

# **‘Giriama Enculturation of World Faiths in Coastal Kenya’**

**by**

Ishmael Yaah Kahindi Baya

OCMS

2015

## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis focusses on the Giriama, who belong to the Mijikenda cluster, and are about 73% traditionalist in religion. The purpose of this study is to understand the reason for the Giriama’s low conversion rate to the Christian faith as well as to Islam. Why is this, when in Kenya over 83% of the population is Christian? Is the cause the culture of the Giriama, or the approaches of Muslim or Christian missions? What model of mission might be employed which would enable the Giriama to enculturate the Christian religion?

The chosen research method was qualitative and interactive: the researcher spent one month per year on-site to observe, participate, interview, and record practices and events systematically as they occurred naturally at the selected location. This allowed the researcher, who was brought up in Giriama, to penetrate people’s ordinary lives in their cultural context.

Reasons for the low conversion rate of the Giriama include their religious self-sufficiency, for conversion is seen as ‘leaving’ one’s own house (*kaya*) and ‘entering’ into a foreign house or *dini* (scriptural religion). A new finding is that Giriama converts feel that they are entering exclusively the houses of others. Muslim and Christian approaches have tried to acculturate Giriama but the Giriama felt repudiated. Churches and mosques have denigrated the cultural practices of the Giriama as backward, primitive and evil, enabling some to believe and proselytise (enter) to Christian or Muslim beliefs. I have called this ‘conversion by denigration’.

The primary implication for Christian mission is that the Giriama must themselves be the active agents and decision-makers, so that adherents may be disciplined so as to own Christian faith and practice as Giriama. Therefore, Giriama enculturation of an initially foreign religious tradition is the appropriate model of mission for a people who adhere to a traditional religion. It enables the believers to be in charge of the transaction, and to decide whether and how they want to enculturate Christian faith rather than to accept, unchanged culturally alien social institutions.