and Rev. Epaphrus Nthiga was posted to Kiriribu. In the same year, a congregation was opened at Kanjagi in the lower part of Meru Central (KPF, 1976). In 1977, Rev. Nthiga was transferred and Rev. Lenson Mbogo from Embu was posted to Kiriribu (KPF, 1977). In 1978, Kiriribu parish sent its first student to St. Andrew's Theological College, Kabare for ministerial training. His name was John Peter Mutiria. In 1979 two more congregations were started at Ntitune in Meru Central and Mithigini in Tharaka (KPF, 1979). Upon completion of his ordination training, Mutiria was posted to Kiriribu in 1982 and Mbogo was transferred to Mitunguu in Meru Central to start a congregation at Mitunguu Market as well as cater for Kanjagi, Ntitune and Mithigini congregations which had now a total of about 128 members (KPF, 1982). An important thing to note is that the AC concentrated in evangelizing the lower parts of Meru because the upper zones were already occupied by Presbyterians and Methodists (Mutiria, 2015). In 1982, Mutiria started Weru in Chuka division and Murigi in Tharaka while Mbogo started Mitunguu. In 1983, Mutiria started other congregations at Mbironi in Mwimbi division and Chuka in Chuka town (KPF, 1983). In the same year, the second student from Meru, Charles Mwendwa who is the current bishop of the Diocese of Meru (DOM) was sent to St. Andrew's College for ordination training. Mwendwa graduated in 1986 and was posted to Embu.

In 1984, Kiriribu parish was subdivided and Kanoro parish formed. Mutiria remained at Kiriribu and Rev. James Kanake was posted to Kanoro. Other congregations including Gaturi, Kamugaa, Nkorongo, Ciaragu and Mwenjeu all under Kiriribu parish were started (KPF, 1984). It needs to be noted that while Rev. Mutiria

enthusiastically opened up many congregations, Rev. Mbogo in Mitunguu was not so keen in this. He only started Mitunguu and Mithigini. In 1985, Mutiria opened new congregations at Muthira, Igangara and Kaanwa while Rev. Kanake started Kiiga and Gichure.

Between 1985 and 2000, so many congregations were begun in Mwimbi, Muthambi and Chuka divisions in Meru South prompting the creation of more parishes. For instance, in 1986 Kiriribu was subdivided and Kithinge parish formed. In 1989, Kiriribu was again subdivided to create Chuka parish. In 1990, Kanoro was subdivided to create Makutano and Mbironi parishes. In 1993, Chogoria parish was carved from Mbironi and in 1995, Kiiga was formed from Kanoro. In 1999, Kaanwa and Chogoria were subdivided to form Ciaragu and Igoji parishes respectively and in 2000, Gatari parish was formed from Chuka. In 2001, Mbironi was subdivided to create Gichure parish (DOM, 2009).

Between 2001 and 2009, only two parishes were added in this region. That is Twamikua from Makutano and Kiegumo from Kiriribu. Thus by 2009, there were 15 parishes, 53 congregations, four deaneries (Kiriribu, Chuka, Kanoro & Chogoria) and two archdeaconries (Chogoria & Chuka).

Phase Two: Mitunguu Mission

This mission concentrated in Meru Central, mainly in what is today South Imenti Sub County. Ntintune had been started in 1979 just about three Kilometers below Mitunguu attracting about 66 members. In early 1990s this congregation lost many of its members to Seventh Day Adventists due to poor leadership leaving only four members (Mbogo, 2015).⁴ Rev. Mbogo had began a congregation at Mitunguu to cater for the Anglican Christians who had come from other parts of the country to work as business people, farmers, teachers and employees of various sectors such as Mitunguu Irrigation Scheme, British American Tobacco and others. These brethren used to meet for fellowship on Fridays and Sundays where they could worship together. It is this group that Rev. Mbogo started a congregation with (Munyi, 2015).

In 1985, Rev. Mbogo was transferred and Rev. Benson Kimaru from Kirinyaga was posted to Mitunguu. Unlike his predecessor, Kimaru was keener on evangelization (Munyi, 2015). For example, when he reported in January 1985, Mitunguu had only 21 members but by December of the same year the membership had increased to 68 (Mitunguu Parish Register of Services, 1985). In the same year Mitunguu Parish was created to cater for the rising number of Anglicans (Mutiria 2015). Rev. Kimaru in the same year started Tunyai in Tharaka and Kanywee in Central Imenti, five Kilometers North West of Mitunguu (Munyi, 2015).

In 1986, Kimaru was transferred and Mutiria was moved from Kiriribu to Mitunguu. Mutiria, a very keen evangelist started Mwereria, Rwakarai and Ciakariga congregations in Tharaka (Mitunguu Parish File {MPF}, 1986). In 1987, he opened Rikana below Kanywee and Kiamurio four Kilometers above Mitunguu (MPF, 1987). In 1989, Mutiria was transferred to Chuka and Rev. James Muthamia (born at Chuka) was posted to Mitunguu. In 1990, Muthamia was defrocked and Rev. Antony Murithi was posted to Mitunguu (Gitari, 1989). In 1990, Murithi opened new congregations at Nkubu, Ndamene and Gitie. In 1995, Murithi was transferred and Rev. Germano Kaburu (born at Kiriribu) was posted to Mitunguu.

Between 1995 and 2009, several other congregations including Kanjagi, Maraa, Nyanya, Nkui, Mukothima, Mbeti, Marerine and others were started. In 1994, Mitunguu was subdivided to form Nkubu parish, in 1999, Marerine parish was carved off from Nkubu and in 2002, Kiamurio parish was formed from Mitunguu (DOM, 2002). By 2009, this mission had born 8 parishes, 2 deaneries (Mitunguu & Nkubu) and one archdeaconry (Mitunguu).

Phase Three: Mutindwa Mission

This mission is associated with Canon Daudi Petro who had started the first Anglican congregation in Meru at Kiriribu. In 1980, Canon Petro opted to leave Kigari parish in Embu to become a missionary in Meru. He therefore settled at Meru town (Mutindwa) where he opened a congregation near Kinoru Stadium (Mwendwa, 2015). This congregation started with 11 members and within a year the membership had risen to 74 (Kinoru Parish File, 1981). In 1981, Rev. Cyrus Murithi from Kirinyaga was posted to Mutindwa to assist Canon Petro (Mutiria, 2015). This mission mainly concentrated in Central Imenti, North Imenti, the whole of northern Meru and some parts of Tharaka. In the same year Canon Petro started Muramba in Central Imenti with 56 members, and then went back to Embu leaving Rev. Murithi to continue with this mission (Mutiria, 2015).

⁴ It has never recovered to date as it still has only 4 members. Since then SDA does very well in this area as it is followed by the majority of the people living there.

In 1982, Murithi opened new congregations at Kiagu below Muramba and Marimanti in Tharaka. In the same year he started Maua, Kianjai, Ntonyiri and Ambaru all in northern Meru (Mutindwa Parish File, 1982). Other congregations that were started in this mission between 1984 and 2009 included Kariini, Mukothima, Maragwa, and Nduruku in Tharaka area; Gakuri, Lailang'i, Ruiiri, Laare, Thali, Mweronkoro, Nthraragwene, Nguchia, Kiambogori, Thura and Njuki Njiru in Central Meru; Nthangarine, Kathanga, Mporoko, Katherwa, Tuuru, Karembwine, Muthara, Mbaranga, Kitheo, Kirindine, Kanuni, Ikuu and Kathawene in Northern Meru; and Kithima, Mutunyi, Maili Tano and Ntumburi in Isiolo (DOM, 2009).

In 1982, Mutindwa parish was subdivided into Muramba, Marimanti and Maua Parishes. In 1987 Maua was subdivided to form Ntonyiri parish. In 1999, Maua was again subdivided to create Kanuni and Muthara parishes. In the same year Ruiiri and Mweronkoro parishes were formed after the subdivision of Mutindwa and Ntonyiri was subdivided to create Mutuati parish. In 2002, Ntimene parish was carved off from Mutindwa. In 2003, Njuki Njiru parish was formed from Mutindwa. By 2009, this mission had 89 congregations, 19 parishes, 5 deaneries and 2 archdeaconries (DOM, 2009).

CREATION OF MERU EPISCOPATE

In 1975 the Diocese of Mount Kenya was subdivided to form the Dioceses of Mount Kenya South and Mount Kenya East, and Rev. David Gitari who was the General Secretary of the Bible Society of Kenya was consecrated as the bishop of the later while Bishop Obadiah Kariuki continued as the bishop of the former until he retired in 1976 (Kariuki 1985). Meru region was under the episcopate of Mount Kenya East.

In 1990, the Diocese of Mount Kenya South was subdivided to create the Dioceses of Kirinyaga and Embu. Technically, Meru would have remained under Embu because geographically it is near Embu than Kirinyaga. Culturally and linguistically, the Ameru are also closer to the Aembu, although as Kenyatta (1938) notes, the Agikuyu, Ameru and Aembu are members of one family who have a lot to share in common. In fact Kenyatta (1938) does not draw any major distinction between these three tribes. Even during the struggle for independence these three tribes fought the white man together. Their closeness is further clarified by Nkonge (2008) who explains that even today these three tribes conduct their social, political and economic activities together. For instance, during national elections, they mainly vote for the same Presidential candidate. It was however expected that the Meru people would choose to be under Embu which is geographically closer, but interestingly they opted to go to Kirinyaga. Reasons for this were more economic than social or religious. Canon Mutiria informs that the Ameru felt that they would get more economic support from Kirinyaga than Embu (Mutiria, 2015).

In November 1996, Bishop Gitari was elected as the Archbishop of ACK and was enthroned in January 1997 (Kirigia, 2002). In July, 1997, the Diocese of Kirinyaga was subdivided to form the Diocese of Meru. By then there were 22 parishes in Meru region (DOM, 1997). In January 1998, Rev. Henry Paltridge, a mechanical engineer from New Zealand, who was working as a NZCMS missionary in Mombasa, Kenya was elected and subsequently consecrated and enthroned as the first bishop of Meru (Church Pocket and Diary, 1999).

Bishop Paltridge is described by many (as confirmed during my interviews) as a committed and prayerful man who worked very hard to build the new Diocese of Meru. He solicited for funds from abroad to train the clergy, build permanent church buildings, run the office, facilitate Theological education by extension (TEE), pay the church workers serving in the diocesan missionary areas and many others. By the time of his retirement in 2002, he had trained 19 clergy at St. Andrew's College of Theology and Development with 5 of them having an opportunity to further their studies at the universities (DOM Staff File, 2003). In total the diocese had 33 clergy and 16 evangelists serving in the 32 parishes. 119 lay Christians had gone through TEE training. There were 5 permanent church buildings and a bishop's house (DOM Parishes File, 2003). He therefore left a stable and promising diocese in 2002 when he left for New Zealand after retirement (Mutiria, 2015).

Rev. Charles Mwendwa took over as the second bishop of Meru in December 2002. By the time of his election, Mwendwa was the Archdeacon of Chuka Archdeaconry and had served as a priest for 15 years. Before joining the AC he had been trained as a Roman Catholic Priest at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary but he was not ordained. When he joined the AC he was trained as a community health worker before joining St. Andrews in 1983 for ordination training (Mwendwa 2015).

Summary of Growth

One notable thing concerning the AC in Meru is that since its inception it has been experiencing a tremendous physical growth but as discussed in the section, in the years 2002 to 2003, it encountered serious challenges that led to the decline in membership. This is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: A summary of the growth of the Anglican Church in Meru from 1969 to 2009

| Year | Anglican Christians in Meru | Parishes | Congregations |
|------|-----------------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1969 | 76 | 0 | 1 |
| 1975 | 583 | 1 | 5 |
| 1980 | 1,212 | 1 | 8 |
| 1985 | 2,806 | 7 | 24 |
| 1990 | 4,664 | 15 | 52 |
| 1995 | 6,273 | 22 | 74 |
| 2000 | 8,505 | 27 | 89 |
| 2002 | 12,872 | 31 | 91 |
| 2003 | 8,871 | 31 | 77 |
| 2005 | 10,306 | 31 | 83 |
| 2009 | 9,201 | 41 | 71 |

Source

The figures used have been extracted from the Diocesan Parishes' files in the Archdeaconry Centres and Diocesan office.

Information from Table 1

During the years 1969 when the AC was incepted in Meru to 2002 when Bishop Paltridge retired, the said Church experienced tremendous numerical growth drawing its membership mainly from the already established denominations such as PCEA, MCK and RCC. There was however serious decline in membership between years 2002 and 2003. Some congregations even closed down (Reasons for this are explained in the next section). Between 2003 and 2005, the situation improved and there was an increase in membership. Some of the congregations were reopened (see reasons for this in the next section). In the years that followed, that is, between 2005 and 2009, there seems to have been another problem as there was again decline in membership and some congregations also closed down (some reasons for this are discussed in the next section).

2002 - 2003: Turbulent Years

One of the challenges that continue to haunt the ACK in general concerns bishopric elections. Whenever there have been elections of bishops, many ACK dioceses are left with scars that sometimes take a long time to heal. In some dioceses, the elections are preceded by massive sacrilegious campaigns by the contesters and their supporters and this sometimes leaves the dioceses in very irreconcilable and detrimental situations after elections. Nkonge (2008) cites power, authority and wealth enjoyed by bishops as the major cause of this.

Thus when the Diocese of Meru held elections in 2002 to replace Bishop Paltridge who was retiring it could not escape from this problem. When Rev. Mwendwa was elected, several clergy contested his election and filed an injunction in Court seeking to nullify his election arguing that he was not qualified (The Standard, 2002, 17 Dec). The Court dismissed this injunction and ordered the consecration and enthronement of Mwendwa to proceed as scheduled (The Standard, 2002, 21 Dec). This was the beginning of the hiccups that the diocese faced in the years that followed in her effort to evangelize the people of Meru. The saddest post bishop's election effect was that out of the 33 clergy, the diocese lost 22 leaving only 11 to serve the vast diocese. Of these 22 clergy, 17 defected to Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) which they wanted to introduce in Meru and 6 went back to PCEA where they were members before joining ACK. Several ACK members went back to their original denominations, others followed their clergy to ELC and some congregations closed down (Mugambi, 2015, see table 1). The effect of this was a serious decrease in the diocesan membership.

When I was recalled from Nairobi where I was a post-graduate student to become the Diocesan Administrative Secretary in January 2004, the diocese had very few clergy and it was seriously losing members who were mainly returning back to their original Churches. We quickly solved this problem by ordaining some 11 evangelists who had successfully completed their TEE training and also requested 5 retired senior clergymen from Embu Diocese to come and assist us. Table 1 above shows that this helped in improving the situation where

some congregations were reopened and some members came back. By the time I left at the end 2005 to become the ACK Provincial Chaplain in Nairobi the diocese had about 10,306 members and 83 congregations. In the years that followed, that is, 2005 to 2009, the diocese encountered more problems because as Table 1 indicates that some congregations closed down and there was also decline in membership. The main reason given by some of the people whom I interviewed as the cause of this was lack of qualified personnel to do evangelization and administration in the diocese after the retired clergy who had been hired on contract from Embu returned home. It has to be noted that during the 2002 -2003 crisis, the diocese had lost all the graduates (clergy) to other denominations and it was not easy to train more within a short time. The young clergy contracted from other dioceses could not help much due to culture shock and sometimes poor theological training backgrounds (Mutiria, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Because of the missionary subdivision of Africa into 'spheres of influence', the AC took a long time to come to Meru. It managed to enter to Meru only after independence but within a short time it was able to penetrate to almost every part of Meru. In spite of the challenges it encountered especially at the beginning of the twentieth century, the AC in Meru has a promising future if priorities are set right especially in the area of leadership. For training of Church leaders has to be prioritized. In-service training for those who are already in service will greatly help the clergy improve their leadership and managerial skills. The AC in Meru has a promising future as evidenced by the tremendous physical growth it experienced in the initial years of its establishment.

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