

Kahinju, Meri (1905–1996)

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Meri Kahinju was a lay evangelist to the Rwenzoris and the first woman to serve as a preacher in Uganda.

Early Life

Meri Kahinju was born Bungaizi in the current Kakumiro district of Bunyoro Kingdom in 1905.¹ She belonged to the Abesi clan. Meri attended Kyebambe primary school in Fortportal. She married Mr. Kwebiiha with whom she had two children, Absolom Ndyanabo and Yoneki Kisembo. Apparently, they separated early in their marriage and Meri brought the children on her own. As an active member of the Anglican Church, she was sent to work at Kahinju church of Uganda on Fortportal-Bundibugyo road. After serving there for a while, she was transferred to Bukuku, about 2 km from Kazingo, the first site for Adventism in the Rwenzori Mountains area.²

Conversion

Magdalon E. Lind, the first Adventist missionary to the Rwenzori, wrote about Meri's conversion:



Meri Kahinju

Photo courtesy of Eunice Kisembo.

Meri had a dream. There can be no doubt but that it was God who spoke to Meri in a dream. Although certain dreams have their origin in eating too late at night, and other dreams come from excitement, the dream that brought Meri into the truth came to her from the God of heaven. In July 1946, she dreamed that she heard a drum calling people. It made the same kind of drumbeats as those used for calling people to a meeting. In her dream she prepared to go to that meeting, and heard a voice saying, "The white man is going to preach!" Well, Meri called some of her friends and relatives, and together they went. When they were on the way they heard the second drum being beaten, indicating that the meeting was about to begin. "Let us hurry," said Meri. But to her sorrow she noticed that her friends and relatives had already turned and were on their way back to their homes. She, however, went on to the meeting. When she woke the following morning she told everybody about her dream, and asked their honest opinions. No satisfactory explanation was given her.

It was in October the same year that we arranged for our first evangelistic effort at a place called Kazingo. The temporary buildings were erected. My native evangelists were out calling people to the first meeting. Then at 3 P.M., as is our custom in Uganda, the first drum was beaten. At 4 p.m. the second drum sounded, and approximately fifteen minutes after that the meeting, the first meeting in this part of the world, began. Perhaps a hundred or more people were present. Day after day for more than a month we preached to them. When we closed the effort about thirty souls had taken their stand for Christ. Meri was one of them.³

Meri was baptized in 1946 among the first converts in the Rwenzori Mountains. After her conversion, she was expelled from the Anglican church and the house in which she lived and went to Kazingo where she got a small parcel of land on which she lived with her two children. The discontinuation from her work in the Anglican Church led to the cancellation of tuition assistance to her son Absolom, so he was transferred to Kazingo Primary School, which Magdalene Lind had just established.

Ministry

Following her baptism, Meri started house to house evangelism. She climbed the mountains and crossed valleys preaching and establishing churches in the mountains. She also established a church in Mitooma, Kasisi.

Kazingo Primary School, being the first and only primary school in the mountain, attracted the boys from the Bakonzo tribe who wanted to learn how to read and write. However, the boys from the Batoro tribe bullied them and many Bakonzo boys stopped attending school. Mary talked to the Batoro people about the incidents at school, and when violence against the Bakonzo children did not stop, she reported it to the parish chief. It is due to her efforts that the Bakonzo boys continued going to school.⁴

In 1964, a war broke between the Bakonzo and the Batoro tribes. Since Meri lived right at the foot of the mountain at Kazingo, she had to leave and settled at Nteza, from where she attended Kasiisi SDA Church. She opened a Sabbath School Branch at her home in Nteza, which later became Rutooma Adventist Church in

Kasiisi, Western Uganda Field.

Meri Kahinju died in 1996 at the age of 91 and was buried at Bukabya-Harubaho, South Division, Fort-Portal Municipality, Kabarole District.⁵

Legacy

Meri Kahinju is remembered as a woman who fought against tribalism which caused animosity and conflicts between different tribes. She climbed the mountains and socialized with the Bakonzo women, ate their food and slept in their houses, which very few of her kin being from a different tribe would do. She is remembered as a woman who dedicated her life to evangelism. She preached freely and passionately at the time when women were supposed to be only listeners, not preachers. Considering that she did not have much education, Meri is an example of what God can do through an individual who is willing to be used by God. She was an inspiration to many. Lind called her “one of our best lay evangelists” and “a great preacher for God,”⁶ while her daughter remembers her as a woman of prayer.⁷

SOURCES

Lind, M. E. “Meri Had a Dream.” *ARH*, December 28, 1950.

NOTES

1. Eunice Kisembo, Meri Kahinju’s daughter, interview by Naftali Harelmana, in Mitooma, August 5, 2019. A transcript of this interview is in the author’s private collection.
2. Yowasi Bukambi, telephone interview by the author, October 10, 2020.
3. M. E. Lind, “Meri Had a Dream,” *ARH*, December 28, 1950, 17.
4. Paul Kibwana, interview by the author, Kasese Town, September 15, 2020.
5. Yowasi Bukambi, telephone interview by the author, October 10, 2020.
6. Lind, 17.
7. Eunice Kisembo, Meri Kahinju’s daughter, interview by Naftali Harelmana, in Mitooma, August 5, 2019. A transcript of this interview is in the author’s private collection.

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