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FRIENDS IN EASTERN AFRICA

ANN K. RIGGS

What has God done; what is God doing; what will God do in the future in East Africa? That's what *Quaker Religious Thought* editor Howard Macy asked.

Ah! After serving five years in Kaimosi, Kenya as the principal of Friends Theological College,¹ I can say firmly that I wish I knew the answer to those questions.

From our limited human perception, it is always challenging to distinguish what is from God and what is not. In Africa the challenge is amplified by the many challenges of the context. Things happen there that it is hard for we in the global North to think of as being within the limits of what God allows in our world. And there things that it seems God might have been longing to see that fail to happen. God has to live, as we do, with the results of our human free will.

Kenyan scholar John Mbiti speaks of the understanding of time in African traditional religions and philosophy by using Swahili words. While African traditional cultures would have had to adapt to changing physical circumstances as all cultures must, they are not ordinarily perceived as having done so. Events of the past (*zamani* time) are timeless. Once accomplished the events of *sasa*, now, recede into what in contemporary English conversation in Africa may sometimes be referred to as “in those days” (*zamani*). As Mbiti puts it, *zamani* “is the final storehouse for all phenomena and events, the ocean of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before.”² While in current usage there are terms in Kiswahili to speak of the future, in traditional African cultures there were not concepts and terminology for extensive discourse about the future.

I have arranged this brief essay by use of these Swahili perceptions of time: *zamani* and *sasa*. In place of the English term “future”, I have used “hope,” *tumaini*.

I offer these few remarks addressed to the “academy” and at some points speak about the “academy” in relation to Friends in Eastern Africa. By academy I do not mean educational institutions that might employ academics. I mean to refer to a community of scholars and creative theologians, wherever they may be preaching and pastoring,

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studying, teaching, working or reflecting. For far too long the Quaker academy has been made up primarily of those in the global North.

ZAMANI

In 1885, Anglican Bishop James Hannington passed from Maasai land through Kavirondo, where there was no presence of people of European descent at the time. His travel and his martyrdom in Uganda a short time later are recounted in *Missionary Heroes in Africa*.³ Twenty years later in Kavirondo, Kiamosi Mission had been established by missionaries supported by the new Five Years Meeting, in 1902. With industrial and agricultural activity to support the mission, oral proclamation of the Gospel, incipient offerings of medical care, religious and other forms of education, the new mission was complex and multi-dimensional from the beginning. Soon a second location, taken over from an earlier Anglican mission in Vihiga, included the beginnings of Bible translation into one of the local Luyha languages (Maragoli), a printing press and locally-organized and locally-funded mission building projects. Significant centers followed in the subsequent decades at what is now called Lugulu and at Malava. Hospitals, primary and secondary schools, institutions for training teachers, nurses (no longer in operation), pastors and pastoral workers (now Friends Theological College), and a technology college came with time. Attempts at establishing a church-based university have not been successful in the ways that some Friends have hoped. The two universities in the Kiamosi-Vihiga area are satellite programs of Kenyan government universities of science and technology in one instance and agriculture in the other. There are currently more than 1200 government-funded schools sponsored by Quaker bodies, primarily in Western Kenya.

In 1946 East Africa Yearly Meeting (EAYM) held its first sessions. What is now Tanzania Yearly Meeting grew out of movement of Kenyan Friends to Tanzania in search of arable land. An earlier presence of Friends on Pemba Island, Tanzania, originated in the anti-slavery concern of British Friends. Uganda Yearly Meeting grew from mission work of Kenyan Friends in the 1940s.

There is a small unprogrammed meeting at the Friends International Centre in Nairobi and from time to time unprogrammed worship groups have arisen across East Africa when unprogrammed Friends

are present in large enough numbers to set them in motion. There is a small presence in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda of groups claiming to be Evangelical Friends. In some cases, these bodies are recognized by Evangelical Friends International. In other cases, that recognition is absent. Kenyan yearly meetings are numerous and growing in number.⁴

Most Friends in Kenya are members of the various Luhya tribes. Many of the others are members of the Maasai and related pastoralist groups: Turkana and Samburu. Missions among these pastoralists were initiated by Kenyan Friends and are jointly supported by Kenyan and North American Friends. Kenyan alumni of Friends Theological College have been organizing small gifts of funds to support other alumni and current students at the college in missionary service to Tanzania Yearly Meeting. Evangelical Friends International has from time to time funded recent FTC graduates as missionaries to support their work in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In addition to relationships with Friends United Meeting, most Kenyan yearly meetings are gathered together by Friends Church in Kenya. It can be hard for foreign Friends to fully grasp the intensity of the association by local Friends of the phrase “Friends Church in Kenya” with this specific body. I regret having made this mistake myself in my essay “Denomination Beyond the North Atlantic Ecclesial World.”⁵ It is a term that simply cannot accurately be used to refer to Kenyan Friends in a general sense.

Senior missiologist Lamin Sanneh has called for accounts of Christian missions focused not on missionaries, but on what those who receive the mission and the faith developed from that missionary presentation have believed, accomplished and created.⁶ Yet, we may suppose that the note of heroism among foreign missionaries, evident in the title *Missionary Heroes in Africa* cited above, was used for specific purposes other than cultural insensitivity. Such writing would have been aimed at inspiring new generations of missionaries and at eliciting support for the foreign missions effort.

The Kaimosi mission, originally named Friends Africa Industrial Mission, was intended to build a self-supporting, self-propagating native church. Financial records of the mission show that forestry and milling, printing, clothing production and agriculture generated substantial income to support the multi-faceted work of the mission and the emerging church. Yet, long before John Stott’s well-known

words, “the whole church, taking the whole gospel to the whole world,” were incorporated into the Lausanne Covenant⁷ it also took generous economic and spiritual support from thousands of North American Friends to sustain the missionaries, the mission and its many institutions and the developing yearly meetings.

At the centenary of the Kaimosi mission Friends United Meeting published *Go Into All the World: A Centennial Celebration of Friends in East Africa*, edited by Herbert and Beatrice Kimball.⁸ Herbert Kimball served as principal of Friends Theological College and the pair had extensive knowledge of Kenyan Friends. The book they prepared combined history and documentation of then contemporary church and social life, photos, documentary lists and maps, narrative and reflection. Attentive to the same concern Sanneh voices, it engages both mission as an enterprise of the global North and the growth and development of the indigenous Friends community in East Africa in relationship with one another.⁹

From time to time articles, bachelor’s papers and master’s theses, small books and pamphlets written by or about East African Friends appear. They are not all of equal academic seriousness. Some of those of the highest quality appear within broader, non-Quaker-specific, contexts. Such on-line services as WorldCat¹⁰ and the Friends-related resources of the Earlham College Libraries¹¹ are transforming access to international bibliography. Librarians at Friends International Centre, Nairobi and Friends Theological College attempt to keep up-to-date bibliographies of materials on or by East African Friends, as well.

However, much more rigorous, sustained academic investigation in history, historical pastoral theology, and contemporary pastoral theology, pastoral practice and spirituality is needed before we can adequately understand the *zamani* of Friends in eastern Africa. I would highlight three areas of research through which Friends could very productively connect with research currently or recently engaged in by non-Quaker academics: the roles and impacts of Friends and among Friends of the East African Revival;¹² the role and impact of traditional African religion and cultures in contemporary East African Quakerism;¹³ and further research on women in East African Christianity.¹⁴

SASA

Despite the many achievements in both meeting/church growth and development¹⁵ and institutions and programs that foster human well-being, *sasa*, now, is filled with many challenges for Friends in East Africa. Some complain that Kenyan Friends are shallow and self-serving. In *Quakerism in the Perspective of the Friends Church in Kenya* Zablon Malenge, later to be the presiding clerk of Friends Church in Kenya, observed, “Friends Meetings in Kenya today spend most of their time gossiping and struggling for leadership and looking for material gains.”¹⁶ Friends’ peace and community healing and reconciliation activists in the region have ample work.¹⁷

I hope the multi-dimensionality of the social challenges of the context and direct experience of Friends in eastern Africa might be grasped through a kind of riff on food, hunger and eating. Journalist Roger Thurow’s book *The Last Hunger Season; A Year in an African Farm Community on the Brink of Change*¹⁸ is set in western Kenya in the immediate environs of the facilities of Elgon Religious Society of Friends (Lugulu Yearly Meeting). It documents the lives of small-hold farmers of a kind, while not typical of Friends, not unusual among East African Friends. Their small, depleted land is unable to sustain the family. Education, including at the Friends secondary school to which one of the young people goes, is painfully expensive. And children who literally do not have food to eat during the annual hunger season are unable to make the best use of such educational opportunities as may be secured. *The Last Hunger Season* recounts the new possibilities made available in the area by an innovative project of asset-based financing and agriculture training services called the One Acre Fund. The improved crop yields participants in the program are able to achieve holds out hope that these subsistence farmers may be able to actually subsist. Journalist Michela Wrong’s *It’s Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle-Blower*¹⁹ is about “eating” in a different sense. In Kenya “eating” is also a euphemism for the corrupt plundering public assets when a particular ethnic group is in political ascendancy.

Everyone has heard the adage, if you give a person a fish their hunger will be satisfied for a day, if you teach them to fish, their hunger will be satisfied for a life time. But the adage does not go on to note as life experience makes us ask: If you don’t have a net and boat or a hook and line, it doesn’t matter if you know how to fish.

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Where is the capital needed to procure that equipment to come from? If someone or some small group is lucky enough to get investment funds from Right Sharing of World Resources or one of the many interest-charging ecumenical or commercial micro-finance entities in eastern Africa, what then? The next question must be, “where are the expanding markets for all those fish?” If all that has been accomplished to get a new fisherman into an already competitive market, this will mean the new participant will negatively impact the well-being of some who had formerly succeeded in making enough money from fishing to support their families. Yet, certainly, giving fish again and again, without new training and opportunities creates destructive levels of dependency and forecloses a future of growth and hope.

TUMAINI

The World Economic Forum lists what they consider to be most challenging of the many global challenges for 2015: deepening income inequality, persistent jobless growth, lack of leadership, rising geostrategic competition, weakening of representative democracy, rising pollution in the developing world, increasing occurrence of extreme weather events, intensifying nationalism, increasing water stress, growing importance of health within economy.²⁰ Every concern on this list will impact Friends in eastern Africa, directly or indirectly.

A poster made by Friends Theological College students for a local peace event carried a compelling message: If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other. Friends in East Africa can benefit from practical partnership with Friends in the global north as they engage these troubling needs and demands. If we remember we belong to each other, Friends in the academy also have roles to play. Theological and pastoral insights, creative problem-solving, intellectual and pedagogical resources can make an enormous contribution to the well-being of Friends in east Africa. In recent years academics and educators from diverse disciplines from Iowa Yearly Meeting, Northwest Yearly Meeting, Baltimore Yearly Meeting, New England Yearly Meeting, Britain Yearly Meeting and Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association have been able to share their intellectual and pastoral expertise. Scholars in theological disciplines are seeking ways to develop shared theological discourse

and dialogue despite the challenges of limited resources and cultural differences.

The Friends communities of eastern Africa are a growing body. Community leaders aspire to greater spiritual depth and pastoral effectiveness in the face of many challenges to the wholeness of life the Gospel proposes for God's people everywhere. There are many reasons for *tumaini*, hope, if Friends can keep remembering that we belong to each other.

*Have we forgotten we belong to each other?*²¹

ENDNOTES

1. Friends Theological College, Kaimosi, Kenya is a ministry of Friends United Meeting in partnership with East Africa Yearly Meeting. The views expressed here are my own and are not necessarily the views of Friends United Meeting or East Africa Yearly Meeting.
2. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1990), 22.
3. John C. Lambert, *Missionary Heroes in Africa* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1909), 64 or <http://web.b.ebscohost.com flagship.luc.edu/ehost/archiveviewer/archive?sid=672480f6-6741-4c90-bc5d-86b037bd5c1d%40sessionmgr110&vid=15&hid=106&bd ata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QrbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#kw=true&acc=false&lpId=div1009&ppId=divp0067&twPV=true&xOff=0&yOff=0&zm=fit&fs=null&rot=0&hid=106&docMa pOpen=true&pageMapOpen=true&AN=33270098&db=h8h>, accessed 9 November 2014.
4. In this rapidly shifting landscape the most current information on local bodies can usually be found by contacting Friends World Committee for Consultation, Evangelical Friends International or Friends United Meeting directly rather than relying on the posted information on the websites of these bodies. The websites, <http://www.fwcc-world.org>, <http://www.evangelicalfriends.org>, <http://www.fum.org>, are also invaluable resources for anyone seeking information on East African Friends.
5. Ann K. Riggs, "Denomination Beyond the North Atlantic Ecclesial World," in *Denomination: Assessing an Ecclesiological Category*, Paul M. Collins and Barry Ensign-George, eds. (London; New York: T&T Clark Intl, 2011), 117-132. I believe there may also be typing errors that crept into the text, especially the notes, from "corrections" made by overly helpful word processing software.
6. See e.g, Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).
7. Lausanne Covenant, <http://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>, accessed 10 November 2014.
8. Herbert and Beatrice Kimball, *Go Into All the World: A Centennial Celebration of Friends in East Africa* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Meeting, 2002).
9. The early history of missions of the Five Years Meeting and Friend Untied Meeting in Kenya is well documented in archives stored at Earlham College. Personal archives of missionaries are available in a variety of locations. *Quaker Life*, a publication of Friends United Meeting, has provided an on-going series churchly accounts of Friends in

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- Eastern Africa over many decades. See also FUM-related publications such as *The Advocate*, an organ of the United Society of Friends Women International.
10. <https://www.worldcat.org/>, accessed 11 November.
 11. <http://library.carlham.edu/ecarchives> and <http://carlham.worldcat.org>, accessed 11 November 2014.
 12. See e.g. Richard Kerwin MacMaster, *A Gentle Wind of God: The Influence of the East Africa Revival* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2006) and Kevin Ward and Emma Wild-Wood, *The East African Revival: History and Legacies* (Surrey, UK: Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).
 13. See e.g. Paul Jenkins, “Four Thousand Forgotten Generations: The *Longue Durée* in African History Challenges Mission, Theology and Piety,” *Mission Studies* 22 (2005): 249-64. Non-Quaker Jenkins draws intentionally on Quaker theology to make Christian sense the long history of humanity in Africa.
 14. Dorothy L Hodgson, *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2005); Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton, *Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith and Gender in Robo Religion in Western Kenya* (Oxford University Press 1996) and Kenda Mutongi, *Worries of the Heart: Widows, Family, and Community in Kenya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
 15. The number of Friends in eastern Africa is contested. Friends World Committee for Consultation measures around 150,000 Friends. David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World /* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001-). Anecdotal figures run much higher. Presumably the differences lie in differences in how participation and membership are defined.
 16. Zablon I. Malenge, *Quakerism in the Perspective of the Friends Church in Kenya* (Nairobi: Dianas Books Library Service, 2003), 48, quoted by Marjorie Post Abbott in “Global Quakerism and the Future of Friends,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, eds. (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2013), 549-64 at 555.
 17. See e.g. David Zarembka, *A Peace of Africa: Reflections on Life in the Great Lakes Region* (Gaithersburg, MD: Madera, 2011); Judy Lumb, Kathy Ossman, Joe Ossmann and David Zarembka, *Ending Cycles of Violence II: Kenyan Quaker Peacemaking Response to 2007 and 2013 Elections* (Caye Caylker, Belize: Producciones de la Hamaca, 2013) and David Zarembka, African Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Teams Reports, www.agliftp.org/rfk/, accessed 10 November 2014.

See also such non-Quaker resources as Allan Korongo for UNESCO, “Regional Report on Youth Policies and Violence Prevention in Great Lakes Region (Paris: UNESCO, 2011) and “Regional Report on Youth Policies and Violence Prevention in the Great Lakes Region, 2nd Year” (Paris: UNESCO, 2012) or <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002170/217098e.pdf>, accessed 9 November 2014.
 18. Roger Thurow, *The Last Hunger Season; A Year in an African Farm Community on the Brink of Change* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013).
 19. Michela Wrong, *It’s Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle-Blower* (New York: Harper, 2009).
 20. <http://reports.weforum.org/outlook-global-agenda-2015/>, accessed 12 November 2014.
 21. 90-4 “A ‘New Breed of Missionaries’: Assessing Attitudes Toward Western Missions at the Nairobi Evangelical School of Theology, F. Lionel Young III
International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Vol. 36, No. 2 2012