

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The East African Revival

AFRICAN INITIATIVE WITHIN
A EUROPEAN TRADITION

BRIAN STANLEY

In 1877 the first missionaries of the Church Missionary Society arrived at the court of Kabaka Mutesa, the ruler of the kingdom of Buganda; a kingdom lying at the heart of what is now Uganda, which had risen during the nineteenth century to pre-eminence among its neighbours.¹ European missions in Africa at this time were winning most of their converts from amongst marginal groups at the fringes of traditional society. In Buganda, however, the story was very different. Christianity offered the Kabaka and his supporters the ideological weapon they needed in their attempts to assert his authority against the representatives of the traditional gods, and with remarkable rapidity the political élite aligned themselves either with the Anglican missionaries or with their Roman Catholic rivals. In the tumultuous conditions associated with the advent of British influence and then rule, Bugandan politics assumed a strongly religious flavour, and it was the Protestant party which emerged from the Uganda Agreement of 1900 as the chief beneficiary of the colonial concordat with the British. Protestantism was thus entrenched as the virtual established religion in Buganda, and Anglican baptism followed by Anglican education became the accepted route to social and political advancement. In a context of intense Protestant-Roman Catholic rivalry, the Catholic policy of mass baptisms prompted the Anglicans to follow suit, and thus to accelerate the spread of a nominal Christianity throughout Uganda.²

The evangelical Anglicans of the CMS were not slow to diagnose the shallowness of the conversion of so many of their adherents, and to prescribe revival as the only remedy. Revival on a limited scale came as early as 1893, largely through the influence of the CMS missionary G. L. Pilkington, whose leadership was strongly coloured by the model of D. L. Moody's recent revival campaigns in Britain. A mission for the deepening of the spiritual life of the Ugandan Church in 1906 was similarly fashioned on the pattern of the evangelistic campaigns of Torrey and Alexander.³ The impact of such movements was, however, temporary and localized. The Ugandan Church continued to expand both geographically and numerically, but the spiritual foundations were shallow.

In 1920 the CMS authorized two young missionary doctors, Len Sharp and Algie Stanley Smith, to commence work in the Belgian

territory of Rwanda, although the financial support for the new mission for the first four years was to be raised independently of the CMS by the two doctors themselves.⁴ Political difficulties rendered immediate entry into Rwanda impossible, and in consequence the Ruanda Mission, as it later became, began work in the Kigezi district of Uganda. Work in Rwanda itself began in 1925, and in the following year the existence of the Ruanda Mission as an independently supported auxiliary of the CMS was formalized by the establishment of a Home Council.⁵ The Mission began work in the neighbouring kingdom of Burundi in 1935.⁶

Spiritual awakening

In June 1928 a young Cambridge doctor, Joe Church, arrived at Gahini, the first station established by the Mission in Rwanda itself, to take charge of the as yet unfinished hospital there.⁷ Joe Church's first year at Gahini was dominated by the experience of a severe famine throughout Rwanda and in September 1929, physically and spiritually exhausted, he returned to Kampala for a holiday. There he was greeted by a young African, Simeoni Nsibambi, who had heard Dr Church speak about 'surrendering all to Jesus' at a Bible class run by Mabel Ensor⁸ in Kampala in March. Simeoni complained that he had 'surrendered all to Jesus', but that there still seemed to be something missing. The two men went away to spend several hours together with a Scofield Bible, tracing through the chain references to the subject of the Holy Spirit. The result for both men was a spiritual transformation. Joe Church related the experience in a letter to his prayer partners in the CICCUC (Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union), which concluded with the significant statement:

There could be a Revival in the Uganda Church if there was someone who could come, Spirit filled, and point these thousands of nominal Christians to the Victorious Life.⁹

From now on, signs of spiritual awakening began to appear at Gahini.¹⁰ Yet relations between Joe Church and his African hospital staff were strained, principally owing to his insistence that they should combine their hospital duties with village evangelism, and consequently should be paid on the same level as the village evangelists.¹¹ The senior hospital boy, Yosiya Kinuka, led the resistance to the doctor. In January 1931 Joe Church, as a last resort, sent Yosiya to see Simeoni Nsibambi in Kampala. Nsibambi offered Yosiya no sympathy, insisting that the fault lay not with the doctor but with Yosiya's own unrepentant heart.¹² Yosiya returned to Gahini with a markedly changed attitude. Joe Church wrote home on 5 May:

He has come back an absolutely changed life. There is no doubt that an African can have a 'second blessing', if you like to call it so. He got to work at once to stamp out sin among the other boys, chiefly drinking, and work has gone ahead very much spiritually since . . .¹³

Yosiya Kinuka and Simeoni's brother Blasio, the head teacher at Gahini, now set to work as a team to call the African Christians at Gahini to a true repentance and conversion such as they had themselves experienced. By February 1932 Joe Church could report:

We have seen teachers who at one time were always weak and grousing, now suffering persecution and hardship gladly for Christ. We have seen many cases of senior Christians who at one time thought little of slipping a few of our francs or other things into their pockets when no one was looking, coming up voluntarily to confess and restore the things. . . . Above all I can say, without the slightest shadow of doubt, that I have seen Africans truly saved and living really changed lives. I have learnt that at heart the African is by no means such a child as he is made out to be, and that his sense of sin, his need, and his spiritual experiences are the same as our own.¹⁴

African spiritual experience was overturning missionary pre-conceptions, but leaving intact the categories of spiritual explanation which the missionaries had learnt from their theological background: they discovered that the African Christian was not destined to perpetual spiritual inferiority, but was on the contrary capable of a conversion which conformed in all essential respects to their own. Until December 1933 the movement of new spiritual life at Gahini proceeded relatively quietly. At Christmas, Joe Church held an African convention on Keswick lines at Gahini, which yielded no apparent fruit until the final prayer meeting, when, after half an hour, one of the 'revived' Christians, Kosiya Shalita, left the meeting to complain to Joe that he could not stand it any longer :

People praying these beautiful long prayers, many of them were hypocrites, he knew it, and needed to be broken down before God. . . . A remarkable thing then happened a few minutes later. While everyone was bowed in prayer, a native Christian got up and began confessing some sin he had committed and . . . it seemed as though a barrier of reserve had been rolled away. A wave of conviction swept through them all and for two and a half hours it continued, sometimes as many as three on their feet at once trying to speak . . .¹⁵

The revival at Gahini had now broken surface, and in the coming months the 'abaka', 'those on fire', as the revived Christians came to be known, became the cause of increasing dissension at Gahini.¹⁶ Opposition to the revival intensified after the head of the Evangelists' Training School, Blasio Kigozi, gained a new experience of the power of the Spirit in May 1935, and began to preach on the themes of sin and repentance with a new urgency.¹⁷

In September 1935 Joe Church, Blasio Kigozi and Yosiya Kinuka led a convention at Kabale, the principal Ruanda Mission station in the Kigezi district of Uganda. As a result Kigezi was caught up in the revival.¹⁸ The Synod of the Church of Uganda was due to meet at the end of January 1936. Blasio Kigozi, though only a deacon, prepared three points for the consideration of the Synod. He died of fever just before the Synod opened, but his three points were delivered posthumously before a hushed audience:

1 What is the cause of the coldness and deadness of the Uganda Church?

2 The communion service is being abused by those who are known to be living in sin and yet are allowed to partake. What should be done to remedy this weakness?

3 What must be done to bring revival to the Church of Uganda?

Blasio's answers had been:

That complacency in the leaders, together with loss of urgency and vision in their teaching, were the causes of the coldness and deadness.

That revival could only come by the way of new birth, the coming of the Spirit, and the claiming of His power.¹⁹

In May 1936 ecstatic signs began to appear in the Gahini district. Conviction of sin began to be accompanied by dreams, visions, falling down in trances, weeping, shaking, and other phenomena of near hysteria.²⁰ Hymn-singing sessions went on all night. Revived Christians began to organize themselves into fellowship groups.²¹ The revival was by now spreading far beyond Gahini itself. In December 1936 it reached Burundi. The Synod in January 1936 had planned a series of missions in various parts of the diocese to commemorate the coming jubilee of the Ugandan Church.²² Joe Church and a revival team from Gahini were due to lead three such missions, at Kako in Western Buganda, at Fort Portal in Toro, and at Hoima in Bunyoro. The Fort Portal mission was cancelled owing to the opposition of the resident missionary, but the other two missions took place and were the means of spreading the revival into these districts.²³ In April the Gahini team went on to lead a revival convention at Kabete in Kenya.²⁴ By mid-1937 the ripples of the movement were being felt through large areas of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, and were beginning to move northwards into Kenya. By late 1939 the impact of the Revival had extended further still: into Tanzania, southern Sudan and eastern Zaire, affecting missions of other denominations and nationalities. Over the next thirty years, revival teams and conventions spread the message of the Revival to other parts of Africa, and to other continents.

The paradox

We still await a full scholarly history of the Revival. The little which has been written tends to fall into one of two categories. Evangelical accounts have done little more than narrate the course of the Revival, and rest content with the explanation that it was the work of the Holy Spirit. African historians, sociologists and anthropologists, on the other hand, have begun to show some interest in the movement, but naturally enough interpret it almost exclusively in terms of categories drawn from African traditional religion and society. The Revival is seen as an expression of indigenous African protest against European missionary domination, a less developed form of the movement of religious and social dissidence which elsewhere in Africa has resulted in the rise of the so-called 'independent' churches. These writers

have consequently tended to concentrate their attention on those unrepresentative sections of the Revival movement which show some approximation to independent movements in other parts of Africa.²⁵ Whilst I would wish to retain both the insistence of popular evangelical accounts that the Revival was the work of the Holy Spirit, and the emphasis of the Africanists on the Revival as an outlet for independent African initiative, I intend to argue that a true understanding of the Revival is impossible without an adequate consideration of the European religious tradition from which it sprang. The paradox which forms the theme of the remainder of this article is that of how a movement so deeply rooted in an alien religious tradition proved to be an ideal vehicle for the expression of indigenous initiative.

The role of 'Keswick'

J. B. Webster in 1964 was the first historian to emphasize the important implications for African history of the new flood of missionary enthusiasm released by the Keswick conventions, the first of which was held in 1875.²⁶ Although his contention that Keswick can be held responsible for the appearance of a new breed of racialistic and imperialistic missionaries is open to serious question, the influence of Keswick teaching on British evangelical missions during the next sixty years or more cannot be too strongly stressed. By the 1920s, 'Keswick' represented a clearly identifiable school among Anglican evangelicals in Britain. The Ruanda Mission originated in the aftermath of the controversy which resulted in the secession of a large number of conservative evangelicals from the CMS to form the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society. The Ruanda Mission was anxious to retain its ties with the CMS, but only on condition that its conservative doctrinal basis was safeguarded. From mid-1929 the Ruanda Mission magazine contained a doctrinal statement which included the assurance that the Mission was satisfied that it had received from the CMS 'full guarantees' to safeguard the future of the Mission 'on Bible, Protestant and Keswick lines'.²⁷ The early personnel of the Mission were almost without exception products of the CICCUC, and men who had gained their theological schooling at Keswick. Keswick implanted in them a hunger for personal holiness, and an expectation of revival as a norm which Christians should constantly be seeking to realize. Joe Church's first prayer letters, sent from Brussels in 1926 and 1927 where he was studying tropical medicine, appealed to his prayer partners to pray that God 'will raise up from amongst these magnificent tribes of Ruanda-Urundi sanctified men, filled with the Holy Spirit, to blaze the trail throughout Central Africa' and that, 'if the Lord will tarry, this part of Africa may be a great centre for Evangelization and Revival.'²⁸

It was thus with Keswick eyes that the missionaries of the Ruanda Mission contemplated the nominal state of Ugandan Christianity. Nominal Christians meant powerless and defeated Christian lives, and the sense of defeat rubbed off on missionaries who had been accustomed to regard a victorious Christian life as the norm. Lawrence Barham's letter from Kabale, written on 28 November 1931, is worth quoting at length:

It has been brought home to us very strongly, lately, how desperately low the spiritual standard is here at Kabale, and in the Kigezi district. We have been brought one by one to realize the state of things, and have been seeking God's face to find out where the failure lies, and God's remedy for it. There is such an impression in England that missionary work is 'one long CSSM',²⁹ and we out here want you to realize what a terrific *wrestle* we are engaged in against 'principalities and powers'. Just at present there is a lack of missionary spirit and enthusiasm among our Christians, and a very lethargic contentment with things as they are, and in consequence, we hear of Christian backsliding.

Now we have been praying about this, here in Kabale, asking God to revive us again. . . . We believe that God is going to give us a big new blessing, and a growing longing for the things of God, and an enthusiasm for His Word. . . . So continue with us in prayer, and then don't be surprised, if the Lord Jesus hasn't come first, to hear of a new wave of blessing coming over the Church of Kigezi.³⁰

The sense of failure was reinforced by the fact that the young churches of Kigezi and Rwanda appeared to be as much plagued by the problems of skin-deep Christianity as the second- and third-generation churches of Buganda. As Lawrence Barham put it in 1935: 'We were ashamed that a church so young should need reviving'.³¹

When revival came, its doctrinal teaching flowed down those Keswick channels which the Ruanda missionaries faithfully dug out of the African soil, and only occasionally, as we shall see, did the flood threaten to overflow its banks. The addresses at the first African convention held at Gahini in December 1933 closely followed the Keswick pattern,³² and the innumerable revival conventions which followed departed very little from the original model.

Other influences

Two other aspects of the European tradition behind the Revival must also be mentioned. The first is the popularity in the 1920s and 1930s of the Scofield Reference Bible within conservative evangelical circles on both sides of the Atlantic. Mention has already been made of the part the Scofield Bible played in the spiritual breakthrough achieved by Joe Church and Simeoni Nsibambi in 1929. Scofield's references also provided the structure for the daily Bible studies for the whole station at Gahini which Joe Church instituted in June 1929; studies which played an important role in preparing the ground for revival.³³ Most assessments of the influence of the Scofield Bible fasten on its dispensationalism³⁴ but, although expectation of the imminent return of Christ is a common enough theme in the correspondence of the

CHURCHMAN

Ruanda missionaries, there is little evidence of the full dispensationalist system being carried over into the East African context. Far more influential, in Joe Church's case at least, was Scofield's interpretation of Old Testament history as an intricate typological tapestry whose every detail pointed forward to the cross of Christ and to the spiritual experience of the Christian.³⁵ Some of the characteristic emphases of the Revival teaching are foreshadowed in Scofield's notes on topics such as the redemption from Egypt and the person of the Holy Spirit.

A further influence upon the Revival was that of Frank Buchman and the teaching which later acquired the label of 'Oxford Group'. Buchman was resident in Cambridge in 1920-21 when Joe Church was an undergraduate, and exercised a considerable influence within the CICCUC. One of the features which became typical of his Cambridge meetings was the practice of public confession of sin.³⁶ There was also contact of a more direct nature in East Africa itself. During the 1930s, Oxford Group adherents held house parties for moral renewal in Kenya, and in 1936 they organized a house party at the Bishop's house in Kampala, which Joe Church attended. He was not, however, over-impressed.³⁷ By December 1939 Joe Church was expressing concern at the damage being caused to the Revival by those who identified it with the Oxford Group:

I believe we have in the Ruanda Revival something better and deeper, but this calling it 'Groups' is not true, and it simply brings down a cloud of coldness, sorrow and suspicion.³⁸

Oxford Group teaching appears to have been more influential among the expatriate than among the African population in East Africa. The closest the Revival came to a common front with the Oxford Group was in a mission to the European community in Kampala in August 1939. The team entitled the mission 'Spiritual Re-armament' in the hope of drawing in those on the non-Christian fringe of the moral re-armament movement.³⁹ Nonetheless, Buchman's emphasis on the open sharing between Christians of the consciousness of sin and the experience of forgiveness was clearly a significant source of the teaching which became characteristic of the Revival.

Radical implications

The other side of the paradox which lies at the heart of the Revival is the prominence of African leadership and direction. The hesitant and anxious attitude towards the Revival of so many missionaries, including conservative evangelicals, was in part the product of their recognition that the movement had acquired its own impetus and had passed beyond their control. Missionaries who had for so long prayed for revival found, when it came, that Africans could after all live

'really changed lives', and the change was so radical as to turn on its head the relationship of spiritual superiority between missionary and African Christian which had hitherto been axiomatic. The paradox is resolved only when it is realized that the emphases deriving from the Keswick tradition themselves provided the key for Africans to seize the initiative in transforming a superficial brand of imported Christianity into an authentic African faith.

A theological tradition whose constant goal was holiness and victorious Christian living proved enormously attractive to African Christians who knew that beneath much of the appearance of so-called conversion lay an undiminished commitment to traditional beliefs and practices. Doctrinal teaching which came close to advocating the necessity of a 'second blessing' seemed to offer the answer to those dissatisfied with the results of conversion. But once they had been revived, the emphasis on a second blessing was in practice obliterated by the new distinction between those in the revival fellowship—the 'balokole' or 'saved ones'—and those outside. To be revived and to be saved became virtually synonymous. Writing in April 1937, Joe Church posed the question:

As one looks at these two or three hundred changed lives in Ruanda and Uganda what is one to say? Were they saved before, and were now just revived; or were they never really born again? Almost everyone of them would answer you himself that the latter was his experience. All seem to state unmistakably that they only had a nominal Christianity before.⁴⁰

The division into the 'balokole' and the rest, provided the African Christian with a universally applicable spiritual standard of radical implications. Polarization within the Church was inevitable. Geoffrey Holmes, writing from Gahini in April 1939, lamented the division of the station into two camps:

those who are in with the 'abaka' . . . and those who are not in with them. Actually here at Gahini most of the native Christians are in with this new group. There is no real fellowship between those who are in this group and those who are not. Those who are in it are continually seeking to convert those who are not to their way of thinking, and every means of persuasion and moral coercion are employed.⁴¹

Holmes had found himself on the wrong side of the fence. Geoffrey Holmes was a military man with an abrupt temper which the revived Africans were quick to censure.⁴² Missionaries were disconcerted to find that Africans did not regard them as exempt from the need for revival. As Simeoni Nsibambi once told Joe Church with disarming simplicity:

Do you know, Dr Joe, I can tell after I have shaken hands with a new missionary, whether he has got the real thing in his heart or not.⁴³

For the missionaries it was a humbling experience, and not all succeeded in coming to terms with it. In Joe Church's words:

We were beginning to see that we had come as missionaries to bring the light, but every now and again that light was turned round to shine on us.⁴⁴

Public confession

European holiness teaching thus proved to have democratic implications on the mission field. Accustomed to regard themselves as a spiritual aristocracy, many missionaries now found themselves excluded from the new spiritual aristocracy of the 'balokole'. Furthermore, the Keswick emphasis on sin and repentance was capable of development in a direction which was remarkably congruent with the needs of the East African Christian. Evangelical orthodoxy has tended to lay great stress on the fact of sin and the necessity of repentance, but has found it difficult to provide a theologically acceptable institutional means of releasing the psychological tension thus created. The crucial display of African initiative in the Revival came in the Gahini convention of December 1933, when the prayer meeting was spontaneously transformed into a session of public confession, quite independently of any missionary influence. Thereafter, meetings for public testimony and confession became one of the most marked and most controversial features of the Revival. Many missionaries believed that the practice encouraged fraudulent confessions of non-existent sins, and deplored the making public of intimate personal details in testimony meetings. Most alarming of all was the use of public confession to implicate others. One of the revival leaders at Gahini, Ezra Kikonyogo, was in 1936 implicated by the confession of another and, although he repented publicly of the sin which had been exposed, he had to leave the station.⁴⁵ In April 1942 the Bishop of Uganda, Cyril Stuart, issued new rules of procedure in an attempt to regularize and control the practice of public confession, specifying:

- 1 No accusation against clergy or Church workers will normally even be considered unless brought by communicant members of the Anglican Church.
- 2 Public confession of shameful sins is not allowed.⁴⁶

This feature of the Revival has, understandably, attracted the attention of the Africanists. D. J. Stenning, in a study of the impact of the Revival amongst the Bahima of North-Eastern Ankole, argued that the use of public confession as an institutional means of initiation into the Revival fellowship was a reflection of traditional religious practice.⁴⁷ In traditional Bahima religion, the tutelary spirits were worshipped by local cult groups, entry into which was effected by an initiation ceremony where the initiate had to confess alleged infringements of sexual prohibitions. The initiate went through a ritual of being killed and being brought back to life before being accepted into the cult group. The parallelism in the Bahima case between Revival usage and traditional practice is certainly interesting, but it is far from proven that the prevalence of public confession in the Revival throughout East Africa can be explained in terms of the role of ritual confession in traditional religious practice. Missionary testimony is to

the effect that in Rwanda, if not elsewhere, public confession was wholly unnatural to the African mind. Jim Brazier, for example, writing from Kigeme in December 1936, commented:

The heathen are disturbed by this new 'witchcraft', as they call it, which makes people do what no self-respecting African does—to confess sins no one knew about!⁴⁸

The parallels which public confession and the physical phenomena associated with the Revival suggested to the pagan African were not with traditional religion but with witchcraft.⁴⁹

A more sophisticated interpretation of the social significance of public confession in the Revival is provided by F. B. Welbourn.⁵⁰ Drawing a distinction between, on the one hand, guilt-feelings 'as arising from knowledge of a prohibition touched or transgressed' and, on the other hand, shame-feelings as 'response to a goal not reached', he argues that traditional societies have no concept of subjective guilt and conceive of evil purely in terms of shame, of the failure of the individual to fulfil the role demanded of him by his position in society. A moral and subjective concept of guilt was the creation of the Puritan ethic in the Protestant West. Its emergence reflected 'the transition from a "tradition-directed" society motivated by shame, to an "inner-directed" society motivated by guilt.'⁵¹ The 'inner-directed' men of British imperial expansion were confronted by a traditional society in East Africa whose psychological roots they were incapable of understanding. Missionaries lamented the lack of a sense of guilt among the Baganda, not fully realizing that most Baganda had become Christians in response to shame, in other words to indirect social pressure, and not to claim salvation from guilt. However, in order to advance themselves within the dominant inner-directed culture of the colonial power, the Baganda needed to adopt the modes of thought of a 'guilt-culture', and the Revival, so Welbourn argues, provided the ideal vehicle. In publicly confessing his sins, the African was repudiating the shame values of traditional society and identifying himself with the guilt-oriented culture of the West.

Welbourn's argument has major implications for missiology which cannot be dealt with here, and I suspect that not a few anthropologists would question the validity of his premises. Whilst I would resist any claim that the Revival can be explained in terms of African aspirations to appropriate the full goodies of colonial rule, I would suggest that public confession was an important means whereby the African Christian declared his severance from traditional society and his open commitment to the new society of the Revival fellowship. Keswick teaching on sin and repentance, when developed into an overt and institutionalized form in the practice of public confession, offered a spiritual release powerful enough to enable the African to make a clean break with pagan society.

True community

Evangelical Christianity in a missionary context has often faced the problem that while demanding of the individual a radical separation from his traditional society, it has offered him in return only a pale and diluted form of Christian community. In the East African context, however, the emphasis of the Keswick tradition on fellowship more than compensated for this tendency of evangelicalism to undervalue the corporate nature of the church. The Revival demanded an open repudiation of the pagan substratum which underlay so-called Christian society, but it also offered the prospect of incorporation into a fellowship group which fulfilled all the social functions of traditional kinship groups, and more besides. In many areas, the 'balokole' moved out of their pagan settlements to form close-knit Christian communities under the authority of a recognized spiritual leader.⁵² Within the fellowship group, clan and even tribal distinctions paled before the fundamental unity of the saved. In Rwanda itself, the strength of the Revival fellowship has been demonstrated by its ability to draw together Christians from the two bitterly opposed ethnic groups: the Tutsi, the traditional aristocratic minority from which most of the early converts were drawn; and the Hutu, their former serfs. In the Kigezi district of Uganda, this aspect of the Revival was noted by Joe Church as early as December 1936:

Fellowship is becoming one of the marked results of the blessing that we have had. Tribal distinctions are being swept away. Kabale is a different language area to Gahini. The Bakiga were once the sworn enemies of the tall Batutsi . . . but it seems that under the hand of God, that barrier has absolutely vanished.⁵³

The Revival also made possible fellowship between missionaries and Africans on equal terms, a new working relationship which Joe Church describes as 'the greatest fruit of the Revival'.⁵⁴ Some missionaries, however, were not prepared to accept the racial implications of fellowship on equal terms with the Africans. Among the American missionaries of the Africa Inland Mission the fear was expressed that the eventual result would be mixed marriages.⁵⁵ For the African Christian, on the other hand, the old Keswick motto of 'All One in Christ Jesus' found practical application in a fellowship which, in Max Warren's words, was 'an effective demonstration of the power of God to establish right human relationships.'⁵⁶ One biblical text more than any other was central to the Revival:

. . . if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.⁵⁷

The forms of worship associated with the Keswick tradition also proved eminently suitable for development by African initiative until they became thoroughly indigenized. The hymns of the Keswick repertoire, many of them products of the 1859 revivals in Britain or of Moody and Sankey's campaigns, captured the theme of the blood of

Jesus in simple, repetitive verse. The 'balokole' simply reinforced the element of repetition and syncopated the tunes. For example, the hymn 'My hope is built on nothing less/Than Jesus' blood and righteousness',⁵⁸ originally sung at Gahini in the 3/4 time of William Bradbury's tune, was from July 1936

sometimes sung nearly all night, more and more syncopated until the Africanized six/eight time completely took the place of the original time.⁵⁹

As the melodies became syncopated, drums were introduced into church services, and bodies began to sway to the music.⁶⁰

It is possible also that the typological exegesis of the Scofield Bible proved peculiarly appropriate in the East African context. The recurrent theme of cleansing through the shedding of blood, emphasized by Scofield's chain-reference on the topic of sacrifice, must have made a ready appeal to a society long accustomed to various forms of ritual cleansing through blood sacrifice. The Revival brethren in Nyanza, Kenya, were known as the 'Joremo': 'the people of the blood'.⁶¹ The treatment of the Exodus account of Israel's redemption from Egyptian slavery as a type of Christian salvation must have rung true to peoples for some of whom enslavement at the hands of neighbouring states was a comparatively recent memory. The East African slave trade had reached its peak as late as 1873, and had continued well after that date; Buganda and Bunyoro had been among the sources of supply for one of its main routes.⁶² Just as Scofield encouraged his Bible readers to visualize Christian experience in terms of pictures drawn from Old Testament history, so Joe Church's method of Bible teaching made extensive use of simple visual images of the process of surrender to Christ, presented by means of pin-man drawings on a blackboard. Such pictorial theology seems to have been ideally geared to the African way of thinking.

One final aspect of the 'European tradition' which again underwent further development by African initiative remains to be considered. The Ruanda missionaries were extreme low churchmen, with very little sympathy for any form of clericalism. In commencing work in Rwanda they were encroaching on Roman Catholic territory, and the continual awareness of the 'game of chess'⁶³ which they were carrying on with the Catholics influenced the Evangelicals to emphasize their distinctiveness by giving their innate anti-clerical tendencies freer rein than they might have been prepared to do in an English context. An important aspect of the process of 'disengagement' described by John Taylor, whereby the Ugandan Church had lost effective contact with the grass roots, had been the concentration of power in the hands of the clergy and a corresponding exclusion of the laity from responsibility.⁶⁴ The Revival, as Max Warren first pointed out,⁶⁵ was a re-assertion of the role of the laity within the church. The single spiritual standard of the 'balokole' enabled the humble layman to place himself on a superior level to members of the clergy whom he

regarded as unsaved, and in the revival teams laymen could preach on completely equal terms with clergy. Once again, however, this assertion of African initiative was no more than an extension of tendencies central to the missionary tradition itself. Within the Ruanda Mission the controversy between lay initiative and clerical authority first came to a head at a missionaries' convention held on Lake Bunyoni in September 1933. The enthusiasm of the lay missionaries for lay teams came into conflict with the desire of the chairman of the Mission Council, the Rev. St John Thorpe, to encourage the rapid diocesanization of the church. Thorpe therefore pressed, recalls Joe Church, 'for the rapid training and ordaining of African clergy (the very thing we feared)'.⁶⁶ That fear sprang, not from any aversion to the principle of giving Africans responsibility, but from a reluctance to allow the same educated priestly caste to emerge in Rwanda as had been created in Uganda.

Surviving a crisis

As the Revival proceeded, the conflict between laity and clergy tended to align itself with the division within the CMS between conservative and liberal evangelicals. The conservatives of the Ruanda Mission, closely identified with the Revival, were opposed by the more liberal missionaries of the CMS in Uganda, who were increasingly anxious about the threat posed by the Revival to ecclesiastical order and discipline. In April 1941 Harold Guillebaud, the Archdeacon of Ruanda, died scarcely more than a year after the death of his predecessor.⁶⁷ Joe Church, Lawrence Barham, and Godfrey Hindley began to wonder whether the sudden removal of two archdeacons was not a providential indication that the Ruanda Mission ought to hold more loosely to the traditional Anglican ecclesiastical system. A few days after Guillebaud's death, Lawrence Barham addressed a letter to the two others which summed up the tension between the impetus of the Revival and the constraints of the existing ecclesiastical structure:

I feel we do see that there is something wrong. . . . There is deeply ingrained in the rank and file of the church here a clerical pedestal which comes partly from Uganda, and partly from the system. . . . I said that . . . God had given us another tragic warning, that we were on the wrong path. . . . I said I believed that we were not meant to leave the C of E . . . but that God is calling us to run the mission on Fellowship lines, of a team of brothers, with Christ as the 'Mukuru' (leader), fully surrendered, to be guided by God, within the framework of the C of E. . . . I believe this to be the cross-roads for us at the moment, because it is the critical point between Totalitarianism and Democracy in the Ruanda Church—'Bukuru' (i.e. Autocracy) v. Fellowship.⁶⁸

In the event, the potentially radical implications of such thinking were never realized. Lawrence Barham went on to become a bishop. Yet Joe Church, commenting on that letter from the perspective of 1971, could still write:

I must add that we have never lost that vision, but we have modified our way of attaining it. We feel now that everything depends on keeping the Fellowship really alive and burning within the visible church set-up, and then in time 'new life' will change things irresistibly.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, the challenge the Revival posed to ecclesiastical authority precipitated a situation which by 1 December 1941 Bishop Stuart could describe as 'the greatest crisis in the history of the Church of Uganda.'⁷⁰ Relations between the Revival leaders and the Bishop were extremely tense over the next three years; yet the church survived the crisis, and the Revival remained within the Anglican communion. The independent action of lay African leaders impatient with the constraints of church order and authority constituted the primary source of the danger of schism, yet it is clear that their action represented little more than the practical application of the thinking of the missionaries most involved in the Revival. If schism had taken place, its course would surely have demonstrated a much greater affinity to the Methodist secession from the Church of England in the eighteenth century than to the majority of the 'independent' secessions from mission churches which have occurred in twentieth-century Africa. The missionary leaders of the Revival interpreted the issues at stake during the crisis in terms of European ecclesiastical and theological categories. For them, the issues were fundamentally no different from those which had confronted them in their student days at Cambridge; when they had given their exclusive loyalty to the CICC, and Cyril Stuart and those like him had been closer in sympathy to the SCM (Student Christian Movement).⁷¹ The congruence between European tradition and African initiative which has been the theme of this article is perhaps summed up by the observation that the mission which had insisted, despite doctrinal differences, on remaining within the CMS should give birth to an African spiritual awakening which refused, despite the tensions it created in the ecclesiastical structure, to countenance the possibility of schism.

There were moments in the course of the Revival when the flood of African spiritual life did threaten to carve out wholly new channels beyond the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. The instance which attracted the most adverse publicity was the conclusion of a handful of revivalists in Kampala in November 1939 'that some exposure of the body was a sign of victory over temptation.'⁷² Yet even that excess could be said to be in the best, or rather the worst, tradition of European perfectionism. The East African Revival conforms in all essential respects to an European religious model. Yet it was the means of Africans expressing their dissatisfaction with a missionary religion which left them stranded half-way between pagan and Christian society. They expressed their dissatisfaction by seizing the initiative in a movement which fundamentally challenged missionary

superiority. Both sides of the paradox could be true at once only because of the remarkable congruence between the characteristic features of the European model and the spiritual needs of the East African Church at this point in its history. To the Christian mind the congruence is providential rather than accidental. Without the Revival, the Church in Kenya could scarcely have had the strength to survive Mau-Mau, and the Church in Uganda would not today be standing up to President Amin.

Brian Stanley is engaged on a PhD at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, concerning the home base of the early Victorian missionary movement.

NOTES

- 1 The first draft of this article was presented to a meeting of the Historians' Study Group of the UCCF Associates on 26 March 1977. I owe an especial debt to Dr Joe Church, who kindly gave me free access to his autobiographical account of the Revival and answered many of my questions. The responsibility for the interpretation of the Revival advanced in this article is, of course, entirely my own.
- 2 This paragraph is based on D. A. Low, *Buganda in Modern History* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson : London 1971) pp 13-52.
- 3 J. V. Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda* (SCM Press : London 1958) pp 96-7.
- 4 Patricia St John, *Breath of Life: The Story of the Ruanda Mission* (Norfolk Press : London 1971) p 23.
- 5 *Ibid.* pp 54-5.
- 6 *Ibid.* p 95ff.
- 7 *Ibid.* p 61.
- 8 Mabel Ensor subsequently set up her own church. See F. B. Welbourn, *East African Rebels* (SCM Press : London 1961) pp 59-76.
- 9 *Quest for the Highest or An autobiographical account of the East African Revival Movement* (unpublished typescript in possession of Dr J. E. Church) pp 54-5.
- 10 *Ibid.* p 57.
- 11 *Ibid.* p 66; and *Ruanda Notes* No.36 pp 18 and 21.
- 12 *Breath of Life* pp 71-2.
- 13 *Ruanda Notes* No.36 p 21.
- 14 *Ibid.* No.40 pp 18-19.
- 15 *Ibid.* No.48 p 20.
- 16 *Ibid.* No.49 pp 13-14.
- 17 *Quest for the Highest* pp 103-6.
- 18 *Ruanda Notes* No.55 pp 35-7.
- 19 *Breath of Life* pp 114-5.
- 20 *Quest for the Highest* pp 120, 125-6.
- 21 *Ibid.* p 130.
- 22 Max Warren, *Revival. An Enquiry* (SCM Press : London 1954) p 45.
- 23 *Quest for the Highest* pp 135-9.
- 24 *Ibid.* pp 142-3.
- 25 See in particular:
F. B. Welbourn. *East African Rebels* (London 1961).
F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home* (OUP : London 1966).
D. B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (OUP : Nairobi 1968).

CHURCHMAN

- 67 Arthur Pitt-Pitts had died on 22 March 1940.
- 68 *Quest for the Highest* p 183.
- 69 *Ibid.* p 183.
- 70 *Ibid.* p 190.
- 71 This point is well illustrated by a letter from Joe Church to Bishop Stuart, written at the height of the crisis in 1942, in which he promised the Bishop that he would never be party to any schismatic movement in the Church of Uganda, but went on to point out that the Ruanda Mission 'found it very difficult to be one with him in his insistence on trying to get the SCM and the CICCUC together on the same platform, as the message of Revival needs a very special call of God, based on the evangelical emphasis.' (*Quest for the Highest*, p 197.) Cyril Stuart was an undergraduate at Cambridge several years ahead of Joe Church and his contemporaries, but from 1921 to 1925 he was chaplain and lecturer at Ridley Hall, by now representative of the liberal evangelicalism which characterized the SCM (see Barclay, *op. cit.* pp 79-82.)
- 72 *Quest for the Highest* p 179.