

DEVELOPMENT OF PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIANITY IN WESTERN KENYA:
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO MARAGOLI, NYANG'ORI, AND TIRIKI 1909-1942

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ABSTRACT

There are varieties of Protestant Christian Churches in Kenya by virtue of their historical backgrounds and origins. Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches were started by missionary societies which came from Britain. African Inland, Baptist and Seventh Day Adventist Churches have their origins in America, Canada, and Scandinavian countries.

The third category of churches is the fastest growing compared to the other two. No research has hitherto been done on the Pentecostal churches in Kenya. It is with this in mind, we have undertaken to do research on one branch of Pentecostalism.

Nyang'ori Pentecostal Mission, which has been known by various names over the years and is currently called Pentecostal Assemblies of God, was started by one Clyde Toliver Miller. He came from the State of Iowa in the United States of America. He started his work at Nyang'ori in western Kenya in 1909. Although the name implies that the Mission was intended for the Nyang'ori people, it was the Luhya mainly who attached themselves to the Mission and who became actively involved in the work of the Mission. They were able to open a branch church at Tigoi, Tiriki Location.

In the ensuing years Miller and his followers were faced with problems which curtailed the expansion

of the Mission. First, Mrs. Miller left for the United States in 1912 but never returned. Secondly, the Mission's work was affected with the outbreak of the World War I of 1914-1919. Thirdly, a split took place in the Mission when Miller came to espouse and emphasize the teachings of the then extremist Pentecostal group in North America, called the Jesus Only movement. Fourthly, the proverbial "straw on the camel's back" was when Miller decided to marry one of his "children". This led to his eventual withdrawal from the Mission in 1922.

Otto C. and Marian Keller who had been working with a company at Maseno Mission and had previously been in charge of Nyang'ori Mission while Miller was away, were invited by the members of Nyang'ori Mission to assume the leadership of the Mission. In 1924 they entered a formal agreement of affiliation with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) whose headquarters were in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The Kellers carried out their missionary activities in Nyang'ori, Tiriki and Maragoli Locations, and in parts of the then North and Central Nyanza Districts, between 1924 and 1942, when Otto Keller died. Marian Keller continued to stay at Nyang'ori until 1945 when she returned to Canada and retired from missionary service. Due to certain factors, this study has confined itself to the period of Miller and the Kellers, 1909-1942.

Although they opened schools in the areas of their endeavour, which was the one essential means of spreading Christianity, the Kellers' emphasis was on evangelism. They were rewarded in their efforts when a revival took place between 1926 and 1927, not only among the Pentecostal churches, but also among the surrounding Quaker churches. This brought about a rapid growth of Nyang'ori Mission, a growth which has been unrivalled by other Missions in Kenya over the years. At the same time, there has evolved a christianity akin to the free and spontaneous African spirit of celebration and expression.