

# JOHANA NJUMBI (1886–1991): THE PIONEER AFRICAN LEADER IN MUTIRA MISSION

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## ABSTRACT

The article sets out to retrieve the critical role of the pioneer African clergyman, Johana Njumbi (1886–1991), in the Mutira mission of Kirinyaga, Kenya. Despite the death of the first wife in 1921, and the second one in 1952, Njumbi surged on to provide leadership in the new socio-religious dispensation following the introduction of Christianity in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His stewardship is seen in his emphasis on ‘modern’ education, farming and medical services. As Mutira mission marked one hundred years of missionary Christianity (1912–2012), in August 2012, it is imperative to assess the pedigree and the religious-social life times of the key character who contributed immensely in mid-wifing Christianity and modern education in an area hitherto unknown in the map of the world. In so doing, Njumbi catapulted the desolate hills and valleys of Mutira mission into greater heights of human progress. As the area produced its second Bishop, Joseph Karimi Kibucwa, in December 2012, after Daniel Munene Ngoru proceeded to his retirement upon reaching the mandatory retirement age of 65, one cannot fail to see the fruits of the pioneer clergy who persuaded the reluctant locals to ‘accept the white man’s religion and education as our own’ under difficult circumstances. In other words, did Njumbi’s leadership leave a lasting legacy in Mutira mission? Does the maternal role of Canon Njumbi’s wife, Agness Wambui (1914–1952), have any relevance for African motherhood today? The materials in this article are gathered mainly through oral interviews, reading of extensive literature and archival sources.

## INTRODUCTION

The Mutira Mission Centre is situated in Kirinyaga County,<sup>2</sup> Kirinyaga Central District, and in Mutira location. In turn, the Kirinyaga County of Kenya has five administrative districts: Kirinyaga Central, Kirinyaga West, Mwea West, Kirinyaga East and Mwea East. Further, Kirinyaga County covers a total area of 1 478km<sup>2</sup>. It is situated in the eastern side of the former Central Province; and her neighbouring counties include Embu on the eastern side, Nyeri and Murang’a on its Western side, and Mt. Kenya forest on its northern side. Like her neighbouring Embu County, Kirinyaga is situated in the southern slopes of Mt. Kenya, the highest mountain in Kenya, and the second largest

in Africa. The upper parts of the county receive abundant rainfall (over 63 inches per annum) and have fertile volcanic soil. In this section, tea and coffee are grown as cash crops. In the lower ‘star grass’ (referring to agro-ecological) zone (middle zone), maize and beans grow well and dairy cattle are kept. In the “lower down” area, the Mwea plains, which were once dry wastelands, booming horticultural activities are currently the order of the day. The change from mere dry wastelands came about as a result of an irrigation scheme that tapped water from the rivers Nyamindi, Thiba and Rupingazi. These rivers drain their water to the Tana River, which is the largest river in Kenya. Apart from french beans, onions, tomatoes, maize, beans, bananas, peas and cotton, 75% of Kenya’s rice is grown in this area. In addition, herds of cattle and goats are also kept. Despite a favourable environment for agriculture, farming is limited to small-scale production, where each peasant has an average of 2 acres of land, with a few exceptions. Mutira is located in the present day Kirinyaga Central District.

The area covered by the old Mutira mission of Kirinyaga County is endowed with human resources, material and spiritual resources plus a good habitable climate. Indeed, the area surrounding the missionary centre is near Kagumo Town, which is a trading centre that stands between Nyeri and Embu counties. It lies between Kerugoya and Karatina Towns. It is rich with fertile soils where coffee and tea are the main cash crops, while dairy farming continues to be an important occupation for the small-scale farmers in the locality. Various other crops are grown – maize, beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, tomatoes, peas, bananas, avocados, mangoes, oranges, apples. With the decline of coffee prices, the locals had by 2010 begun to diversify in their economic activities by venturing into small-scale businesses so as to meet the challenges of the time. While it is difficult to account for all the resources in the old Mutira parish, as it is currently comprised of parishes, deaneries, archdeaconries, divisions, locations, districts and even dioceses (refer to parts of Mbeere and Kirinyaga Dioceses), it is significant to survey some case studies of human resources, to which we now turn:

## THE PIONEER AFRICAN CLERGY

‘The pioneer African clergy’ refers to the first local African clergy who set the pace for others by seeking ordination in the sacred ministry. In other words, the so-called pioneer African clergy refers to the indigenous Kenyans who continued the work of European missionaries working under the auspices of Church Missionary Society (CMS) – a British religious outfit. In particular, they complemented the work of the Pioneer European cleric, in Central Kenya, Rev A.W. McGregor, and the team that was posted there by the then Bishop of Mombasa, as the whole of east Africa was then within the said diocese (refer to Bishops Alfred Tucker (1849–1914), William G. Peel (1854–1916), Richard Heywood (1867–1955), Reginald P. Crabble (1883–1964), Leonard J. Beecher (1906–1987)) and their successors. In particular, the European clergy who were posted in Mutira mission after Rev McGregor founded the mission

include Revs. Brandon Laight (served from 1912–1917), Herbert Butcher (1919–1927) and Hillard (1927–1928).

The pioneer African clergy thus includes Revs. Canon Johana Njumbi (1886–1991), Paul Kibuti (1918–1996), Canon Jason Minja Mwai (1928–2008), Canon Joseph Mwangi Ngooro (1926–) and Canon Joseph Kangangi Mwanake (1930–2010). In this article, I shall attempt to offer an in-depth analysis of the pioneering role of Njumbi, particularly with regard to his pedigree, the challenges he encountered and his contributions to the larger society. While Canon Njumbi was ordained 1930, Kibuti was ordained in 1960, Minja in 1962, Canon Ngooro in 1964 and Joseph Kangangi, the fifth, was ordained in 1966. The above five are the real makers of Christianity in the old Mutira Pastorate, which stretched from the Ndia part (comprising Kirinyaga Central and West Districts) of the current Kirinyaga County, the Western part of Kirinyaga South (read Mwea West) to Riakanau-Makutano of the current Mbeere Anglican Diocese, in the Embu County. Together with Rev. Amos Karani who was made an Anglican Deacon in 1971 and priested in 1975, they form a hexagon of pioneers. In the nature of things, Mutira Mission, which was elevated into a pastorate in 1923, had certainly come of age. With her own sons (no daughters then) taking responsibilities, as clergy, the mission had moved on to a higher rite of passage.

## REVEREND CANON JOHANA NJUMBI (1886–1991)

Johana Njumbi was not only a pioneer African clergy in the old Mutira pastorate but a leader for all the people of the larger Ndia sub-group of the Kikuyu nation of Kenya. Though he was also a leader of some parts of Mwea and the western part of Mbeere land of Embu County, Njumbi's progressive activities, as we shall see later, were not restricted to Anglican Christianity. Rather his interests in business, farming, environmental preservation, education among others set the pace for the larger Ndia community.

Indeed, when the history of the 'modern' Ndia and its people will come to be written, the name of Johana Njumbi will always appear as the *de facto* leader. Yes, there are other leaders such as the paramount Chief Njega wa Gioko, but the contribution of Njumbi in working towards a 'modern' society is not comparable. Indeed, as wa Gioko, who ruled from 1900 to the time of his death in 1947, was discouraging 'modern' education, Njumbi was planting schools all over the vast land inhabited by the Ndia sub-group of Kikuyu nation and beyond. Undeniably, the farsightedness of Njumbi is uncomparable to any other local leader in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike Njega, Njumbi set an example by educating his children as he urged the society to appreciate that only by going to the newly established schools and embracing the new form of education could they truly liberate themselves from all forms of domination. In words that are *in tandem* with those of the American civil rights leader of the 1960s, Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968), Njumbi in the 1930s through to 1950s, used to caution, thus:

Don't you know that only intellectual force, as opposed to physical force, can deliver genuine freedom? How can you win over somebody without first understanding his or her form(s) of education and/or general way of life? To liberate ourselves fully, let us first kick illiteracy out of our villages, our houses and our respective compounds. The rest will follow naturally (Wakanugu 24 March 2013).

## NJUMBI'S ROOTS

Njumbi was born in the Mutira location, Ndia Division, in the present day Kirinyaga County in 1886. Born to Mr. Kamuku (Rungu) wa Kibara and mother Wamwirua wa Gakuya, he was named after his paternal uncle, Mucubi. In turn, the name *mucubi* is derived from the Kikuyu phrase, *gacumbiriri-ini* (meaning hilly or elevated place). His uncle got his name, *mucubi*, as a result of his constant climbing at the very top of a Mururi tree to notify the locality whenever the rival Maasai attackers or any rival clan was about to strike the village, and thereby help them react appropriately. He was thus named Njumbi in honour of his paternal uncle who rendered critical services to the society. Interestingly, Canon Njumbi later came to play the comparable roles with those of his uncle: when the missionaries came, he went to the top of the metaphorical Mururi tree and saw the right direction that the society had to take (read modern education and religiosity). Consequently, he became the beacon that shaped and reshaped the history of his people permanently.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to his pedigree, Johana Njumbi's siblings included Waruguru (Kabuto) Gatune wa Kamonde, Kibara, Gakuru, and Paul Kangi (Baba Isaaka na Silla). Njumbi whose father, Mzee Kamuku, died during Njumbi's infancy in 1887, was the last born child in their family. As a result of this early setback in his life, Njumbi learnt to trust in God's providence and sustenance – as he wrestled with the bitter reality that earthly life can be discontinued abruptly – even for those who matter most in the society.

Luckily, his uncle, Mucubi Kibara, took him and gave him the much needed attention and care that he needed during his early upbringing. His mother, Wamwirua, died in 1928, during the great earthquake that took place around Mutira area. This was also the period when the Mutira Church office was under construction under Rev. Canon W.H. Hillard. By then, Mutira Pastorate, as it was then called, comprised the entire Ndia Division (today Kirinyaga Central and West), Mwea and parts of Eastern Kenya (refer to Riakanau, Gategi, Karaba among other places). His Uncle, Mucubi, who brought him up, was a *Mundu Mugo* (traditional medicine man); but by the time he died in 1929, he had already enrolled in catechism classes, ready for baptism, only to die before the rite was administered on him.<sup>4</sup>

## NJUMBI AS A HERDSBOY AND HIS RESISTANCE AGAINST THE MISSIONARIES

In his childhood days, Njumbi was a herdsboy. He took care of his uncle's livestock. He also loved farming. Sometimes in 1907, one European by name Margereka (refer to McGregor) came to Mutira from Mbiri, later called Fort Hall (refer to Weithaga Mission Station, Murang'a county) and bought land where the Mutira Anglican Church is built. He bought it from the owner, Karunditu Gitura, for 30 rupees (about 60 Kenya Shillings then), roughly 600 000 shillings in 2012 (about \$7 500). He then placed a bill board on a Muthariti tree, indicating that he had bought it. He then left for Kabare and Kigari, Embu, where he opened mission centres in 1910.

According to Mzee Charles Makumi, this land comprised three acres where the Mutira Church is built and 12 acres where the Mutira primary school is located (Makumi 21 November 10). According to him, the land belonged to a member of Mzee Leonard Kunga's immediate family – within the larger Ithimbwi family of the Ugaciku clan. Later in 1970s, 12 acres of land were carved from the neighbouring Icamumu family of the Ugaciku clan to build the Mutira Girls' Secondary School.

During this early encounter, the missionary team at Mutira was first greeted by tough resistance from Mr. Kairang'a and his team, as he claimed ownership of the land that the Mutira mission occupies to date. According to Coun Munyi, this resistance delayed the early mission work – as it sent cold shivers down the spines of the missionaries (Munyi 24 November 2010). Even Johana Njumbi, a member of Ithimbwi family, who was taking care of his uncle's flock in the locality, came from the bush to see the land transaction notice by the missionaries, climbed the tree, removed it and tore it into pieces and threw it away, even though the message had already been swallowed by the locals – 'that the land has been bought'. Hence this hostility could not have helped Mutira to begin as a mission station before the neighbouring Kigari and Kabare had opened theirs – and where both began in 1910.<sup>5</sup> In both the Kabare-Kirinyaga and Kigari-Embu cases, the missionary team bought land in order to provide space for mission work.

After missionaries fears were settled, Rev Laight (nicknamed by the locals, 'Kamonde'), who had previously served in the vast regions of Kambaland, was posted to officially open the Mutira Mission Centre on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1912. As the missionaries settled in Mutira, they began a school and a dispensary. To this end, Njumbi entered Mutira primary school in 1915. His class had a total of 60 learners; some of whom included Philip Karanja Ngungi, Petero Kanjobe (grandfather to Samuel Murimi Kanjobe of Kirinyaga Anglican Diocese), Hezekiah Ngigi (who went to become the first African medical practitioner in the locality), Zakariah Gakure, Gideon Kibugi (father to Njumbi's wife, Wangari), Musa Nguri and Stefano Kabuitu (father to a pioneer clerk in the locality, Leonard Kunga). Some of their teachers included Rev. Clark and Thomas Meero (Bundi).

With regard to Njumbi's education the local chief, Ndegwa wa Kimere, who supported the missionary work in order to protect his job as British administrators

preferred chiefs who worked hand in hand with the missionaries, pleaded with the locality to accept missionary education. Characteristically, Ndegwa was keen in recruiting school children, and indeed one of those whom he recruited in 1914 was Johana Njumbi, thus Njumbi started schooling after Ndegwa had ‘persuaded’ his guardian, uncle Mucubi, to ‘release the herdsboy’ to go to school and the mission for catechetical instructions (Karanja 1999: 52). Having undergone the African rite of adulthood (read circumcision) via Kikuyu customary laws, in 1918, Njumbi recalled his most celebrated age-mate as Mzee Obadiah Tuguti. In the same year, 1918, he got employed as an untrained teacher, at Mutira Primary School.

## CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIRST FOUR CHURCHES

Having began as a ‘persecutor’ of the church, Njumbi saw the building of the first church under the supervision of Rev McGregor from the neighbouring Fort Hall (previously Mbiru) District in 1911. It was thatched with fern (*Ruthiru*) and dry banana barks (*Magoto*). The church did not stand for long, as it collapsed in mid 1913, and opened its doors to the first Christians on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1912 when Rev Brandon Laight was posted there as the first resident European clergy. Njumbi also saw the building of the second church in 1915. Under the leadership of a black missionary from Taveta in the coastal region of Kenya, Thomas Meero, the builders used bamboo stems from the local Mt. Kirinyaga (also Kenya) forest. In this second building, Meero used it both as school and a church.

In the third building constructed from 1919 to 1923 under the second European resident priest, Rev Herbert Butcher, the church was built using mud bricks. It was consecrated on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1924 – a year after Mutira was declared a pastorate. The third church at Mutira was constructed around 1932 to 1935 under the leadership of Johana Njumbi. It was built with stones from the Rundu River and other stones from the people’s farms. It was officially consecrated by the second bishop of the then Mombasa diocese, Richard S. Heywood (1867–1955) in August 1935. As the building of the fourth and the current church began in 1956, and subsequently consecrated by Bishop Obadiah Kariuki of the then Mount Kenya diocese in 1974, Rev. Johana Njumbi had already gone for retirement (Wakanugu 24 March 2013).

## CONSECRATION OF THE THIRD CHURCH AT MUTIRA IN 1935

From 1933 to 1945, African Christians at the Mutira mission and in the rest of Central Kenya displayed a remarkable zeal for the construction of permanent church buildings. During this period, about seven permanent buildings in total were either completed or started in Mount Kenya region. In particular, St. Michael’s Church Gathukeine, which was built in 1926, was enlarged in 1936; St. John’s Church Kahuhia, which was started in 1926, was consecrated in September 1939; Emmanuel Church Mutira, which was started in 1932, was consecrated in June 1935; and St. Paul’s Church Kiruri, which was

started in January 1938, was consecrated in September 1939. The latter three (Mutira inclusive) were built without financial assistance from the CMS. St. Paul's Mother Church Kabete and St. Stephen's Church Njumbi were started during this period (1933–45) (Karanja 1999: 223).

What factors made it possible to complete the Emmanuel Church Mutira in a short period of three years (1932–35)? First is the hard working people that he had – a people who understood the importance of the task. Second is the leadership of Rev. Johana Njumbi. According to John Karanja, he was 'wise and dynamic' (Karanja 1999: 224). Again, missionary clergy from the neighbouring pastorate Kabare, Rev Bewes, in his 1936–7 annual letter, praised Njumbi for his dynamic leadership, which had made possible the construction of the Church and pastorate office.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly, when leadership is entrusted to the wise and dynamic, whether in the county, municipality or even in the church, the tasks ahead become easy, as a good leader has a way of 'lightening' the burden of the people he or she leads. Third, Mutira as a medium-sized pastorate did not begin an extraordinary big building; rather, they put up a medium-size building for about four hundred worshippers, which cost about 150 British pounds to build (Karanja 1999: 224).

Njumbi's dynamic and wise leadership must have been a product of the good leadership of his predecessors, Laight, Butcher, Hillard and Comely. For it is no wonder that by 1923, the Mutira Anglican Mission had been elevated to a Pastorate. Elevation to pastorate status means that the local Christians got a greater voice in the running of their own Church. In each pastorate a committee was set up comprising an African pastor (where one was available), the resident missionary, and at least five communicant members of the pastorate. In turn, the committee had several responsibilities, some of which included collection and disbursement of church funds, developing church programmes, taking direct responsibility for church property, evangelism campaigns, and advising the priest on disciplinary matters (Karanja 1999: 224).

## NJUMBI'S BAPTISM IN 1920

Njumbi was baptised on 29<sup>th</sup> February 1920 by Rev. H.J.E. Butcher and named Johana. In the same year, he married a lady, Wamuruana Matheri, daughter of Kogi from the neighbouring Kiamaina settlement. With Wamuruana, they were blessed with a baby girl called Abijah Wamwirua. Afterwards, Wamwirua died, and later the child also died. Such setbacks did not stop Njumbi from pursuing his dream of liberating his people from ignorance, disease and poverty. For in 1922, he joined Kahuhia preparatory school to train as a teacher for one year.

He completed his training successfully and was awarded a Certificate in Vernacular Studies, and was declared the best student. Subsequently, he was employed as a teacher at Mutira primary school from 1923 to 1929. In his tenure as a primary school teacher, he opened various schools: Kanyeki-ini, Kiamaina, Mukure, Kiburu, Gakoigo, Kiandangae, Gacaru and Ki-ini. Interestingly, Njumbi's success in promoting modern

education, which went hand in hand with Christianity, was well received across the continent of Africa and Europe for it was unusual, in those dark days of African history, to see a black man championing aggressively the white man's education. This earned him admiration from European missionaries who were stationed at Kabare Centre.

To this end, Rev. J. Ramphley started working out ways and means of getting Njumbi join the ordained ministry of the Anglican Church and thereby spread his education mission while being a clergyman. As a result, Ramphley organised a parish council meeting, in 1929, to discuss Johana Njumbi's fate. After the meeting, where Njumbi was readily welcomed to the sacred ministry, it was resolved that Christians living around Mutira area were to contribute towards his theological education. It was also proposed that men should pay 6 Kenya shillings while women were to pay 3 Kenya shillings. And after the success of this fundraising towards Njumbi's education, he joined St. Paul's United Theological College, Limuru (today, St. Paul's University) in 1930. He completed his studies in 1934 and was first made an Anglican Deacon by a Bishop who had come from Rwanda. After one year of probation, Njumbi was ordained as an Anglican Priest in 1935, at St. Stephen's Church, Nairobi, by Bishop Richard S. Heywood (1867–1955) of the then Mombasa Diocese, covering Kenya, Zanzibar and Tanganyika. He was assigned the task of superintending the then Mutira Pastorate.

## MARRIAGE TO AGNESS WAMBUI IN 1933

Having previously lost his first wife, Wamuruana, in 1921, Njumbi married Agness Wambui in 1933, the daughter of Gatuai. In turn, Gatuai was a brother of Mabu. They were brought up by Mabu, the father to the great church administrator, the late Mr. James Njogu Mabu. Agness and Johana were joined in a holy matrimony by Rev. Shedrack Mulewa from the present Diocese of Taita Taveta. The marriage ceremony was hurriedly done because he could not get ordained as a church minister while he was still a bachelor. This was, however, unrealistic as he was already a widower. In 1952, Njumbi experienced another setback when Agness died. By then, they had sons and daughters, namely Joyce Wamwirua, Mary Muthoni, David Kiragu, Thomas Muriithi, Elizabeth Kabuto, Jacqueline Wambura, Paul Kinyua, Dionasius Gathaiya, Stanley Gakuru and Wangui who died during her infancy. In the same year that Njumbi lost his wife, 1952, he retired as a church minister.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS

As a clergyman, the Rev. Canon Johana Njumbi is remembered for having initiated the establishment of various schools and churches across the old Mutira pastorate. They include Riakanau, Thaita, Karimaini, Karaini, Kiaritha, and Kiamuthambi among others. For instance, in establishing Kiamaina church (later St. Andrews), as an out-station of the Mutira Pastorate, in 1935, Njumbi walked for one hour as he closely monitored his wall clock. Once the hour was over, he told his assistant, 'this is where we



shall build another church, as it is imprudent to allow our Christians to be walking for more than an hour before they access a Church [read Mutira Mission Centre]' (Kanjobe 28 October 2010). Before then, church elders such as Laban Rukenya, Hosea, Phenehas and others had started the Gicuka outstation at the site where the present day St. Anne's Kangware church is situated.

As the vicar, Johana felt that the distance between Mutira Mission Centre and Gicuka is too close considering that churches were very much scattered. Coupled with this, he also wanted to widen his catchment area (Rukenya 2 February 2010). Thus when he walked for one hour, covering a distance of four miles, he declared to his assistants that the church should be built there. In the nature of things, Njumbi planted a big cross to mark out the place where a new church was to be constructed – a distance of about 6 kilometres north of the Mutira Mission Centre. And in a succession of events (read fundraisings, committee meetings, re-strategising), St. Andrews Kiamaina Church, later Parish, was built in the present site, the Kiamaina shopping centre. In all these places where he began schools and churches, Njumbi used to walk or ride his bicycle, as there were very few cars in the country. During the Mau Mau skirmishes, Njumbi went to live at Mutitu Chiefs Camp where he started Mutitu Anglican Church. He also worked hand in hand with the serving clergy to counsel the victims of the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s.

With regard to secondary school education, he was a member of the committee that began the Kamuiru Boys school, among other schools. As a result of his pioneering role in social and ecclesiastical matters, Bishop David Gitari installed him as Canon Emeritus on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1976 during the great ceremony that officially marked the birth of the Diocese of Mount Kenya East. As a result of old age, Canon Njumbi began to experience body pains and on Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1991, around 5 p.m., Njumbi was admitted at Kerugoya District Hospital. He died the following Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1991 at 5a.m., leaving behind 15 children, 32 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren. Ven. Ephantus Muriuki officiated his well attended burial ceremony on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1991.

In honour of his huge contribution in the education sector, parents in the local Mutira primary school sat in 2007 under Dickson Kabuga, their head teacher, and resolved to start another secondary school that was named Canon Njumbi Mutira, in his honour. This ultimately hapened in 2010; and in January 2011, the teachers service commission sent the first principal of the school, George Kagondu, to steward the young school. In turn, it is significant to observe that the new day and mixed secondary school for both girls and boys lies between Mutira Girls and Mutira primary schools.

## NJUMBI'S RETIREMENT SERMON IN 1952

According to Thomas Meero's unpublished memoirs, Njumbi's last words, to the Christians of his Mutira pastorate, during his retirement ceremony, on the 18th of August 1952, were: '*Amani na iwe kwenu.*' That is 'peace be with you' – thereby echoing the words of the resurrected Christ (Luke 24: 36).

An exegesis on this will show that, as recorded by St. Luke and St. John, the first thing that Jesus said after he rose from the dead and subsequently appeared to the assembled apostles was: ‘Peace be with you.’ Considering that the disciples were hiding behind closed doors, ‘for fear of the Jews’, Jesus could have meant: ‘Do not be afraid, everything is all right now?’ In taking into account that the Gospels were written in Greek, but Jesus did not speak Greek to his disciples, he would have greeted them with the Aramaic *Shalama* (equivalent to the more well-known Hebrew *Shalom*). The term can be used as a mere greeting, but it becomes a greeting when we look at it as a wish for an abundance of blessings. In Jesus’s case, it was not merely a wish, even for blessings, because, as the second person in trinity, he has the power to communicate what he says. In other words, he does not *wish* peace, he *gives* it.

According to *Strong’s Concordance*, the Hebrew word *Shalom* means completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord. It comes from a root verb meaning to be complete, perfect and full. Therefore it is a kind of fullness of life, both materially and spiritually, in relations with God and humanity, that is expressed here. In view of this, Njumbi explained about God’s *shalom*, which St. Paul says ‘passes all understanding’ and ‘will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 4:7).

In his farewell sermon on the 18th of August 1952, thus, Rev Njumbi explained that God gives a supernatural peace, a spiritual completeness, an abundance of grace, an interior rest (as when Jesus says, ‘Come to Me ... I will give you rest ... you will find rest for your souls’ (Mt. 11: 28-29). That, to him, explains why Jesus, in his ‘farewell discourse’, said to his disciples: ‘Peace I leave with you. *My* peace I give to you. *Not as the world gives* do I give to you ...’ (Jn. 14: 27). He elaborated that God’s peace is much more profound, healing, strengthening, and lasting than anything the world can offer.

Undeniably, Njumbi was retiring at a very critical moment in Kenya’s history when the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s had divided the Kikuyu nation, and Kenya at large, alongside the collaborators/traitors versus the freedom fighters; hence ‘peace’ wish was critical to everyone. As the villagers butchered one another; and as suspicions and tensions reached their zenith, Njumbi had nothing to offer the flock but ‘holistic peace’ – *shalom* of God. Indeed, leading African leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta, Ochieng’ Oneko, Kung’u Karumba, Fred Kubai, Paul Ngei and Bildad Kagia were arrested on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1952, and later sentenced to seven years imprisonment in the remote part of Northern Kenya, Kapenguria, for their alleged involvement in the freedom struggle. At the same time, the state of emergency was declared following the arrival of Sir Evelyn Baring as the Crown of the Kenya colony of the British government. Baring was thus the newly appointed colonial governor of Kenya in early October 1952 who gave a ruthless crackdown to the Mau Mau freedom fighters. The immediate cause for the declaration of emergency was the brutal killing in October 9, 1952, of Chief Waruhiu from the present day Kiambu County.

In turn, Waruhiu was a known sympathiser and collaborator of the colonial government. Coupled with this, there was general tension in the country following

skirmishes between Mau Mau (freedom) fighters and colonial forces resulting in much bloodshed. In the Mutira mission, the situation worsened in 1953 when the pioneer African nurse and laboratory technician, Reuben Kinyua Kaara, was brutally killed by Mau Mau militants for allegedly being sympathetic to the colonial leadership.

The situation for Kenyan nationals got worse by the day. Between January and April 1953, Governor Baring instituted dozens of extreme and wide-ranging laws, referred to as Emergency Regulations. These included communal punishment, curfews, influx control, and as Elkins related:

The confiscation of property and land, the imposition of special taxes, the issuance of special documentation and passes, the censorship and banning of publications, the disbanding of all African political organisations, the control and disposition of labour, the suspension of due process, and detention without trial (Elkins 2005: 55).

It was clearly a reign of terror in a government-sanctioned police state. In addition, emergency legislation controlled African markets, shops, hotels, and all public transport, including buses, taxis, and bicycles. In addition, Baring created concentrated villages in the African reserves, and barbed wire cordons in African towns, including the city of Nairobi. He also established mini-detention camps on settler farms in the so-called White Highlands. Above all, he sanctioned the treatment of *Mau Mau* suspects (Elkins 2005: 55).

Nevertheless, these brutalities outrightly caused worldwide indignation. Speaking at an African National Congress (ANC) Conference, September 21, 1953, Nelson Mandela aptly described the Kenya of the 1950s thus:

The massacre of the Kenyan people by Britain has aroused worldwide indignation and protest. Children are being burnt alive; women are raped, tortured, whipped and boiling water poured on their breasts to force confessions from them that Jomo Kenyatta had administered the *Mau Mau* oath to them. Men are being castrated and shot dead. In the Kikuyu country there are some villages in which the population has been completely wiped out.

Mandela went on to say:

We are prisoners in our own country because we dared to raise our voices against those horrible atrocities and because we expressed our solidarity with the cause of the Kenyan people. You can see that there is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountain tops of our desires (Mandela 1994: 42).

## NJUMBI AS A CIVIL SERVANT: ANY LEGACY AS A CHURCH MINISTER?

After retirement in the church ministry in 1952, Johana Njumbi was employed by the government as a peace ambassador in a divided country. In the nature of things, he travelled in various parts of Kenya preaching peace, harmony and equality before God and humanity. The places he visited included Hola, Ndundu-ini, Kandongu and Gathigiriri prison, till 1957 when he retired again.

It is against this background that his critics have constantly accused him of having betrayed the ‘commandments’ by accepting to carry the gun as he pursued peace in those turbulent days. Certainly, ‘desperate times call for desperate measures’. As a matter of fact, it was a common trend for those in leadership positions to carry shot guns – including the white missionaries, particularly to protect themselves from wild animals, which occupied the thick forests that surrounded the nation. Mwalimu Thomas Meero, in particular, owned a licenced D.B. shot gun 12 that bore No. 6218. But as Meero says in his unpublished memoirs, he and Johana Njumbi were disarmed on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1955. At times, Meero would be called upon to shoot marauding hyenas. This helps us to understand the background within which Njumbi handled a shot gun (Ruri 20 June 2010).

Despite doubling as a civil servant and a clergyman, Njumbi’s pioneering role as the first African to be ordained as a priest in 1930s was not broken down as some of his critics would have it. Indeed, his legacy as a clergyman is seen when Rev. Paul Kibuti was ordained as the second clergyman in the locality, in 1960. In 1962, Rev. Jason Minja was ordained as the third African clergy in the locality. Others included Rev. Canon Joseph Mwangi Ngooro, 1964; and Rev. Canon Joseph Kangangi Mwanake, 1965. By 2011, the area had over one hundred clergy, men and women, with Canon Daniel Munene Ngoru (1947–) seemingly appearing to break his record by climbing the ecclesiastical ladder to become the second Diocesan Bishop of Kirinyaga in 1997.

In December 2012, Rev. Joseph Karimi Kibucwa (1966–) was consecrated as the third Bishop of Kirinyaga following Ngoru’s retirement at the age of 65. Interestingly, Bishop Kibucwa’s village home at Kiarugu is a distance of about four hundred metres from Njumbi’s. In a phone interview on 20 May 2013, Kibucwa confided to me that it was Canon Njumbi who baptised him at St. Peter’s Kamuiru church in 1978. Having begun a ministry that was initially unpopular to the locality, Njumbi would be excited in 2013 to find his dream for a local African bishop, particularly from his neighbourhood, come true. Indeed, as he conversed with his close confidants in his final days (late 1980s), Njumbi used to emphasise the point that his prayer to God would only be fulfilled when a person from the locality will be consecrated as a Bishop. Only then ‘shall I know that my pioneering efforts were not in vain; and indeed, the kingdom of God will have come’. Did Bishop Kibucwa’s consecration, in December 2012, as the third bishop of Kirinyaga Anglican diocese fulfill Njumbi’s dream albeit his physical absence? Certainly, Njumbi’s dream compares well with the pioneer CMS missionary

in east Africa, the Rev. Dr. Ludwig Krapf, who upon arriving at Mombasa port in 1844, prayed for the realisation of a vibrant African Christian church. On one occasion, he wrote:

My Spirit often urged me to look upon the high mountains around me, to weep and pray that the Redeemer's Kingdom might soon be established in these heights, and that His songs might be heard in these lofty hills, and in full reliance on the promises of God, I took possession of the pagan land for the militant Church of Christ (Cole 1959: 1).

Shortly after his arrival in May 1844, Dr J. L. Krapf, who had already lost his wife on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1844 and her little baby girl a few days later, wrote to the CMS in London:

Tell our friends at home that there is now on the East African coast a lonely missionary grave. This is a sign that you have commenced the struggle in this part of the world; and as the victories of the Church are gained by stepping over the graves of her members, you may be the more convinced that the hour is at hand when you are summoned to the conversion of Africa from its Eastern shore (Cole 1970: 3).

Without wife and the child, Krapf laboured in the humid coast of east Africa for two years before he was joined by another CMS missionary, Johannes Rebman. Nevertheless, as in the case of Johana Njumbi, he looked forward to the ordination of African clergy with an African bishop, as the chief steward of the diocese. In both cases, their dreams seem to have come true.

## NJUMBI AS A BUSINESSMAN AND AN ENVIRONMENTALIST

An interesting dimension to note in Canon Njumbi's life is that he was not only a 'man-of-the-cloth' but more importantly a good farmer and a businessman. As a matter of fact, he was the first person in the locality to trade in wattle bark (*magoko*) from 1926 to 1959. In turn, wattle bark is extracted from Wattle tree (*Muthanduku*). He is also the pioneer coffee farmer. He was the first chairman of Mutira Farmers Society (1951–1956); and later 1964 to 1972 he was a committee member. Until 1990 Canon Njumbi never failed to attend meetings that were arranged by the coffee boards.

Additionally, Njumbi was the pioneer keeper of daily cattle or high quality cows for milk, popularly called Grade Cows, in 1959, in an area where long horned traditional cattle were then kept. He was a great environmental conservator whose farm in Mugaya village of the Kirunda sub-location, has the tallest trees in the larger Ndia Division of Kirinyaga County and Mbeere District of Embu County to date. On his farm, fruits of various brands are available – an inclination that was not broken by the members of his family following his death in July 1991. As a farmer, he pioneered horticultural farming in carrots and cabbages during the Second World War (1943–1946).

As an environmentalist who liked to say 'preach by deeds rather than words', Njumbi only left a third of his farm for crop growing – as he dedicated 66% of his ten acre farm to tree planting. Wherever he visited any part of Kenya, he would always pick a new variety of trees

and subsequently plant it in his own garden. His compound was a kind of a botanical garden. Having learnt from the CMS missionaries who held that 10% of the landmass should be covered by trees, Njumbi strived hard to live up to this ideal (Cira 24 March 2013).

## MARRIAGE TO MARY WANGARI IN 1960

In 1960, Johana Njumbi married Mary Wangari (1941–), the daughter of Gideon Kabugi. Interestingly, Kabugi was Njumbi's classmate at Mutira primary school in 1915. They were taught by Rev. Laight, Rev. Clark and Thomas Meero. During their marriage ceremony, Njumbi and Wangari had Johana Rukungu and Rose Muthoni Reuben as their sponsors (read best man and best lady, respectively). The celebrant was Rev. Johana Muturi. Wangari and Njumbi were blessed with eight children, Gideon Kabugi, Alexander Kiragu, Joseph Kibara, Stanley Njine, Titus Gathutwa, Joyce Wamwirua, Susanne Muthoni and Margaret Wangui.

As will be noted later, Wangari's marriage to Njumbi did not break up Njumbi's family, which already had grown-up children. Considering that Agness Wambui had brought up God-fearing children who abhorred vices, Njumbi's family remained intact. A few cases of indiscipline, where a member of the family was seen in the marketplace irresponsibly drunk for example, however, was talked about in the locality, particularly after Njumbi's demise in 1991.

## NJUMBI'S THEOLOGICAL STANDPOINT

Another interesting dimension of Canon Njumbi's life is that his theological standpoint did not change with the coming of the East African Revival Movement (popularly called praising or *Tukutendereza* group), which swept across Kenya from Rwanda via Uganda in 1937.

According to Canon Joseph Mwangi Ngooro, a strict adherent of the revival movement, Njumbi remained a typical African despite his pioneering role – as a black missionary in Ndia (Ngooro 27 October 2010). In particular, he differed with the revivalist view of not keeping dogs for protection – as 'God protects you'. He also differed with the Christian revivalists who propounded their theological position that a Christian did not have to take bank loans or be indebted to anyone or to any institution as the 'second coming of Christ may find him or her indebted hence rejection due to this un-preparedness'. Above all, he could not understand how Christianity could make an African to abandon some leisurely African cultural practices such as sniffing tobacco, which he did. He, however, discarded traditional liquor – as he argued that it makes one to lose his focus, especially when one is intoxicated. Njumbi could also not understand why a Christian could habitually confess Christ as lord and saviour by giving a long testimony about his or her relationship with God rather than leading a 'practical Christian virtuous life'. Why should words 'be more visible than actions to a Christian? Is this not behaving like the Pharisees whom Jesus

dismissed as hypocrites’?, Canon Njumbi would wonder. To him, a Christian should be seen attending to the needy cases such as a troubled neighbour, the hungry, the thirsty, the widowed, the orphaned and other marginalised people in society, rather than being heard. This approach was not well received by the revivalists who later dominated Anglican Christianity in his locality.

As the Mutira Anglican Mission marked the first centenary celebration (1912–2012) with pomp and colour, in August 2012, Canon Njumbi, in my view was not given his deserved attention. Nonetheless, it is significant to appreciate that the pioneer African priest, as a person who was ahead of his time, approached church ministry holistically. In a nutshell, his version of African Christianity is that which stresses both realised and unrealised eschatology, as it values both culture and the gospel. Njumbi’s theology is both present and futuristic. It stresses realised eschatology (present) as well as the unrealised eschatology (future).

Put differently, while the promise of future reward (such as heaven) or punishments (hell) make little impact to one who is hungry, ragged and destitute, his theological standpoint did not just stress on the ultimate prize, ‘the heavenly’, but also the need to be good stewards of the resources that God has bestowed upon humanity: land, environment, flocks, human beings and so forth. Clearly Njumbi was sensitive and committed to the African Christian praxis. He was a person whose theological perspective did not exclude the wider human context in both physical and moral geography. He endeavoured to obliterate the dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual, the secular and the sacred. To this end, he teamed up with others to build schools, dispensaries and churches; and he attended to issues of human development. He will always be remembered as a pioneer African missionary in the locality in Western Mbereland, Mwea and to the larger Ndia sub-group of the Kikuyu nation.

Njumbi had a dream of liberating the people of Kirinyaga from ignorance, disease and poverty – a dream that was shared by Kenyan nationalists of the 1950s and 60s, such as Jomo Kenyatta, Bildad Kagia, Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya, Achieng’ Oneko, Paul Ngei among others. During the land demarcation of the 1957 in Embu District, as the entire Kirinyaga was then part of Embu, he was disappointed by his fellow clan mates who used shrewd and dubious means to corruptly acquire more pieces of land than others. Reportedly, he wanted to live at Kiamai village near Mutira Anglican mission centre, but his bid to acquire land was foiled by some interested parties within his Ithimbwi family of Wanjiku clan, who pushed him four kilometres south of the Mutira Anglican mission, that is, Mugaya area. Referring to his Ithimbwi family of his Wanjiku clan, where he served as the Chairman till his death in 1991, he once cautioned:

Don’t be troubled by those who are allocating themselves clan lands in strategic and fertile places by force. Anything that you acquire by force backfires at one stage, as physical might is never permanent; those who are bodily strong today will be weak tomorrow; but those who follow justice will realise that a just cause will remain just till eternity .... They push others to the hills and valleys plus other inhabitable places – where it is difficult to settle and build a home.

Let them not fret you; they will not go very far – for you cannot be smarter than God. Yes, they can hide under the cover of being freedom fighters or associated with Mau Mau movement or as home guards for that matter. Some create the wrong impression that they were more concerned with freedom of our people than anyone else. [Surely] who made more contribution in the quest for liberation of our people than us – we who worked hand-in-hand with the missionaries to promote [western] education in Ndia and beyond? They can just choose to be naughty, harass others, and force others with machetes and axes to vacate certain places – as they claim it is ‘their prime land’ but their thirsts will never be quenched. It is disheartening that they do not want fair distribution of land among the members of the clan. Take it from me [read “my prophesy”]: these pieces of land [that] they are forcefully acquiring will never benefit them in anyway [read socially and economically]. They will be despondent even with their illicit land. They will not experience peace – as God hates dirty deals. Who knows? their children or the children of their children may lack meaning for these chunks of land that they are dishonestly and cogently acquiring; and hence mismanage them or even sell it altogether ... (Nguri 20 April 2010).

True to his prophecy, most of the illegally acquired land by the greedy lot ended up poorly managed or even sold to other people outside the locality. As we focus on his life times, and the Anglican ministry in the larger Mutira Mission, where he served, we realise that his lasting legacies stand out clearly. Truly, he was a prophet whose prophecies need to be put on our agenda of the twenty-first century Africa; and like prophet Amos of old, ask ourselves: who has robbed the poor? Who has failed to attend to the marginal of the society: the widows, the orphans, the disabled, the displaced, the refugees, the youth and children? Where are we taking our country – with regard to social justice? How have we addressed our failing education standards – particularly when we compare ourselves with others?

In a song composed in 2010 by Mutira church choir led by David Murage Justin – in preparation for the 2012 centenary celebrations, Johana Njumbi’s pioneering role is well captured in five poetic stanzas. It goes as follows:



### Canon Johana Njumbi

1. Umuthi twina kiririkano  
Gia Canon Njumbi wa Kamuku  
Uria waninire nduma Ndia  
Na ngoma nyingi iria ciari kuo.
2. Okiraga ruci-ini na Ngware  
Aikurukite ya Riakanau  
Ruci-ini ruru rungi ari Ki-ini  
Ciana cia Ndia igie na githomo.
3. Tene twarumagwo Ndia irimu  
Ringi tugetwo akui Ndoo  
Canon Njumbi niatuthambirie  
Riu twi Ndia itangitong'eka.
4. Andu a Ndia tukiaria githungu  
Na riria tukugia Madaraka  
Tumenyage ati muru wa Kamuku  
Nianogire tugaikara wega.
5. Murata korwo ni unyendete  
Niukarimira mbirira yakwa  
Mwendi Canon niamenye atiri  
Muro wake ni Kirikaniro

### Canon Johana Njumbi

1. Today we are commemorating the  
Achievements of Canon Njumbi son of  
Kamuku; The one who chased away  
darkness in Ndia; And exorcised the  
demons that inhabited Ndia.
2. He used to wake up early in the morning;  
then move towards Riakanau; Then move  
to Kiini the following morning; All in his  
bid to ensure sons and daughters of Ndia  
get quality education.
3. In the past, we used to be called "the  
foolish Ndia people"; Sometimes we  
were called "toilet cleaners" - who carried  
human emissions in buckets; But thank  
God, Canon Njumbi has 'washed' us  
clean;  
Today, no one can easily underrate us.
4. My fellow Ndia people; as we speak  
English; And as we get various  
promotions in our lifetimes; Let us always  
remember that the gallant son of Kamuku  
worked hard to secure a better future for  
us.
5. My friend, "if you love me  
Take care of my graveyard."  
Whoever loves Canon Njumbi must know  
That his working tool is the Bible

## PAUL KANGI (1868–1956)

Another notable person in Canon Njumbi's family is his elder brother, Paul Kangi (popularly called Paulo). In turn, Kangi is the father of Isaaka Kiragu and Cira wa Paulo – the latter is one of the early medical practitioners at the Mutira Mission. In turn, Isaaka Kiragu is the father to the long-serving former secretary of Mutira parish council, Paul Kinyua Kiragu. Kiragu, who later defected from the Anglican Church in 2008, was ordained as a clergyman on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2012. In 2013, Rev Kiragu was serving as a cleric under his wife, Bishop Sicily Kariuko Kinyua, who is the founding head of a Pentecostal outfit, Pace New Life Ministries (PNLM) church whose headquarters is in

Kinoo Township, Kiambu County. Kinyua has served the church as its pastor since 2007 but was consecrated as the bishop of the church in November 2012.

According to Isabella Wanjiku Githaiga, daughter of Chief Ndegwa Kimere, Kangi taught them catechism during the early years of Christianity in Mutira from 1937 into the 1940s. He was an evangelist/catechist and a lay reader at the Emmanuel Church Mutira who retired out of old age during the war of independence (1950s). Isabella notes that he was very lively and dynamic. He tried to persuade his audiences to abandon traditional African dances; and join the church. In his teaching methodology, which was heavily punctuated with humour, he propounded the view that people must accept the reality that the wind has blown and altered the direction of the locality. Whoever failed to accept the new reality was simply wasting time – as Christianity had come to stay in Africa. How can they resist a marriage whose burns have been announced appropriately; and why would somebody think that marriage is a temporal business? (Githaiga 21 November 2010). By using such analogies, Kangi's message came powerfully and greatly impacted the locality.

### AGNESS WAMBUI (1914–1952)

Njumbi married thrice. He lost his first wife Wamuruana in 1921, married Agness Wambui in 1933, and finally married Mary Wangari in 1960. Of the three wives, perhaps it is Agness Wambui who made a remarkable impact on Njumbi's ecclesiastical ministry.. Although she died of maternal complications in 1952, she lived with Njumbi during his most critical period in his public ministry. In particular, she lived at a time when Njumbi was leading the locality to appreciate Christianity as their new religion and its attendant westernisation of education and general lifestyles. As such, Agness was largely seen as the mother of the larger Mutira pastorate, a mother who helped in midwifing the birth of the emerging society that Njumbi sought to create – the *athomi* (enlightened) society.

In my interviews with her second born child, Mary Muthoni (1936–), it was established that Agness was a mother who handled her husband's daily diary. At times, she could accompany her husband in his missionary travels to Riakanau in Embu County, Kiini, Mwea and other places in the vast lands of the old Mutira pastorate. In turn, her hospitality was seen whenever people from the far edges of the then Mutira pastorate would be hosted in her homestead, particularly when there were confirmations by the Diocesan bishop of the then Mombasa diocese. In such cases, Christians would come from the distant lands. Muthoni (Interview 16 May 2013) recalls attending open air crusades with her mother. She also recalls seeing a huge number of people from Riakanau, in the present day Embu County, assembling in their home compound as her mother (Agness) and her assistants served them food and drinks. In such scenarios African hospitality played out as a missiological tool.

Another notable aspect of Agness Wambui's life is that she was a good steward of time. In her church attendance, both as a member of the parish council and as an ordinary Christian, she set pace that was envied by the entire congregation through her

punctuality. On Sundays, she would wake up early in the morning to prepare breakfast and other household chores, after which she would leave for the church. During the weekdays, she would lead the family in wheat farming, zero grazing, and coffee farming. Due to her efforts, people from far afield would constantly visit her farm, which was a kind of demonstration farm, in order to see the ‘modern’ ways of farming where ‘grade’ or exotic cows that produced more milk than the indigenous ones could be found. The farm also had sugar cane, maize, beans, and fruits. At times, she would go to the market to sell her farm produce. She also supervised workers on their farm, guiding them on ‘new’ farming techniques, and she also ensured that they were well fed. Interestingly, some workers would come from as far as Kambaland in the eastern part of Kenya.

In an interview with her son, Thomas Muriithi Njumbi (16 Ma7 2013), he says Agness Wambui was a good orator who complemented her husband well. In cases of disagreement between her husband and the parishioners or with the European missionaries, she acted as the bridge between them – that ultimately ensured a harmonious relationship. Additionally, she co-ordinated various activities taking place in the mission centre, particularly with the women missionaries of European descent; and in a sense became the *de facto* founder of mothers’ union movement in the locality, particularly as she undertook the duty of teaching the young mothers about new techniques in farming, education and business. To this end, the *athomi* (educated ones) looked upon her as their model in various aspects of life. Indeed, she was a beacon that helped in mapping out the direction for the rest of society; hence she was a model in dressing, as a wife, farmer, social networker. As a model, she was sought by the emerging elites to speak whenever they had family functions. In particular, she was the best lady during the wedding of Kiragu wa Warui, who was among the leading pioneer teachers in the locality. It is no wonder that after her death, Njumbi took eight years before he got another suitor to marry (1952–1960), despite having young children who needed motherly care. When Njumbi finally married Mary Wangari in 1960, he realised that Agness had set a good foundation that the former was able to adjust to with ease, hence Njumbi’s home remained a beacon of peace that was envied by their neighbours. As a result, Agness’s children excelled in education and thereby served the society in line with her wishes. In particular, Paul Kinyua became a medical doctor, Gathaiya Njumbi became a surgeon, Thomas Muriithi became a surveyor, Stanley Gakuru became a medical records officer, David Kiragu became a medical superintendent, and Jacquiline Wambura became a nurse. Indeed, Agness compares well with the biblical ‘wife of noble character’ who is described thus:

She is worth far more than rubles. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. ... She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. ... She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. ... She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. ... Her husband is respected in the city. ... Her children arise and call her blessed ... (Proverbs 31: 10–31).

## CONCLUSION

The article began by locating Mutira mission of Kenya, particularly the first mission centre, which is located in an agriculturally rich area. It then chronicled the histories of the pioneer African clergy, Canon Johana Njumbi. It has demonstrated that despite the early challenges, Njumbi was able to navigate through the terrain to emerge victorious. In recalling Agness Wambui, as the mother of the new African society that emerged after the coming of the European missionaries, the article has demonstrated that ‘wife of noble character’ (Proverb 31) was an ideal person who does not ‘eat the bread of idleness’ (Proverb 31: 27). Certainly, it is through the efforts of Njumbi and his team that the holistic growth of the society was experienced. As Kirinyaga Anglican Diocese consecrated its third bishop, Joseph Karimi Kibucwa, following the retirement of the second bishop in the locality, Daniel Munene Ngoru, in December 2012, an African church had clearly demonstrated that it had come of age after having fulfilled the Krapf and Njumbi’s dream. Indeed, the work of the pioneer African clergy in the locality has made a huge impact; hence it is being felt up to the present.

Nevertheless, his critics will always wonder why he chose to raise huge families. Did this not contradict his quest for a ‘modern’ society where smaller families are easily managed? Second, Njumbi’s concern for the environment, where 66% of the less than ten acres of his land was dedicated to tree planting, could be seen as poor stewardship – where one avoided work and left the peasant farm to appear as a botanical garden for research. Third, Njumbi’s ordination in 1934 did not attract many people into the church ministry. What went wrong? Was he too selfish that he discouraged anyone else from inheriting his ecclesiastical mantle? Indeed, for Paul Kibuti to get ordained in 1960 and Jason Minja in 1962 – about ten years after his retirement – shows that Njumbi did not prepare his successor within the locality. Or did the death of his most important confidant and wife, Agness Wambui, in 1952, affect him so negatively that he forgot his cardinal duty to prepare more people for church ministry during his heyday? Even though St. Paul reminds us that no human being has all the gifts, Njumbi’s failure to ensure that more church workers were trained before he went into retirement comes out clearly (Eph 4: 11–13). On the whole, Njumbi’s pioneering and immense contributions cannot be underestimated. It is no wonder that he was ordained an Anglican Canon by the first bishop of Mount Kenya East, David Gitari, in 1976, during the official inauguration of the new diocese. Certainly, the modern generation can only improve upon the holistic ministry of Canon Njumbi but cannot necessarily break new ground. He remains the father of modern African Christianity in Mutira mission and beyond, and a leader who laid the egg that is hatching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## ENDNOTES

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- 2 Following the August 4, 2010 national referendum and subsequent promulgation of the new constitution, Kenya, which was previously made up of eight provinces (Central, Eastern, Western, Nyanza, North Eastern, Coast, Rift Valley and Nairobi), was now sub-divided into 47 Counties. That is, Kirinyaga, Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Tana River, Lamu, Taita/Taveta, Garissa, Wajir, Mandera, Marsabit, Isiolo, Meru, Tharaka-Nithi, Embu, Kitui, Machakos, Makeni, Nyandarua, Nyeri, Murang'a, Kiambu, Turkana, West Pokot, Samburu, Trans Nzoia, Uasin Gishu, Elgeyo/Marakwet, Nandi, Baringo, Laikipia, Nakuru, Narok, Kajiado, Kericho, Bomet, Kakamega, Vihiga, Bungoma, Busia, Siaya, Kisumu, Homa Bay, Migori, Kisii, Nyamira and Nairobi City.
- 3 Information extracted from Canon Njumbi's burial speeches on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1991, at his Mugaya farm, near Mutira, Kirinyaga, Kenya.
- 4 Information extracted from Canon Njumbi's burial speeches on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1991, at his Mugaya farm, near Mutira, Kirinyaga, Kenya.
- 5 Information gathered during Canon Njumbi's burial ceremony on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1991, at his Mugaya farm, near Mutira, Kirinyaga, Kenya.
- 6 KNA: CMS 1/638: Mutira Log Book, entry for 13<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

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## Interviews

- Interview with Vev Canon John Mararo, Cool Breeze Hotel – Mombasa, November 11, 2010.
- Interview with Joshua Koigu Ndegwa at his Kamugoiyo home, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2010.
- Interview with Isabella Wanjiku Githaiga, at her Kandegwa home, Muragara, 21 November 2010.
- Interview with Wilson Murimi Reuben, at my Mutira house, on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2010.
- Interview with Joseph Mwangi Gatimu, at Roswam hotel, Kerugoya, on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2010.
- Interview with Dr Gathaiya Njumbi, May 16, 2013, via phone interviews.

Interview with Mary Muthoni d/o Njumbi, May 16, 2013, via phone interviews.

Interview with Thomas Muriithi Njumbi, May 16, 2013, via phone interviews.

Interview with Alice Wakanugu, March 24, 2013.

Interview with Mama Zipporah Nguri, at Mutira mission centre, April 20, 2010.

Interview with Bishop Joseph Kibucwa, May 20, 2013.

Interview with Mzee Samuel Karani Ruri, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

## Archival materials

Kenya National Archive (KNA): CMS 1/638, Mutira Log Book, entry for 12<sup>th</sup> December 1921.

KNA: CMS 1/638: Mutira Log Book, entry for 13<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

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