

# Challenges Faced by the Missionaries: A Case Study of Mill Hill Missionaries at Kibabii Catholic Mission, Kenya 1903 to 1970

Oscar Robert Wasike<sup>1</sup>, Melvine Chepkoech Lilechi<sup>2</sup>, Dr Kennedy Mokaya Moindi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Humanities, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, P. O. Box.62157 - 00200, Email: [oscarwasike\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:oscarwasike[at]gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of Humanities (History and International Relations), Catholic University of Eastern Africa

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer, Department of Humanities (History and International Relations), Catholic University of Eastern Africa

**Abstract:** *This is a microcosm of missionary experience in Africa. The missionaries originated from Europe. They were motivated by two main reasons to come to Africa, namely evangelization and modernization. To set the foundation and continue building on it was dependent on the response from the particular community. In their struggle and determination to introduce and sustain Catholic evangelization they were faced with many challenges. This paper highlights the challenges experienced by the Mill Hill Missionaries as they established Catholic evangelization in Bukusuland. In their plan and projection, Kibabii Catholic Mission was to be established as the Mother Church from where Mill Hill would spearhead the advancement of Catholic evangelization in Bukusuland. The emergence of challenges they experienced in the process of Catholic evangelization are accounted for by the explanation that the host community, namely Bukusu people, were not a dormant community. There were many dynamics at play in the community that brought about these challenges. The challenges then give us an insight into what the missionary work of evangelizing the African communities entailed. Reflections on the challenges condition us to think about the benefits and relevance of the sacrifices expected from actors to realize the mission of the Church. Conclusively, Missionary determination to overcome the challenges brought forth the expected results namely, establishment of Catholicism in Bukusuland. Additional benefits then blossomed from Catholic tools of evangelization, especially introduction of formal education, which accelerated the cultural, social and economic transformation of Bukusuland.*

**Keywords:** Mill Hill Missionaries, evangelization, Catholicism, Traditions

## 1. Introduction

The story of Africa cannot be complete without a mention of the Christian missionaries. They came to evangelize and in the process ended up laying the infrastructural trajectory that set Africa on the path to modernization. This was because they looked at evangelization as a means of improving standards of living of the African people. Of course this was measured using Europeans standards hence modernization. No wonder it is argued that evangelization and modernization were two sides of the same coin (Bulhmann, 1979).

This study has narrowed down to the Mill Hill Missionaries, also known as the Missionary Society of Saint Joseph. These are a Catholic Missionary society that originated from England, founded by Cardinal Herbert Vaughan in 1866. Being a member of the Manchester Geographical Society, Vaughan came to the knowledge of what was happening in Africa. These disturbed his conscience, especially the African slave trading business and the description of the Africans as backward, ignorant, witches, among other terms of prejudice. From his Catholic standpoint, the human dignity of the Africa person was in danger and had to be reclaimed. Vaughan strongly believed Catholic evangelization would contribute to restore the human dignity of the African person (O' Neil, 1999)

According to Faupel, (1969), the Mill Hill Missionaries first arrived in Uganda in 1895 welcomed by the White Fathers who had originated from France. When Buganda became a

British protectorate territory as from 1894, they saw it fitting for Missionaries from Britain to evangelize Buganda. As the Mill Hill Missionaries arrived, the White Fathers handed over the Catholic Mission stations they had founded. The Mill Hill Missionaries then began an aggressive Catholic evangelization opening up many more Catholic Mission stations. At the time what is Western Kenya, in this case Kisumu and Mumias (Elureko) were part of Uganda territory. The Mill Hill Missionaries opened Catholic Missions in the trading centers along the caravan route beginning with Kisumu at a place known as Ojolla in 1903 and Mumias in 1904 (Burgman, 1990).

According to their plan and projection, the founding of Mumias Catholic Mission was to spearhead Catholic evangelization of the Luhya people namely, Banyalla, Samia, Bakhayo, Bukusu, Wanga, Maragoli, Isukha, Idakho, Batsotso among others. For now the interest of the study is the challenges that the Mill Hill Missionaries faced as they pursued Catholic evangelization in Bukusuland. The Bukusu people are not far from Mumias, they share the border with the Wanga people at Bulimbo, along the Mumias – Bungoma road. The border is less than ten Kilometers to Mumias. This helps us to understand the proximity of Bukusu people to Mumias where the Mill Hill Missionaries were stationed and from where they pastorally administered to the Bukusu people. Factors that necessitated the missionaries Catholic evangelization of the Bukusu people included, first, the commitment of Chief Sudi to have the Missionaries in his territory, second, was the aggressiveness of Catechist Dominic Osyanju, Leo Makokha, Pascal

Volume 10 Issue 9, September 2021

[www.ijsr.net](http://www.ijsr.net)

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

Nabwana, to mention but a few; third was the flooding of River Nzoia that had made it very dangerous for the Bukusu catechumens to cross to Mumias Mission for catechesis. Forth and finally, the strong Muslim resistance and incitement the missionaries were experiencing in Mumias leading to the partial closure of Mumias Mission as from 1910 until 1913.

To set the foundation of Catholic evangelization in Bukusuland, the missionaries opened many catechumenates in Bukusuland. These are Syoya, Mahero, Khasolo, Kongoli, Kimwanga, Netima, Mwanda, Kabula, Kibabii, Misikhu, Chesikaki, Chebukaka, Kimilili, to mention but a few. These contributed largely in creating the awareness of Catholic teachings to the people of Bukusuland. As early as 1916, Bishop Bierman had foreseen Kibabii area as best placed point from where Catholic evangelization would be spearheaded and advanced to the Bukusu populace (Burgman 1990).

The missionaries' struggle to establish Catholic evangelization in the territory was not without tensions, confrontations, collision and resistance. The study made a finding of the following challenges: mockery, resistance at Nalondo from some Bukusu clans, the clash with Protestantism, financial problems, diseases, attacks from the "Dini ya Musambwa sect members," language problem, frustrations from British colonial administration etc.

The emergency of these challenges help us to understand the character of the host community. For instance, there were internal dynamics such as the desire to preserve the traditions that led to resistance of the new religion. Equally, it can also be argued that external dynamics were at play. For instance, when the colonial administration frustrated missionary plans, or when the Protestants resisted the establishment of Catholicism, these were external forces manipulating the host community. All in all, despite the Challenges, the Mill Hill story of Catholic evangelization and establishment in Bukusuland was achieved.

## 2. Examination of the Challenges that the Mill Hill Missionaries Encountered

### 2.1 Mockery

The stories of White people traversing Mount Elgon (Mount Masaba as locally known at the time) and Mumias (also locally known as Elureko at the time) had spread so much in the region (Burgman, 1979). It aroused a desire among the local people to see a white human being. In many villages the Mill Hill Missionaries were the very first white people that the local people encountered. Father Stam was known from about 1903 to have visited villages in areas around Mateka (Burgman, 1990).

The presence of the white people in the villages elicited different reactions. To some it was something celebrated, to others it remained disturbing by virtue of their mission. Those who celebrated were encouraged to trek to Mumias to register for catechetical classes. However there are those who felt the missionaries' new religion would undermine their traditions (culture). They resorted to negative branding

of the missionaries as carrying some evil and misfortunes. They went as far as claiming that missionaries stole their children in the name of wanting to teach the new religion. This sent out fear among many people who did not want to hear anything of the missionaries. They designed a way of frightening and discouraging people from the Missionaries. They crafted propaganda that white people were cannibals and a sign of bad omen. As soon as Father Puylert, took Charge of Kibabii Catholic Mission, they nicknamed him the "bad spirit of the river." When he carried out home to home visitation to win converts to Catholicism, the opponents were quick to track him and warn the homes he had visited how misfortunes would befall them. Makokha Walunya of Kibabii area remembers how a people known as Bakisayi, designed a ritual to cleanse the homes visited by Father Puylert, even the paths he had passed. They instructed that a goat had to be slaughtered and blood sprinkled along that path to neutralize the evil powers Father Puylert left behind (Walunya, O. I June 2, 2019).

This challenge can be rated as issuing from internal dynamics. While in the host community some members got excited to identify themselves with the missionaries for reasons best known to them, others from the onset were afraid and so expressed their disturbance at the presence of the missionaries in their community. They did not want foreign influences to tamper their way of life. They chose to be conservative.

### 2.2 Resistance in Nalondo

When the opening of Kibabii Catholic Mission was suspended in 1919 it took ten more years for the plan to be realized. Chief Sudi and Catechist Dominic Osyanju were heavily involved in the plans. Early in 1931 Chief Sudi directed Missionaries to occupy Nalondo area. They moved in quickly and put up temporary structures. Already at Nalondo, local people had received news that Catholic Missionaries were to settle in their place. The news, it is thought, to have probably been spread by the catechumens who seemed to have begun celebrating that distance to Mumias to study catechism would now be reduced. Some clan elders banking on the rumors that missionaries were stealing children, planned to make it difficult for the missionaries settle. They blocked the paths so that those who wanted to visit the missionaries did not easily get there. Two clans that showed a fierce resistance were the Bakiyabi and Babichache. Later on it was from the Babichache clan that Elijah Masinde Nameme, the founder of "Dini ya Msambwa" emerged. Despite the resistance, the Mill Hill Missionaries went on to construct grass thatched structures. That very week, people believed to have been incited and sponsored by the Bakiyabi and Babichache elders, attacked and destroyed the temporary structures the missionaries had put up. This was reported to Chief Sudi who again directed that missionaries now move to Kibabii area (Wetangula, Osyanju, O. I May 28, 2019)

This challenge also issues from the internal dynamic. The fear of foreign influence was so high that some radicals emerged. Their joy was to maintain the status quo. The presence of the missionaries settling in their territory disturbed their peace. To express the radical spirit, they

designed propaganda of how missionaries would steal children and then caused them to evict by flattening the missionary settlement.

### 2.3 The Frustrations from the British Colonial Administration

In consideration of the Mill Hill Missionaries history of Catholic evangelization, it is argued that they were very aggressive (O'Neil 1999). As soon as they got an opportunity for expansion, they did not waste time to construct catechumenates in the villages then appoint a catechist to take charge. By 1916 the numbers and determination of the catechumens from Bukusuland were impressive to the Mill Hill Missionaries in Mumias. For this reason, Bishop Bierman thought of opening a mission station in Bukusu land. Ten acres of land had been found in Kibabii area. Unfortunately a huddle was put on the way. According to Fathers Stam's Pastoral report covering the years 1916 to 1931, the Nairobi authorities made it difficult for Mill Hill Missionaries to acquire a ten acre land in Kibabii for the establishment of the Catholic Mission (Burgman, 1990). As a consequence opening up Kibabii Catholic Mission delayed for ten more years.

As if that were not enough, the colonial administrators turned against the catechumenate schools. They were of the opinion that catechumenates should be closed down so as to force the children of school age to attend proper schools. "Bishops Fredrick Hall's Pastoral Lette of 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1959 responded to this move and clarified to the colonial administrators that "the catechumenates were wrongly termed "Dini - Schools" by non - Catholics.... and in several African District Councils and District Education Boards Meetings. The bishop then directed all the priests to work out a plan to ensure that catechumenates continued to serve their purpose.

This challenge issues from an external dynamic in the host community. Both the British colonial administration and the missionaries were external forces in the host community. Sometimes interests of these two forces clashed. The British colonial administration was in power and expected submission from the missionaries otherwise they made evangelization difficult.

### 2.4 The Rise of "Dini ya Musambwa" (Local Religious Movement)

Around 1937, a man known as Elijah Masinde Wanameme, began a religious movement known as "Dini ya Musambwa" translated as the "religion of the ancestral spirits or mystical powers" He came from Maeni area in Kimilili. He belonged to the Babichache clan. He used to climb Mount Masaaba (today known as Mount Elgon) to pray. The word "Masaaba" is a Luhya term which means "that which is associated with prayers" (Wetangula O. I May 28, 2019). This mountain was a sacred place for the Bukusu. One day Elijah coming down from the mountain claimed that God had spoken to him demanding that white people (Europeans) must leave Bukusuland. Their departure would allow the Bukusu people to get committed to their culture, traditions and the heritage of their ancestors. The white people

(missionaries) had brought a new teaching (religion) that was diverting people's attention from the cherished traditions and culture. Elijah wanted to defend the Bukusu cultural religion. He began the struggle by putting in place his "*Dini ya Musambwa*" (Wetangula, O. I May 26, 2019).

In 1948, he gathered courage and invaded the Kibabii Catholic Mission (De Wolf, 1983). Together with his followers, he began shouting and demanding that the Mill Hill Missionaries pack and go. They vandalized and burnt down the first mudded and grass thatched church structure in the compound (Wamalwa, Makokha, O. I May 31, 2019). Present in the compound was Father Stewart, headmaster of Kibabii Intermediate School that had just been opened, who came out with a gun and began shooting in the air. Without fear, Elijah and his team came charging at him. He gave up the shooting run back into the house and locked himself in. Elijah then picked the bullet shells and claimed the bullets were aimed at him and melted on landing on his body (Wamalwa, Makokha, Furukha, O. I. May 31, 2019).

When Chief Sudi received the report about what Elijah and his followers had done at Kibabii Catholic Mission, he gave orders for his arrest. From Kibabii, Elijah and his followers proceeded to attack Malakisi Police Station. Cosmas Kachu, one of the *askarissent* by Chief Sudi to arrest Elijah, followed and found them at Malakisi Police Station, with Elijah daring the police. Corporal Williams was already engaging the rowdy team of Elijah ordering them to surrender but they disobeyed. The corporal ordered the police to shoot them. Cosmas Kachu participated in the shooting killing three adherents of "*Dini ya Musambwa*." (Kachu O. I August 20, 2019). Elijah escaped but was later arrested taken to Kisumu Court, tried by Magistrate Whitehouse and imprisoned for seven years (Kachu, O. I August 16, 2019, Wakoli O. I August 21, 2019).

The attack did not dampen the Mill Hill Missionaries pastoral spirit. The church structure was repaired. From that day, some of the Bukusu converts to Catholicism became very afraid of being attacked by the followers of "Dini ya Musambwa." But at the same time, according to Makokha Walunya, some converts men like Lokhati, took courage to strongly condemn the "Dini ya Musambwa" adherents. He referred to them as "a people who are lost." They threatened to burn his house. This was reported to Chief Sudi who gave them a stern warning. After a period of two years, Catholic evangelization had regained its momentum and on track.

This challenge is an internal dynamic. While resistance to the missionaries had been expressed, it appeared not strong enough to stop the missionaries. The new religion continued to erode the Bukusu culture. Elijah Nameme, a Bukusuman, not being satisfied with the kind of resistance that the Missionaries had experienced, believed his "Dini ya Musambwa" would be more forceful and aggressive in fighting for the preservation of the Bukusu Culture. The Bukusu people, who felt disturbed with White Missionaries' presence and their new teaching, joined Elijah's movement to forcibly resist Christianity. It was disturbing to him that missionaries seemed to be achieving their mission namely establishing Catholicism.

## 2.5 The Geographical Vastness of Kibabii Catholic Mission Territory

Kibabii Mission was a vast area and therefore much effort was needed to keep Catholic evangelization on course. The vast territorially it covered today comprises of Bungoma County and half of the TransNzoia County. Areas that were sub - centres of Kibabii Mission included: Kabula, Netima, Myanga, Kimaeti, Kimatuni, Bukokholo, Machakha, Malinda, Sirisia, Chesikaki, Mayekwe, Lwandanyi, Lwakhakha, Sitabicha, Bukukholo, Cheptais, Chesikaki, Sangalo, Mwibale, Kongoli, Lutungu, Ndengelwa, Mabanga, Nasaka, Chekulo, Luuya, Khachonge, Sichei, Malaha, Chebukaka, Bokoli, Matulo, Misikhu, Makemo, Matili, Sosio, Nakalila, Kibuku, Kaptalelio, Mukuyuni, Sikhendu, Mbakalo, Naitiri, Lungai, Kiminini, Kitale, Matunda, Lutaso, Tartar, Ortum, Kacheliba, Cherenganyi, to mention but a few.

The vastness gave the missionaries the challenge of transport and communication. In terms of transport the "road" network through the villages and bushes was complex for the Missionaries. They needed assistance of the guides, who in most cases were catechists. They had to pass through the wildness risking attacks from wild animals such leopards, snakes and hyenas. It was for this reason that the missionaries were always armed with guns and medication (Mayamba, Osyanju O. I. May 15, 2019). In terms of communication, sending a message to the catechumenates that the priest would be arriving to test the catechumens took days. For instance, in 1916 when Father Stam visited Syoya Catechumenate he found that Catechists Yakobo Mabunde and Paulo Sapuli had given up the faith and gone back to traditionalism. So far he had believed catechesis was going on. He only discovered this on arrival at the site finding a few catechumens struggling to chant prayers on their own (Burgman, 1990).

In order to be pastorally effective there was need for personnel. Given the many converts and many catechumenates being opened it demanded priest personnel for supervision. Father Stam in his pastoral report made it known that "...the number of the catechumenates is fairly good but bigger numbers could be got if the district would not be too big for the regular visits" (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Report 1916 to 1931). Considering it a matter of urgency, Father Stam tried to convince the bishop to solve the personnel problem; he wrote to remind Bishop Bierman "... Already we have agreed that you should get a third man as soon as possible and I have a good hope that this will not be far off" (Stam Letter to Bishop Bierman 29<sup>th</sup> May 1918)

This challenge qualifies as a logistic challenge on the part of the Missionaries. Somehow a massive and extensive positive response was not expected by the missionaries. But everything possible was to be done not to waste the opportunity to evangelize. Missionaries put all efforts in place to carry on Catholic evangelization to all places that appeared promising while Father Stam worked the personnel problem.

## 2.6 The Confusion about Kibabii and Kisoko Catholic Mission Borders

The mission stations were vast and located at a distance. The boundaries were not clear and as a consequence there was a clash in pastoral administration. In certain villages, the Catholic converts did not know where they belonged. An example is the villages in Namatotoa and Khasoko. It was not clear whether they belonged to Kisoko or Kibabii Mission. The priests in Kibabii pastorally served these villages without knowing that the same villages were also being served by priests from Kisoko mission. This confusion went on for a long time until 1951. To work out the confusion, Father Bervoets, in charge of Kisoko Mission, wrote to the priests in Kibabii asking that they needed to decide the definite boundary of their mission stations. He wrote "... Since we have become neighbors the question of Namatotoa and Khasoko has to be resolved whether they belong to Kisoko or Kibabii (Bervoet, Letter 19<sup>th</sup> January 1951).

This challenge too is logistic. The missionaries based their territorial evangelization determined by tribes and sub tribes borders. While Kisoko Mission was dominated by Bakhayo sub tribe, Kibabii was dominated by the Bukusu. The inhabitants of Khasoko were Batura sub tribe, thus not Bukusu and not Bakhayo. They remained confused which mission station would accommodate them. For that matter while others chose Kisoko, others chose Kibabii. It was left at the discretion of the Fathers in Charge of Kisoko and Kibabii to make the decision as to where Khasoko could be served effectively. The Fathers agreed to have it under Kibabii mission.

## 2.7 The Behavior of Bukusu Traditional Loyalists

The people who did not convert to Catholicism decided to defend their cherished traditions and rituals, especially those regarding circumcision (Osyanju, Wetangula, O. I September 29, 2019). The Mill Hill Missionaries had not strongly condemned the practice but unfortunately it began to impact negatively on the catechumenates. Father Stam in his Pastoral report (1916 to 1931) noted that "because of circumcision ceremonies the catechumenates had to be closed. " This is because it engaged the whole clan and many young men who were catechumens happened to be candidates for circumcision.

The Missionaries conceived it as being a hindrance to the progress of Catholic evangelization. This problem was wide spread. It was experienced in other areas such as Buwanga, Kakalewa and Ketosh (Bukusuland). Father Stam was again concerned and reported "... the circumcision in Buhanga, Kakalewa and Ketosh etc gave a temporary blow to our work in the outside schools there. " (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Report 1916 to 1931)

Unexpectedly, traditional ceremonies generated a mixed reaction among the Mill Hill Missionaries. Some became very harsh and decided to aggressively attack, condemn and discourage the custom. Others felt condemning was a dangerous move that would lead to serious conflict with the Bukusu community. The matter was then made known to the

Bishop by Father Stam. He reported “.....another serious point I like to suggest to your Lordship. There are a lot of customs amongst these different tribes in Kenya which clash more or less with our religion. Most of the priests are inclined to forbid such customs as being incompatible with our faith. Am afraid we do a lot of harm by doing so. If these people see we do away with their customs they will protest” (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Reports of 1916 to 1931)

This challenge is rated as an internal dynamic. They were inhabitants within the host community that cherished their traditions. When they learnt that the new religion was in opposition to some of their traditions, and fearing the weakening and gradual disappearance of these traditions, they came out strong to resist the missionaries. While some had already been converted, they remained loyal to their traditions. It was now upon the missionaries to adapt, integrate, inculturate or condemn the culture of the hosts. This experience laid the foundation to theological debates about the place of African culture in Christianity.

### 2.8 Financial Problems

In their struggle to achieve Catholic evangelization, the missionaries faced a financial problem. They had been receiving money from home (Europe) to support their personal needs, to support the local people, to pay the salary and poll tax for the catechists, for construction of churches, schools and dispensaries. In 1923, Father Stam acknowledged Father General’s letter. “Allow me to acknowledge the 200 shillings you allocated to our Mumias Mission for the last twelve months.... I wish to thank Father General most heartily” (Stam, Letter to Father General 31<sup>st</sup> August 1923)

It was the duty of Father General to work hard to raise funds to finance the missionaries in the field. Financial problems intensified during the World Wars period. The economic damage caused by the War in Europe greatly diminished the financial resources from the benefactors. Consequentially the Catholic programs and projects in the Mission field had to slow down. It was so tough that the Bishop Hall had to ask the Missionaries to make local investments (Hall, Letter to Priests Easter Monday 1952). In Kibabii Missionaries invested in the *posho* mill. It was located where the Bishop’s house stands today. Another *posho* mill was located in Sikusi and the other in Khachonge (Wafula, O. I. October 10, 2019). The Bishop also directed the priest to appeal to the local Christians to support the church.

To subsidize the priests’ financial efforts, the bishop also sought help from the colonial government, though fearing that conditions would be attached and these would hurt the spirit of Catholic evangelization. The Bishop notified the priests “. . . It is unfortunate that we have not the means to build our own schools and staff them ourselves. We need the help of Government in this matter. But that help is of no use to us if our obligations towards Government militate against the only reason for our having schools: namely the teaching of Christianity. ” (Hall, Pastoral Letter 9<sup>th</sup> November 1951) Again given the complexity of the emerging existential circumstances resulting from Cold war tensions, the Bishop

explained that he needed to keep money for emergencies especially the possibility of another war.

This challenge is rated as logistically. When the missionaries engaged in the process of catholic evangelization, they got financial assistance from their benefactors in Europe. Challenges to the economy in Europe, as in the case of the World Wars, impacted negatively on financial resources. But evangelization mission had to go on. It demanded that the local people be taught how to support the mission of the church. In this way the missionaries had to participate in teaching and encouraging the money economy among the local people.

### 2.9 The Struggle to Learn, translate and speak Vernacular Language

When the missionaries landed in Kibabii from Mumias in 1931, they had mastered the Luwanga language. That means they used Luwanga language among the Bukusu people. This was so because once appointed to work in Luhya land, the Mill Hill Missionaries had designed that one had to stay in Mumias to learn Luhyia (Luwanga) language then move on to the new station. It was demanded that once appointed to a mission station; the missionary had to introduce himself in the local language. For instance Father Hoorn left a note of how he introduced himself to the people of Kibabii in 1960.

He wrote:

*“Mulembe babandu.... esese ndi omukhulundu Hoorn namwe John. Necha mwa Africa omwaka kwa kumi na mbili. Mala omwepiskopi kandumile mu Misikhu. Luno ndi mu Kibabii. handi sangala okhuba nende enywe. Ndikho khaka khuloma lulomo lweywe manyile lubukusu hatiti hatiti”* (Father Hoorn Pastoral Diary in 1960)

The English translation of the above is:

*“Greetings people. Some of you are surprised so much. I am known as Fr. Hoorn or John. I came to Africa in the month of December. The bishop has sent me to Misikhu and now I am in Kibabii. I am happy to be with you. I am struggling to learn your Lubukusu language little by little”* (Father Hoorn Pastoral Diary in 1960)

Luwanga language was only to help the Missionary have something to say in Luhyia. It has a different dialect from the Lubukusu. It therefore demanded that as priest were appointed to minister in Kibabii they had to engage in learning Lubukusu language, how to speak, read and write it. They believed the local language was the most efficient tool for communication to achieve proper evangelization. Father Puyert stayed long enough in Kibabii to mastered Lubukusu language. Among the people who assisted him to learn were Edward wafula, Stephen Wamalwa, Nichola Mulongo, Dominic Osyanju (Osyanju, Mayamba, Wetangula, O. I May 15, 2019). Eventually he wrote and preached his sermons in the Lubukusu language.

This challenge is logistical. Evangelization was about communicating the message of Jesus and the message of the Church to the converts. At the onset the local people did not know the language of the missionaries. It demanded

therefore that the missionaries, to be effective in evangelization process, had to take the pains to learn the local language.

### 2.10 Dependency Syndrome from the Local people

By dependency syndrome is understood that helping a person makes him or her cultivate an attitude of being helped all the time. He or she does not wake up to the sense of personal responsibility and self - reliance. This is what came to befall Kibabii Mission station. In the beginning the missionaries were very supportive to the local people. Financially by paying school fees and materially by giving clothes to catechumens, building houses and supporting the poor.

Unexpectedly and unfortunately, this created the tradition of dependency on the missionaries. Every day there were people in the mission compound asking for money and seeking other kinds of material support. The outcome of this attitude was the belief that church was very rich. Consequentially it became difficult to convince the local people to support the church (Wamalwa, Makokha, O. I May 31, 2019).

This challenge is a result of an internal dynamic. Some members in the local community having tasted missionary support, they misunderstood the objective. They became beggars, misunderstood the Church as very rich and found it difficult to support the church.

### 2.11 Protestantism

The Protestant missions arrived in Bukusuland before the Mill Hill Missionaries. These are the Church Missionary Society (also known as the Anglicans) and the Americans (also known as the Quaker or Friends). They made all the possible efforts to undermine Catholic establishment. When Father Watervis in 1950s constructed a school for Catholic girls' in Sirisia, the Quakers in the area under the direction of Chief Jonathan Barasa massively vandalized school structures. Father Watervis gave up the project closed the Sirisia Catholic centre (Wamalwa, Makokha, O. I May 29, 2019). According to Father Stam the Quakers "...had found a way in which they used protestant chiefs to make it difficult for Catholics to settle in their areas" (Stam, Letter to Bishop Brandsma 28<sup>th</sup> February 1928). The opposition was so strong that Father Stam noted "...I have tried to get a footing in Northern Ketosh (North Bukusuland) where the Quakers have a post. But up till now I have failed." (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Report, 1916 to 1931). Protestant opposition to the Catholic evangelization was not only in Bukusuland, but also in Butere and in Samia. "... lot of opposition is shown by the CMS of Butere. Not only have they displayed a great activity in Samia location as usual but they have swarmed Buhanga proper with teachers..." (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Report 1916 to 1931)

With utmost determination and after many trials Father Stam then wrote to Bishop Brandasma to let him know how things were in the field "...the progress is steady all along the line, even in Kakalewa and North Kitosh which two provinces were totally in the hands of the Americans who did their

utmost to keep the Catholics out (Stam letter to Bishop Brandsma February 28 1928).

This challenge emanates from a clash of external dynamics namely Protestantism and Catholicism. Here the members of host community fell victim and were being used for the benefit of the external forces to further their interests.

### 2.12 Sicknesses

Sickness was one of the most expected and feared challenge for the missionaries who came to Africa. The missionaries who had been to Africa warned fellow missionaries in Europe to be prepared for this particular challenge. According to Burgman (1990), missionaries in Africa wrote to fellow missionaries reminding those who were to be posted to Africa not to forget to pack, *Quinine, laudanum, alkali volatil, acide phenique, bismuth, pilules de cockle, huile de croton, mooches de Milan, teinture d'arnica, teinture de quinquina.*

Admittedly the missionaries suffered from fevers as they had been warned. This was before they left Europe for Africa. In 1924 Father Stam reported to Bishop Biermans how sicknesses were taking toll on the Fathers. As a consequence this was slowing down Catholic evangelization "... it is getting from bad to worse with regard to illness amongst the Fathers. Father Morris had to go home. Father Brenman seems to be in the poorest of health....." (Stam, Letter to Bishop Bierman February 29, 1924)

### 2.13 Small Pox Epidemic

In 1944 Kibabii region was hit by smallpox epidemic (Agapetus, Speech 1979). Father Puyler worked with Chief Sudi to ensure that the people were vaccinated. Father Puyler permissioned the shifting of the Kibabii health center to Kabuchai as the central place from where vaccination in the region could take place. Missionaries had to stop Catholic evangelization business by closing down catechumenates. Many people were dying. Father Stam reported "... the epidemic of small pox in Bunyalla which required many viaticum has practically upset reading there at least for the time being: some catechists there have died or are down with this sickness...The plague has and is still upsetting here and there our teaching. Therefore travelling is necessary in order to reestablished teaching which has been stopped for a time." (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Report 1916 to 1931)

### 2.14 The Lack Resource Materials for Catechesis

To help in the teaching of Catholicism, the missionaries had employed many catechists. Almost every village had a catechist. They had received basic education reading, religion, writing and arithmetic. Unfortunately, probably because of the increasing number of converts and therefore opening many more catechumenates, there were no enough Catechetical books. To deal with the challenge, Father Stam engaged the Catechists in copying by hand. He informed the bishop "... we are still spending a tremendous amount of time copying catechisms for the big number of catechists" (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Report 1916 to 1931). He

sought bishop's assistance to facilitate the translation and the printing of the catechism and prayer books for the catechists. "...from the accompanying report your Lordship should have noticed the number of catechists. You know there is no printed catechism and the work of copying the catechism for all these teachers is surely an enormous job and at the same time not lasting. Therefore your Lordship would do this mission a great favor by allowing a catechism to be printed and a prayer book would also be a great boom." (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Report 1916 to 1931)

### 2.15 Lapsing in the faith of African Christians

This was very discouraging for the missionaries. It meant to the missionaries that there was need for a lot of pastoral efforts engagements to visit and encourage the neophytes. It happened that the converted adults did not last long in the practice of the new faith. Father Stam believed these adults had matured in the traditional practices and so could not easily embrace Christianity. He reported to the Bishop "... Some more of the old Christians have gone back to heathenism but the younger generation is better and the future is bright.... I have often asked myself why such a big percentage of our old Christians has given up the practice of our holy religion" (Stam, Mumias Mission Pastoral Report 1916 to 1931)

Burgman (1990) also notes that "at Kibabii too things took a turn for the worse: the people seemed to lose interest. Out of 5671 Christians, no more than 1008 did their Easter duties"; the priest noted that there were 600 perverts and 1700 lapsed. "According to Father Stam, the reason young people did not easily lapse in the Catholic faith was because they had not matured in traditional practices.

### 2.16 The Impact of the World Wars

Undoubtedly, the two World Wars slowed down missionary activities all over the world. During the First World War, Bishop Biermans complained "many of our Christians and catechumens were left to serve as soldiers during the war, especially as stretcher bearers and porters. Bishop Bierman had suspected it would happen, he had written to alert the priests, "I can assure you that you are closely watched and everything is being reported to the military authorities" (O'Neil, 1999). Missionary personnel suffered too because priests were taken to serve as military chaplains. For instance, Father Puylert had to remain alone in Kibabii after his assistant Father Vincent Farell who worked from 1931 left in 1939 to serve as a chaplain to the British Military in Karachi during the Second World War. More painfully, Mill Hill priests of Austrian, German and Italian origin working in the British Colonies were subjected to psychological torture. They were branded spies of their home governments. For this reason they lived in extreme fear of being arrested at any time. Among the German Mill Hill Fathers working in Kenya who were taken into custody by the British authorities were Father Kuhn, Father Holzl, Father Herzog and Father Ortner. Bishop Stam tried to intervene to save the German and Italian Mill Hill missionaries (Burgman, 1990). It did not work. Providentially due to the intervention of Father Louis Burgman of Mukumu Catholic Mission, also known as "Father Staas" the priests were later released from

Custody. According to Millhilliana (1968) it was because of Father Louis Burgman negotiations with the British authorities that the missionaries secured their release. Father Louis succeeded because he enjoyed good relations with the British government officials. This scenario had affected the general pastoral mood of the British Mill Hill missionaries, to see their brother missionaries being tormented by the British authorities. The pain translated into a slowed Catholic evangelization since it was difficult to work under these circumstances of being spied on by the British Colonial government.

## 3. Conclusion

This paper has investigated the challenges that were experienced by the Mill Hill Missionaries in their effort to establish Catholic evangelization in Bukusuland. According to the findings, the challenges that the missionaries had to put up with include mockery, resistance in Nalondo area, frustrations from the British Colonial administration, the rise of Dini ya Musambwa, geographical vastness of Kibabii Mission territory, the confusion about Kibabii and Kisoko Catholic Mission border, the behavior of the Bukusu traditional loyalists, financial problems that Missionaries experienced, the struggle to learn, translate and speak the vernacular languages, the dependency syndrome attitude acquired by some converts, clash with Protestantism, sicknesses, small pox epidemic, lack of resource materials, lapsing in faith and the impact of the World Wars.

Admittedly therefore Catholic evangelization in Bukusuland was not without challenges. However, in spite of these challenges the periodic numbers of converts remained a positive sign that local people were responding positively to the missionary efforts. Providentially, this translated into the stability of Catholic evangelization in Bukusuland. Consequently and gradually, benefits accrued from this stability. Catholic foundational investments thrived. They included schools, technical colleges, clinics and hospitals. These investments then contributed to a continued social - economic transformation of people in Bukusuland. Today Kibabii Catholic Mission stands as one among the many legacies of the Mill Hill Missionaries.

## References

- [1] Buhlmann, Walbert. (1979). *The Missions on Trial*. NEW YORK: Orbis Books
- [2] O'Neil, Robert (1999). *Mission to the Upper Nile*. London: Mission Book Service.
- [3] Faupel, J. F. (1969). *African Holocaust: The story of Uganda Martyrs*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- [4] Burgman, Hans (1990). *The Way the Catholic Church Started in Western Kenya*. London: Mission Book Service.
- [5] Burgman, Hans. (1979) *The Early History of Mumias Mission*. Kisumu: National P Press
- [6] Father Stam Nicholas *Mumias Mission Pastoral Report 1916 to 1931*.
- [7] Bishop Fredrick Hall Letter to Priests on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1959
- [8] De Wolf, J. (1983). *Dini ya Musambwa: Militant Protest or Millenium Promise?* Canadian Journal of African Studies Vol.17 No.2 265 - 276

- [9] Father Stam of Mumias Catholic Mission Letter to Bishop Bierman 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1918
- [10] Father Bervoet of Kisoko Mission's Letter to Father - In - Charge of Kibabii Mission 19<sup>th</sup> January 1951
- [11] Father Stam of Mumias Catholic Mission Letter to the General Superior of the Mill Hill Missionaries 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1923
- [12] Bishop Fredrick Hall Letter to Priests of Kisumu Diocese on Easter Monday, 1952
- [13] Bishop Fredrick Hall Letter to Priests of Kisumu Diocese 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1951
- [14] Bishop Fredrick Hall Letter to Priests of Kisumu Diocese 30<sup>th</sup> November 1951
- [15] Bishop Fredrick Hall Letter to Parish Priests Catholic Diocese of Kisumu 18<sup>th</sup> February 1952
- [16] Father Hoorn 1960 Pastoral Diary when he visited Kibabii Catholic Mission
- [17] Father Stam of Mumias Catholic Mission Letter to Rt. Rev. Brandsma 29<sup>th</sup> February 1924
- [18] The Speech of Father Agapetus Muse "*Memorandum on the occasion of the historic visit of his excellency the President to Kibabii Parish*" 27<sup>th</sup> May 1979
- [19] Millhilliana (1968) In Memoriam *Father Louis Burgman* Great Britain: Vaughan Press