



Ron A. Carey the manager of the Advent Press with Literature Evangelists in 1932. They are holding a copy of the newly released book Vita Kuu, the Kiswahili translation of The Great Controversy. Yuda Odongo is seated on his left while Ezekiel Kimenjo the pioneer evangelist among the Nandi people is seated to the right. Standing on the extreme left middle row is Caleb Kipkessio, pioneer Nandi Adventist.

Photo courtesy of the British Union Conference.

## Busienei, Caleb Kipkessio araap (1898–1998)

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Caleb Busienei was a pioneer Nandi Seventh-day Adventist who came to the faith through the early work of David Sparrow in Western Kenya. He went on to become a prominent literature evangelist, teacher, and minister of the gospel. He brought many to the faith and planted many churches, including Kaigat, which was the first Seventh-day Adventist Church in Western Kenya.

## Early Life

Caleb Kipkessio was born around 1898 in Northern Nandi in the early years of Kenya's colonial rule. Following the imposition of Hut and Poll taxes over the Nandi, Caleb was compelled to move to the settled areas to find work in 1912. Caleb first worked on a European farm belonging to Mrs. Clarke, an English widow who was a neighbor to David Sparrow.<sup>1</sup>

Every morning, Mrs. Clarke sent Caleb to collect milk from the Sparrow farm, and from that encounter Sparrow introduced him to the Adventist faith. David Sparrow had made his faith so clear to everyone around him that even the Nandi people far away from the area knew the Sparrow farm as the place "where no work is done on Saturday."<sup>2</sup> However, being the dutiful servant, Caleb approached his employer Mrs. Clarke and told her that he was contemplating joining Sparrow's faith. Furious, Mrs. Clarke immediately dismissed Caleb and threw him out of her farm. Caleb went to Sparrow who took him in and gave him a job as his domestic worker. Caleb began working for Sparrow only months after he moved to his own land in 1913.

Caleb was now very close to the Sparrow family. He proved to be a gentle-spirited person, kind and honest, not participating in controversies. David Sparrow arranged for Caleb to obtain an education at his expense and ensured that he was able to travel to Nairobi and back to the farm every school holiday. The railhead was 70 miles away and this was a two- or three-day journey by oxcart.

Caleb continued as a faithful servant in the Sparrow household. He was bidden to teach the other workers on the farm how to read and write and he also studied the Bible with them. The congregation on the Sparrow farm grew and by 1924 there were two dozen members attending regular Sabbath services in the Sparrow barn. After 12 years of continuous service, Caleb finally met Ezekiel Kimenjo araap Maswai who was sent to David Sparrow in 1928. Sparrow authorized the duo to continue with the school and church in his barn while he planned how the work would move into the Nandi Reserve.

To further spread the gospel, Sparrow asked Caleb to become a literature evangelist, selling books and tracts in various places. Caleb went to Gendia to train to become a literature evangelist and then moved through the reserve and the settled areas selling books. By 1931 Caleb had moved out of the Sparrow farm into Kaigat which would become his abode for the rest of his life. By 1934 Caleb had become an evangelist of note moving from one place to another preaching. Caleb preached in Luhya country and was responsible for bringing to the faith Petero Chetambe who would become the foremost Luhya evangelist and pastor further spreading the Adventist

message in the Western Kenya region.<sup>3</sup> Together with Chetambe, Caleb was instrumental in establishing the Chebwai Adventist Mission in 1936 which would also oversee the work in Nandi and northwestern Kenya. In 1937, Caleb was on hand to receive Matthew Murdoch as the new missionary in charge of Chebwai.

## Marriage

On August 18, 1937, Caleb married Kiwarie at the Kaigat Church. Caleb's wedding was conducted by Pastor Matthew Murdoch, but his marriage lasted only until October 1940 when Kiwarie left Caleb and moved in with another man. For five years, Caleb continued to hope that his wife would return to him and he was still willing to forgive her, but she never came back. Kiwarie made it clear that she had little interest in Caleb's faith and resented his involvement in the ministry. It was good that they had no children together.

On May 7, 1945, Pastor D. M. Swaine, the missionary in charge of Chebwai Adventist Mission, wrote to the Nandi district commissioner asking for an annulment of Caleb's marriage. After going through the legal procedures, the annulment was granted, but not long after that Kiwarie died. He waited another three years after the annulment before he married again. In 1949 Caleb married Rebecca, some nine years after Kiwarie left him. They were married by Pastor Swaine at Kaigat. It was at this point that Caleb was appointed as a Credentialed Missionary.<sup>4</sup> He was now on course for further training for ministry.

## Caleb and the Kaigat Dispersal of 1941

During the Kaigat dispersal of 1941, Caleb as well as Enoch Kitur and Jackson Kipiel araap Maiyo were tasked to remain at Kaigat to continue the work. Caleb continued to organize the church at Kaigat and preach throughout Nandi. Together with Enoch and Jackson, the three ensured the spiritual and physical survival of Kaigat and, in fact, they lived in a large triangular formation around the Kaigat church dispensary and boarding school. Caleb was a great reader of Adventist literature. One of his last acts after he retired was to purchase a public address system for the Kaigat Church, something that they had not been able to do for many years.

## Further Work in Nandi

Kaigat remained the focal point of the evangelism work in Nandi. In 1952 Caleb was sent to Bugema Adventist College in Uganda, along with Cleophas Masai, where they qualified as pastors. On his return, Caleb continued with his zeal for gospel preaching and advancing the Adventist message in Nandi. He acquired the nickname "Tarumbeta" because every time he was given a chance to speak, he often broke into the Swahili Song Tarumbeta ya Mwana itakapolia mara<sup>5</sup> (When the Roll is Called up Yonder, SDA Hymnal, #216). This was by far his favorite song and it pleased him to sing out his Advent hope in the words of the song.

## Later Life

Caleb and Rebecca raised eight children: Eunice, Keziah, Milka, Prisca, Stephen Kessio, Baruch Kessio, Eucabeth and David Kessio. Caleb went to his rest on December 6, 1998, at the ripe age of 100 and was survived by his widow Rebecca and a son and daughter.

### Source

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954.

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### NOTES

1. Kipchoge Chomu, interview by author, June 12, 2015.
2. Philip Kili, interview by author, July 14, 2015.
3. Ibid.
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954), 184.
5. *Nyimbo za Kristo*, hymn no. 168 (Africa Herald Publishing House).

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