

U THE KIKUYU, CHRISTIANITY AND THE AFRICA INLAND MISSION

BY

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ABSTRACT

Christianity and political protest are strong themes in twentieth-century Kikuyu history. This dissertation is an examination of some aspects of both Christianity and protest; some linkages between them are suggested.

The Kikuyu selected for study live in a forty by thirty-mile section, roughly one-third of Kikuyuland and approximately the area taken for evangelism by the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) and its later offshoot, the Gospel Mission Society (GMS). Both missions are dealt with, not as ends in themselves, but as an entree into the general study of all religious activity in the area and particularly into the origins and growth of three religious divisions in Kikuyu society: the Aregi, the Kirore and the Arathi.

The Aregi and the Kirore date from the first twenty-five years of this century, when AIM and GMS activity among the Kikuyu resulted in two groups: the earliest adherents to the mission and later adherents that came after the First World War. The earliest and older adherents had had the most intense contact with the missionaries at central stations and tended to support their ideas for cultural change. The later and younger

adherents, whose connection to the mission had come by way of out-stations, were often critical of the missionaries and of the older adherents for their arrogance and for their belief that Kikuyu customs were incompatible with Christianity. During the 1920s each group subjected the other, and non-Christian Kikuyu as well, to a great deal of humiliation and ridicule. The rivalry between these groups culminated in the 1929-30 female circumcision crisis, when the younger adherents (Aregi, those who separated), supported by many non-Christians, separated from the AIM and began independent churches and schools of their own. Freed from mission control, they could practice female circumcision and other Kikuyu customs as they saw fit. The older adherents remained loyal to the AIM and earned the derogatory name Kirore (thumb print) for their support of the mission ban on female circumcision. RF

A third group, the Arathi or "dreamers," also evolved in the religious turbulence of the 1920s. Some of the initial members of this group were disgruntled AIM adherents, mainly from the younger group; and others were non-Christians. All Arathi were critical of the AIM and GMS for their attack on Kikuyu customs. They also became critical of the Aregi for their inattention to "spiritual dreams." By the early 1930s, most of the informal ties between Aregi and Arathi had been broken as the Arathi

began to pursue their own autonomous and largely pentecostal direction.

Continued rivalry, antagonism, and even hostility has prevailed between these groups to the present day as they have competed for adherents among themselves and within the larger pool of non-Christian Kikuyu. It is imperative that we take these religious dynamics into account when discussing the origins and growth of Kikuyu protest and political awareness. In fact, the continuing religious and cultural antagonisms have made it difficult for any group to identify with the political activities of another regardless of how sympathetic they might be to political protest itself. When the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) and later the Kikuyu Provincial Association (KPA) helped to promote church and school independence, a vital concern of the Aregi, who were often KCA and KPA members, the Kirore and Arathi could not bring themselves to support these political associations. The KCA and the KPA were too closely identified with their rivals, the Aregi. The gulf that separated each of these groups was too great to cross.