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'THE QUAKER EXPERIENCE IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF PEACEFUL SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE'

(University of Bradford: unpublished M.A. thesis, 1980)

This thesis explores the roots of East Africa Yearly Meeting, at the time of writing the largest Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in the world, with 50,000 members. The study centres on the American Friends' Mission to Kaimosi, British Colonial Kenya between the arrival of three Quaker Missionaries in 1902, and 1946, when African Friends took charge of their own Yearly Meeting. It is suggested that Quakerism was so successful in Kenya because an American Evangelical tradition was employed there and because Western medicine and especially education were central parts of what conversion offered. However, it was ultimately African Friends who were responsible for the spread of Quakerism. The author considers the challenges of Quaker testimony in working within the British Colonial administrative system and in engaging with the various tribes of Kenya, where traditional cultural practices could include beer-drinking and polygamy. It is also suggested that Western misunderstanding of local customs and communication damaged the success of Quakerism, as did the failure to build on Peace Testimony with the Maragoli, a tribe who were most open to the faith and whose community was based on concepts of peace. The author alludes to the impact of Quakers or Quaker education on post-Colonial Kenya, its peaceful transition to independence, its politics and governance.

Keywords: American Friends Board of Foreign Mission; Friends Foreign Mission Association; Kavirondo; Maragoli; Tiriki; Kalenjin; Nandi Crisis; mirembe; Kaimosi; British Colonial Government; Willis Hotchkiss; Daudi Lungaho; Yohana Amugane; Jomo Kenyatta; Quaker education; Alliance High School; circumcision; beer drinking; polygamy; peace; African Friends.

Useful for: those exploring Quakerism and the Peace Testimony in non-Western societies and the cultural issues that arise; people interested in the marriage of Christianity with traditional practices and beliefs; those considering the impact of (Quaker) education on social and political change; anthropologists; historians of East Africa, of British Colonialism and of the origins of Independence movements.

INTRODUCTION

'The inspiration to write my dissertation on this topic', the author explains, 'stems from a deep-rooted concern to show the vital, and yet less known, role that the indigenous African Quakers in Kenya, played in the establishment of what is now commonly referred to, amongst the Quaker Community world-wide as: 'The largest Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends''. Kenyan social change is examined through what the author terms 'peace people'. A fundamental tenet of the Religious Society of Friends was the attainment of peace, either through personal conversion or by reforming society and creating institutions of peace. The Pennsylvania of William Penn (1644-1718) is described as one instance of successful social change. The Kenyan Quaker author considers how this relates to Kenya between 1902 and 1946, from the arrival of American Quaker missionaries to the point where African Friends took charge of their own Yearly Meeting. At the turn of the twentieth century, the 'British Government, weary of religious conflict, sought to establish Religious spheres of influence in Kenya'. The inter-Church result was that Quaker missionaries operated in the Marigoli area of Western Kenya, north of Kisumu off the Gulf of Lake Victoria.

CHAPTER I. SOURCES OF DATA AND RESEARCH INFORMATION

The author explains here that his inspiration, cited in the Introduction did not become reality due to the practicalities of time and travel, with pertinent records located in Kenya and America. He therefore moved towards the topic of social change and peace. His central primary sources were at Friends House, London, and included: minutes of the American Friends Board Mission, and their British equivalent, the Friends Foreign Missions Association; and reports from them and placed under the African Industrial Mission, 1903-10. Other contemporary sources (including autobiographies, such as that of Willis R. Hotchkiss, one of the very first Quaker missionaries in Kenya) were held here – especially *Hill of Vision* by Levinus King Painter – and at the Royal Commonwealth Association Library, London, where reports by the East African Institute of Social Research at Makerere College (associated with the University of Cambridge) were held. The author briefly notes the difficulties encountered whilst using the sources: incomplete records or curt minutes; inherent bias stemming from both prevailing contemporary conceptions of Africans and the intention of many sources to elicit funding from the reader. He also states that he was able to interview several Friends active in Kenya around 1946.

CHAPTER II.

PART I. QUAKERISM IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY – ENGLAND

The author here presents a brief overview of the religious fallout from the European Reformation within which George Fox (1624-1691) and the early Quakers emerged, centring discussions on the influences and testimonies pertinent to Friends in Kenya, 1902-1946. The section on Fox postulates the early formulations of his beliefs: from the status of his mother, perhaps influencing the emphasis on sexual equality, an issue for African Friends; and a disregard for gambling (something not inherent in the Maragoli people); to the disdain for alcohol, which would become controversial in Africa. The Quaker belief in the Inner Light of Christ in all people and testimony of non-violence are referred to, as is Fox's call from God to climb Pendle Hill, the vision of His infinite love once at the summit, and the strength of belief this nourished amongst Friends.

The 'Second Period of Quakerism' was punctuated by the 1895 Manchester Conference, which reinvigorated Friends to be an active and worldly Society and one that, in the words of historian Elfrida Vipont, saw a 'sacramental interpretation of the whole of life'. The same spirit propelled the vision of Friendly missions in Britain and America, despite the profound disparity in the manifestation of their Quaker faith: from the silent worship (unprogrammed Meetings) in Great Britain, to the voice-based services, preaching, praying and singing (programmed), of Mid-Western US Meetings. The Mid-Western way was the model that was introduced successfully into Kenya.

PART II. KENYA – BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION OF QUAKERISM

The late-nineteenth-century 'Scramble for Africa', in which imperial European nations wrestled for the control of useful trade routes, land and resources, including the Suez Canal, which 'set in motion a chain reaction that culminated in the birth of a nation – Kenya'. East Africa, around Uganda and Lake Tanganyika, became a strategic focus for the British in their fight to counteract the French and Germans. Kenya and Uganda were secured as British and Tanganyika as German by the 1890 Berlin Conference, aimed at stemming the worst of the Scramble. Concurrently, British Friends became concerned about East Africa's vibrant slave trade and in 1897 established the Friends Industrial Mission at Pemba. The

author postulates that the surveying of the Ugandan railway involving the husband of Isabel Ross, a direct descendent of Margaret Fell (George Fox's wife and pivotal to early Quakerism), may have led Quakers to Kenya; certainly the railway became vital for their arrival. It is against this backdrop that the 1902 mission took place.

In Western Kenya there exists a complex patchwork of Bantu languages, placed under the anthropological umbrella of the Kavirondo and the local term of the *Abaluhya*. It is the combination of the dialect and culture of the Maragoli, who settled in an area of twenty square miles, that the author focuses upon. He contends here that the Maragoli's social institutions, which 'hinge around what I shall call "Family Life"', were central to the friction that emerged with Quakers. This begins with the very concept of family, which is not one of the nuclear family, but one based on clan. Land 'was a communal property', but also one 'linked to the totality of the African's lifestyle' (pp. 33-4). Religion and worship are, to some extent, split in two: a belief in God ('Were', 'Nyasaye' or 'Nysaye') was a way of life, but ancestors were revered; their spirits co-existed with the living and they responded to prayer. 'The cultural concept of peace', or *mirembe*, is central to understanding the Maragoli and their affinity with Quakers. *Mirembe* 'is a word of greetings ... accompanied by hand shaking ... [and] is used to inquire' about health. 'In the wider context, it is used to express the prevailing atmosphere' – it seems, in essence, that if the land and its people are in a state of conflict, the greeting *mirembe* is not employed. The Quaker missionaries actively adopted *mirembe*. The ideals of the Maragoli, if not their reality, was peace.

PART III. QUAKERISM IN WESTERN KENYA (1902-1946): CONFLICT OR COMPROMISE?

Establishing the Mission: The American Friends Board of Foreign Mission (AFBFM) was established in 1867 and responsible for introducing Yearly Meetings in Japan, Cuba, Jamaica, East Africa and part of India. Britain's Friends Foreign Mission Association was instituted in 1868, which established Madagascar, Mid-India, part of West China, Pemba and Lebanon/ Palestine. The local running of these overseas Yearly Meetings came around fifty years after their foundation. Kenya itself was inspired by Willis Hotchkiss, who had previously spent four years there. In 1902, AFBFM mooted a Friends Africa Industrial Mission, with the primary goal 'the evangelization of the heathen'. Hotchkiss, Edgar T. Hole and Arthur B. Chilson were chosen for Kenya, on the way garnering support from Britain and Ireland.

In Kaimosi, Quaker missionaries sought assistance from the British Colonial Government, local chiefs working with the British, and the indigenous population. Friends, however, came into conflict with the Government by supporting Kenyans' education and the North Kavirondo Central Association, part of a political movement encompassing the Mau Mau (anti-colonial guerrillas). Nevertheless, Friends recognised that cooperation with the British administrative structure was imperative and worked fruitfully with local chiefs – despite indigenous customs such as circumcision, drinking and polygamy – who themselves occupied an uneasy balance between the British and Africans. Friends also fostered relationships with “approachable’ locals’: the author proposes that many Africans conceptualised whites as badly as most whites (including Quakers) did Africans. However, Friends continued to act for equality, albeit accompanied by encouraging local converts (like Daudi Lungaho and Yohana Amugane) to wear plain garb. By 1907, African converts were undertaking missionary work independent of the Missionaries. Western education, industry and medicine were also deployed.

Spreading the Word: ‘If statistics are anything to go by, the Africans seem to have been readily accepting of this new lifestyle’, although, the author argues, ‘the desire to read and write seems to have been the major attraction’. Local converts Lungaho and Amugane were instrumental in the spread of Quakerism. They had been taught to read and write, and in turn taught others, who went on to found schools; 85 sites with 4,000 pupils by 1921, and 349 with 38, 300 pupils in 1952. The author suggests that such self-help contributed to the twentieth-century political development of Kenya; something which the Alliance High School near Nairobi – the only African secondary school, and one with numerous Quaker students – is also credited with. Quaker alumni included Joseph D. Otiende, who was appointed Minister of Education by head of state Jomo Kenyatta after Kenyan Independence in 1963. The author also emphasises the Quaker connections of Kenyatta, who guided Kenya peacefully and spent time at Woodbrooke Quaker College, Birmingham.

Mixed Successes: The Friends Centre at Kaimosi sat at the boundary between several tribes and was therefore at the locus of conflict. Their intervention could positively influence events. Conversely, it could exacerbate trouble. The Nandi Crisis (originating in the conflict between Nandi and Tiriki) centred on cattle and border disputes, which precipitated the stationing of colonial police at Kaimosi. In the febrile atmosphere, a young American Friend, William Wende, was the subject of mistaken identity and shot with a poison arrow. Government retribution was ‘heavy handed’ and disquiet continued. However, three months after hostilities ceased, the Mission was reconciled with the Nandi, who went

on to attend Quaker Meetings and tutors. Less successful was Willis Hotchkiss' splinter Mission to bring peace to an area of the Kalenjin tribe. Cultural misunderstanding frustrated intentions. Hotchkiss recounted an incident told to him of warring local chiefs who had marked their reconciliation by spitting at each other, then at a missionary, who, perceiving aggression and not the local sign of friendliness, 'knocked them down'.

CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the ideal of the American Friends – to establish a locally-run, self-sustaining Church – was achieved in Kenya by Kenyans. However, local converts retained some of their own cultural religious practices, such as beer-drinking and polygamy. In 1935, a Quaker convert broke away from the Mission to marry a second wife. He then established a new sect, the Dini Ya Msambwa, which had attracted c.6,000 adherents by 1947 and was banned for its anti-colonial stance and its militancy. The dominance of beer-drinking and circumcision amongst the Tiriki may be one reason why Quakerism took greater hold amidst the Maragoli. The author questions why Quakers did not exploit their Peace Testimony in converting the Maragoli, given the important of peace to their culture and the impact of the First World War on the Colony: local chiefs forcibly sent men to join the army, including Yohana Amugune, and Friends did nothing. The emphasis seems to have been on saving natives; indeed, it was only in the 1950s that East African Friends spent time abroad at international Quaker events. Even so, the Quaker tenet of equality meant that the Maria Lungaho and Rabeka Amugune were as active as their husbands in spreading the faith. Moreover, in 1960 two African Women Friends attended the United Nations Human Rights Seminar in Addis Abbaba, Ethiopia – something the author argues was pioneering in terms of coming from a British colony and from a male-dominated society. The author also continues the point made about the importance of Quaker or Quaker-educated Kenyan politicians and public officials to modern Kenya, citing Educational Officers, Ambassadors, Civil Servants, board members of the Central Bank, and singles out Court Elder (Judge) Joel Litu.

INDICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The author identifies six areas of study/ assessment which are ripe for further research: the success of Quaker Testimonies in foreign climes; how Quaker was Dini Ya Msambwa; why Quakers were so successful in Kenya in comparison to other parts of Africa; a comparative study of the cultural predispositions of Kenyan tribes to accept or reject Quakerism; the influence of Quakerism on the Kenyan 'political scene', including within the criminal justice system and the Mau Mau Rebellion; and the role of African Friends in the spread and settlement of Quakerism in East Africa.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Map of Kenya and its surrounds, with the 'Quaker region', their direction of travel and the location of the Mission.

Appendix II: Letter from The Africa Record of the Friends Africa Industrial Mission to the Friends House, London, regretting the non-arrival/ incompleteness of material.

Appendix III: A copy of the Quaker Peace Testimony.

Appendix IV: Published report of the Friends Industrial Mission, Pemba: 'A Twenty-One Years' Retrospect and Report of the Anti-Slavery Committee for the Year 1917'.

Appendix V: An artist's impression of George Fox at the top of Pendle Hill in 1652.

Appendix VI: American Yearly Meetings, 1894-5.

Appendix VII: Appears to be an Extract (including photographs) from an Annual Report of the Friends Mission, evidencing the adoption of evangelical Quakerism in Kenya.

Appendix IX: Pictures of Non-Asomi (non-Christian Tiriki) dress to mark circumcision and initiation.

Appendix X: Images of Beer-drinking rituals as cultural marker between mature and younger men.

Appendix XI: Picture of a crowd gathering for Sabbath at Kaimosi Station (Friends Africa Industrial Mission) in 1903.

Appendix XII: Kenyan newspaper obituary from 1977 of Joel Litu, Quaker and Court Elder.