

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFRICA INLAND MISSION AND AFRICA INLAND CHURCH IN MARAKWET, KENYA

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Arrival and Setting Up of the Mission

In the year 1929, the AIM created a new District in the northern area of their field and designated it the Eldoret District. This area comprised all the Kalenjin speaking people group. Other than Keiyo, Marakwet and Pokot, the groups had received the Gospel earlier.

As late as 1930, the District Commissioner in his Annual Report indicated that there were no Missions working in the District. Towards the close of the year two Catholic Fathers, Hartmann and Bergman, visited the Government School at Tambach (the District Headquarters) and conferred with the Principal regarding the possibility of attaching to the school a Christian (Roman Catholic) native who might give religious instruction to those who desired it.¹ A native Catechist was sent from the Roman Catholic Mission at Eldoret in 1931.

In that same year, Rev. Reg Reynolds of AIM Kapsabet accompanied by Abraham Rurie of Githumu visited Tamabach and Marakwet with a view to inaugurating Mission work in this field. In October 1931, the mission sent two native adherents from Kapsabet on a short trip to Marakwet 'to spy out the land'. Meanwhile the Government was moving its out-post station from Kapsowar (Marakwet) to Tambach (Keiyo). The Mission, therefore, made arrangements with the District Commissioner to purchase Old Government 'boma' at Kapsowar. In addition, thirty acres were surveyed and granted for Mission purposes.

The Government consented to the Mission's request under certain conditions, "the chief being that a resident trained medical practitioner or

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nursing sister be in continuous residence on the plot and that adequate medical equipment be provided.”² The Mission Completed the purchase in 1933. In handing over the property to the Mission the following agreement was reached with the elders:

We the undersigned elders of Talai, Marakwet so agree to hand over to AIM the portion of land as pointed out to us by the District officer for the purpose of building a hospital mission and housing for staff provided only such land is confined to the top of the edge.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Kiptum Arap Cheptiot | 2. Chepkियeng Arap Chemurmet |
| 3. Kipsewa Arap Keture | 4. Chepkochoi Arap Kimetet |
| 5. Chepto Arap Kaino | 6. Murongwet Arap Kiror, and |
| 7. Moyot Arap Kiptoi ³ | |

The Mission was wise in involving the local elders because in the late fifties and early sixties when the sons of these elders demanded their land back, the surviving elders cited the agreement.

As soon as the property was purchased, Rev. and Mrs. Reynolds took residence and as well a nursing sister, Miss Bessie Mildernhall, S.R.N., F.R.N. arrived in December, but no hospital buildings had been erected.

In 1934, a dispensary was erected and opened on the 19th of October. Brick Rondevels – formerly the police lines –were purchased and used as hospital wards. Dr. Lee Ashton had arrived in September and later joined by Mrs. Ashton also a medical doctor. Towards the end of the year the first Marakwet woman came in for the birth of a child. Serious operations were successfully performed which won the hearts of some of the Marakwets who learned of it.

The supervisor of the Technical Station in the year 1935 noted: “These Missionaries impressed me as keen, and efficient. The work at present includes itinerating in the villages, and minor medical treatment of out-patients so far as it can be done without a hospital. Fees for medical treatment are being paid by the villages in potatoes. A sack of potatoes cost Kshs. 5/=.”⁴

In concurring with this, Mr. W. Slade Hawkins, the District Officer in his report wrote “... the activities of the Missionaries at Kapsowar included Evangelical, Medical and Educational, and it would be hard to find an area offering more scope in both directions.”⁵

Difficult Beginnings

The beginning of Missionary work in Marakwet did not go without difficulties. One major problem came from Ibrahim Ali, a Somali Muslim who owned a shop next to the station. One of my informants said that Ibrahim staged considerable amount of opposition to the Missionaries and told the Local people that, if they allowed the Missionaries to settle, they would be deprived of their sons by them. This created some suspicion in the minds of the people.⁶

Ibrahim's opposition though, was not lasting. He died and in the long run Rev. Reynolds bought his buildings from a Mr. Guled.⁷ The shop was converted to be the first worship place and school.

Another problem encountered was sickness on the part of the Missionaries. Between the years 1936 and 1939 Rev. Reynolds had to return to England due to sickness. Most of the work fell on Dr. Ashton. Apart from medical services, he administered sacraments, served as superintendent of the Mission station, and was also responsible for supervising Africa Inland Missions Schools in the District.

In April 1938 Dr. Ashton and his wife went on leave. Mr. and Mrs. Powley took charge of the Kapsowar Station and, with occasional visits from a visiting doctor, carried on the medical and educational work.

During the war years of 1939 to 1945 some of the Missionaries were instructed by the colonial Government to render their services. Mr. Powley had to join an ambulance service in Nairobi.⁸

Rev. and Mrs. Richardson who were assigned to Kapsowar arrived on the 1st of April 1940.⁹ Rev. Richardson valiantly tried to carry on both the medical and educational activities of the mission, but was not too successful. He seemed not to have gotten along very well with the people. Needless to say, "his strength was in expository preaching."¹⁰

At the end of 1940, the District Commissioners Assessment of the AIM Missionaries was as follows:

The resident missionaries at these places (Kapsowar and Kessup) do practically no touring in the district to gain the confidence of the people by visiting them in their homes and such respect as they do command is entirely negated by their anti-circumcision attitude. These AIM folk seem wrapped up in their families to the neglect of the work.¹¹

In February 1941 Dr. Ashton joined the military service and a year later Rev. and Mrs. Richardson went on leave to South Africa. The station was thus left without a European.

Because of the irregularities of the Missionaries the Field Superintendent of the AIM suggested that "the Local Native Council take over at least the out-Dispensaries in Marakwet, i.e. Mokorro (Ngejer); Kobuswa (Katkook); and Sengwer (Kapcherop)."¹² This was not acted upon because the Lord honoured the work of missions by providing more workers.

In June 1943, Dr. W. B. Young and Mrs. Young arrived at Kapsowar. "Dr. Young was keen and energetic, thus bringing his work added qualities."¹³ In March 1945 Miss Banks, a nursing sister joined them and four years later, Dr. Phillip Morris F.R.C.S. whose skill in surgery attracted many from near and far arrived.

Through the ministry of these two doctors, by the end of 1949 about seven African women were in training for nursing and there were five male dressers. Unfortunately, none of the nurses were Marakwet.

As far as maternity work was concerned, the women were dissatisfied when they were not treated according to indigenous custom, and when attended by uncircumcised women. A missionary nurse at Kapsowar in later years expressed this fear when she wrote:

Before I came here one of the leading thoughts impressed upon me was to get near the people, learn to live as they live, think as they think, do as they do. Yet now I could not help thinking to myself, what have I in common with them?Circumcision and marriage are the marks of an adult. I am but a child in their estimation.

Many of the Marakwet women, therefore, resented coming to the hospital for delivery because of this traditional custom which is deeply rooted in them.

There is no way the Mission could provide needed workers for them because there were no trained Marakwet women or men. With time, this resentment died as Christians increased.

Expansion of the Church through Medical Work

Church development in Marakwet cannot be spoken of without the mention of medical work. The following principles suggested by the British Home Council as pertaining to medical policy helped to advance the Africa Inland Church in Marakwet. The policy stated:

Jesus went about Preaching the Gospel and healing the sickness. (Matt. 9:35).

- (a) In obedience to our Lord's command to heal the sick as well as to preach the Gospel, medical work was instituted within the framework of the Africa Inland Mission as an integral part of its mission.
- (b) The purpose of this branch of the mission's activities is to propagate the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, to demonstrate the love of God by healing the sick and relieving suffering and to disseminate the knowledge of hygiene throughout villages.
- (c) The spiritual contribution, an opportunity for Christian witness which medical work affords, cannot be too strongly emphasized and must never be lost sight of. This is assumed as a predominant factor in the mission's policy for its medical work.¹⁴

Dr. Ashton , and later Dr. Morris, saw Marakwet as "an ideal setting for a community health programme with a well established hospital base and wide contacts with the populace through a strategically placed chain of dispensaries."¹⁵ These dispensaries would serve as centres of witness to the Gospel. This dream was realized. Presently, Kapsowar hospital is the established base with over ten dispensaries scattered all over Marakwet. The Gospel is shared in all these centres before the people are treated.

Dr. Richard Stanley Lindsay, who took over the Mission hospital at Kapsowar in November 1953 when Dr. Morris went on furlough, extended the work even further. He traveled far and wide, ate with the people, slept in their homes and spoke the language fluently.

The District Commissioner in his Annual Report commented: "The AIM medical officer, Dr. Lindsay, continued to do sterling work in the Northern areas. Due to lack of adequate roads (and a natural predilection for walking) most of his safaris are carried out on foot and his energy is most commendable."¹⁶ In the following year he wrote: "Tribute must be paid to

Dr. Lindsay who is obviously a most efficient and hardworking medical missionary."¹⁷

Dr. Lindsay would travel from Kapsowar to Ngejer, a distance of about twenty five miles, minister to the sick, and preach the Word, then, stay overnight. The following day he would walk on foot to Kisigiria, then Baroko and finally Liter (a distance of about 42 miles from Kapsowar). From Liter he would go to Tot, Kabetwo, Chepkum, Koitilial, Kapseu, Chebara and finally Kapsowar.¹⁸

Rev. A. R. Checkley did some of their trips with Dr. Lindsay especially in the early months of 1954 to encourage the few believers and witness to non-believers.

Other than medical work, Dr. Lindsay was also a gifted preacher. He administered both baptism and Holy Communion.

Mrs. Lindsay was a gifted Bible teacher. She taught and disciplined most of the Marakwet Christian ladies who lived around Kapsowar. Other notable characters who combined both medical skills with church ministerial skills included Miss Ruth Buckingham who excelled in Sunday School teaching and serving as a pianist at AIC Kapsowar. Miss Kileen Manhood was remembered for her ability in training the nurses. Her warm personality won the hearts of many nurses. Miss Grace Saunders had great capacity for organization and getting the hospital neat, tidy, and running smoothly. Marakwet women still remember her services in their fellowships.

It is evident that wherever a dispensary was built, a school was also built and one of the classrooms was used as a place of worship.

In conclusion, the primary object in medical work was the spread of the Gospel to those not easily reached by other means. Medical work provided contacts and opportunities. However, for this to be achieved the professional side of the medical work needed the backing of the organized church, and the support of lively evangelists in team effort. Kapsowar lacked this because there was no organized church nor trained evangelists. [Yet, on one hand the early converts with their limitations were used by the Spirit of God to witness to those who came for Medical treatment.]

In his report to the AIM medical committee Dr. Morris noted:

An African Christian who has received training at Kapsowar Hospital is in charge of the dispensary. He is encouraged to have his wife and family with him and living in the midst of the heathen people of his tribe; he has the opportunity daily of preaching the word and healing the sick. The success of these very isolated areas depends upon the individual African – his spirituality and his ability. For the most part the dispensers have been a very low standard educationally and in training and whilst they have all been Christians, prolonged isolation and lack of fellowship with other Christians have often resulted in ineffectiveness.¹⁹

He advised on having refresher courses and periods of special Bible studies for them.

Expansion of the Church through Education

Before the arrival of the AIM Missionaries, there were no education facilities available in Marakwet. The District Commissioner's annual report of 1924 makes this clear: "There are no educational facilities whatever provided for the Marakwet, a deplorable state of affairs in a tribe which is being fully taxed and showing signs of wishing to advance."²⁰ It was only in the year 1927 that the first school in Elgeyo/Marakwet District (Government African School Tambach), was built. It is reported that this demand came from small boys who forced the elders to agree to it. They stated that all other tribes had schools but that Elgeyo/Marakwet had none and was thus at a disadvantage. This request was not granted by the Hon. The director of Education. Later, when accepted, the following objectives were set:

The objects of the school are to provide technical education for 30 Elgeyo and Marakwet pupils a year. Reading and writing are to be looked on as necessary evils and natives are to be educated with a view not to their being learned clerks capable of signing work tickets but artisans useful both in their own reserves and to the colony generally.

It is purposed to try to use and improve first the materials and methods at present existing in the Reserve. For instance as the natives all keep bees it is hoped to introduce through the school better and more economic bee hives, to foster the bees wax industry and to obtain a sale for good honey.²¹

This view was later changed because E. B. Hosking in the year 1931 reported that the school provided the "three Rs" and in addition a five year course

in masonry and carpentry, the final year being spent at Kabete (Native Industrial Training Depot).²²

In the year 1934 the AIM proposed to set up an elementary boarding school at Kapsowar, to feed Tambach (G.A.S.), and Kapsabet (AIM) where they proposed to specialize in training teacher evangelists.²³ The mission succeeded in launching this department. They began with a boys' school and later a girls' boarding school. The teachers included Mr. Joel Arap Chemibei together with his wife Jane, who had been sent by the Nandi District Church Council to open up work in Marakwet. He engaged in evangelistic work and held a small school in his house. His support came from the Nandi Church. As outreach ministry took most of his time, Reuben Arap Seronei and his wife Rebecca also from Nandi took over the education work.

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 were introduced by Reuben.²⁴ Reuben later developed some problems and misunderstandings with the Missionaries at Kapsowar. The Nandi elders discontinued him from working with the Mission because of "fighting with all missionaries at Kapsowar and refusing to say sorry. Secondly for supporting those who wanted to break away from AIM. The elders used the following Kalenjin idiom: 'Kimwa chi kole magiume sasurwet ye maen kebet'. (It literally means, 'one cannot take a shelter under a banana plant, when the rain stops he cuts it down).'" They lamented that AIM had helped Reuben in many things but now has turned against her.²⁵

When Reuben left, the first Marakwet young man, Samuel Chepkarmit took over. He taught until 1942 being replaced in turn by Daudi Kisang and George Kendagor. Daudi left Kapsowar for Ngejer and later opened Kamogo School. In 1937 Miss Halliday was appointed to Kapsowar in connection with the girls' work on the station.²⁶ By the year 1939 the school numbers in Marakwet were about 50 which included 8 girls, some of whom attended daily from their homes.²⁷ The District Commissioner commended the Mission for spearheading female education.

In the year 1941 the Local Native Council granted a site at Sinon near Kapsowar to the Roman Catholic Mission for a new out-school despite protests of the AIM at Kapsowar. The District Commissioner "considered that a little competition would be a healthy thing especially as the surrounding population cannot muster even 1% of literate Christians."²⁸

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By the year 1944 the District Commissioner stated, "the people of the District are certainly becoming much more desirous of education, but the position has been gravely prejudiced by the cessation of any teacher training by Government throughout the year."²⁹

Two years later, a teacher Mr. Job Birech who witnessed to several students at Government African School Tambach, left for Kapsabet after 16 years of faithful service at Tambach. The first Marakwet converts, Mr. Samson Chelanga and Mr. Joshua Chebobei, who were baptized in 1932, were his students and fruits of his witness.³⁰

AIM Kapsowar by this year had eight out-schools most of them attached to a dispensary. All these schools were lower primary except one full primary School at Kapsowar. Ismael Koimur, a first class Marakwet teacher, introduced English at Kapsowar Primary School.

Education of girls at Kapsowar was basically to prepare them for marriage. The mission felt that "the Christian African home is the corner stone of Christian civilization in Africa."³¹ Because of this the Mission sought to teach and train the girls so that they could found Christian homes as the wives of their evangelists and Christian men.

R.V. Reynolds emphasized the importance of the home. He quoted Abraham Lincoln who said, "all that I am or hope to be I owe to my mother." Napoleon also when asked what France most needed, replied, "mother." Africa therefore stands in great need of Christian mothers and Christian homes, for she will not rise above the level of her mothers.³² 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' school, the courses taught other than the Government approved course of studies included "mothercraft, dressmaking, spinning, weaving, and home management."³³ These courses among other things brought many girls to the Mission Station. Mrs. Richardson gives another major reason that brought girls to the station:

In Marakwet the girls found that they could not live pure Christian lives in their home and they came to us for protection from the cruel and filthy initiation rites. Often when they come on the station it is very hard for them to resist the angry threats and curses and other forms of persuasion adopted by their parents and relatives in order to make them undergo the rites.³⁴

In interviewing two mothers and especially one who ran to the station because of the above traditional rite, I found that they concurred with what Mrs. Richardson has written. This particular lady went through terrific persecution. Her 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, 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."³⁵ She was later married to a Christian young man and has since been one of the key women leaders in the Marakwet Church.

As late as 1958, it was difficult for the Marakwet girls to receive parental consent to go to school. Mrs. McMinn said of those in the school:

The majority of these girls cannot go home for holidays as their parents are against their coming to school. Three girls had to hide in our home while angry relations stormed around outside trying firstly by persuasion and then by pleading and finally by threats to make them return home. One succeeded on the second visit.³⁶

In spite of persecutions faced by the girls, solid and sure Christian foundations were laid in them for the upbuilding of Christian character and the establishment of the Christian home. The Mission succeeded in this training but not to the extent of achieving their objective of establishing Christian home. Mrs. McMinn noted this problem:

One factor is that there are fewer Christian men than girls in this tribe, so if the girl has had no offer of marriage, she can see no alternative but to accept the one who her parents favour In the ten years that I have been acquainted with the work at Kapsowar, ten girls have had a Christian wedding out of a possible three hundred or so who have been in the home for varying lengths of stay.³⁷

A good number of those who went through the girls' school did not have it easy especially when married to nominal believers or non-believers. Two examples would suffice here.

One young woman married in the church started her married life with fair prospects but after a year or so her husband started backsliding and

going back to the older way of life, and recently he has threatened to kill her because she protested at his taking a second wife.

Another woman was mistreated by her husband; the chief fault he had to find with her was that she had only given birth to girls and no boys!³⁸

Such marriages would deprive the home of love, purity and joy. I feel that the Mission and the church should have emphasized the training of the boys as they did for the girls. Their outreach ministries should have been directed towards the men and boys because often women are easily reached. To date, there are a number of local churches in Marakwet without male leadership. Some older folk see the church as being for young children and women. It would take time to erase this from their minds.

Needless to say, the Marakwet Church is blessed with strong Christian women, attribute to the Mission.

In the year 1962 the Marakwet Church Leaders felt that it was time for a Boys' Secondary School to be opened in the division. One of my informants said that some of the missionaries were against it. He quoted one who said "Marakwet children have no need for further education, they should be satisfied with the primary education they are receiving and the manual jobs they are doing."³⁹

Other Missionaries, for example Mr. McMinn and Mr. Pinaar helped to promote the School.

Chebara was chosen as the site. The ground had literally been prepared by the foresight of the church leaders. Members of the Christian community moved away from the original settlement to leave the site clear. With the discontinuance of the Primary Boarding School at Kapsowar there were buildings available in which the High School could be accommodated for the first two years of its existence, 1965-1967, until new buildings were erected at Chebara.

Similarly, in 1972 the same buildings at Kapsowar were again used for the beginning of a Girls' High School. It was the wish of the Church that when the Girls' School was vacated, perhaps the next use for it would be as a Church Conference/teaching center. This never materialised because Kapsowar Hospital occupied them.

Out of the AIM Schools came our first traders, teachers, chiefs, members of Parliament, doctors (recently), etc. Most of these people were nurtured and

trained in the Mission Schools. The most saddening thing however is that, quite a number of them are out of fellowship. The greatest problem especially among the men is marrying a second wife.

The first converts especially those baptized prior to 1945 seem to have withstood the above temptation. Out of the twenty one baptized members, three yielded to the temptation.⁴⁰ The number of those who left the fellowship increased later.

Other than the issue of the undisciplined believers, several members of the Church came out of the classroom, for example the first baptized Marakwets Samson Chelanga and Joshua Chebobei, were students at Tambach Government African school in 1932. As stated earlier, Job arap Birch an AIM product who was teaching at Tambach, led them to the Lord. Two years later, Elijah Kilimo and Daudi Kisang students at Kapsabet Mission School were baptized and they brought the message back to Marakwet with the first Missionaries.

Bible Training

Bible training was not implemented to go hand in hand with schools' education.

In 1937, "the Eldoret Field Council approved the suggestion of training boys who are not suitable for school teachers but who would make good evangelists. They recommended that, should anyone apply to the Mission who had no other qualification (teaching, medical, etc), that there is not only scope for such a person to train evangelists, but also the urgent need that such a work be started. In due course, he might open up a Bible School for this area."⁴¹

This did not take off the ground until the year 1950, when the Mission took the challenge seriously to start a Bible school. The Rev. Kenneth Phillips wrote:

The school will provide courses of intensive Bible study and practical evangelism for representatives for the five tribes in this part of Kenya, numbering about half a million people, all of whom speak the same language. These tribes are, Kipsigis, Nandi, Marakwet, Elgeyo and Tugen."⁴²

The Bible School was begun at Kabartonjo. There were six or seven students in 1952 and all were Tugen. The academic standard for the 1952 class was Standard I and II, some of the students being taught the elements of reading and writing. This is quite startling because of the effort expended by the Church

and the Mission alike in Church work against that put by them into Schools. The Church leaders of the immediate future were not taken into consideration. The Church had no men who could cope with the new young learned Africans, especially those teaching or training to teach in Church related Schools. These teachers who were more advanced academically, looked down upon the Pastors, partly because a Pastor received a much lower allowance than a young T4, the bottom grade of a trained teacher.

Some individual Missionaries saw the need for Church leaders of depth and ability. They challenged the Church and the Mission to concentrate on building up training for Pastors and elders.

In February, 1954 Mr. And Mrs. E.J. Andersen were assigned to the newly opened Nandi/Kipsigis Bible School at Kapsabet. Mr. Andersen was to be the Principal.⁴³ The Bible School at Kabartonjo was closed down.

The first Marakwet ministers were sent to Kapsabet Bible School in the late fifties and early sixties. These were Loyei arap Talai, Esra, Samuel arap Yego and a lady by the name of Edith Jelimo. This first group did not last long in the ministry especially the first two. The lady did not complete her studies. Samuel arap Yego served the Marakwet Church until the year 1975 when he fell into sin and finally married a second wife. He was the first ordained minister in Marakwet.

The second group of Pastors who have served Marakwet faithfully to date includes Rev. Samuel Cheserek, Rev. Paulo Chepkieny, Rev. Edward Cheboi, Pastor Musa Chelanga and Pastor Stanley Misoi. Some lady workers included Irene Chesum (deceased), Rhoda Musa and Nancy Kendagor.

The third group included Mr. Joshua Kwambai (Sub-Chief), Rev. Joseph Cheserek, Pastor Joel Cherono, Pastor Daniel Clement, Grace Mariko (Mrs), Mary Chelanga (Mrs) and Truphena Chepkwony (Mrs).

The majority of the above workers completed primary education before joining Kapsabet Bible School.

In the year 1974 the Lord called the writer of this paper after completing High School to join Scott Theological College. being the first Marakwet to join the College. Since then the Lord has called other men and women.

The scope of this paper will not allow the mention of many others who have graduated from Bible Institutes/Colleges and are serving the Marakwet Church.

In brief, I would say that at present, there are over twenty workers serving more than seventy Churches in Marakwet.

Due to the shortage of workers, the Marakwet leaders are seriously considering opening an evangelist training centre. I was recently made to understand that an area of thirty acres has been acquired for this evangelists school.

Early Converts

The rate of conversion in Marakwet was quite minimal. This discouraged a number of Missionaries to the extent that they referred to the tribe as "degraded". In twelve years, only fifteen Marakwets had been baptized. In 1944 Dr. W.B. Young wrote:

Mrs. Young and I both have felt for a long time that the Marakwet don't deserve the title "degraded". They are backward, certainly, but no more degraded than any other tribe in Kenya so far as we with out very limited knowledge can see....They are cheerful friendly and show real care for their children.⁴⁴

He requested that the word "degraded" be erased from the annals of the Kapsowar work.

For the few converts, the step from traditional culture to Christianity was such a tremendous one that the young Christians had to go through a period of indoctrination.

Kapsowar Mission Station helped train the young converts in a spiritual environment. The Christians learned a new way of life (Christian culture) and education. In an annual report of 1945, Kapsowar was still likened to a little island of light in a sea of darkness. Nearly all the souls won for Christ were still congregated there. Over one hundred attended regularly on Sunday mornings. Regular preaching journeys were the order of the day. Two evangelists supported by the Church constantly traveled through the tribe, preaching the Word.⁴⁵

For the new believers, the catechetical classes afforded a period of observation during which the Missionary could see whether the convert was completely divorced from evil traditional practices.

The next step was baptism and being received into Church fellowship. The first baptized Marakwets were two schoolboys, Samson Chelanga and Joshua Chebobei both of Government African School, Tambach in 1932. Two years later, Daudi Kisang and Elijah Kilimo of Kapsabet Mission Schol received their baptism at Kapsowar. Their wives received theirs a year later. Other notable characters were Abraham Ngelech, Isaiah Cheptoo, Solomon Cheptoo, Joseph Kipkore, Philip Chepkong'a, Zechariah Kimosop, and Job Kibor (1937); Ezekiel Chebet (1944).

In the early stages of the Church, the Missionary was the prominent figure. Later he appointed elders. The first recognized elders of the Marakwet Church were Mr. Daudi Kisang, Mr. Joshua Chebobei and Mr. Job Kibor.⁴⁶ As these elders and others grew in grace and the knowledge of the Lord, they began to share with the Missionary the responsibility of governing the Church.

Preachers, teachers and dressers (dispensers) were chosen from among the elders. Mr. Job Kibor and Zechariah Kimosop. were paid by the Church to minister in Kapsowar Local Church and visit the surrounding villages to share the Gospel.

Mr. Job Kibor heard the Gospel message for the first time while serving a jail term at Eldoret Government Prison, but never responded to it. A year or so later after his release, he came to Kapsowar with a small herd of goats to seek a permit from the Missionary who was responsible for issuing passes to those who wished to journey from one district to another to sell or move goats or sheep. The Missionary requested him to stay at Kapsowar for a little while to learn how to read. He further promised him work to do and pasture for his goats. Mr. Kibor agreed and thus began learning how to read. It did not take him long to know the alphabet and join the letters together. As soon as he mastered these he requested the Missionary to allow him to continue his journey. He took with him the book of Genesis and the new Testament text in the Nandi language. Mr. S.M. Bryson writes that:

Night by night he lit his crude lamp, a small piece of wool for a wick floating in oil in a half gourd, which gave just enough light for him to read by. He read of Abel, the good man, and of Cain, the murderer, and conviction came to his heart. As he read the New Testament especially Matthew 11:28-30; he believed and surrendered his life to the Lord.⁴⁷

No sooner did he surrender his life to the Lord than he began moving around preaching the things which God had revealed to him. The Missionaries saw the potential in him and thus enlisted him both as a preacher and an evangelist. He had a good reputation as a man of faith, a man of the word and a man of prayer.

He imitated the Lord Jesus Christ in his loving spirit; he thought, spoke, and acted in a kindly manner.

As a preacher, Mr. Kibor gave very powerful messages full of illustrations and idiomatic expressions. He rebuked those who claimed to be Christians but did not show it by their actions.

His home became a place of refuge for those young Christians who fled from their homes because of being forced to undergo traditional initiation rites.

Though Mr. Kibor and his wife had no children of their own, their home was always full of young people. The testimonies which were given at his funeral by those who passed through their home bore witness to this.

The temptation to marry a second wife because of not having children by the first one never moved him from his faith.

The Marakwet Christians are grateful for having a church father that they can emulate. Mr. Kibor is not the only Marakwet elder that we can talk of. Others included Elijah Kilimo a dispenser and a preacher; Ezekiel Chebet, a teacher and a preacher; Daudi Kisang, a teacher; Samson Chelanga and Joshua Chebobei, carpenters and preachers; Abraham Ngelech, a dispenser and preacher, and a few others who are still faithfully serving the Lord in spite of their old age.

In these early days the Missionaries did all the baptizing of converts and presiding over the communion table. It was not until the mid sixties that this ministry began to be shared by the Marakwet pastors.

As earlier stated, the council of elders was born in 1939 but it took the Mission about twenty years to transfer the offices of Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer to the Marakwet leaders. It was in the year 1958, that Mr. Joshua Chebobei was elected the Chairman, Daudi Kisang, the Treasurer, and Henry Cheboi, the Secretary of the Africa Inland Church. Marakwet District Church Council.

Church Extension

The development of outreach work was a feature of the work based on Kapsowar. All Marakwet Christians as stated earlier congregated at Kapsowar Mission Station. Several of the early believers interviewed, praised the Calibre of the fellowship enjoyed. They ate together, visited one another, helped one another and worked as children of one parent. Their unity helped quell opposition from non-Christians. These early believers met in the Church

building every morning at 6:00 a.m. for prayers. On Sundays some went to surrounding villages to share the Gospel. Sunday afternoons were used for sharing prayer requests, testimonies and praying for other Mission stations using the AIM prayer letter.

As far as Church extension is concerned, the policy in Marakwet seemed to have been – build first a dispensary, or a school and run the Christian work from these. Teachers and dispensers (dressers) were to do their regular work of teaching or healing and then serve also as evangelists and preachers during the weekends.

A Missionary with a vision (Mr. Maxwell) told the congregated believers, “It is good for you to separate or disperse because the number of believers was growing large and the Talai people who lived around the Mission station feared that their land might be taken. They constantly fought the Christians.”⁴⁸

The believers positively responded to it. Some of them e.g. Samuel Koilege, Kimuron Arap Tolkos, Ezekiel Chebet, Josiah Kipsarno Arap Yego and Marko Meng’ich moved to Chebara. A site for a school was granted to them. All Christians from Kapsowar went for a week to build the classrooms and a teacher’s house. They slept in the open under a bush at night. The ladies slept in a nearby home.

While the men cut the poles and built the houses, the ladies cut the grass to thatch the roofs. Mr. S. Chelang’a remarked. “because our fellowship was great, no one complained.”⁴⁹

Mr. Solomon Ara Chemwal and Ezekiel Arap Chebet became the first teachers. Mzee Ezekiel taught until his retirement. In 1986 he went to be with the Lord. The Marakwets remember him as a good teacher and a good preacher.

As Christians increased in the out-stations, services began to be organized in the neighboring villages.

From Kapcherop services were held at Kamoi eight miles away and at Tenden the same distance in the opposite direction.

Kamogo and Ng’ejer combined and held services at Kapchebau and Tot. Chebara reached out to Kapseu and Chebiemit.

Kapsowar supplied speakers for Chesoi, thirteen miles away and Sowerwo, six miles away. They also began fortnightly services at Kapsumai six miles east of Kapsowar.

From Yemit, the Christians visited Chebororwa and sometimes Kimnai.

Sites for building these Churches were granted. The Mission helped with some corrugated iron sheets for roofing some of the Churches. The walls were smeared with mud. Mr. Joshua Chebobei who was a trained carpenter constructed many of the buildings. Dr. Young helped construct the Kapsowar Church.

The Marakwet Church had as yet no trained workers. Simple believers were ready to visit these places and lead the services. They held these people together. They read the Scripture, gave a simple message, led in singing and in prayer.

In her report of 1960, Mrs. McMinn said:

There was an increase of small and larger meetings all over Marakwet on a Sunday. Twenty gatherings were held week by week, some with only ten attending or larger ones with one hundred and fifty folk. The majority of these are led by our African Christians, some with very little teaching themselves.⁵⁰

To achieve this growth, the Mission and the Church used Church services, catechetical instruction, school work, a hospital, itinerant evangelism and village visitation. Also the spontaneous extension of the Church from the Mission station was a feature. Several young couples moved to new out stations, to start new gardens, build new houses and invite their neighbors to little informal services.

Description of Growth Patterns

Statistics for composite membership advocated by "Church Growth" are not available.

All the AIC Churches in Marakwet had people attending the catechumen classes. But, the average attendance of these classes does not seem to have any bearing on the actual number of baptisms each year. There were those who remained in the catechumen classes for a very long time because of their marital problems or other reasons that hindered them from baptism.

The growth of Church membership was slow but steady. This can be seen from the following figures.

Between 1932 and 1942, the Marakwet Church had seventeen baptized members. 1943 and 1952, forty one; 1953 and 1962, two hundred and twenty two. 1963 and 1972, eight hundred and eighty.⁵¹

We need to bear in mind that these baptized members belong to sixteen local Churches and few other Church centers. Also that not necessarily all baptized members are in fellowship. Some members reverted to old traditional customs by their consulting traditional religious specialists, marrying other wives or being enslaved by alcoholic drinks. Others never abandoned the custom of circumcising their children secretly by sending them to the grandparents, aunts or other relatives. Between the year 1932 and 1960, eighty six men were baptized and twenty two of these married other wives.⁵² Christians of this kind cause others to stumble and constantly wound their own conscience. They are ever guilty and lack the fruit of the Spirit – peace and joy. One of my informants counted less than ten families who had completely abandoned these traditional rites.

The Church experienced phenomenal growth in the sixties when compared with earlier years. The reasons for this growth are several in number. It will suffice to mention a few here. The major reason was the Marakwet Pastors. The Marakwet Church received its first trained ministers during this period. They were quite active and aggressive in evangelism. They visited different surrounding homes and villages for one full week once a month, preaching the Gospel and inviting people to Church. Many people responded positively to the Gospel. Secondly, the newly constructed Church buildings attracted more people than when they met under shades of large trees. Thirdly, converted youth witnessed to their peers. Many responded to the Gospel. An indication of this was a youth camp of 1972 which was attended by approximately two thousand young people.⁵³

The Church has grown steadily ever since. The main thing that puzzles one is the failure to fill the constructed Church buildings. Local Churches which were constructed in the fifties are still half full. Yet there has been a continuous population increase.

Several of those interviewed thought that many baptized Christians went back because of lack of teaching. Pulpit ministry too was not strong enough to hold the people together, thus causing some to leave the Church. Some of the other members moved to new districts e.g. Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu.

So, in spite of numerical growth, the expansion of the Marakwet Church was not really healthy. As earlier stated, the Mission majored on the youth and

women and failed to reach the heads of families, thus hampering the real growth of the Church. They failed to prioritize in reaching men. Coupled with this were the children of the Church members. Unlike healthy Churches that received more of their new members by biological growth, the Marakwet Church was different. It is sad to say that the majority of the children of our first believers are out of Church fellowship. Not one entered into Church ministry. Interviewing some of the believer's children made me understand that their parents emphasized secular education. They wanted them to be teachers, doctors, engineers, etc.

Church ministry was discouraged because those who entered into it were poorly paid. I remember when he received God's call to the pastoral ministry, some elders of my local Church AIC Kapsowar discouraged me a lot. Their argument was, "What shall we pay you when you return home from College? You could as well do something else and be used of God in the Church". I pleaded with them that the one who called me would provide for my needs. Mr. Job Kibor whom I earlier referred to in this paper supported me, encouraged me and daily prayed for me. He persuaded the Church elders to allow me to join Bible College. They finally agreed and sent him with their blessings. Many other Marakwet pastors can share the same experiences they faced and also end up praising God for Mr. Job Kibor.

Since Marakwet is basically a rural area, several of the learned young Christians leave their homes to look for jobs in towns. Not many survive the temptations of town life. Those who do, benefit the Church of Christ in these places and the Marakwet Church remains the poorer.

The present leadership of the Marakwet Church needs to think of ways and means of assuring constant and healthy growth of the Church.

End Notes

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Rev. Samuel Cheserek is the second Ordained Minister, the first Youth Camp Director, the second District Church Council Chairman, and the first Regional Church Council Chairman.