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Paul David Zakayo Kivuli and the founding of the Africa Israel Church Nineveh

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Introduction and Biography by Philomena Njeri Mwaura

Before discussing the biography of Paul David Zakayo Kivuli, it is important to provide a brief background on the beginnings of Pentecostal Christianity in Kenya, for it was in this context that he was baptized and his faith nurtured.

The earliest roots of Pentecostal Christianity in Kenya can be traced to Clyde Toliver Miller and his wife Lila Sturges who were associated with the Apostolic Faith Mission in Iowa, United States of America.¹ They went to Kenya as independent missionaries. They arrived in Kisumu in 1907 in response to the perception of Africa at the time as a dark continent in need of the light of the Gospel.² For a short time, they helped at the Nilotic Independent Mission (NIM) at Oganda before they purchased their own land in Nyang'ori in 1908. They moved there in 1910 and established their own mission. As a result, this is the place where the seeds of Pentecostal Christianity in Kenya were first planted.

In 1919, Miller sold the mission to Otto Keller, an independent missionary who had settled in Kisumu in 1914 and who helped him whenever he went on furlough. In 1919, Keller had married Marian Wittich, a former Pentecostal missionary in Tanganyika loosely connected with the Nilotic Independent Mission in Oganda. In 1924, Keller sought affiliation with a chartered mission, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). The colonial government at the time was wary of independent missions for they lacked accountability and transparency, not being affiliated with a formal organization.³ In Nyang'ori, the Kellers established a rapidly expanding network of churches and schools for many years until Otto Keller died on October 4, 1942.⁴

¹ Susan W. Murimi, "The Changing Face of Pentecostalism in Kenya Since 1910: An Examination of Historical, Religious and Cultural Dynamics," (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, 2013), 95.

² Ezekiel M. Kasiera, "The Development of Pentecostal Christianity in Western Kenya" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1984), 212-213.

³ Murimi, "The Changing Face of Pentecostalism in Kenya Since 1910," 103.

⁴ F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home: A Study of Two Independent Churches in Western Kenya* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1966), 73.

Nyang'ori Mission was, at the time, the center of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), mission outreach in Kenya. In 1942, the current Pentecostal Assemblies of God, the oldest Pentecostal church in Kenya formed out of this mission. This is the Christian tradition into which Paul Daudi Zakayo Kivuli was converted and raised. The Africa Israel Church Nineveh (AICN), founded by Kivuli, also emerged from this tradition. So who was Kivuli?

Kivuli, Paul David Zakayo

1896 to 1974

Africa Israel Church Nineveh (AICN)

Kenya

Early Life and Conversion of Zakayo Kivuli

According to John Padwick⁵, Kivuli was born near Tiengere, between Tigoi and Jebrok, near Nyang'ori in 1896. He belonged to the Bagenya clan from Ugenya in Nyanza, which, though Nilotic in origin, was wholly integrated into the Luhya community. Welbourn and Ogot observe that “it is important for his [Kivuli's] development that the Nyang'ori location not only borders on the Nilotic Luo to the south but contains a considerable admixture of Nandi.”⁶ This multi-ethnic context was to prove important for the acceptance of the Africa Israel Church Nineveh among the Luhya, Nandi, and Luo communities of western Kenya. Kivuli is said to have been proficient not only in his Logooli language but also in Nandi, Luo, standard Luhya, and Kiswahili (he acquired the latter when he went to school). As a young boy Kivuli enjoyed taking care of his father's cattle.⁷

In 1914, Kivuli escaped conscription in to the Carrier Corps (to serve in the 1st World War) and in 1918, at the age of 24, he attended school at the Nyang'ori Mission. He left after a short while to work as a farm laborer and then

⁵ Timothy John Padwick, “Spirit, Desire, and the World: Roho Churches of Western Kenya in the Age of Globalization” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham. 2003), 90.

⁶ Welbourn and Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home*, 75.

⁷ Welbourn and Ogot, *A Place to feel at Home*, 75.