CHAPTER FOUR

A SECOND FOOTHOLD: MISSIONS AT LAKE VICTORIA

4.1 Initial Stages

Acquiring Another “Virgin Territory”

After four years in Pare, Adventists decided to enter a second territory in Tanzania. In one way, this is surprising. So far, there had been no baptism in the Pare mission, and the work in the mountains was still in its infancy in most respects. Nevertheless, Adventists must have felt that South Pare was not enough as a field of evangelization. Expansion to areas next to these narrow confines was impossible, and the small area could not satisfy the missionary energy of German Adventists. As early as 1906, Adventists had become aware of the fact that four main mission centres were enough to serve this area. Yet the potential of missionaries and funds was big enough to support a much larger work. In 1907, Ernst Kotz, a leading brain in the mission, argued that it was “definitely necessary that we also do wider travelling in order to see where the land is open.” This push for exploratory trips was finally implemented in late 1907 when missionary Enns was sent to Lake Victoria in order to survey the whole region, which resulted in the establishment of Adventist stations in the east of the lake from 1909 onward.

Why was the eastern side of Lake Victoria chosen as a second foothold of Adventist mission in Tanzania? The main concerns in the choice of mission fields were commonly health matters and population density.

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1 The Leipzig Mission had occupied the adjacent area in the north just after Adventists had come in; the Bethel Mission claimed solitary access to the area on the other side, and the large steppe in the south-west did not have a sedentary population.
3 “Kihuiro” [sic], ZW 13, no. 19 (5 October 1907): 346.
5 Niesel, “Kolonialverwaltung und Missionen,” 76. Other missions in the then German East Africa enjoyed environments similar to Pare as far as the absence of
Different from the Pare Mountains, one had to be much more worried about health around Lake Victoria. Yet the fact that the region was rather densely populated justified heavy investments. Moreover, the territory was so large that Adventists could establish stations at many places. Another advantage of this area was communication and transport. There was a reliable and relatively fast connection with the coast through ships on the lake and the Kisumu-Mombasa rail through Kenya. Although hopes for permission to put up a mission in the Bukoba area, in the west of Lake Victoria, had not materialized in 1903, the lake area still remained a favourite Adventist choice. In spite of its health hazards, the eastern side promised to provide more opportunities for missionary work than Pare.

In addition to these general considerations, the ‘virgin territory’ principle was a cardinal reason that led to inaugurate this second segment of Adventist work in Tanzania. Adventists expected to have much more freedom at the lake than in Pare because no other missions competed according to the 1907 survey. Catholics were not very far, but the area was so big that it was very easy to allot different parts of the territory to these two denominations. Conradi began to dream about establishing a church that served an enormous number of people. For this purpose he intended to secure land in which an unchallenged Adventist presence, free from competition with other Christian bodies, would enable the mission to build an Adventist folk church. Of course, under German colonial policies, even the government was interested in allocating such territories to any mission that would guarantee the absence of inter-denominational controversies. After Adventist South Pare had not exactly been such a territory, it might have been a relief even for the government to see Adventist energies being shifted to a zone with less potential for conflicts.

The Adventist belt was to be laid around the east and south-east of Lake Victoria. A large population lived there: Mara with its many small ethnic groups and the territory of the Sukuma, the largest among the peoples of Tanzania. There were about five hundred thousand

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malaria is concerned. This was the case, among others, in the Usambara Mountains, the Kilimanjaro region, the Mbeya area, and Rwanda.

6 In 1909, Conradi enthusiastically wrote about the “[h]undreds of thousands of Protestants” including the king and many of his administrators in Uganda and applied this observation to the potential in the lake area; see L.R. Conradi, “In the Heart of Africa,” *General Conference Bulletin*, 1909, 56.