

HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN KENYA: PAST AND PRESENT

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One Saturday afternoon, April 7th, 1498, Vasco da Gama anchored off Mombasa from Portugal, near where Fort Jesus stands today. His mission was two fold: To expand the trade and to counter the Muslim hostility by introducing Christianity. He supposed that it would have a civilizing effect as well. He was not welcome in Mombasa, and hence moved north to Malindi where he found a friendly ruler who was always at war with Mombasa. Therefore, he thought that Portugal would make a good ally.

Vasco da Gama erected a marble pillar at Malindi to commemorate the friendly treaty that was concluded between Malindi and Portugal. Malindi was to remain an invaluable ally of the Portuguese occupation. This formed one of the oldest structures representing Christianity in Kenya today

Francisco d'Almeida was sent in 1505 with a very large fleet. He had instructions to invade Kilwa in order to secure the trade at Sofala at the coast. The Sultan of Kilwa was dethroned and a puppet ruler was installed by the Portuguese, who also built a fort in Kilwa to defend their interests. From Kilwa, Almeida went to Mombasa, but met with stronger resistance than at Kilwa. The town was taken after heavy fighting and was set on fire.

Almeida did not make any attempts at evangelization. Although he left two Fransiscan friars behind to say mass, it was understood that they were chaplains to the Portuguese soldiers and were not necessarily there to spread the Christian faith among the people of the land. In a letter to the king of Portugal dated August 31, 1506, the Sultan of Kilwa reported that he had forty people who wanted to become Christians. Against the advice of the Sultan of Kilwa, the Portuguese captain of Kilwa had the people baptized, much to the consternation of the Muslims. The Kilwa captain sent an envoy to search for an inland route to Ethiopia. This envoy, however, did not get beyond Mombasa, where he was murdered. Another attempt was made from Malindi, but it also failed due to hostile inhabitants in the interior. Eventually two Portuguese reached the court of the regent of Ethiopia and they reported this in a letter to King Manuel of Portugal. In 1513, the Portuguese abandoned Kilwa after they had established themselves at Sofala, as they had effectively gained control over the South African gold trade.

In 1585, Mir Ali Bey, a Turk, made an attempt to oust the Portuguese from the Indian Ocean. He preached a jihad against the Portuguese and received enthusiastic support for his mission. On the

Island of Pate, a Portuguese man named John Rebello was dragged around the town and pelted with stones for his refusal to give up his Christian faith. He later died from his injuries. Two years later, the Portuguese avenged his death by attacking Faza. Not only did they loot it and raze it to the ground, they slaughtered all the inhabitants, including the women and children. They destroyed the palm trees by cutting them down and set fire to the whole town. This kind of destruction did not reflect well on the Christian faith that they intended to propagate, nor did it improve human relations. On the contrary, it caused an explosive situation that might be blown out of all proportion at the slightest misstep.

If a chicken belonging to a Moor (Muslim) enters the dwelling of a Christian (Portuguese) and the Moor asks for it, the Christian answers that the chicken entered his house because it wanted to be a Christian, and so he cannot give it back.

In 1599, Francisco da Gama reported that the church in Mombasa was nearly completed and that evangelization was in progress. The Augustinians who were responsible for missionary outreach reported that 600 people had been converted. Among the new converts was the exiled ruler of Pemba, who was living in Mombasa, and who had been baptized as Philip. In addition, the Brethren of the Misericordia were caring for the widows and orphans who were converts to Christianity. The Misericordia who needed support for their work were given part of the tribute that Portugal extracted from Pemba. It was quite obvious that most of the people who were converting to Christianity were adherents of traditional religion. As a vicar from Zanzibar reported in 1612, "Kafirs (traditionalists) are not so hard to convert as Moors (Muslims)." There were reports that by 1600 there had been 1,200 baptisms and that there was a Christian community of 4,000 souls. Gradually, the number of baptisms increased to 1,000 a year. The clergy, however, sent back reports on the scandalous lives of their compatriots.

By 1624 there seems to have been four established places of worship in Mombasa. There was the Augustinian cathedral, the Misericordia church, the church inside the walled town referred to as the igreja matriz (mother church) and a chapel inside Fort Jesus. There are no records to show how Christianity was faring at Lamu and Pate, but there was a good deal of literature concerning Faza. At Pate, the ruler, Mwinyi Kombo, had been beheaded because of his great hatred for the Portuguese. There was, therefore, very little missionary enterprise to be expected in the context of such a strained relationship.

Fort Jesus, which became contested between the Arabs and the Portuguese, was completed in 1595. The architect of this great monument was the chief engineer of India who was an Italian named Giobanni Battista Cairati. After the fortification of Mombasa, the ruler of Malindi was appointed by the Portuguese to govern Mombasa as well. He was a puppet ruler, since all decisions were made by the Portuguese, and although he was distressed by the uneven political arrangements, there was nothing he could do about it. He died in 1609, leaving his son Hasan bin Ahmed to be his successor. In a rather unprecedented provocation, the Portuguese captain demanded that the sultan send out all his grain stock to Fort Jesus. When the sultan refused, the

captain bombarded the royal palace with cannon balls. The sultan had to flee to Kilifi, leaving Mwinyi Nasr as the regent. A few years later the sultan was able to resume his power, but by then the relationship was strained. The captain had voiced accusations against the sultan to the viceroy in Goa and word was sent that the sultan should be sent to Goa to stand trial. He refused and fled to the mainland, where he was treacherously murdered as a result of a Portuguese instigation. When his brother was installed as the regent, his son Yusuf, who was a minor, was sent to Goa to be trained by the Augustinians.

Yusuf apparently distinguished himself as a good student and was converted to Christ, assuming the name of Dom Jeronimo Chingulia. He was married to a Portuguese noblewoman and was crowned ruler of Mombasa, Malindi and Pemba. He received the honor of being knighted as a Knight of Christ by the king of Portugal and was sent back to Mombasa. He probably returned in the year 1626, to a tumultuous welcome and much pomp. His reign began with an incident however, as he was apparently insulted by the Portuguese captain, Marcel de Macedo. He had not forgotten what the Portuguese had done to his father, and he complained to the viceroy at Goa about the mistreatment by the hand of the Portuguese, but to no avail. He eventually reverted to Islam in secrecy. Word went out that he was in the habit of visiting his father's grave, where he prayed using Islamic rituals. The Portuguese commander intended to arrest Yusuf and send him to Goa, but when Yusuf heard of the plan, he decided to strike first.

It was the day of the feast of the Assumption of our Lady, August 15, 1631, when Yusuf entered the fort as if he was paying a courtesy call to the commander. Accompanied by his bodyguards, he killed the Portuguese commander and the few Portuguese soldiers that were inside the fort. When word went around about what had happened, the Portuguese sought refuge in the Augustinian monastery. Yusuf requested that they come out, saying that he would spare them if they were willing to become Muslims. They rejected his offer and were killed. Many of the Portuguese women were drowned in the sea.

Even though attempts have been made to ascertain whether this was martyrdom, it seems that this was a colonial uprising which had little to do with religion. A number of people may have died in their refusal to accept Islam, but they might have refused because they did not want to become servants of another master. The contest was not so much a conflict between Islam and Christianity as it was a contest for dominance between the Arabs and the Portuguese.

The partition of Africa by the Berlin Conference (1884/85) had implications for the pattern that missions later followed. Missionary societies tended to respect their nation of origin, as they perceived the need to have maximum protection. The granting of the Royal Charter to the Imperial British East Africa Company (I.B.E.A.C.) in 1888 had a direct bearing on the expansion of Protestant missionary activities. Sir William Mackinnon, the company's director, encouraged

the missions to extend their work into the interior, particularly where the company could ensure their safety.

One of the Missionaries under the British Protectorate called Steward left for the interior on September 19, 1891 with a party of seven missionaries and 273 porters. The original purpose was to go as far as Kikuyuland, but due to turbulence among the Gikuyu, he decided to settle at Kibwezi. In Kibwezi, the mission encountered numerous misfortunes. Not only was the mission decimated by famine, but a number of people were killed in raids. It was decided that the mission should be transferred to Kikuyu forthwith. The Rev. Thomas Watson led the Scottish Mission to Kikuyu in 1898. By 1899, a mission station had already been built at Thogoto. The Holy Ghost Fathers had also gained entry into the mainland and reached as far as Kambaland, and Nairobi. The Consolata Missionaries had also gained access into the Kikuyuland by the early 1900s.

The establishment of the British East Africa Protectorate and the building of the "Uganda Railway," which was begun in Mombasa in 1895, reaching Nairobi in 1899 and Kisumu in 1901, provided an impetus for other missions to venture into the interior. The railway provided a cheap and safe route across the savannah and a thorn-scrub country inhabited by the warlike Wakamba and Wamaasai. The CMS had already established themselves in Taveta by 1890. Taveta had been an important Arab Swahili trading center, as well as a supply station for caravans about to cross Masailand. The CMS located itself in Kabete, within eight kilometers of the Presbyterians. In order to limit conflicts, the "sphere of influence" doctrine was enacted. An imaginary line was drawn between the Ngong Hills and Mount Kenya, with the CMS getting the region east of the line, while the Scottish mission got the area west of the line. The CMS spread to Kihuruko in 1901, Weithaga in 1903, Kahuhia in 1906, and Mahiga in 1908. The Church of Scotland went to Nyeri and to the southern part of Meru. There was contention between the CMS and the United Methodist Free Churches Mission over the territory of the Embu. Apparently the governor had offered the Embu to the Methodists, while the land commissioner, Colonel Montgomery, a member of the local governing body of the Anglican Mission, had it given to the CMS. The conflict delayed the missionary occupation of Embu for almost a year. It was finally resolved in favor of the CMS, and the Methodists were appeased by being given leave to occupy Meru. What is amazing is that "spheres of influence" meant the negotiation of religious boundaries, with little regard for the wishes of the Africans. For example, the Anglicans were able to prevent the expansion of the Consolata Fathers into the trans-Tana region for some time, arguing that this was in the interests of Britain and favored the cause of Protestantism.

It is bishop Allgeyer who is credited with taking the initiative to move into the interior of Kenya. In 1899, immediately after the railway line reached Nairobi, the Holy Ghost mission moved there. The St. Austin Mission was established, developing the first large plantation of Arabica coffee in Kenya. The St. Austin Mission became a center for industrial training, and opened other outstations: Kabaa in Ukambani, Gatanga in Murang'a, and Rioki, in Kiambu.

The Congregation of the Holy Ghost accepted assistance from the Consolata Society of Turin. The first Italian Fathers arrived in June of 1902, and were stationed at Kiambu. The Consolata mission was born out of the spiritual enthusiasm of Father Allamano, who was inspired by the memoirs of the Capuchin mission in Ethiopia. He inaugurated a missionary training institute (Institute Mission Consolata), which was responsible for training its missionaries. From Kiambu, the work spread to Limuru (1903), Manglu, and Thika (1906). It was in 1905 that the Zanzibar vicariate was divided between the Holy Ghost and the Consolata missions. The latter were given the whole of the Mt. Kenya area, and the Society recorded its first baptisms in 1907. Before long, however, there was friction between the two missions, because the boundaries they had set for themselves were imaginary, and they found themselves infringing on one another's territory. The conflict was not resolved until 1931.

The Society spread to Murang'a, with Tutho as their base. The Nyeri vicariate was formed in 1909, with Filippo Perlo as its first vicar apostolic. Their large mission at Nyeri was Mathare, where they established an estate of one thousand acres. This estate is still in existence as part of the Nyeri diocese. They used the large plantation for the support of their missionary outreach. Between 1911 and 1913, the Consolata Mission established four stations in Meru. In 1922, Father Maraviglia opened outstations at Baricho and Kianyaga. Meru became a prefecture in 1926, under the leadership of Monsignor G. Balbo. The Society attempted to enter Embu, but they were stopped by the government authorities until the 1930s, when permission was granted. In the early 1920s the Consolata Fathers from Kenya moved to Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania, to open new work there, and they also spread to the southern highlands. While the Holy Ghost missionaries were used to comfortable quarters and built complex structures, the Consolata were used to simplicity, often beginning with humble and makeshift buildings until they were able to afford permanent buildings.

The Mill Hill congregation was the only British society working in Kenya. While the Holy Ghost missionaries were predominantly French, the Consolata missionaries were wholly Italian. The Mill Hill group was English and Dutch. They came to Kenya via Uganda, where they had established their work. The railway had reached Kisumu in 1901, and the first Mill Hill missionaries were sent to Kisumu in 1903, spreading to Mumias in 1904. Van den Bergh opened the first station in Kakamega in 1906, and within three years, there were four stations operating in western Kenya. In 1908, Plunkett opened another station in Nakuru to cater to the Catholics who were working in the railway station there. Kisii station was opened by Father Brandsman in 1910, and in 1911, a new station was started at Nyabururu. During the same year, John Biermans was named vicar apostolic.

We should mention that the Roman Catholic missionary outreach was augmented to a large degree by numerous orders of sisters. The first to arrive on the scene were the Daughters of St.

Vincent, in 1903. By 1918, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters was formed as an African congregation. It was elevated to the status of a religious congregation in 1927. The first African Mother superior, sister Giulia Wambui, was elected in 1946. The Fransiscan Sisters of St. Mary were part of the Mill Hill congregation and started working in western Kenya in 1902. Since then, there has been an outburst of congregations of sisters who have been a major factor in the physiognomy of the new churches and the related social services, as there are normally more nuns than there are priests.

From Mission Church to being a Missionary Church

1953: Kenya became an ecclesiastical Province with the Archdiocese of Nairobi and three Dioceses: Kisumu, Meru and Nyeri.

1957: Maurice Otunga became the first African auxiliary bishop of Kisumu

1959: Catholic Diocese of Eldoret and Prefecture of Ngong erected

1960: Catholic Diocese of Kisii erected

1963: Founding of St Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Catholic Diocese of Marsabit Erected

1965 Establishment of the Apostolic Nunciature in Kenya

1968: Catholic Diocese of Nakuru erected and prefecture of Lodwar erected

1969: Catholic Diocese of Machakos erected with Raphael Ndingi as first Bishop

1971: Archbishop Maurice Otunga erected first Kenyan archbishop of Nairobi

From 1970s more Dioceses were created. Today there are 26 Dioceses in Kenya including the Military and Isiolo Vicariates.

Today, there are over 1000 Kenyan priests and over 3000 religious men and women working in Kenyan parishes and institutions. There are also about 7.5 Million Catholic Faithfuls.

The Missionary recruitment of Kenyans has grown and there are many Kenyan missionaries (priests and religious) working in other parts of Africa, Europe, the larger America (USA, Canada, South America), and Asia.

The Catholic Church in Kenya has also become more and more self reliant in various areas like:

1. Priests and Religious personnel
2. Financial
3. Catechists

4. Lay leadership

The Lay faithful and its institutions in Kenya

Among the main groups of the organized faithful groups are:

1. Catholic Men Association
2. Catholic Women Association
3. Young Catholic Students
4. International Movement of Catholic Students
5. Legion of Mary
6. St Ann group of widows
7. Charismatic Group
8. St Vincent De Paul

The mission of the Catholic organized groups is to:

1. Spur evangelization and mission work of the church. They operate through families, institutions and other fora.
2. Growth of faith among the faithful
3. Promotion of vocations to priesthood and religious life
4. Enhancement of family life
5. Pastoral care of the youth and students

Main Missionary Groups that Evangelized Kenya

1. Holy Ghost Missionaries
2. The Consolata
3. The St Patrick's
4. The Augustinians
5. The Jesuits

6. The Loreto Sisters
7. Franciscan Sisters
8. Consolata Sisters
9. The Immaculate Conception Sisters
10. The Assumption Sisters

Catholic Men Association(C.M.A.) is a lay movement for all men in the Catholic Church whose origin dates way back in 1947 by the Catholic Men Of Italy, under the guidance and instruction of Cardinal Guissepe Pizard of Italy.

In 1948,Pope Pius XII welcomed the C.M.A. foundation and declared it a Catholic Church Association.

In 1983,C.M.A. was first nationally introduced in Kenya through the Diocese of Nakuru by missionaries from Austria.