

Edinburgh 1910 - Roots and fruits – Kenya - Laurie Campbell

This is something of my story - and being involved in one small way in the evolution of the Scottish missionary movement.

In 1951 I was about to start at New College , Edinburgh, having been accepted as a candidate for the Church of Scotland ministry after a (brief !!) interview with J,K,S.Reid. But the Rev Dr JW Arthur – distinguished ex missionary and politician – introduced me to the Headmaster of Alliance High School, Kenya, - E.Carey Francis - in Easter 1951. He interviewed me in London and invited me to join the staff of AHS in August 1952.

I consulted Kenneth McKenzie and JKS Reid at 121 Geo Street and they urged me to put my New College study and Ministry preparation on hold: and go to Kenya, to this first High School for Africans founded in 1926 which owed much to the vision and efforts of the Church of Scotland Mission. I changed from Divinity to Teacher Training at Moray House and went to Kenya in August 1952. God was calling in that co-operation which had significant effect in the following 20 years and more.

I was one of the first “local appointments” as a missionary teacher, employed by the school Governors under the umbrella of the Christian Council of Kenya. Six other Scots followed me within four years; three as CofS missionaries - Geoff Irvine, Jessie Cousins, David Philpot; with Mary Bruce, Gordon Wright, Charlotte McNaughton, as local appointments. And there were others in both categories almost year by year. We were all equal colleagues in our calling, and not recognizably different in our relationship to the Church in Kenya. The “local appointment” teachers were from then on interviewed and “sent” by the Overseas Appointments Bureau which became the Christians Abroad organization. But we were always regarded as different in the eyes of the CofS in Edinburgh who insisted on only being able to recognize in the Holy Tryst Prayer Manual, those who were official missionaries of the CofS no matter how much a part they were all together in the work of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Was God in that, I wonder ?

Geoff Irvine spent his whole life’s work in medicine in the Church’s hospitals in Kenya; David Philpot was called to the WCC in Geneva; Gordon Wright became Headmaster of one of the Senior Schools in Kenya and then brought back to the Isle of Jura all his skills in education and agriculture, and Christian leadership to transform almost single-handed the life of that community; Jessie Cousins was seconded by the CofS FMC to be (local appointment) Headmistress of Alliance Girls High School to succeed the great Mary Bruce; Charlotte McNaughton returned to Scotland to be depute Head at Grangemouth and lay church leader. Laurie Campbell stood for Parliament in Kenya in 1961 and then became Head of Alliance High School, 1962-70, before being called to be Head of Kingswood School in Bath (John Wesley’s foundation) and though re-selected for the CofS Ministry in 1981, was then time-barred by a new Assembly rule but was invited in 1987 to be a senior candidate Methodist Minister and ordained in 1988.

I mention these specific people (and there are many others like them in other parts of Africa) to show that “mission” is two way traffic and that their contribution to the World Church was hugely enhanced by what they received from the people of God in Kenya, as much as by what they were able to give. Unless we see it that way then, in my view,

our Church mission theology is still marked by its own in-built colonialism. Where is God in all that ?

To continue:- By the skill and foresight of people like Dr George Calderwood and (Dr) David Steel the two wings of the Scottish Church were united - the FM part and the Colonial and Continental part – into the one Presbyterian Church of East Africa and became independent from Scotland in 1955, when hundreds of titles on notice boards on schools, churches, hospitals and clinics change from CSM to PCEA. And that was a great God-given achievement which released and prepared an African leadership almost 8 years before Political Independence. The Anglicans followed 2 years later; the Methodists not till 1965. It was a huge delight and privilege to be in that united Church, with God calling us on.

There were still a few hiccups in the years from 1955 to 1970 when CofS office people found it easier to contact their “missionaries” direct, about policy and funding rather than to “trust” dealing with the PCEA Moderator or General Secretary – or with me as Chair of Education Board and Hospitals Board. It embarrassed most missionaries and hurt some church leaders. And I sense - indeed I experience – a struggle still going on in 2008 in the mind and spirit of many in World Mission in Scotland; a struggle which is kindly and thoughtful but has in it an underlying paternalism and condescension. We are all guilty of that as parents and grandparents and teachers and doctors and politicians, so let’s not rush into denial as church leaders. It is a factor in Mission which , I guess, God could do without !

But; in my own direct time in Kenya – 1952 to 70 – there was nothing but huge support from the visits in person by Jim Dougall, Neil Bernard, Betty Walls, John Hamilton and others and their wonderful capacity to relate to “missionaries, visionaries and stationaries” as Dr Calderwood so aptly put it !

The World Mission of the CofS has many strands in the giving and receiving and sharing of the grace of God; and we – of all sorts – from Kenya still gather annually as the “Friends of Kenya”. David Philpot, as Secretary, must have a list of about 200 people. That mainly lay community is part of the 1910 legacy of the CofS - from Lord Steel to Douglas Aitken and Ian Paterson; from Diana Bailey to Carol Wright and Elspeth Dougall.

I could say more - but that has to do for now, if it has to reach you before midnight on 31st December 2008 !!

Immanuel !! Laurie Campbell

Appended: Letter to “The Times” of 4th December 2008

Editor, “The Times” letters@thetimes.co.uk
Re - Barack Obama’s Luo grandfather

Perhaps I am the only “British” person still alive who stood for Parliament in Kenya in the first post-Mau Mau general election of January 1961: an election including all races in Kenya on the terms of the Lancaster House Conference

devised with great skill by Ian MacLeod, the Colonial Secretary. So, while I think it fair for Ben Macintyre and David Anderson to re-visit those dark days of torture and murder, in the light of the evidence from Barack Obama's grandmother, it is not the only legacy that Britain shared with Kenya in the 1950s and 60s.

There were very strong protests made by black and white church leaders to Walter Coutts, the Chief Secretary, against the "Operation Anvil" mass round up and detention, of Kikuyu people. It was led by a broadcast sermon from St Andrew's Church, Nairobi, by the Rev. David Steel (father of Lord Steel) which almost resulted in his deportation. There were always "British" voices in Kenya - doctors, teachers, lawyers, farmers and the rest, women and men - willing to stand up and be counted against injustice, discrimination and racism; and after the Mau Mau tragedy, the Colonial Secretary risked betting that the minority communities of Kenya - European, Asian and Arab (as we were described then) - would come to terms with African nationalism, the power of the future. I failed to win the North Kenya constituency but I was glad to say time and again at meetings of white "settlers" that the new proposed constitution was "not too much, too soon; but just enough, in the nick of time."

Jomo Kenyatta was released from detention within the year and was Prime Minister at Kenya's Independence Day on December 12th 1963, powerfully declaring throughout the country afterwards (as Mandela did later) that there should be reconciliation, not retaliation for the wrongs of the past. His position as national leader had been greatly strengthened by the outstanding last British Governor, Malcom Macdonald, delegating several of his powers to Kenyatta, six months early.

The great Schools of Kenya, where from 1927 to the 1970s all Kenyan tribes had the opportunity to learn together, were also part of the legacy of which Britain can be proud. Being at one of them opened the way for President-elect Obama's father to distinguish himself in academic America. He was one of the dozens in the student "air-lift" to US Universities at a time when there were not enough places in East Africa. President-elect Obama is certainly a wise enough man to recognize this, perhaps especially when he meets the Prime Minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga, a man with a Luo father like himself, who also went to one of those Kenya Schools.

Laurie Campbell, Headmaster Alliance High School, Kenya, 1962-70