

# The Catholic Mission and Early Educational Activities in Gusii: A Historical Metabletical Overview

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## ABSTRACT

This study discusses the role played by the Catholics in the development of Western education in Gusii. This is a historical study that has utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. To put the topic into focus, the study starts by tracing the origins of the Catholic Church to Gusii. The study shows that just like other missionaries who evangelized the area, the Catholics also took education as an important instrument for evangelization. It emphasized catechism and memorization of the scriptures. In Gusii, the first education centre for the Catholics began in Nyabururu in 1912.

Catholic education in Gusii was quite slow; the first secondary school St. James Nyabururu was established in 1961 by the Catholic Diocese of Kisii upon its formation. Later, it was transferred to Mosocho and it was named after Bishop Otunga of Kisii Diocese in 1962. The school was run by Tilburg Brothers from Holland; however, the school project was funded by the government. The study also shows the contribution of the Catholic Church to the Social-economic development of the people of Gusii.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the consequences of the revival of the Protestant Churches in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the upsurge and the foundation of missionary organizations (Maangi, 2011:1; Muhoho:1970:2) It is the missionary organizations that were formed during this period that introduced western education in Kenya. Initially, Kenya had traditional education that played initial and effective role. Traditional education aimed at fitting children into their society. The children were taught about love and respect for their families, clans, tribes, religions and traditions (Bogonko, 1992).

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was the first society to send its missionaries to Kenya in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dr. Krapf Ludwing was appointed to the staff of Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia). He worked among the Northern Galla tribesmen in Abyssinia until 1843 when the mission had to close down. After getting permission from his superiors in London to try his work among the Galla from the south, he arrived at the Kenyan coast in 1844 (Muhoho, 1970). He was later joined by Johannes Rebman in 1846 and the two began the task of “exploration, translation, education, church planting and an assault of slave trade in East Africa” (Kendall, 1978). The first mission station and school in Kenya was opened at Rabai by the two CMS missionaries. This was about three centuries after the arrival of the Portuguese on the Kenyan coast; they brought Christianity in 1498 but not Western education (Anderson 1970; Sheffield, 1973, Furley & Watson, 1978).

The efforts of the Church Missionary Society did not last long. The two missionaries did not establish schools inland apart from Rabai. After the Berlin conference of 1844, European nations, scrambled for a piece of the African continent. The British took Kenya as their sphere of influence in 1895. Immediately they started constructing the Kenya-Uganda railway. It was started at Mombasa in 1895 and completed in 1901. After its

completion the missionaries began serious competition for “spheres of influence” in the interior of Kenya. Opening of various mission stations followed; CMS opened stations at Taita (1895) Kahuruko (1901) Weithaga (1903), Kahuhia (1906), Mahiga (1908) and Embu (1910). The Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) opened station at Kikuyu and in Tumutumu. The African Inland Mission established station at Kijabe in 1901, the Friend’s African Mission in Kaimosi in 1902. The Seventh Day Adventist Church opened its stations at Gendia in 1906, Kamagambo and Nyanchwa in 1913 (Amayo,1973; Bogonko, 1992). These missionaries established mission stations and schools. As much as they were concerned with spreading Christianity, they realized that education was an effective tool for evangelization. The churches and schools always shared the same buildings (Nyaundi, 1997). This was a symbolic of the missionaries’ attitude which linked education with Christianity and western civilization. It should be noted that for missionaries “educated man” and “a Christian” were interchangeable terms (Raju, 1973).

The Roman Catholic missionaries the subject of this paper came to Gusii because of the following four factors. First the church as was instituted by Jesus Christ is by nature apostolic. Then, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholic revival and the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Britain in 1850 can be said to be another factor. The restoration led to the founding of St. Joseph’s Society for foreign missions, the Mill Hill Mission which was started by Herbert Cardinal Vaughan. Third, the 1892 religions war in Buganda and the subsequent association of Catholicism with the French and Protestantism with the English made it necessary to invite English speaking Mill Hill Fathers to Uganda. Finally, until 1902, the present day Gusii was part of the Eastern Province of Uganda. For this reason when the Vicariate of the Upper Nile was created in 1894 and placed under the Mill Hill Fathers Gusii fell naturally under the jurisdiction of the Mill Hill Fathers (Ogutu, 1981; Burgman, 1990).

Having traced the background of Christian roots in education and the coming of Catholic Mill Hill missionaries to Gusii, we endeavor to trace their early education activities. This paper is based on a metabletical overview in understanding the early educational activities of the Catholics in Gusii. The term metabletic is derived from the Greek word ‘mettablein’ which means change (Meir, 1996:32). According to Van Rensburg and Landman (1979, S.V “Metabletics”) man is a historical being who in course of time has undergone changes but a gradual change of circumstances. This change can also manifest itself in education (Lewis, 1999: 22).

In this paper we place the early Catholic educational activities in Gusii within a metabletic approach which attempts to understand the changing educative phenomenon as a human occurrence in the context of time and space. According to Van der Walt (1992:22), “a more acceptable procedure in historiography is to regard and assess historical data in their own historical context, and not the context of later periods with different and other backgrounds”.

### **The Catholic Mission and Early Educational Activities in Gusii, (1911-1970)**

The Catholic White Fathers arrived in Uganda in 1877. They spoke the French language. During this time the Church Missionary Society also sent missionaries to Uganda and Protestant missionaries followed. The Christian missionaries found the Muslims already spreading Islam in Uganda (Maangi, 2011:32). As a result, there was rivalry between the Muslims and the Christians on one hand and the Catholics and Protestants on the other. The British colonialists in Uganda were speaking English just like the Protestants. The people of Buganda saw Protestantism as English and Catholicism as French. This made Monsignor Livinhac, superior of the White Fathers to go to London and consult the superior of the English speaking Mill Hill Fathers. This led to the creation of the Vicariate of the Upper Nile. Rt. Rev Bishop Henry Hanlon was made the first Vicar Apostolic (Burgman, 1991). Bishop Hanlon was accompanied with four priests, Thomas Matthews, James Prendergast, Gregory Kestens and Luke Plunket (Ogutu, 1981; Burgman, 1990). From their headquarters in Kampala the Mill Hill missionaries established a mission in Kisumu. It is from Kisumu that the Catholic Church spread to other parts of Western Kenya.

The Gusii people resisted the British Occupation and control. In 1908, the Gusii of Kitutu ambushed Mr. Northcote (*Nyarigoti*) the then Assistant District Commissioner. Otenyo had wounded him by a spear. The wound was not serious on Northcote but for the Gusii people it was quite punitive. A punitive expedition was

mounted, many villages were burnt and crops destroyed. The people of Mogusero sub-clan suffered the most. More than 160 people were killed and thousands of cattle captured. Later, the same year Northcote invited Father Brandsma who was based in Kisumu to establish a mission in Gusii (Burgman, 1990). Father Brandsma did a journey of Gusiiland. He settled at Nyabururu and appointed Michael Butiko, a Muganda as a catechist. On 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1911, Father Brandsma and his assistant Father Jack de Wall arrived at Nyabururu and officially opened the first Catholic mission to the people of Gusii. Father Brandsma went back to Kisumu and left Father Jack de Wall. In 1912, Father Jack de Wall was joined by Father Stam. The two priests started educational activities at Nyabururu. In 1913; Father Scheffer opened a mission in Asumbi.

The Gusii people did not co-operate with the two Catholic missionaries. They did not appreciate the value of education so much. Therefore, the people did not know the need of education; to majority of the locals the idea of learning was far-fetched and foreign like the white man himself. Really of what use will learning be of the Gusii people during this time? How many goats, cattle or sheep would learning add for instance? They wondered. Besides, colonialists had killed their people in 1908 (Nyaundi; 1997:53).

The First World War interrupted the establishment of Catholic education work in Gusii. The missionaries including the Seventh-Day Adventists at Nyanchwa fled for safety to be with the Friends Missionaries at Kaimosi. The Catholic priests came back to Nyabururu in 1919. After the First World War, the Catholics established their main station Nyabururu. Bogonko (1992), says that mission education changed the pre-Christian Gusii traditional, commercial, and social and politics. This mission education is responsible for the early elites in Gusii land.

Father Jack de Wall was succeeded by Father Doyle in 1923. In 1930, he started an intermediate school at Nyabururu; it was also called junior secondary or standard seven and eight. Since 1936 the school was headed by Father Mol. The other Priests at the main station Nyabururu were part-time teachers, the other staff was African. St. Mary's Nyabururu acquired a good reputation. The learners who pursued after eight years of schooling their examinations were admitted at St. Mary's School Yala, the only Catholic secondary school in Western Kenya region.

During 1950s, Bishop Fredrick Hall of the Catholic Diocese of Kisumu wanted to make St. Mary's Nyabururu a high quality secondary school. He therefore, put the school's fate in the hands of the Tilburg Brothers (*Fraters Van Tilburg*). True to the Bishops hopes St. Mary's Nyabururu gave birth to St. James Nyabururu the present day Cardinal Otunga High School-Mososcho in 1962 (Burgman, 1990).

It can be argued strongly that, not much of the Mill Hill Fathers can be said as far as involvement of early educational activities is concerned. It can be argued with a lot of accuracy that early educational activities of the Catholics were concentrated in St. Mary's Nyabururu. Nyabururu Intermediate School remained the major educational project for the Catholics in Gusii up to 1959. Up to this time the Catholics did not have a secondary school in Gusii.

In 1959, the headmaster of Nyabururu Father Innocens de Kok mentions in a news letter to the pupils of St. Mary's Nyabururu on the building of a boy's secondary school at Nyabururu from 1960. This was confirmed by the Education Secretary of the Mill Hill Mission, Rev Fr. H.M Homelryk in his letter to Brother Adelbert van Hauvel the Education Secretary for South Nyanza. He said that, "In 1961 new day secondary schools will be opened in Homabay, Bungoma, Kisumu and Nyabururu". The Mill Hill Mission gave St. Mary's Nyabururu \$ 2,500 building grant for the school's development into secondary school. The secondary school was named St. James Nyabururu making it the first secondary school for the Catholics in Gusii. During this time The Catholic Diocese of Kisumu was split and Bishop Maurice Otunga took over the Kisii Diocese (Maangi, 2011).

In 1961, the school was moved to Mosoch. The new Kisii Diocese had raised Ksh. 32, 000 to purchase land at Mosoch (the place of *emesoch* trees). The brothers of Holland spontaneously gave \$ 25,000 towards the first buildings; St. James Mosoch for boys was born. The total area for the school was approximately 35 acres. The complete cost of building the school was \$ 27,859. \$ 7,500 was public money through the grants in aid by the government. \$ 20,359 was donated by the Tilburg Brothers (*Fraters Van Tilburg*). The brothers from

Tilburg had come to Kenya in 1958. St. James Nyabururu was moved to Mosochi in 1962 when the building project was completed. The first four dormitories were named; Kenyatta, Obote, Nyerere and Sagini. Because of the good relations between the Tilburg Brothers and the Bishop, the school was changed from St. James Mosochi to Bishop Otunga Mosochi. When it was officially opened and named in 1962, the superior general of the Tilburg Brothers M. Norvatis said that, the school was 10th to be opened by his mission in Africa.

When the Catholic diocese of Kisumu was established, Bishop Otunga embarked on the establishment of schools. The diocese bought land in Sengera and Nyansiongo where they established schools for girls and boys respectively. The establishment of these schools led to the increase of secondary schools in Kenya. It should not be forgotten that the number of secondary schools in Kenya were 81 in 1958 and 105 in 1961 (Raju,1973).it is important to emphasized that as much as other Catholic secondary schools were established, Bishop Otunga Secondary School remained the major Catholic secondary school in Gusii.

In 1964 the school's first candidates sat for the Cambridge School Certificate Examination where 64% passed. In the years that followed it gained fame of being the best school in Gusii in both academics and co-curricular activities (Maangi, 2011). By 1966 the school had become a leading school in Gusii defeating the Government African School-Kisumu for the government, Sameta for the Pentacostal Assemblies of God, Nyanchwa for the SDAs and Itierio and Matongo for the Lutherans. In 1969 the school was granted a vocational stream and the 35 acres were extended by 15 acres. The other two streams were for arts and sciences respectively. Thus by this time the identity of the school was fully established; a lower three stream school of four years was leading in the East African Certificate of Education and a high school with alpha and beta streams (Burgman, 1990). It should be noted that because of the good administration of the Tilburg Brothers, the school's population had hit 500 by 1970. The school had become unbeatable giant both in academics and in sports.

It can be argued that as much as the Catholics had Mosochi as their only secondary school in the 1960s the school had an impact on the socio-economic lives of the people of Gusii . Apart from good performance in academics and sports, the school had choirs , jazz bands , art clubs , science clubs and African history and cultural society with proper historical bulletins and quarterly periodicals . The Catholic Church made a very serious impact on the people of Gusii because they established Mosochi when the Government African School – Kisumu was the only school offering secondary education. Therefore, the Catholic founded the school when secondary school opportunities in Gusii were quite limited. The school has contributed to the development of secondary education in Gusii. The school has also contributed greatly to social – economic lives of the locals. A list of its former students reads like who is who in Kenya ; Doctors , Lawyers, Academicians , Journalists , Teachers among other professionals studied in the school . Thanks to the efforts of the Catholic missionaries, the schools graduates enjoy privileged social – economic levels in the society.

## CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that the Catholic Church played significant role in the development of education, at secondary level in Gusii . This paper shows that Catholic education in Gusii was quite slow. The first secondary school, St. James Nyabururu was established in 1962.The Mill Hill Fathers and the Brothers from Tilburg contributed significantly in the establishment , growth and development of the first Catholic secondary school, Bishop Otunga Mosochi Secondary School, Later Cardinal Otunga High School – Mosochi . The establishment of the school has influenced the aspirations of the local community.

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