

***Mutira Mission: An African Church Comes of Age in Kirinyaga, Kenya (1912-2012), Julius Gathogo***

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The book, *Mutira Mission: An African Church Comes of Age in Kirinyaga, Kenya (1912-2012)*, is an outcome of original research work that traces mission work in central Kenya from the European missionary days. In central Kenya, Mutira Mission is seen as the climax of the success of the Church Missionary Society's (CMS) pioneering role under the illustrious stewardship of Rev. Arthur Wallace McGregor, who left his initial mission base at the Taveta-side of the Kenyan border in the then Tanganyika (now Tanzania) in 1900. Upon leaving Taveta, McGregor (though he was not an ordained clergy then) was able to recruit an African, Thomas Meero, who had been trained in carpentry at Moshi on the Tanganyika side of the border with Kenya. Initially, Meero was to travel with the European missionaries as he attempted to translate local Bantu-African languages, build houses for them, and assist them in their bid of attempting to localise the mission and eventually give it an African taste. As a result, McGregor led in the establishment of the Kabete Mission (1900), Weithaga Mission (1904), Kahuhia Mission (1906), Kiruri Mission (1906), and then crossed over River Tana (locally called Rui Rwa Thagana) in 1907 to the present-day Kirinyaga County, where he attempted to open Githuguya Mission near Sagana Town. However, he was stopped by the paramount Chief Njega wa Gioko (1857-1948) who advised him to move towards the Mutira Hills (Gacu-mbirira—as he called it). At the Njumbi Hills of Mutira, he was to be guided by Chief Njega's assistant (Chief Ndegwa wa Kimere) in locating the specific place for the present-day Mutira Mission Centre, neighbouring Mutira Girls High School and Canon Njumbi Mutira Mixed Secondary School, in the Kirinyaga County of Kenya.

The establishment of Mutira Mission could not, however, take place smoothly in 1907–1908 due to the resistance of the locals, especially the owners of the land, the Ithimbwi family of the Wanjiku clan. As McGregor marked the 12 acres for the local Mutira Primary School and three acres for the present-day Emmanuel Church Mutira, the youths would not hear of it.



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They would from time to time disrupt the procedure, remove demarcating beacons and display other disruptive behaviours. Ironically, as Gathogo has noted, Johana Njumbi—who later became the pioneer African clergy in the early 1930s—was one of those youthful men who were disrupting the mission work. This made McGregor and his team to abandon the Mutira Mission temporarily and they eventually moved eastwards to Rukenya, the headquarters of Chief Gutu wa Kibetu (1860-1927) where they also sought space to establish Rukenya Mission. Equally, Chief Kibetu directed the McGregor missionary team to the hills above Rukenya shopping centre (Kabari anglicised Kabare) in 1909. In the same year (1909) they moved further east and reached Kigari where they established Kigari Mission by 1910, just as they did for Kabare Mission. Buoyed by the success of Kabare-Kirinyaga and Kigari-Embu missions, they returned to Mutira Mission Centre in November 1911 where McGregor and Meero led in the construction of the house of the incoming area clergy, Rev. Brandon Laight, who was posted by the then Mombasa Diocesan Bishop, William G. Peel. In view of this, McGregor acted as the St Paul of central Kenya, a missionary who opened several missionary centres without necessarily settling in those spots. McGregor, however, settled in Weithaga, in the present-day Murang'a County where his imprints are visible even in 2018, as his huge permanent building/house is still visible over 100 years later. It is in his Weithaga-Murang'a operational base where he compiled the English-Kikuyu vocabulary for the use of the Church Mission Society (CMS) in East Africa in 1908.

In a nutshell, Gathogo's book drives us to rethink and/or reconstruct our oral memories of mission—not only in central Kenya but also in eastern Africa. As the missions employed their three-fold ministry of educating through establishment of schools, healing ministry through the establishment of dispensaries and modern first-aid kits, and evangelism through the establishment of primary schools, our broad understanding of mission becomes clear. Above all, Gathogo's fourth chapter on David Gitari helps the reader to understand the mission of the church in the political arena.

*Mutira Mission: An African Church Comes of Age in Kirinyaga, Kenya (1912-2012)* has seven chapters. The first chapter gives a short introductory background of Kirinyaga County (Kenya is composed of 47 counties). In turn, Mutira Mission centre is geographically situated in Kirinyaga County.

Chapter two retraces the work of McGregor in the establishment of Mutira Mission and indeed the entire central Kenya Mission from 1900 to 1912, when the general central Kenya Mission was completed. With the central Kenyan Mission reaching Mutira-Njumbi centre in 1912, the chapter drives us to see the works of the first and only three European missionaries who served from the Mutira Mission centre up to the time of the Subukia earthquake of 1928, which demolished their houses. They were Rev. Brandon Laight (nicknamed Kamonde by locals, 1912-1918), Rev. Canon Herbert Butcher (1919-1927), and Rev. Hillard (nicknamed Gikubia by locals, 1927-28). The author further helps us to understand that since Mutira Mission was the one which was least served under European missionary clergy, it is logical to conclude that this is the reason why it took longer to erase some elements of African culture that had been eradicated in the neighbouring divisions and missions. Indeed, this is the

climactic chapter that shows that unlike the neighbouring missions, Mutira Mission was no longer under resident European missionaries from 1929 onwards. This marks the publication's weakness, as the climax of the seven-chapter book cannot ordinarily be reached in the second chapter. Nevertheless, it is possible that the author wanted to portray Mutira as a unique mission that left the leadership of the church to the African people many years before colonialism left the Kenyan scene. It could also point to the fact that it had socio-political implications for the entire Kenyan scene; a phenomenon which points out that African leadership began much earlier than is normally stated in various published works.

The third chapter of the book, Mutira Mission, deals with the pioneer African clergy, namely: Johana Njumbi Kamuku, Paul Kibuti, Jason Minja Mwai, Joseph Mwangi Ngooro, Joseph Kangangi Mwanake, and Amos Karani.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the fourth Anglican Archbishop (David Gitari, 1937-2013) who ironically came from the neighbouring Kabare Mission, and not Mutira Mission. Gathogo, however, argues that a publication that seeks to commemorate 100 years of missionary Christianity (1912 to 2012) could not have left out a long-serving episcopate that had a huge influence on the entire region and the country at large. Comparable to South Africa's Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Gitari's political ministry remains in the annals of Kenyan history. His gallant fight against neo-colonialism is indeed commendable, as he and others fought collectively against single-party dictatorship in Kenya and eventually ushered in multiparty democracy by December 1992.

The fifth chapter chronicles some prominent post-independence clergy who included Bishop Daniel Munene Ngoru, Revs Japhet Miano Mutugi, Jephthah Kiara Gathaka, Moses Mwangi Njoroje, and Hon. Rev. Mutava Musyimi. It is not clear how the author distinguished between more prominent and less prominent clergy within Mutira Mission. This again points to a weakness of the publication.

The sixth chapter deals with some outstanding women clergy from the Mutira Mission. This is regarded as both a strength and a weakness of the publication, for the criteria of distinguishing between prominent and less prominent women clergy is a tricky equation. Based on the fact that the women leaders who are cited, such as Mary Koigu, Winfred Munene, and Jane Mwangangi are Anglican canons, archdeacons and college tutors, one may easily dismiss these criteria as not inclusive enough. The questions arise: Who appoints clergy (men and women) to leadership? Is there any clear professional approach to promotion in church leadership? Certainly, this is a debatable area that cannot be exhausted easily. There are many concerns regarding promotion and/or elevation for church leadership that may require researchers and scholars of all categories to revisit the matter and give the way forward. There are reports of bias, episcopal autocracy and other serious glaring concerns of huge magnitude.

Equally, chapter seven chronicles key lay African leaders who have emerged from 1912 to 2012. Gathogo cites Thomas Meero, Elijah Kimani Kiongo, and James Stanley Mathenge.

While the choice of lay leaders is fairly distributed, one wonders why the name of Elijah Njogu, who attended the Ecumenical Conference at Tumu Tumu from 8 to 12 March 1929 with the Rev. Canon Johana Njumbi Kamuku and Elijah Kimani Kiongo, is not appearing save for page 46 where he is mentioned in passing. What became of Elijah Njogu? For the abovementioned trio to represent the entire Mutira Mission in an ecumenical gathering of 1929, and where the European dominance was readily felt, shedding more light on Elijah Njogu is regarded as critically significant.

On the whole, Julius Gathogo, a prolific writer of no mean repute, has innovatively helped his readers to understand the central Kenya missions of the nineteenth and twentieth century in a manner that no one else has done. While relying on primary data, collected in the archives, orally, and through extensive reading of published works, Gathogo has brought out critical mission histories that have remained ambiguous. Being an Africanist scholar, his book, *Mutira Mission*, fits all readers across numerous disciplines—historians, theologians, anthropologists, sociologists, among others. As its blurb says, so I support it thus: “This rich composition of African biographies and mission histories, woven into a seamless narrative of how the Anglican Church has carried out its work in Mutira area in the past 100 years, is not only a welcome addition to academic libraries in African universities, but also offers delightful and instructive reading to Africanist scholars all over the world.”