

The Establishment of St. Mary's School Yala by the Mill Hill Missionaries in Kenya

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Abstract

European missionaries came into Kenya in the late 19th and early 20th centuries primarily to evangelise and spread Christianity to the indigenous African population. Missionaries soon realised that evangelising; which required knowledge of reading of the bible and catechism instruction, would only be possible by provision of basic formal education. Hence the provision of this basic education began in various mission stations across the country in form of bush schools and later, primary schools. The beginning of mission secondary schools in Kenya was however a result of competition between the various missionaries in the country to; gain more converts into their faith, keep the converts they already had, and to have expanded space in the hierarchies of the colonial administration. This article will thus highlight this missionary rivalry and the subsequent development of St. Mary School Yala, a secondary school that was began in Western Kenya by the Roman Catholic Mill Hill Missionaries.

Keywords: Missionaries in Africa, African Education

1. Introduction

The political and economic changes taking place in Europe and North America in the second half of the 18thC and the whole of the 19thC (namely; growth of secularism and democratic processes, the industrial revolution) had a huge impact on Africa. These changes triggered Christianity activities on the continent as Protestant and Catholic missions began moving into Africa in their evangelisation mission. The missionaries intended Africans to completely change their way of life which they considered pagan, and adopt European civilisation and Christianity. However, making Africans abandon their way of life proved not to be easy. Hence it dawned on the missionaries that their mission would be more successful with the active participation of Africans.¹ Education had hitherto been successfully used to bring change to the poor working class in Europe and missionaries were of the opinion that the same could be used as a means of bringing controlled change to African converts.² It was also imperative to provide education to Africans as this was the only way they would understand the bible and catechism instructions for evangelisation to be. Missionaries thus began several intermediate and bush schools that soon became primary schools. In Kenya, several mission bush schools were began in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

The number of mission primary schools increased after World War I. The colonial system started being properly felt by Africans after the war and Africans realised that in order to survive the colonial set up, they had to learn the ways of the white man. Many started sending their children to school to learn the white man's religion and way of life. In addition, education gave Africans an opportunity to be exempted from various forms of forced colonial labour. Missionaries thus exploited this need for education to entice Africans to join their specific faiths.

Calls for the provision of secondary education to Africans had also started being made at the end of World War I. Protestant groups in the colony were the first to heed these calls. The Church Mission Society (C.M.S) was the first group to start providing secondary education in their mission schools by the gradual upgrading of Maseno School (started in 1906) into a secondary school. The various Protestant groups in the colony also decided to come together in the early 1920s to start a high cost secondary school for Africans; Alliance High School, that opened its doors in 1926. The school would enable the provision of junior and senior secondary education to Africans in Kenya, and thereafter a direct entry to Makerere College. As entry to a mission secondary school entailed conversion to the missionary's faith, provision of secondary education was used as a means to not only keep the converts they had acquired, but to also make Protestantism more attractive to Africans. Catholic missions were fearful of losing their converts to Protestants as Africans were looking for formal education to enable them survive the colonial economy. At the time, Catholic missions only had Mangú High School that was not only small for the growing number of Africans seeking secondary education, but also only provided junior secondary education. This competition for converts ultimately led to the beginning of St. Mary's School Yala in the highly populated Western region of Kenya. Hence this article will discuss this rivalry in the search of converts by missionaries and the subsequent development of St. Mary's School Yala

¹ E.I. Njiro, (1985) *A History of Africa in the 19th Century*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, p.186

² J. Anderson, (1970) *The Struggle for the School*. Nairobi: Longman, p.10

1.1 Theoretical framework

This study has applied the Social Development Theory. The theory attempts to explain changes in the structure and framework of society that help a society better realise its aims. The major proponents of this theory include sociologists Gary Jacobs and Robert MacFarlane. The theory is derived from Walt Rostow's model of development whereby societies develop economically by lineally passing through five distinct stages. Proponents of Social Development however argue that Rostow's model explains economic development rather than the overall development of a society. The theorists define development as an upward ascending movement featuring greater levels of energy, efficiency, quality, productivity, complexity, comprehension, creativity, mastery, enjoyment and accomplishment.¹ The process of development occurs by the creation of higher levels of organisation in society. The theory argues that society grows through various stages. These stages of development are; physical stage, vital stage, and mental stage. In the physical stage, the society is most concerned with survival. Its energies are therefore directed towards physical protection and preservation of the status quo. The vital stage is characterised by dynamism and change whereby new ideas start coming up in the society. In the mental stage, there's more practical application of the mind to generate new ideas and social organisation. Hence this study has applied the Social Development Theory to explain the changes in the education needs for and by Africans, and Catholic missionaries' adaptation to these needs, which eventually led to the development of St. Mary's School Yala.

2. The Establishment of Mission Schools in Kenya

Christian missions in Kenya began at the coast with the first mission being opened in Rabai by the C.M.S. Christianity managed to penetrate the interior of Kenya with the building of the Kenya-Uganda railway. Western Kenya was one of the highly populated areas of the country, and thus many missionaries moved from the coast into Western Kenya when the railway reached Kisumu. Other groups of missionaries came to Western Kenya through Uganda. The main group of missionaries working in the area in the early colonial period included the C.M.S, Mill Hill Missionaries, and the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) Mission. The rivalry between these mission groups played a crucial role in the beginning of formal education in the Western region of Kenya, and the establishment of St. Mary's School Yala.

Wherever Protestant and Catholic missionaries met in Africa, opposition, antagonism and rivalry flared between them. In Nigeria for example, missionary rivalry was particularly intense. To them, education was as an imperative part of civilisation as it was a way of winning converts. Thus the rapid expansion of education institutions in Nigeria was in actuality, an accidental outcome of missionary rivalry rather than the result of altruistic policy to provide expanded educational opportunities.² The same rivalry was witnessed in the East African Protectorate. In Buganda, the Protestant and Catholic missionaries wanted to stop the other from gaining ground in Buganda; and also from getting an upper hand in dealing with the Kabaka; the Buganda king. Buganda society was highly centralised and the various religious groups saw that it would be easier to evangelise if they managed to convert the royal ruling class first, and let conversion trickle down to the populace. The Protestant C.M.S thus began Kings College Budo to train children of chiefs and the royal family; with religious instruction being a major component in the curriculum of the college. The Catholics followed suit and began St. Joseph Kisubi, to also train the ruling class's children and thus enable conversion from the top.³ The same rivalry was also replicated in Bunyoro in Uganda. In Bughaya and Masindi areas of Bunyoro, Protestants who were the first to arrive made alliances with local chiefs and the Bunyoro king with the hope that conversion of the masses would be achieved from above. When the Catholic missionaries arrived later, they had a hard time converting the locals as people were discouraged from joining Catholicism.⁴ The Catholics therefore decided that they would win converts by opening a dispensary to treat the sick; a situation which led them to be known as the religion of the "lowly sick and those with jiggers," a smear campaign started by the C.M.S.⁵

In Kenya, there also existed unscrupulous competition between the Catholic and Protestant missions. This was mostly prevalent in highly populated areas like Western Kenya where St. Mary's School is located. Missionaries had very few resources to carry out their operations; thus many ended up settling in highly populated areas to increase their chances of winning high numbers of converts with the limited resources they had. This had the result of many mission stations being found in a particular area. The existence of other mission stations in ones area of operation served to increase the necessity for moving with speed to gain converts by

¹ G. Jacobs, et al, (1996) *Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Social Development*, California: International Center for Peace and Development, accessed from http://www.icpd.org/development_theory/comprehensive_theory_of_social_development.htm

² M.O Basse, (1999) *Missionary Rivalry and Educational Expansion in Nigeria, 1885-1945*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.p.62

³ Anderson, *The Struggle for the School*, p13

⁴ A.B.T Byaruhanga-Akiiki,(1982) *Religion in Bunyoro*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, p 103

⁵ Ibid., p 103

particular mission stations. Each therefore tried to spread its influence as quickly as possible. The missionaries' main aim was evangelisation and conversion to their respective faiths. However, the initial trials for conversion using sermons were unattractive to local populations. Missionaries therefore resorted to using devious means to get converts. They began offering them incentives like sweets and clothing to come to church.¹ Later on, education was used as an inducement to convert.

The pioneer missionaries in Kenya quickly realised that the entire pattern of African society had to first be altered before Africans would accept Christianity.² This was to be achieved by separating potential converts from their traditional way of life, and introducing them to Western civilisation through education. This was the beginning of formal education in the region. Education in Kenya therefore started with various bush schools started by the missionaries.

Before 1911, the various missions singly handled all matters regarding African education in the colony. Between 1895 and 1910, the colonial government was most preoccupied with acquisition and distribution of land for settler occupation than with the provision of any social amenities to the indigenous African population. By 1910 for example, the government had only built two schools; one for Indians and another for Europeans.³ The work of provision of education to the indigenous African population therefore fell squarely on the missionaries. The colonial government only pledged to help missionaries financially in their efforts to establish education institutions as per the recommendations of the Frazer Report of 1910.

The beginning of the colonial enterprise proved to be a blessing to the missionaries' aims of conversion. In the initial years of starting education institutions for Africans, the number of Christian converts and students in the mission schools remained low due to the strength of traditional society. However, in the face of a new colonial world, the traditional ways of life began to be slowly undermined. The impact made by the colonial situation through the introduction of wage labour, money, urban centres, production for export, individual enterprise and colonial laws were too much for traditional society and religion to counter.⁴ Many Africans therefore started enrolling in the mission schools to get answers on the situation of the new world confronting them. As schools provided avenues where one could get an education and thus better wages in the colonial enterprise, they proved to be effective incentive to enable conversion of Africans when European colonialism took root. The beginning of World War I brought even more African students to mission education centres. Mission stations became refuge for young men seeking to avoid being drafted into the carrier corps of the British army.⁵ After the war, the need for education by Africans became even greater. The experiences of the war had shown Africans that they could only compete effectively in the colonial economy if they acquired Western religion and hence, education.⁶ Missionaries thus used this new desire for education by Africans to force adaptation to their specific religious leanings.

Due to financial constraints, missionaries usually focused on providing primary education. Very few missions provided secondary schooling which required more human and capital resources not easily available. By 1925 when St Mary's School was being conceived, Protestant Missions were way ahead of Catholics in provision of secondary schools. The Protestants had Maseno School and the prestigious Alliance High School was underway. Catholic students only had Mangú School which was quite small for the increasing number of African converts. The only other Catholic institution, Kabaa School was ailing after the death of its founder Fr. Michael Witte. St. Mary's School therefore was an outcome of the race to catch up with the Protestants in the quest to gain and keep converts.

The situation of lack of secondary schools continued for quite some time as by 1939, there were only 4 secondary schools in Kenya; Alliance High School, Mangu High School, Maseno School, and St Mary's Yala.⁷ The need for more secondary schools only became evident after World War II. This increased need for secondary education brought great strain on the missions in terms of financial and human resources. It also resulted in stiff competition between schools for the few trained teachers available in the colony. Although they were began solely to enable evangelisation, schools developed by the missionaries brought with them the benefits of creating a group of educated elite who were instrumental in shaping the history of Kenya.

¹ W.B. Anderson, (1977) *The Church in East Africa, 1870-1974*. Dodoma: Central Tanganyika Press, p.54

² M. Amatsimbi, (2013) "Christian missions, government and local councils partnership in educational development: The case of western Kenya, 1911 – 1938." *International Journal of Education and Research* Vol. 1 No. 9. p. 1

³ N.A.O. Ochieng, (1965) *Education and Culture Change in Kenya (1844-1925)*. Nairobi: Equatorial Publishers Limited, p.49

⁴ Amatsimbi, (2013) "Christian missions, government and local councils partnership in educational development" *International Journal of Education and Research*, p. 2

⁵ S. D. Morad, (1996) *History of the Africa Inland Mission in Kenya* accessed on 20 February 2014, from http://www.wciu.edu/docs/resources/C11K_Morad_history_of_AIM_in_kenya.pdf,

⁶ Amatsimbi (2013) "Christian missions, government and local councils partnership in educational development", *International Journal of Education and Research*, p.4

⁷ D.N Sifuna and J.E Otiende, (1994) *An Introductory History of Education*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press, p.109

2.1 Brandsma and the Establishment of St. Mary's School Yala

The early years of St Mary's School were centred on the figure of Monsignor Gorgonius Brandsma. Brandsma came to Kenya in 1900 with a group of Mill Hill missionaries from Holland. The Mill Hill Missionaries had earlier settled in various parts of Uganda and there, began several missions. The Mill Hill Missionaries operating in Eastern Uganda found themselves on the Kenyan side when the border between the two countries was moved from Naivasha westwards to the River Sio in 1902.¹ The activities of Monsignor Brandsma and these Kenyan Mill Hill Missionaries on education development are what led to the beginning of St Mary's School Yala.

The creation of St. Mary's School took place against the backdrop of a much larger struggle for the development of the education system in Kenya by the Catholic Church. Education development affected the whole Catholic Church in Kenya at the time as they were falling behind Protestant missions on matters education. In the 1920s, the main Catholic missions in the country were the Mill Hill Missionaries, the Holy Ghost Missionaries, and the Consolata Fathers. The Catholic missions were able to expand and occupy most of the densely populated and upcoming urban areas of Kenya. The Mill Hill Missionaries who began St Mary's School mainly settled in what is Western Kenya, and established their headquarters in Kisumu. They had missions in several parts of the larger Kavirondo; that is present day Kisumu, Siaya, Kisii, and the former Western Province.

When he accepted the offer to become the Prefect of Kavirondo in 1925, one of Brandsma's first interests was to advance Catholic education. This was mainly because he felt that the Anglican and other Protestant missions were way ahead of the Catholics in terms of provision of education in the colony. At that time, there was only one well functioning Catholic higher education facility; Mangu High school. Kabaa School that was started by the Holy Ghost Missionaries under Michael Witte was seriously ailing after the death of Witte. The Protestants on the other hand had Maseno School upgraded to a secondary school, and the prestigious Alliance High School that opened its doors in 1926 was underway. Protestant missions also had higher numbers of primary schools compared to Catholic missions. Brandsma was concerned by the lack of higher education facilities for Catholic as most of the important government posts reserved for "natives" were going to the more educated Anglicans; their fiercest rivals, and other Protestant groups. The Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies had made conditions for the employment of natives by declaring that "Provisions must be made to educate those who are required to fill the posts in the administrative and technical services, as well as those who as chiefs will occupy positions of exceptional trust and responsibility".² Brandsma was therefore of the opinion that good Catholic Schools and a good Catholic college were needed to train students to be teachers,³ and thereafter expand Catholic positions in government.

The first step towards the beginning of the institution entailed finding a suitable location. Initially, Brandsma had difficulty in acquiring land to start the school. In 1926, he tried to get a piece of land in Kajulu on the slopes of the Nyando escarpment. The Indian owner however asked for 30,000 shillings which was money the mission did not have.⁴ In 1926, he inspected a plot in Kisumu, near a Swahili settlement called Mkendwa, but later judged that the place would not be ideal as there was neither water, nor wood necessary for construction. In the same year, Brandsma went to Yala, a catechumenate of Aluor Mission. Chief Ogada, the big man of the area and a C.M.S follower was very helpful in making Brandsma's mission possible. Despite the fact that Ogada was not a Catholic, he was willing to help Brandsma start a mission centre/school as he knew that the education facility would be beneficial to his people. Yala seemed appropriate to Brandsma to start the education facility as it had a large population of Africans. He also wanted to curtail C.M.S. influence in the area as they also had a mission and several schools in Rabuor, Rangala, Aluor and Yala. Brandsma therefore applied to the Central Kavirondo Native Council for 50 acres of land in Rabuor Hill to start a Teachers Training College.⁵ The native council however opposed the idea at the Local Native Council (LNC) meeting for three reasons.⁶ Firstly, the LNC was against the idea of ceding any more of their land for purposes that would be under mission control.⁷ The LNC was open to the idea of a government school being opened in the area, but was opposed to a mission school. Government schools usually provided primary education proper, unlike mission primary schools that

¹ J.N.B Osogo, (1974) "Education Developments in Kenya: 1911-1924" *Hadith* 3. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, p.104

² KNA/AV/2/71 Ref.No. 76. Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies.

³ KNA/AV/12/97 Ref No. 395/28 Teacher Training School Eregi. Report by the Director of Education on St. Mary's Roman Catholic Training College, Eregi.

⁴ H. Burgman., (1990) *The Way the Catholic Church Started in Western Kenya*. Nairobi: Mission Book Service, p.139

⁵ KNA/AV/12/96 Catholic Kavirondo Teachers Training School. Letter written by Brandsma to the Central Kavirondo LNC requesting for land in Rabuor Hill.

⁶ KNA/ PC/NZA/DC/CN/7/2 Native Affairs (1923-1928). Minutes of the Central Kavirondo Local Native Council, held on 26 September 1926. Resolution no. 14, "The request was refused"

⁷ KNA/AV/12/ 96 Catholic Kavirondo Teachers Training School (1925-1932). Brandsma's letter to the Mill Hill Mission Headquarter in Kisumu saying his request for land had been denied.

provided education that was heavily religiously inclined. The locals thus preferred a government school as the education provided would better prepare and enable their children survive the colonial economy. Secondly, it was argued that Rabuor would not be able to provide 50 acres as there were three clans in the area who shared that land and cultivation was at a high rate. Chief Ogada also argued that giving land in Rabuor would possibly cause friction between Brandsma and the C.M.S. who were already in the area. He leaned towards the idea of Brandsma going to Jina Hill, where there was already a Catholic Mission.

On sensing the locals' hostility towards his request for land in Rabuor, Brandsma decided to get it from the Governor of the colony through an executive order.¹ He however changed the application from 50 acres to 25 acres, and asked for the land in Jina Hill.² The idea of the facility in Jina was accepted, and approved by the governor. However, before construction began, it was realised that the land on Jina Hill was quite small. Brandsma again requested the governor for the land in Rabuor and his request was granted, even though the LNC was still against it. A week later though, the Senior Commissioner in Yala opined that starting the institution in Rabuor against the locals' wishes would certainly cause discontent. He therefore suggested that Brandsma build his institution in Yala Township. This was acceptable to Brandsma.

Chief Odera Akangó who was the area's leader gave Brandsma a piece of land in Yala; an abandoned forest. The forest was used to bury the dead and it was believed to be haunted.³ It is argued that Odera gave the land with the knowledge that the spirits of the dead would chase the white man away. Odera was unhappy with Brandsma acquiring land to start an education institution through an executive order and against the locals' wishes. It was only after he saw that the institution had begun successfully, and was flourishing that Odera changed his mind about the white man. Thereafter, he actively supported the missionaries and especially education ventures that were in his domain.

Earlier on in 1922, the colonial government's Education Department had adjusted its policy on assisting mission schools which provided African education. Before this, assistance was given to all schools as long as they showed results in education development. This was changed and now subsidies were given to schools that met specific qualifications. Assisted schools had to be open to inspection all the time, and its programmes had to be government approved. Schools providing Primary education were to have seven standards, while those providing secondary schools were to be either junior, or senior. Junior secondary had Form 1 and 2, while senior secondary had Forms 3-6. The Catholic Missions were not open to some of the provisions of the Education Department. They were most against the idea of their programmes being approved by the government as they knew that theirs was a strongly Christian curriculum, with an intention to train Christian converts into their faith.⁴ They did not want government interfering with achieving this. This decision however resulted in a drop in assistance being given to Catholic sponsored institutions and therefore a decline in education standards given by Catholic Missions.

Brandsma was however very passionate about starting an institution that would provide education and teachers to Africans in the Kavirondo Reserve and thus level competition with the C.M.S. and other Protestant groups for converts and government jobs. He therefore wrote a proposal to the colonial government detailing the ideas he had to start a teacher training institution in Yala.⁵ After getting the land in Yala, he also wrote to the Department of Education to come and inspect the land as soon as they could as he wanted to request for money to build the institutions buildings.⁶ Brandsma's efforts to be open to work with government paid off. On December 29th 1927, the grant to open up Yala was formally granted. Brandsma was given grants- in -aid of Sh 5280.33⁷ to start the buildings in Yala. In 1928, he was added a loan of 1050 Pounds; 1,000 Pounds for building and 50 for equipment.⁸ The construction of St Mary's School therefore formally began. The first buildings to be constructed included a Father's quarters containing 3 rooms, a dining room, classrooms, a dormitory that could accommodate 60 students and staff quarters that could accommodate 2 bachelors.⁹

The government gave some guidelines on the construction of the institution. The buildings were supposed to be permanent, and be insured against fire. The mission was requested to pay the cost of the insurance. The loan given to start the institution was also to be repaid after 30 years, with the buildings being

¹ KNA/AV/12/96 Catholic Kavirondo Teachers Training School. A letter written by Brandsma to the Governor in Nairobi asking the governor to step in and help the Mission acquire land in Jina. Letter dated 6 October 1926

² KNA/AV/12/96 Catholic Kavirondo Teachers Training School. Letter to District Commissioner of Central Kavirondo dated 31 August 1926.

³ Awiti, J. Oral Interview. 25 September 2013

⁴ Sifuna and Otiende, (1994) *An Introductory History of Education*, p. 178

⁵ KNA/AV/12/96. Catholic Kavirondo Teachers Training School. "Proposed Scheme for the Establishment of a Catholic Teachers Training School for Kavirondo" (1926)

⁶ KNA/ AV/12/256 Roman Catholic Mission Yala. File No. 676/28 letter written on 18 December 1928.

⁷ KNA/ AV/12/256 Roman Catholic Mission Yala. File No. 676/23 (1928)

⁸ KNA/ AV/12/256 Roman Catholic Mission Yala. File No. 676/28(December 1928)

⁹ KNA/ AV/12/256 Roman Catholic Mission Yala. File No. 676/28(December 1928)

security for the loans.¹ Water was laid from the Yala River, and a ram build to take the water to the school. The school also requested its first equipment; which included 25 benches and 6 iron bedsteads.²

However, it had taken quite some time to acquire the plot to start Yala College. Getting teachers to train the catholic students was also proving to be difficult. Brandsma tried to ask the Fathers of Tilburg (Holland) for assistance on staffing, but they were unable to help him. This was a huge disappointment as he had hoped that the school would have some traditions from his motherland. He was also finding it difficult to get a curriculum for the proposed college. As it was taking longer and longer to get the college running, he decided that it should be begun someplace else and be transferred to Yala at a later date.³ The choice fell on Eregi. Eregi was deemed as a good choice as it was near Yala, and they would easily transfer the students when the school in Yala was completed. Fr. Farmar, the head of the Aluor Mission that Eregi was under, agreed to Brandsma's idea and made the necessary arrangements to start the college in Eregi. This was in August 1927. The college was only moved to Yala in 1929 when the first constructions were completed.

Brandsma next step was to look for teachers who would train the students. All missionaries had difficulties finding teachers for their schools as during this period, money was scarce and trained teachers were limited. There was also no standard curriculum available for African schools and any curriculum made for education institutions for African students depended almost entirely on the ingenuity of the particular missionary concerned. This was the case for Brandsma. As he was not able to get any teachers from Tilburg, he went on to look for lay teachers from Britain. He also negotiated with Kisubi Brothers from Uganda for more teachers. Kisubi Brothers encouraged him to seek help from the Brothers of Christian Instruction from Canada who had done tremendous work in educating the "natives" in Uganda. He also went to Makerere College to get a syllabus for the new institution. In January 1928, the first 2 lay teachers arrived in Yala from Britain; but they were too early as the institution was not yet ready. The two Mr. M. McGuigan, and Mr. A.J. Lea were therefore sent to Kibuye primary school in Kisumu and Eregi Teachers College respectively.

In Eregi, the teacher training school was renamed St. Mary Roman Catholic Training College, Eregi. This was in honour of Mr Lea who had gone to St Mary Training College in Hammersmith in Britain.⁴ However, the department of education was uncomfortable with the institution being called a college as students needed lower standards to be admitted there than they required joining a senior secondary school. The Education Department's schools superintendent suggested that the school's name be changed to St. Mary's Training School, Eregi.⁵ The staff in Eregi consisted of Fr. Farmar; the principal, and his assistant Mr. A.J Lea. Eregi was a small institution, and only had 2 classrooms, a refectory and dormitory. Fr. Farmar was responsible for the literary side of the school, while Lea was responsible for mathematics and physical drills.⁶ Considering the prevailing image of the African as being lazy, heathen and superstitious, missionary groups in Kenya took up educational forms and contents currently in practice in Europe for the working class, a group considered to be afflicted by similar weaknesses.⁷ Emphasis was therefore put on spiritual value of hard work and the tenets of evangelical Christianity. Religious instruction was therefore a major component of the Eregi School's curriculum. Teaching was in English, although the standards were quite low. The education department had also agreed that a common language was necessary for the masses and that language for the time being, had to be Swahili.⁸ Swahili was therefore taught in the institution. Each student was also required to cultivate his own crops. The school also decided to start a Boy Scout movement.⁹ This however did not go down well with the superintendent of schools. He was of the opinion that African students were not allowed to be scouts. Lea however argued against this, pointing out that there were African scouts already in Uganda and Alliance High School. He also informed the inspector that he had already got a recommendation to begin the movement in St Mary's School from the Secretary of Boy Scouts in Nairobi. The matter was finally settled and the scout movement was formally started.

¹ KNA/ AV/12/256 Roman Catholic Mission Yala. File No. 676/23(1928)

² KNA/ AV/12/256 Roman Catholic Mission Yala. File No. 676/28. Procurement Letter No. 36, written between 5 October - 1 December 1928 by Kavirondo Catholic Mission Procurement Committee

³ KNA/AV/12/96. Catholic Kavirondo Teachers Training School. Ref. No. 436/3 Letter by the Education Department Secretary in Nairobi to the Colonial Secretary saying Yala College would be begun in Eregi. Letter dated 22 June 1926.

⁴ KNA/ AV/12/97 Teachers Training School, Eregi. Ref. No. 395/28 A letter to the Director of Education by the Inspector of Schools. (1928)

⁵ KNA/AV/12/97 Teacher Training School Eregi. Ref. No. 675/10 Letter by the Director of Education to Brandsma requesting him to consider changing the institutions name. Letter dated 16 August 1928.

⁶ KNA/AV/12/97 Teacher Training School Eregi. Ref No. 395/28 A Report by the Director of Education on St. Mary's Roman Catholic Training College: Eregi (1928)

⁷ Sifuna and Otiende,(1994) *An Introductory History of Education*,p.187

⁸ KNA/AV/2/85. Minutes of the Senior Commissioners Meetings, Natives Affairs Department, dated 20 January 1925.

⁹ KNA/ AV/12/97 Teachers Training School, Eregi. Ref No. 395/28. Letter to the Director of Education by the Inspector of Schools. (1928)

When the college was finally opened in Yala in 1929, there were problems with the new teachers. These were not ordinary missionary personnel and therefore did not feel obliged to attend mass and other religious activities. Brandsma felt that they were inadequate in boosting the spiritual side of the school.¹ There began constant disagreements between Brandsma and the two teachers over this issue. The two teachers continuously felt undermined and insecure in their position. One; Mr. McGuigan, finally opted to go back to England.

When the school was moved to Yala in 1929, there were students ready and eager to start learning. Generally, Africans started to develop interest in formal education when settlers began to pay relatively highly for reading and writing ability on their new farms.² There were however fewer settlers in Western Kenya, and especially in the predominantly semi-arid areas inhabited by the Luo ethnic group. Nonetheless, the government began to look for clerks and employees who could obey instructions and the mission by giving better educated Africans responsibilities and material benefits. This is the reason that many in Western Kenya were attracted to formal education.

The school again changed its name to St. Mary's Central School in 1931. On several occasions, priests who in many cases lacked training on education were assisted in their educational and other ministries by orders of religious brothers and sisters. As earlier stated, Brandsma had asked the brothers in Kisubi to help in providing personnel to run the institution and the Kisubi Brothers had encouraged him to seek help from the Brothers from Canada. St. Mary's Yala therefore came under the Brothers of Christian Instruction³ and Br. Charles took over the running of the institution in 1931. The exact nature of the school was however still in balance: originally it was seen as a teacher training college, but it was found that most students did not want to become teachers. Many students who passed through the institution opted to go for more lucrative employment in the railway and post office.⁴ The local LNC was also for the idea of starting a school to provide secondary education proper, rather than to train teachers. It had even voted Sh.30,000 to start such a school in Yala.⁵ In addition, the LNC had provided grants for 74 scholarships to secondary schools.⁶ St. Mary's School therefore took advantage of the available opportunities and became a full primary school with a junior secondary added later on in 1939.⁷

Although they had started a school and were making strides in advancing education in Yala, the Mill Hill missionaries were not happy with their lack of presence in Yala. Brandsma was at the time living at the Aluor Mission station and the school was practically at the hands of the Brothers. There was also a lot of suspicion between the missionary Fathers and the Canadian Brothers. The Fathers were of the opinion that religious instruction be paramount to literary instruction in the institution, and they felt that the Brothers were not enforcing this.⁸ To keep an eye on the Brother's activities, Brandsma decided to move and reside in the school. This prompted the opening of another mission in Yala. Yala mission was made up of areas cut off from Rangála and Aluor Missions, and Brandsma became the superior running that Prefecture. Yala then became the centre of the Vicariate of Kavirondo.

After successfully opening the institution, Brandsma moved on to bigger things. St Mary's School started a seminary department attached to it. Brandsma thought that it would be nice to have a preparatory seminary in St Mary's for students who wanted to become priests but were not yet far enough in their studies. The seminary was begun in 1935. However Brandsma did not live to see this dream mature as he suddenly died on 19th June 1935.

2.2 Brandsma's Succession

Brandsma's succession was characterised by a lot of infighting between the Mill Hill Fathers and the Brothers from Canada over the type of education being provided in St. Mary's School. Under the Brothers, the school had been able to produce the first crop of highly educated Africans from Western Kenya. Giving Africans high quality education did not go down well with the Mill Hill Fathers. They argued that instead of giving the students education that would primarily help in evangelising, the Canadian Brothers were giving the boys airs and grace⁹. Under the Brothers, St Mary's School had managed to move from a primary school to become a

¹ Burgman., (1990) *The Way the Catholic Church Started in Western Kenya*, p.138

² Sifuna and Otiende, (1994) *An Introductory History of Education*, p.180

³ Churu and Mwaura, (2012) *The Catholic Church and Schools in Kenya: A Historical Perspective on Education for Holistic Development. Part I: From the Colonial period to Foundations of an Education dispensation for Independent Kenya*. Accessed on 20th November 2013 from http://www.saintleo.edu/media/411879/catholic_education_in_kenya.pdf, p. 4

⁴ KNA/PC/NZA/1/32 District Annual Report Nyanza (1937)

⁵ KNA/AV/12/96 Catholic Kavirondo Teachers Training School. Letter by the District Commissioner of Nyanza to the Senior Commissioner Nyanza dated 7 October 1926.

⁶ KNA/PC/NZA/1/32 District Annual Report Nyanza (1937)

⁷ Burgman., (1990) *The Way the Catholic Church Started in Western Kenya*, p.138

⁸ Ibid, 140

⁹ Ibid., 193

junior secondary school. The infighting between the Brothers and Fathers escalated until finally in 1942, the Brothers left. The school was thereafter given to Englishmen, whose ideology on educating Africans was closer to the Missionaries (Just enough literary education to enable evangelism). Father L. Bartels who had led the onslaught on the previous principal Br. James, became the new principal of the school. Under Bartels, education in St. Mary's School reverted to the three principles emphasised by Catholic missionaries. These were,

- a) The principle of strong evangelism and the inculcation of Christian way of life
- b) Principle of spreading the gospel by making literacy an essential part of conversion before baptism
- c) Principle of teaching industrial arts so as to produce African artisans¹

The Br. James- Fr. Bartels takeover was however not smooth. The students found it hard to adjust to the new tougher regulations required by the priests. They were also against the strong Christian teachings emphasised by the Fathers, preferring the Brothers who gave them more literacy skills. The Fathers also introduced new rules including constant inspections, disallowing pocket money, and beatings as punishment for wrongdoing. Bartels also decided to slash the salaries of African lay teachers. Many old boys of the institutions who now worked as teachers decided to leave the institution when Bartels took over. The principal refused to hear the point of view of the students on the new regulations and this resulted in a strike. Many students walked out of the school, a completely shocking incidence to Fr. Bartels. The strike proved to be a turning point on the type of education being provided by the missionaries in St. Mary's School. It became apparent to the missionaries that their students were interested in education not as a tool for conversion, but because education was perceived as their ticket to material advancement.² Students therefore resented teachings they considered ineffective, and would easily walk out of the institution to find other options; other options being Protestant secondary schools. The missionaries thus decided to make changes on the type of education given to African students. Fr. Traynor who was less religiously inclined in matters education replaced Fr. Bartels as the principal of the school. Traynor was able to attract back the old staff members, and created an opportunity for coexistence between the students, African lay teachers, and the missionaries. The missionaries also began to make preparations to upgrade St. Mary's School to a senior secondary school providing A-level education.

2.3 From Junior Secondary to Senior School

The early 1940's began with World War II at the centre of the colony's preoccupation. Mission schools in Kenya were hard hit by the war in terms of funds and personnel. From 1939, government efforts were concentrated on the war thus grants to schools; especially those offering education to Africans, was reduced. Missionaries also got less funds from their mother country missions as much of this money was also tied to the efforts of the war. In addition to reduced funding, missionaries also faced a serious personnel shortage. Many missionaries decried the calling of lay men to serve in World War II³. The recalling of European teachers and lay people especially affected St. Mary's School. Being a Catholic school for male students and having a seminary section, the school's administration could not call on female teachers to help in the running of the institution; like it was happening in other government schools. The school had just opened its secondary school section and it had barely managed to stand on its feet when qualified European personnel to teach the secondary section became a problem. In addition, there were not many African graduates who would help to teach secondary students as many Africans did not have the opportunity to go to secondary schools themselves. The situation of lack of teachers was also propounded by soaring enrolment witnessed in this period.⁴ Mission education shielded many students from the demands of settler farm labour and also from being drafted as World War II carrier corps. Missionaries were also able to negotiate with local government administrators and proper registered students were excused from most demands of labour. Many African young men therefore joined schools to escape working in European farms and being drafted into the war.

The dire state African education witnessed in the War period began to gradually change for the better at the end of World War II. To begin with, there was a marked expansion of education institutions for Africans after World War II. Many African students were also given scholarships to Makerere College in Uganda, and abroad to Europe and America to acquire higher education.⁵ This group of highly educated African elite became politically conscious and vocal against the colonial system. The growth of nationalism had an effect on the colonial government and for the first time, they took drastic measures and shifted their policy on African

¹ Ochieng, (1965) *Education and Culture Change in Kenya(1844-1945)*, Nairobi: Equatorial Publishers Limited, p.52

² E.B Castle, (1966) *Growing up in East Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, p.219.

³ KNA/ PC/NZA/2/11/7 Education of Natives Central Kavirondo (1931-1951) A letter by Archdeacon W.E Owen, a C.M.S missionary to the Director of Education complaining about the recalling of lay men in the mission, and European teachers to serve in World War II, dated 21 Oct 1939.

⁴ KNA/PC/NZA/2/11/15 Schools (1932-1946) The Director of Education explains that in Mission schools offering African education, the number of pupils in a class generally exceeded the number officially laid down per class by the colonial government.

⁵ KNA/JA/25/49 Bursaries, African Loans, Makerere students, Secondary Education (1947-1958)

education in the colony. Firstly, the colonial office in Britain increased education aid to the colonies in preparation for self governance. In 1940 the Colonial Development and Welfare Act had recommended a 10 year development plan which aimed to provide 50% of African school going children with 6 year primary education. After the war, the central government increased this education aid to African students to 800,000 Pounds, mostly to increase buildings in education institutions. Mission schools took the opportunity of increased government support to expand their institutions. In fact, by 1960, the mission schools presented more than half of all the educated Africans¹ as they had expanded and could enrol many more African students.

Catholic mission schools, St. Mary's included managed to expand also due to an increase in personnel after the war. There was an influx of Catholic religious men and women orders into the country in this period. The Beecher Report² had recommended that African schools be put predominantly under the control of missionaries and thus, Catholic Bishops in Europe encouraged religious orders to come into the country and open new schools.³ As there were enough personnel and an increase in enrolment in both primary and secondary schools, it was essential that more senior schools that cater for African students be opened.⁴ In 1952, a memo was sent to the Education Secretary to petition the government to allow the upgrading of other Catholic institutions to enable the giving of A- level education. At the time, there was only one full Catholic secondary school for boys; Mangu. High School. Selection to join the institution was done after Kenya Secondary School Examination. As there was an increase in enrolment, the Bishops suggested that Mangu be expanded into a double stream school and St. Mary's Yala and Nyeri School to have their own senior school.⁵ This request was accepted and upgrading of St. Mary School began. In 1957, St. Mary's opened its senior school section. This opened up more places for students to get their A-level education. Thus St. Mary's School became the second Catholic mission school in the Kenya colony providing higher A-Level education to Africans. This enabled many Catholic students gain direct admittance at Makerere College with some going abroad for further studies. The upgrading of St. Mary's School had thus managed to level the ground with Protestant missionaries in their quest to attract African converts.

3. SUMMARY

Brandsma's vision of an African Catholic population greatly influenced the establishment of St Mary's School, Yala. The highly populated Western Kenya was attractive to Christian missionaries as it provided an opportunity to convert many Africans with the few resources missionaries had in the early colonial period. As Africans were looking for education as a means to survive the colonial economy, the school was set up to attract Africans to Catholicism and to counter Protestant missions influence in the area. His plans were however to start a teacher training college to get teachers who would help in evangelising. Brandsma's plans however changed when he realised that his students were more interested in getting primary education proper. The school therefore changed to a primary school, and a junior secondary section added later on. In their pursuit of even more converts, the school gradually upgraded to a senior school, offering A-Level education. Hence in their quest to catch up with Protestant missionaries, the Catholic Mill Hill Missionaries played an important role in the advancement of secondary education that was to be in great demand in later years when the struggle for independence intensified in the Kenyan colony.

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¹ B. Davidson, (1963) *Guide to African History*. London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, p.82

² Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, (1949) *African Education in Kenya "Beecher Report"* Nairobi: Government Printer

³ B. Churu and P. Mwaura, (2012) *The Catholic Church and Schools in Kenya*, p.12

⁴ KNA/DC/CN/1/1/6 Nyanza District Annual Report (1951). The District Commissioner explains that there were many students who want to join Maseno and Yala and they are not able to accommodate the numbers. He suggests opening of more secondary schools and upgrading of some schools to senior secondary level.

⁵ KNA/ ED/19461, The Education Secretary General. To The Catholic Missions; General and Accounts. (1950-1965) A joint petition by Catholic Missions requesting for funds to aid in the addition of Secondary Schools for Africans, 1952

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