

# Heroes of Justice and Faith in Contemporary Kenya: The Rt. Rev. Alexander Kipsang' Muge's Early Life, First Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Eldoret, Kenya

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**Abstract:** The late Bishop Alexander Kipsang' Muge of the Anglican Church of Kenya, Diocese of Eldoret, made a remarkable contribution to the struggle for social justice in Kenya in the 1980s. However, his early life has not been adequately studied and documented, hence the need for the present study. The Objective of this article was to analyze the Rt. Rev. Alexander Kipsang' Muge's early life. Knowledge on Muge's contribution to the making of Kenya's history as well as being one of the architects of the struggle for democracy in Kenya, underlie the significance and justification of the study. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Archival and oral sources were significant in generating data. Purposive sampling, especially the snowball technique was used to identify interviewees. Analysis and interpretation of data employed the historical method. The findings of the study fill a knowledge gap about the history of the Rt. Rev. Bishop Alexander Kipsang' Muge's early life.

**Keywords:** Bishop, Alexander Kipsang' Muge, Eldoret, Christianity, Anglican Church of Kenya.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The article examines the early life of Bishop Alexander Kipsang Muge. Muge was the first bishop of the Anglican Church Kenya, Diocese of Eldoret between June 1983 and August 1990. The study is divided into four sections; Muge's Childhood and school life, how Muge joined the police force and his life in the Kenya police, and Muge's conversion to Christianity.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the 1980s, Alexander Muge was an outspoken bishop and an advocate for social justice. Muge was a proponent of freedom and democracy. Media reports in the early 1980s, and onwards, attest to Muge's determination and resilience against totalitarianism by the State. However, Muge's early life has not been studied given a scholarly review, hence the current study.

### 1.3 The objective of the study

The objective of the study was to analyze the Rt. Rev. Alexander Kipsang' Muge's early life.

### 1.4 Muge's Childhood and Schooling

Alexander Kipsang Muge was born at Kipng'oror village of Mosop in Nandi District (currently Nandi county) in 1948. Muge's parents, Kimuge Arap Purko and his two wives, Tamarta Purko and Anna Jepkosgei Purko, were peasant farmers. Kipsang Muge was a fourth born child in a family of seven siblings namely: Some Arap Samoei and Evaline (born to the first wife), Kiptum Arap Kiyai, Mark Kirwa Arap Sitienei, Alexander Kipsang Muge and Samuel Muge, born to the second wife. The first wife Tamarta Purko passed on much earlier having had two children. The family of Kimuge Arap

Purko belonged to Kap Kungurei family of Kamelilo clan. (Chepkwony, O. I, 14 February 2014; Murei O.I, 6 February 2014 and Sitienei, O.I, 17 February 2014.) The family traces their ancestry to the Maasai community of Kenya. The Kamelilo clan joined Christianity much earlier – during the colonial period, than the rest of the Nandi clans and consequently embraced western education ahead of the other Nandi clans. Muge spent the early years of his life in a rural setting. When he attained school age, the parents enrolled him at the African Inland Church primary school, Tangaratwet, in 1959.

The young Muge spent the first term of the year in standard one and when second term came, he joined standard two. Though the initiative to join standard two after only a term in standard one was his, teachers accepted his self-promotion due to excellent performance he demonstrated.

Muge excelled in the common entrance exam in 1961 and was transferred to Kapkoimur ACK primary where he did the Kenya Primary Exam (KPE) in 1964. (Tarus, O.I, 24 February 2014) Upon completion of primary, Muge and a classmate friend, Wisley Tarus, applied for a form one vacancy in Kawalo Secondary School near Kagira in Uganda. The school offered them admission and they joined form one in February 1965. The two cleared form one and towards the end of first term in form two, political skirmishes erupted in Uganda. Muge's School education was therefore cut short at form two in March 1966. Mr. Wisley Tarus, who was a classmate of Muge right from primary to Secondary school in Uganda, recalls using Ksh.9 as train fare from school in Uganda, to Kipkarren River near Turbo in Uasin Gishu, Kenya. When school's re-opened for second term, Muge joined Kapsaos Primary School located in the outskirts of Eldoret town, as an untrained teacher. He taught for one term before joining the Police force in October of the same year. (Tarus, O.I, 24 February 2014)

Majority of the interviewees pointed out that right from childhood, Muge displayed a personality trait beyond the ordinary. He was a brave and daring boy full of initiatives in all he did. Kogo and Chepkwony recalled how Muge was described by his mother, during Muge's burial, as an obedient and fearless child whose desire for truth was exceptional, and that Muge's youth was punctuated by unusual decisions. For example, when time for circumcision came, Muge refused to undergo the traditional circumcision ritual despite having not ascribed to any religion. Other than that, Muge built his own hut much earlier than his peers. Out of his courage, Muge did not fear traversing through the forest like most of his age mates. (Chepkwony, O.I, 14 February 2014) Muge's mother singled out a case where Muge, who liked visiting the silent forest, stayed in the forest longer than usual. A team of young strong men were dispatched to the forest. To their amazement,

the young men found Muge in a struggle with a big snake that had entangled itself around his neck. The young men were able to rescue Muge. Even with such encounters, Muge was not deterred from visiting the forests as he seemed to enjoy the solitary life. (Otieno, *Beyond the Silence of Death*, pp. 10-11)

Rev. Thomas Korir, who was an age mate of Muge, and later worked under him, describes Muge as a jovial, playful boy who liked using metaphors. Rev. Korir says that Muge was chicky, inquisitive and much more intelligent than fellow age mates; and that he carried out his duties and assignments in a committed way. In the village, elders noticed that Muge was very creative and reasoned better than his peers. Due to his shrewdness and intelligence, Muge was nicknamed “Mkora”, implying the shrewd and crafty manner he conducted himself. Charles Arap Kogo describes Muge at childhood as one who was ‘*Jonjo jonjo*’, a *Kiswahili* term referring to one who is always alert. (These two informants concur: Korir, O.I, 16February 2014; Kogo, O.I, 13 February 2014)

Charles Kogo recounted a case where a group of six boys, including Muge, were travelling home in the evening. When the boys were on the verge of crossing a river, they noticed a young woman dressing herself after taking bath. The boys made a quick decision to rape the lady. The lady was rescued by a neighbour who heard her alarm and came to save her. The issue was reported to the police who arrested four out of the six boys. On the night of the arrest, Muge fled the village and sought refuge in Maasai land while the sixth boy also disappeared from the area. Out of the four arrested, two were jailed for six months while the other two were acquitted. Muge and the sixth boy were not followed up as the complainant did not sufficiently implicate them. In another incident involving Muge and a friend, Charles Kogo says that the two went to a hotel and seeing nobody around, they made away with some *mandazi*. (Kogo, O.I, 13 February 2014.) When the two were followed up, Muge’s friend was captured in possession of the *Mandazi* while Muge, who had consumed his, escaped conviction. Kogo concludes that the episodes show how Muge was crafty, clever and quick in thinking.

Tarus, who did the Kenya Primary Examination in the same class with Muge, recounts how they came to know of Kawalo Secondary School in Uganda through a magazine. The two applied for form one admission. Letters of admission arrived and they proceeded to form one in Kawalo Secondary School, Uganda in February 1965.

However, due to political instabilities in Uganda, Muge and his colleague returned to Kenya in March 1966. Between April 1966, and August 1966, Muge taught briefly as an untrained teacher at Kapsaos Primary School near Eldoret Town. Life was difficult: poverty, disease and hunger were common and opportunities for education and economic advancement passed by without hope for change. (Kogo, O.I, 13 February 2014)

### 1.5 Muge in the Kenya Police Service

In August 1966, Muge travelled to Nairobi to visit a friend and a neighbour, Philip Arap Chepkwony, who had already joined the GSU. Chepkwony narrates how, at Embakasi, Nairobi, Muge ended up as a GSU police officer:

*Muge came to my place of work, Embakasi Nairobi sometime in August 1966. I was relaxing during lunch break when one of my colleagues knocked at the door of my house and told me that there was a visitor looking for me at the gate. Immediately, I rose up and walked to the gate where I found Muge. I took him to my house. The next day Muge informed me that he wanted me to*

*assist him find employment. When I asked him what employment he wanted, he said he was ready for any employment. I promised him that I would try. Around a month later, in October 1966, at noon, a colleague of mine, sergeant in rank came to me running and asked me, “where is your brother? Recruitment officer, Mr. Smith, wants to see him in the field right now”. I dashed to the house as I recollected having introduced Muge as my brother to Mr. Smith and that he was interested in joining the police. I found Muge cooking. I told him to leave the ugali, change and pick his certificates. In less than five minutes we were in the field where the ‘Mzungu insulted him as usual as he joined another few recruits. That is how Muge ended up becoming a GSU officer. After their pass out parade, he was posted to North Eastern Province. (Chepkwony, O.I, 14February 2014)*

At the time of Muge deployment to North Eastern Province of Kenya in March 1967, the *Shifta Operation* was on.

The Operation was a fierce combat between the Kenyan administration and an armed militia of Somali origin which wanted secession of North Eastern Province of Kenya to Somalia. The operations which had begun sometimes back in 1966 continued upto 1969. The GSU was the main police force deployed to fight the cessation group that was known as *shifta*. Muge therefore began his career as a police man on a tough note. However, as it turned out later, Muge proved that he was equal to the task. He demonstrated bravery and outstanding performance which earned him the *North Eastern Campaign Medal Award*. Also, in recognition of the excellent performance, Muge was promoted to the corporal rank. (‘Controversial Cleric’ *Weekly Review*, 17 August 1990, p. 9)

In 1969 vacancies for those interested in the fierce RECCE Company of the police force were announced. Muge applied and shortly an interview was done which he attended. When the results came out, Muge was among the few who excelled and got an opportunity to join the competitive and highly respected RECCE Company. RECCE Company is a police unit that is tasked with advance deployment to sensitive scenes, hostage rescue, and protection of VIPs among other duties. In the RECCE Company, Muge was attached to the signal unit as a signaler at its headquarters in Ruiru. In addition to being brave and sharp in mind, those to join the signal unit were soldiers possessing high level of listening and communication skills, and quick in decision making. (Chepkwony, O.I, 14 February, 2014)

While in the GSU, Muge was not happy with the manner in which *shifta* captives were handled. While many of his colleagues were amused by the nature of punishment and mistreatment meted on the captives, Muge held a different view. He was not happy seeing *shiftas* starved to death, denied water or left to thirst for very a long time then given water to choke and wringle them to death. Chepkwony, who was his senior, both in the GSU and also later in the RECCE Company recalls how severally Muge informed him of his displeasure at mistreatment and unwarranted killing of the *Shifta*. Muge confided to Chepkwony how he had severally intervened to save captured *shifta* militia from death on the way to and in concentration camps. (Chepkwony, O.I, 14 February 2014)

Many years after Muge left the police, he narrated the same stories to Rev. Opuka.

*Muge said that he was always disturbed by the stories colleagues narrated at the end of an encounter with*

enemies. The colleagues would happily explain how a bullet blew up an enemy, how one was able to reap off the head of a peeping enemy, how captives yelled under torture and many such episodes. He explained that such inhuman acts persisted and were seen as achievements in the police force. That he occasionally intervened where the law was negated. The Rt. Rev. Bishop told us how common theft was in police stores in the issuance of uniforms, food and other commodities. He was thankful to God and happy to have left the police force without killing a human being. (Opuka, O.I, 11 March 2014)

### 1.6 Muge's Conversion

In 1970, while in GSU, Muge attended church services in St. Michael and All Angels' Church at Ruiru. This was after undergoing an unusual experience for over-drinking alcohol. The wife of one of Muge's friends and fellow police officer, a Charles Boen, played a key role in the conversion of Alexander Muge. Martha Boen recounted:

*In June 1970, I set off to see my husband who worked with the Kenya Police in Nairobi. My mother-in-law packed for me some few items to take to my husband Charles. Among the items packed were five litres of alcohol commonly known 'chang'aa'. I tried to resist the Chang'aa because it was against my faith but finally I gave in. I travelled to Nairobi and found my husband and Muge reporting back for duty after the lunch break. They came back to the house from work at around 6.00 pm in the evening with the Tusker brand of beer. That evening they took the 'chang'aa and half way changed to Tusker beer. When they were fully drunk, Muge left the house. Three hours later, a report reached us that Muge had been arrested and held shortly by his colleagues on duty for roaming around the GSU camp fence at Ruaraka several times shouting. Fortunate enough, investigations revealed that he was drunk. (Boen, O.I, 23 March, 2014.)*

The next day when Muge came home for lunch at Boen's house, Martha Boen took the opportunity to counsel Muge. Muge, who was younger and not yet married, listened carefully to Mrs. Boen, a strong Christian convert. In words of counsel, Martha told Muge:

*Thank God that you are still alive and still in payroll. Remember how you struggled in order to get this employment after failing to complete high school not because your parents were unable to pay but because they loved drinking and making merry. Look back at home. Look at Charles my husband. What has he done after working for several years? My mother-in-law still brews alcohol in order to buy food and clothing yet we have somebody in employment. Your neighbour and brothers are looking up to you for a role model and for assistance. Do you want to follow the steps of those who go for a loan when they are going home for leave; drink the whole period of leave and sell property at home to get fare back to work when leave ends? I have told God I will never brew but work with my own hands to have my children get pencil, exercise book and food. Muge, it is fortunate you don't smoke, stop drinking and God will open your ways and make you prosper. Commit yourself to God and join any church of your choice. (Boen, O.I, 23 March, 2014)*

A Sunday that followed, Muge went for a church service at All Angels Church, ACK Ruiru. From that time onwards, Muge continued to attend church services either at St. Michael or All Angels Church. Muge stopped drinking and never went back to it.

It also emerged in the study that somewhere early October 1970, Martha again visited the husband, Boen, in Nairobi. She was also eager to find out how Muge was progressing and to confirm some rumour to the effect that Muge had abandoned a girl he had impregnated. On arrival in Nairobi, Mrs. Boen found out that indeed Muge had won a court case against a lady by name Herma on account that he was not responsible for the pregnancy.

The next day Muge informed Mrs. Boen that he was going on well in faith. She encouraged him to continue growing in faith but informed Muge that she had one thing to share with him the following day. When Muge left the house, Martha Boen knelt down and prayed for him. (Ibid)

The following day came, and when Martha saw Muge coming, she went in and recited the Lord's Prayer the catholic way. This is how their conversation went:

*I am proud Alexander that you have chosen the Lord as your savior. However, I have one thing which I do not know whether you will accept when I tell you. Muge replied 'just tell me'. Will you agree if I tell you? "Tell me and I will tell you whether I agree or not" Muge replied. Tomorrow at evening after work come straight here and I will share what I have with you. (Ibid)*

Kipsang did not turn up the next day. After another two days Muge came straight from a Sunday service at around 1.00 pm. On arrival Muge explained to Martha as to why he failed to turn up as agreed. Muge then testified to Martha Boen how scriptures in the Bible were giving him new revelation day after day especially that very Sunday. Martha thanked him for that and sang a song from the Kalenjin hymn book whose theme is 'Ma kirokendoegi chebo kipsengwet', interpreted as 'Heavenly things cannot be compared to anything in this world'

After the song, Martha told him that she wanted to find out about his decision to abandon Herma. She referred Muge to the words in the song and went further to persuade him not to run away if he was responsible for the pregnancy. After Martha finished speaking, Muge kept quiet for a while then told her that even if he changed his mind, it would be difficult since the case had gone as far as court. Martha told Muge that "that was a simple thing". She asked him to accept back the lady and leave the rest of the task to her. Muge requested for a day to ponder over the issue. Muge came back the next day and told her he had changed his mind and that he would accept the lady as long as the task of reconciliation between them and the two families was assured.

Martha promised that she would do all that. Martha recounts how, after having special prayers with Muge, three months later she managed to accomplish the task and at last the marriage process was started. (Boen, O.I, 28 March 2014) Meanwhile, Muge continued to study the scriptures in depth and on October 25, 1970, Muge was fully converted and was baptized at the All Angels Anglican Church, Ruiru.

This article found out that Alexander Muge married Herma Chemesunde, daughter to Noah arap Kurgat of Nandi County in December 1971 at Kapkoimur Anglican Church at a wedding presided by Rev. Paul Sawanda. The couple was



blessed with four children: Esther, Andrew, Hermon and Elizabeth. Esther describes her late father as one who was jovial, caring and even at times played with them. Herma Muge describes her late husband as a loving father and husband was committed to his calling. Herma explains that though the reporting for work was 8.00 a.m, she does not recall a time when Muge left the house for work later than 8.00 a.m in the morning. She claims that Muge loved and protected his fellow workers, but was very strict and uncompromising on issues of dishonesty. He would easily forgive one for failing to report or reporting to work late, but for dishonesty or anything that constituted a lie, the bishop would not compromise at all. (These three informants concur: H. Muge, O.I, 5March, 2014; E. Muge, O.I, 10February 2014; Opuka O.I, 11March 2014)

Rev. Korir concurs with Mrs. Muge and cites an example of such incidences. Rev. Korir recounts of a day when the bishop was invited to ordain some church deacons at Kapkoimur Parish. A list of the deacons had been given to him but as the ordination was just about to kick off, the bishop realized that the candidates were more than those in the list given to him and after inquiring discovered a conspiracy. On the spot, the bishop asked the priest and deacons in charge to remove and hand over the church robes. (Korir, O.I, 16 February 2014)

### SUMMARY

The article has examined the early life of Alexander Muge; childhood, schooling and later in GSU. The study found out that Muge was born and brought up in a rural set up but possessed exceptional intelligence, which enabled him do things ahead of his time and peers. In school, Muge attended standard one and two in a single year and later made rare attempts – joining secondary school in a foreign country by his own initiative at a time and age when secondary education, especially in a foreign country, was not available to many people. The study also found out that Muge was aggressive, committed and witty in his undertakings and that when obstacles came his way, he was determined to overcome them. How Muge joined the GSU having shortly taught as an untrained teacher, his outstanding performance in the *Shifta Operations*, how he was dissatisfied with how the *Shiftas* were treated and his later life as a signaler in the RECCE, GSU unit, have been discussed.

### References

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- [9] Tarus, Wisley and Kogo Charles., concur; O.I, 24<sup>th</sup> February. 2014.
- [10] These three informants concur: Chepkwony, Philip. O. I, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2014; Murei Caleb., O.I, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014 and Sitienei, Anthony., O.I, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2014.
- [11] These three informants concur: Herma Muge, O.I, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2014; Esther Muge, O.I, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2014; Opuka Haron. O.I, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014.
- [12] These two informants concur: Korir, Cosmas. O.I, 16<sup>th</sup> February 2014; Kogo, Charles. O.I, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2014.