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## THE EAST AFRICAN REVIVAL

Richard Gehman

The East African Revival which began in Rwanda in the late 1920's is one of the truly remarkable movements of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Church. In terms of duration the East African Revival continues to this day, more than fifty years after the Lord first broke through at Gahini, Rwanda. In terms of changed lives, the Revival Brethren have a reputation of high moral character to whom great responsibility may be entrusted by secular employers. Denominations which were marked by nominal Christianity and works of the flesh among the laity and the absence of conversion among many clergy were profoundly affected. When the Christian churches were tested by the trials of Mau Mau, the Revival Movement caused the church to survive among the Gikuyu. While many others left the local congregations, the Brethren of the Revival Movement gladly suffered and died for their faith, ever remaining true to the Lord. Welbourn acknowledges that the Revival Movement is one of the most vital Christian movements in East Africa today.<sup>1</sup> This Great Awakening in East Africa is the subject of this article.

### The Historical Context

The Christian Church of Uganda is rooted in the 19th Century Great Awakening in Britain. The Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Church was evangelical in foundation. The first party of eight missionaries sent by the CMS in 1877 to Uganda included Alexander Mackay, a convert in the 1860 English Revival. The Rwanda General and Medical Mission working as an arm of the CMS in Rwanda, received its main support from Keswick Anglicans. Thus the roots of the Anglican Denomination in Uganda and Rwanda where the East African Revival burst forth and among whom it had the greatest impact were found in the evangelical movement in Great Britain.

Uganda proved to be "a field ripe unto harvest." Political stability, the special position of the Buganda the identification of Christianity with education, the social responsiveness and other features combined to make church growth in Uganda remarkable. Buganda evangelists and catechists were greatly used in spreading the faith. When Kabaka Mwanga became king of Buganda, he launched a vicious attack on all Christians. The remarkable faith of many African martyrs inspired further church growth after Mwanga was removed. Yet Gordon Hewitt rightly comments, "The immensely rapid response of Uganda to the proclamation of the Christian gospel remains a mystery."<sup>2</sup>

Toward the end of the 19th Century leanness came to the Christian churches. Through the ministry of George Pilkington a great revival spread among professing believers. This revived the flagging zeal, set missionaries and nationals on fire and led

to new missionary impetus. By 1894 the Uganda Church Council sent 13 Buganda missionaries to Lake Victoria. Monthly missionary meetings were conducted. On 85 stations 260 evangelists were at work preaching the Gospel.

By 1909 the Anglican Church in Uganda had "over 100,000 adherents including 70,000 baptized converts, and not only the whole Bible translated and circulated by tens of thousands but an extensive religious literature."<sup>3</sup> However, spiritual conditions began to deteriorate by the turn of the century. This occurred in the midst of continued numerical growth when 7,000 people were being baptized yearly. Many factors contributed to this backsliding.

Social upheavals made life difficult for the people. Uganda was revolutionized. The Uganda Railroad reached Kisumu, Kenya, by 1901 with Steamer service linking Kenya with Uganda. A cash economy was substituted for the traditional bartering system. The British levied a Hut Tax which forced people to work. Sleeping sickness struck Uganda in 1901, depopulating villages and islands. The population on the island of Kome where Pilkington had received spiritual blessing in 1893 was reduced from 10,000 to 500.

Ecclesiastical problems also arose. Christians had gone out to preach the gospel as evangelists whether paid or not. As money hunger gripped Ugandans, the Evangelists expected more salary. Friction developed between the clergy and the laity, with the Catechists going on strike in 1905 protesting the prerogatives of the clerics. Disagreement developed among the missionaries over the appointment of Wallis as Bishop.

A gradual change occurred in the theological perspective of many in the CMS. The favourite verse preached in the pulpit was Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." As Katarikawe observes, "No matter how one lived so long as he was baptized, was a ticket to heaven. This was the kind of gospel they often heard from the pulpits."<sup>4</sup> Thus salvation was through baptism. Because of loss of faith in the CMS back home due to theological controversy and also due to economic hardship following World War I, the contributions decreased considerably. In 1922 the CMS budget was reduced 25% and missionaries allowance reduced by 10-20%. A further reduction occurred in 1927, a "deadly blow". Consequently, the CMS personnel was gradually reduced while the Roman Catholics was increased. This led the secretary of the mission to lament that "Uganda bids to become the fairest jewel in the Papal crown."<sup>5</sup>

Because the missionaries refused to approve a constitution for the Diocese of Uganda in which missionaries would be a part of that church, missionaries tended to move upward in administrative positions while Africans assumed the pastoral and evangelistic positions in the church. Thus the 1920's "saw the withdrawal of nearly all the missionaries from any commitment to the life and struggles of the Buganda Church in its pastoral and evangelistic aspects."<sup>6</sup> All the African pastors and evangelists were first generation Christians with limited training. Due to this tragic lack of involvement in the spiritual ministry of the church, the CMS consigned the spiritual progress to those who lacked the depth needed for sustained spiritual growth.

However one might interpret the reasons for this spiritual relapse, the results are indisputable. "The worldliness of the Church has been a recurrent theme of missionary reports in the 1920's and the early 1930's."<sup>7</sup> A. B. Lloyd wrote in 1921 of "'Clouds in the Sky' overshadowing the early sunlight of the Uganda Church...drunkenness, immorality, concubinage, continuing belief in witchcraft and in the power of the Spirits of the dead."<sup>8</sup> What was needed so desperately was an outpouring of the Spirit of God. The dead bones of an external ecclesiastical organization needed the breath of divine life.

### **The Beginnings of the Revival**

James Katarikawe finds the spiritual roots of the East Africa Revival in the days of George Pilkington in the last decade of the 19th century. There were many parallels. After initial growth of momentous proportions, the life of the Christians, both missionary and African, began to deteriorate. A new missionary, Rev. George Baskerville, wrote home that "I am hoping that another year will see great spiritual advances in the church here. It sadly needs cleansing, especially with regard to drunkenness and immorality; many of our people get drunk at times, and many make a regular practice of it each evening....There is another thing, too, which is not as it should be, and that is that no one seems to KNOW that they are saved; they hope so; they do not seem ever to have realized that it is possible to know."<sup>9</sup>

George Pilkington himself, felt empty and disillusioned. He knew something was wrong with his life. When he took a holiday he read a revival tract by a Tamil evangelist from Colombo. Through this he saw his own need and surrendered his heart to God. Upon returning home he arranged to hold a Mission. They started with the hymn, "Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?", a hymn which remains popular among the Brethren to this day. A great revival broke out with hundreds of men and women praying for forgiveness. This Revival transformed lives and reconciled people to one another. A testimony of the deep change in the people's lives is indicated by a proverb used today. "In the days of Pilkington, the brethren loved one another so much that one banana could be shared by four people."<sup>10</sup>

In the 1920's and 1930's the same spiritual declension prevailed. But God had chosen His servants, Dr. Stanley Smith and Dr. Leonard Sharp. They were both graduates of Cambridge where they had become fast friends. Together they received a burden for East Africa, especially the unreached tribes. Both desired to go to Rwanda and Burundi. When the Belgium government, which had a mandate over the territory, refused their entrance, independently and providentially they were both sent to a relatively unevangelized tribe in Kigezi in southwest Uganda. For reasons discussed later, this turn of events had far reaching effects in the spread of the Revival Movement.

Statistically, there was notable success. In ten years, from 1921-1930, 300 churches were planted. Yet they sensed the need for revival. Drinking, immorality, and witchcraft continued to be a snare to Christians, even the evangelists and church

leaders. Christianity seemed superficial. Deeply concerned about the spiritual life of the Anglican Church, Dr. Smith and Dr. Sharp spent much time in prayer that God would send the Holy Spirit. Jack Warren, another missionary requested that a week of prayer and humiliation before God be held in England and Uganda for the spiritual needs of the people. God blessed with a people movement with hundreds being saved and the churches filled with communicants.

In 1922 a strip of Rwanda was handed over to Britain which dreamed of building a continent-wide railroad through that part of Africa. Immediately, this part of Uganda was opened up to the CMS. Because of the burden and vision given to Stanley Smith, he immediately entered as a pioneer. Calling for recruits, evangelists and schoolmasters from Kigezi volunteered to help in this missionary outreach. Eight centers were established. Within two years this strip of Rwanda was returned to Belgium but the CMS remained. God had planted in Kigezi adjacent to Rwanda an African church with missionaries on fire for the Lord and ready to enter the door of Rwanda when opened.

A word should be said about the nature of the Rwanda Mission. The Anglican Church was troubled with controversies over theological liberalism. The Church Missionary Society which began as the missionary arm of the evangelicals in the Church of England became infiltrated with liberals. But the CMS missionaries in Rwanda and Kigezi were firmly committed to the evangelical faith. After much discussion the CMS agreed to form "The Rwanda Council" in 1927. This council would be self-selective from the start. "The intention was that it should be 'composed of members of CMS in whole-hearted sympathy with the Protestant and Evangelical principles of the society.'"<sup>11</sup> Thus all missionaries were ardently loyal to the Bible and put their whole trust in it. They believed they could be successful only if they remained true evangelicals.

Three principles were established in the Constitution of The Rwanda Council Medical Mission:

- 1) The Rwanda Council and the missionaries of the Rwanda General Medical Mission stand for the complete inspiration of the whole Bible as being, and not only containing, the Word of God.
- 2) Their determination is to proclaim full and free salvation through simple faith in Christ's atoning death upon the Cross.
- 3) They are satisfied that they have received from the CMS full guarantee to safeguard the future of the Rwanda General Medical Mission on Bible, Protestant and Keswick lines."<sup>12</sup>

The financial difficulties of the CMS at this time in contrast to the financial self-support of the Rwanda Mission seems significant. The Rwanda Mission had been largely self-supporting from the start. In 1928 it became fully self-supporting. In contrast the CMS was cutting their budget by 25%. This no doubt reflects the large disaffection of Anglican evangelicals who became reluctant in supporting the CMS. But those significantly touched by the Keswick conventions of England and their teaching on holiness backed the Rwanda Mission.

This theological and ecclesiastical difference between the Rwanda Mission and the CMS may explain in part the cleavage over the Revival Movement. The CMS missionaries in Uganda blamed the Rwanda Mission for the excesses of the Revival movement. The Uganda Church initially rejected the Revival. Since Kigezi was also placed under the Rwanda Mission, the Revival was able to penetrate into Uganda. From Kigezi the Africans spread the revival to other parts of the Anglican Church in Uganda. Had Dr. Stanley Smith not first planted a church in Kigezi, and had there not been a close link between the churches of Rwanda and South-West Uganda, the Revival might have been contained in one country.

In 1927 a new missionary recruit for Rwanda, Dr. J. E. Church, arrived in Uganda. He was confronted with an outspoken Irish nurse, Mabel Ensor, who had just resigned from the CMS. She lamented over the cleavage of the CMS in London between the conservatives and the liberals. In an unpublished letter Dr. Church commented on her conversation with him. "She continued to pour out to me the woes of the backslidden Uganda Church, saying how the crowds of people flock up that hill to communion on Sunday, who have no idea of what they are doing, and of the numbers of baptized Christians who are going to polygamy and witchcraft, and to worship with evil spirits. Christianity had just become a veneer to cover it all up, and that in many cases the only difference between pagans and Christians was that pagans sin openly and Christians hide it."<sup>13</sup> Dr. Church had been active at Cambridge University in the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union. He had also been greatly affected by the message of the Keswick Convention which he attended every year. Two characteristics of Keswick which became prominent in the East African Revival were the prominence given to testimonies, and the emphasis on "commitment" called by some at Keswick as "the second conversion".

When Dr. Church reached Uganda he was confronted with a terrible famine which brought much suffering and calamity. He became depressed with the poverty, hunger and dying. Overworked, overwhelmed and exhausted, he felt a need for more love in his ministry. In 1929 Dr. Church went to Kampala for a rest. For some time he had been praying that God would lead him to some African with whom he could share and pray. When worshipping at the Kampala Cathedral, Joe Church spotted Simeoni Nsibambi. Simeoni said, "I heard you speak at a Bible class here, in March, about surrendering all to Jesus. I have done so and have found great joy in the Lord, but I have wanted to see you ever since. There is something missing in me and in the Uganda Church; what is it?"<sup>14</sup> So the two banded together for prayer. For two days they studied their Bibles and prayed for the fullness of the Spirit. Dr. Church wrote later what happened. "I have often referred to this time in my preaching in later years, as the time that God in His sovereign grace met with me and brought me to the end of myself and thought fit to give me a share of the Power of Pentecost. There was nothing spectacular, nothing ecstatic; it is easy to become proud if one has received a special gift, the only special gift is the experience of the Transforming Vision of the Risen Jesus Himself."<sup>15</sup>

After this Simeoni Nsibambi left his job and became a full-time evangelist. He spoke to everyone. He sold his motor bike and stopped wearing shoes. Many criticized Dr. Church for his influence on Simeoni, thinking that Simeoni had gone mad. One missionary angrily complained to the Church, "He's gone mad and is going everywhere asking people if they are saved." This missionary advised Simeoni to leave the Africans alone because they are not ready for this teaching on sanctification and the Holy Spirit. In spite of criticism and ridicule, Simeoni continued evangelizing, praying and holding Bible studies. In 1930 on 2nd May in the Synod Hall, Kampala, the first Friday prayer meeting was held. It was organized by Simeoni. At that meeting 35 converts of Simeoni were gathered.

When Dr. Church returned to Gahini in Rwanda, the Holy Spirit was poured out in a new way. A junior Tutsi Chief who came to the hospital for medical treatment was saved. Another Tutsi in the same ward was converted through the testimony of the Junior Tutsi Chief. Chief Karekezi, skilled in witchcraft, was led to the Lord by Dr. Church as they knelt on the grass by the path. As the Spirit of God moved there were those in the Hospital who resisted. In January 1931 a decisive conference was held in Kampala. Joe Church, Blasio Kigozi, Yosiya Kinuka and Simeoni Nsibambi participated. During the meetings Kinuka repented for having caused so much trouble at the hospital. He returned to Gahini, repented publicly and returned stolen items. His testimony brought a drastic change to all the hospital staff at Gahini.

As the Holy Spirit began to work in many people's hearts, there was deep conviction of sin. Many spent sleepless nights as they began to realize for the first time their spiritual destitution; many hidden sins were repented of and hypocrisies revealed and stolen goods returned ranging from money, hoes and even razor blades.<sup>16</sup>

Thus the need for revival and the revival flames continued simultaneously. In October 1933 the first Rwanda Missionaries' convention was held near Kabale. The need for reconciliation between the clergy and the laity became evident. The sin of prayerlessness also came to the fore. As a result the missionaries agreed to meet daily for prayer on each mission station and to set aside four days a year when all missionaries would come together for prayer. At Gahini the hospital staff and evangelists arose at 5:00 a.m. for prayer. Great expectancy ensued.

The Hospital staff decided to arrange for a convention around Christmas in 1933 lasting five days. This included teaching on sin, the holiness of God, the new birth, repentance, faith, prayer, the Holy Spirit, sanctification, the christian walk, and the second coming. By the fifth day no spiritual change had yet occurred. During the last prayer meeting scheduled at 3:00 p.m. one of the African Christians stood and confessed his sins. This broke the barrier and the Spirit came in full force. For over two hours men were confessing their sins, moved with extreme joy and happiness. As a result of this forty

Africans volunteered to carry the Gospel to their fellow countrymen.

Those who stayed continued to grow in the joy of the Lord. Deeper oneness and fellowship began to grow among the Africans and Missionary brethren. The missionaries also began to overcome their reserve towards one another. Jesus and salvation was the main topic of every conversation. Joe Church wrote of people beginning to sit in twos and threes under trees. Some went off to their homes and friends to testify about their new found joy in the Lord. It was challenging to most.<sup>17</sup>

The flames of this revival spread from Rwanda to South-West Uganda in Kegezi and Ankole. The reasons are self-evident: Proximity to Rwanda, the affinity of their languages and the common interest of the missionaries on each side of the border, both being under the Rwanda Mission. Upon invitation by letter Dr. Church together with a team of ten Africans including Blasio Kigozi and Simeon Nsibambi conduct a mission. During the eight days Bible reading was held on these subjects: sin, repentance, the new birth, separation or "Coming out of Egypt," the Holy Spirit and the victorious life.

Following this Mission the participants dispersed to their villages witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Revival spread and unbelievers were saved. Lawrence Barham wrote, "Confession of sin, restitution, apologies followed; many had dreams, sometimes receiving strong impressions to read certain verses of the Bible, which led them to put away some sin, beer drinking for example. Preaching bands have gone out all through the district, and very many are stirred..."<sup>18</sup>

When did the East African Revival begin? The official date given by many is June 1936 in Uganda. If that is the case, it is apparent from the foregoing that the Revival had its beginnings in Rwanda during the prior years. Beginning slowly, touching the lives of some, the Spirit of God was increasingly poured out upon His people. Gordon Hewitt affirms, "It would be unwise to consider one individual person or place as the origin of that revival which swept all East African churches from 1930 and on; nevertheless, anywhere the study of the East African Revival will be taught, Gahini will be undoubtedly seen as the origin of the East Africa Revival."<sup>18</sup>

Even in its earliest stages the traits and characteristics of the East African Revival were already evident. A burden for prayer was evidenced by the many prayer meetings started including the one begun in Kampala which has continued until this day. Reconciliation occurred between those estranged, missionaries and Africans alike. In the CMS where the clergy are accustomed to govern, the Rwanda Mission presented a peculiar situation with medical doctors being the pioneers and early leaders. During the first Rwanda Missionaries' Conference this problem was dealt with and a team relationship developed on all stations. Throughout the East African Revival as it came to be known later the evangelistic efforts were always carried out by teams. Dr. Church insisted that Africans accompany him. As



evangelism was carried on through visitation there were always teams. The doctrinal emphasis continued much the same with its roots in the Keswick Convention in England and the Evangelical Awakening. The "blood" was a prominent theme in their hymns. Thus we can see that there was indeed much preparation which led to the East African Revival Movement as it is known today.

### **The Diamond Jubilee of the Church of Uganda in 1936-37**

We have seen that the fires of revival were burning well before the year 1936, the date often given as the beginning of the Revival. This fact is important as we try to understand what happened in 1936. However, the historic occasion when Revival "broke the surface" in Uganda was the Diamond Jubilee of the founding of the Anglican Church in Uganda. In the same year prior to the Jubilee Celebrations, Bishop Stuart planned a Mission for Bishop Tucker Theological College at Mukono. Joe Church, Simeon Msibambi and Lawrence Barham were invited. Throughout the world many were praying for Uganda as a result of the publication of Joe Church's tract, "Call to Prayer."

On Monday 22nd June, mission began. The whole college gathered in the big hall and the tutors appeared in their academic gowns as they sat on the platform. 'The atmosphere was tense,' said Joe Church. 'But very soon as we went on expounding verse after verse conviction came and it became easy to speak.' As they progressively spoke about sin, repentance, the new birth, separation, the victorious life, the Holy Spirit, one by one they were convicted and kept on coming forward to declare their decision for Christ. They numbered about forty in all. They had really moving times; at a praise meeting on Sunday night one Muganda knelt down as he wept and then summed it all in a few words: 'Oh, Jesus, You are a wonderful Saviour, Amen.'<sup>20</sup>

The result was the conversion of forty students. "God had hit the centre of the Church of Uganda." After graduation the students spread throughout Uganda and helped to spread the Revival.

During the Mission held at Mukono revival swept through the churches at Kigezi, Rwanda and Burundi. At Gahini during the week of prayer for the Mukono Mission, people were gripped spiritually and a meeting of evangelists and teachers was called to look into the best way of guiding the movement. Revival broke out spontaneously in the whole Church of Rwanda, Burundi and Kigezi, not just a few bush churches or mission stations.

Bishop Stuart of the Church of Uganda was convinced that revival was the only answer for the spiritual problems in the Anglican Church. He felt that the Diamond Jubilee was an excellent opportunity to seek revival. Therefore, he arranged for several Missions to be conducted. Preparations began as far back as 1934. A common text used in sermons during these years of preparation was Joel 2:25 "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." This was a reflection on the locust plague in Uganda with spiritual symbolism. The longing on the

part of many was the recalling of the Church to its primary evangelistic task. Much prayer was made across the seas due to the tract on prayer written by Dr. Church.

At the Synod which met on January 22, 1936, the subject of concern was the necessity of the new birth. "It is very necessary for all members of the Church and especially church workers to know in their lives the meaning of being 'born again'. Because it is not possible to change others until we are changed ourselves. All Christians are asked to examine themselves."<sup>21</sup> In light of this concern questions were drawn up which the Christians were to use for their self-examination:

- 1) Do you know salvation through the Cross of Christ?
- 2) Are you growing in the power of the Holy Spirit, in prayer, meditation and the knowledge of God?
- 3) Is there a great desire to spread the Kingdom of God by example, and by preaching and teaching?
- 4) Are you bringing others to Christ by individual searching, by visiting, and by public witness?"<sup>22</sup>

Several missionaries were asked to conduct Missions. In addition, there was witnessing by individuals as well as by teams of the Brethren visiting and witnessing. The result was an upsurge in spiritual life within the Church of Uganda.

The Revival Teams conducted missions in Kako, Hoima and elsewhere. The pattern was the same as that followed in Kabale. Conviction of sin fell upon those who heard, confession was made, followed by great joy and witnessing. An example of the power of changed life and boldness to witness is seen in Ananias, a young convert walking to Mbarara. He heard a voice telling him to pray at the top of the hill where he would be told what to do. In obedience he went. There the voice told him to speak to the King of Ankole and tell him to repent and lead his people to God. When Ananias told his desire to Sabiti in the market, Ananias was warned that he might be put into prison, but he replied that he was willing to die if need be. Ananias approached the guards who ushered him into the King's bedroom where the king was still in bed. "I have a message for you from God," said Ananias. The King told him to continue. "You must repent, the Spirit tells me to tell you. You must turn from sin, and lead the people of Ankole back to God." The King was so impressed that he asked the lad to write down the message. God was truly at work.<sup>23</sup>

The Revival neither began in Uganda in 1936-37 nor did it stop there. Through the Revival teams and the Brethren preaching from place to place, the Revival message and work spread to Kenya, Tanzania, southern Sudan, and Congo. Dr. Church was even invited to England accompanied by African Balokole ("saved ones") to preach the Gospel. Neither was the Revival restricted to the Church of Uganda, but it spread across denominational boundaries. Though the Roman Catholic Church resisted, the report is that the Revival has now entered there as well. Though today one Revivalist admitted to the author in Mombasa that the Revival had entered a dampened period of vitality, it remains a force within the life of many Christian churches throughout East Africa.

Assessing the significance of the East African Revival John V. Taylor reports, "It was primarily an answer to the unconverted state of a great part of the Church, and of some of the clergy. It was a revulsion from the hypocrisy of long concealed sins, expressed in the release of open confession and restitution. It was a discovery on a large scale that the Gospel is an offer of actual rescue from the grip of sins. On the basis of these experiences a mutual fellowship was created which appeared to supersede all the older solidarities of family and clan."<sup>24</sup>

A missionary observer of these early Revivalists had this assessment to make.

Three things struck me about those early 'Balokole', which could just as truly be said of them now... First, their tremendous joy, It was so obviously spontaneous and unaffected, and, although I sometimes found myself irritated by their constant reiterations of a single chorus or verse of a hymn, I could not honestly doubt their reality and earnestness, or the depth of their experience of Jesus Christ. Second, their evident love for and fellowship with each other, quite regardless of class, station or race, It gave one an altogether deeper and fuller conception of 'fellowship' than one had ever dreamed of before - the very essence of koinonia, not merely in theory but in practice. Third, their tremendous 'burden' for their fellowmen and their Church which, not without reason, they felt was at a dangerous sly low ebb.<sup>25</sup>

Welbourn assesses the East African Revival in these words:

It is of much the same character as 'revival' at other times and in other places; some of its English-speaking leaders have found ready acceptance in Europe and the United States of America, India and Brazil. Its strength lies in the genuine moral renewal of its converts; the creation of a fellowship which gives not only spiritual guidance but detailed assistance in material crises; the development of an unpaid lay leadership; and a thorough crossing of racial barriers which has not always been achieved in the Church at large.<sup>26</sup>

### **Strengths of the East Africa Revival**

What strengths and weaknesses of the Revival can we perceive as we look back on this historic movement? What lessons can the church today learn? We will discuss seven strengths of the East Africa Revival before looking at some questionable areas.

#### **1. The East African Revival has remained within the churches.**

This is not without significance or meaning. "It is remarkable that a movement which has continued to spread with renewed vigour...should not have become a separate sect...in several areas of Kenya and Tanganyika where sects are

numerous."<sup>27</sup> From the earliest days there was friction between the Revivalists and many clergy and missionaries within the Church of Uganda. Those who had been saved through the revival tended to look down on others whom they did not consider saved. Through the re-emphasis on lay involvement within the Revival movement, there tended to be friction with the clergy who felt the Balokole were usurping their authority and prerogatives. Some Revivalists held their own meetings separate from and at the same time as the regular church services. On other occasions the Revivalists who attended the Sunday worship service would gather afterwards and sing and testify loudly with megaphones as a witness to other Christians. As opposition increased there was an open possibility of a split, separating the Balokole from the Anglican Church. But throughout East Africa apart from two or three exceptions the Revival Movement has remained within the churches.

The exceptions deserve some comment, however. Trouble broke out in 1948 among the Luo in Nyanza, Kenya, over three rival factions in the Revival. Ishmael Noo left the Anglicans and formed the Christian Universal Evangelical Union. Disaffection gathered momentum with many leaving the Anglican Church. These Revivalists left saying, "I migrate with Jesus; I migrate from the church; I migrate from all secular councils." However, a massive split was blunted in 1955 when the Archbishop of Canterbury consecrated four of the Revivalist leaders as the first African Bishops in Kenya. Division was not totally averted, however. Matthew Ajuoga led a pro-revival group within the western Kenyan Anglican Church called the Johera (people of love). The Anglican hierarchy forced the Johera to leave the Church, taking with them 16,000 people in 130 congregations in 1958. The Johera continues to grow and has maintained a strong evangelical character. Another split occurred in Tanzania in 1953 among the Haza Tribe, forming the Church of the Holy Spirit.

However, great wisdom on the part of Ugandan church leaders as well as those involved in the Revival has kept the Revival within the churches on the whole. Bishop Stuart reflected on one occasion, "I always remember that St. Francis must have been an awful nuisance to the Church authorities of his day, but they had the sense to keep him in the Church, to its great advantage; whereas we in England drove out the Wesleyans, to our great loss."<sup>28</sup> J.V. Taylor has paid tribute to Bishop Stuart's role in protecting the unity of the church during the years of revival: "In the Church of Uganda it was probably the unshakeable patience of Bishop Stuart, more than any other human factor, which prevented an external breaking of the revival from the church. More and more those who were in the movement, and those who were not, came to recognize and accept it as belonging to the church for the sake of the church."<sup>29</sup>

## **2. The East African Revival is Evangelical in emphasis.**

We have already noted that the East African Revival arose within the framework of the Scriptures, Reformation doctrines, the emphasis of the Evangelical Awakenings and the Keswick School of holy living. The personal confessions of Dr. Stanley Smith and Dr. Leonard Sharp remind us of these commitments. When he was

posted to Kabale, Uganda in 1919, Dr. Smith posted five basic truths which he considered corner stones of a healthy Christian:

1. The first is the majesty of God Almighty, sovereign Lord, maker of heaven and earth and sea, infinitely wise and unapproachably holy.
2. The second is the sinfulness of man, even the 'good man' entrenched in his righteousness.
3. The third is the grace of God in giving His only Son to die on the Cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
4. The fourth truth is that for those who reject His mercy there is only the terrible certainty of judgment.
5. And lastly, to all those who confess their needs and guilt and bring them to Jesus there is the glorious assurance of pardon, and the certainty of eternal life.<sup>30</sup>

While the particular expressions of the doctrinal beliefs may be questioned, the theology or doctrinal foundation underneath the movement is evangelical beyond question.

Great stress is placed on sin and the sinfulness of sin. Sin is traced to the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Man's depraved state today is due to the consequences of that sin. Great stress is placed on Christ's death and his blood. From the beginning the blood atonement has been taught as God's remedy for sin. The theme song of the Revivalists is, "Tukutendereza Yesu", a song in the Luganda language which has a powerful evangelical thrust: "We praise you, Jesus, Jesus the Lamb, Your blood has cleansed me; I am grateful, Saviour."

The repetition of a theme song...has become a conspicuous outward sign of the movement. The chorus of a gospel hymn, of which the first word in Luganda is Tukutendereza, 'We praise thee', is used as a signal of recognition and greeting between the 'brethren', and as a signature-tune and challenge towards all who are outside. It is sung with syncopated cross-rhythms, with bodies poised on the verge of dancing: It is sung incessantly, until it grows almost hypnotic. It may express the hilarious joy of Africa liberated in Christ, or the hushed adoration of two or three at the close of prayer, or the truculence of a small group challenging the majority.<sup>31</sup>

More than sin and atonement are stressed. Repentance and conversion are powerful themes as well. In fact the Revivalists are known as the "Saved Ones". This is Balokole in Luganda, Jomowar in Luo. "Being saved" through repentance and conversion and faith in the blood of Christ is without question the trademark of the Brethren. Repentance is more than verbal, but includes putting things right, making restitution and confessing. Another trademark of the Revival is "Walking in the Light".

"Walking in the light" became the lamp for the way. It introduced a new dimension into the lives of the Brethren, of being transparent one to another, the solution for

exposing the deceitfulness and subtle attacks of the Devil. Transparency is not something that one achieves because of education, culture, or anything that comes from the world. Transparency is a process of constant cleansing in the precious blood of the Lamb of God. It does not pretend that brethren do not sin nor does it claim that they will stand firm in their places with regards to righteousness forever. But walking in the light calls for humility and brokenness, and is sensitive to the temptation of the Devil, the lust of the mind, and the emptiness and vanity of the flesh. One is prepared to keep short accounts with these things in repentance and confession by 'walking in the light' of scripture, of prayer, of conscience, and of counsel.<sup>32</sup>

This aspect of the Revival Movement is rooted in Scripture but has led to some unwise activities as we shall see later. But one effect of this emphasis is the stress on holiness of life. Sin is repudiated and holiness is espoused, not only in word but also in deed.

These are the peculiar emphasis of the Revival Doctrine. However, since the Brethren are members of established churches and in most cases taught and nourished within them, the broader doctrinal teaching of Scripture is also 'held by them. The new experience of "being saved" is based on old foundations. The Brethren may belittle earlier Christian experience or even say that their earlier instruction is as nothing, yet "in the preaching and teaching given, there is assumed a background of Bible knowledge, and a conscience well aware of what true Christian standards are."<sup>33</sup>

### **3. The East African Revival is Evangelistic.**

In 1951 Calderwood commented that in his opinion a greater weakness in the Revival is that it has not yet touched pagans, at least in Kenya. Noble work has been done in the church but it needs to go further, If the Revival does not reach out to the pagans, he warns, "It must inevitably suffer frustrations, and be turned in on itself in a form of pietism."<sup>34</sup> Calderwood betrays a serious misunderstanding of both Pietism and the East African Revival. Pietism is the father of modern missions today. In the same way the East African Revival has done more for the conversion of the lost than any other movement. Perhaps Calderwood does not appreciate the need to convert the pagans within the established church.

When Joe Church and Nsibambi prayed together and were filled with the Spirit of God, Nsibambi became a full time evangelist winning hundred of people to the Lord. When Joe Church returned to Gahini many non-christians were converted through the witness of the staff in the hospital.

The use of teams to spread the Gospel has been characteristic of the Revival until this day. At first they went to centers in Uganda but as early as 1937 they went to Kenya. These missionary journeys were a recovery of the quality of spiritual life in the early days of the East African Church. Large parts of Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya and Congo were first

reached with the Gospel through African missionaries. The Revival teams captured this concern once again.

#### **4. The East African Revival brought Reconciliation.**

As the Revival Message was shared by the Brethren across denominational boundaries, members of the Methodist, Presbyterian, Moravian, Lutheran and Anglican Churches were brought together in bonds of love. Denominational barriers crumbled, seeming less significant than the unity they found in Christ. Hostility between the races also broke down. Whereas the missionaries of the CMS had begun to serve outside the parish fellowships, those who were in the Revival loved and respected each other, whether black or white. Tribal tensions were eased.

This spirit of reconciliation was especially seen in Kenya during the Mau Mau emergency. During the time when the European was the object of hate and violence because of the colonial policies, the Brethren remained faithful to the white brothers. "In Kenya, however, the important part played by Africa church leaders, not only by resisting the taking of Mau Mau oaths, but also in informing against its administrators, has been widely acknowledged and commended. Their loyalty amid much danger, suffering and loss has evoked a generous response among Christians of white race ...."<sup>35</sup> The reason why the Mau Mau attacked the Brethren in particular was because a striking feature of the Revival was the breaking down of racial distrust and separation. A strong sense of fellowship was created among all those who accepted the Gospel.

#### **5. The East African Revival promoted lay involvement.**

Clericalism was a real danger in the Church of Uganda. This was due to several reasons. From the beginning the church leadership tended to be placed in the hands of the Christian chiefs. Indeed this is one explanation for the phenomenal growth of the Ugandan church. Because Uganda was composed of several kingdoms with centralized authority, the Anglican missionaries who came were able to win whole tribes to Christianity through the conversion of the chiefs. Of the first six men to be ordained, four held chieftainships. In the minds of the Africans the ministry was associated with authority. The laity were subservient. Clericalism was also compatible to the church patterns of the Church of England where the priesthood of the believers was not stressed, especially among the Anglo-Catholics.

But the Revival Movement reaffirmed the responsibility of the laity in the church. Taylor predicts that "This may well prove be the most important emphasis in the whole movement."<sup>36</sup> Over against the centralized diocesan structure, the Revival reproduced the indigenous structure of the church, consisting of living Christian community groups clustered around some natural head of a household. "In many of the places which are regarded as the stronghold of the revival in Buganda it is found that the local leader who is a member of the 'brethren' - it may be a landowner, or civil servant or senior teacher - gathers around him, in his home or in nearby houses, a considerable community of

brethren."<sup>37</sup> So strongly integrated is the group that they almost forget the many different clans or tribes from which the members come. This community of believers takes responsibility for its members in such matters as finance and marriage in much the same way as the large family did in the days when the clan operated strongly. If a marriage is agreed, the brethren in the community undertake the arrangements, provide the feast and transport and attend the ceremony in force. "Within such a local fellowship there is security such as no other kinship-group or association in Ganda society today is able to provide."<sup>38</sup>

From the Revival Brethren are sent out teams of evangelists. It was the quality of life and spiritual dynamic within the brethren that "profoundly challenged the old assumptions of European superiority in the church and opened the way for a recovery of African responsibility and leadership."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the clergy and the missionary who who may have felt that they should have provided the spiritual leadership in the church were bypassed by the grass roots revival. It is understandable that tension should develop. What is amazing is that the tension did not lead to schism.

The Revivalists have insisted that "the primary calling of every 'saved' Christian, whatever his profession may be, is to walk closely with his Lord, foster the fellowship, and preach salvation."<sup>40</sup> This emphasis on the responsibility of every believer could only rectify the former imbalance of clericalism in the Anglican Church.

#### **6. The East African Revival is marked by Fellowship.**

A notable feature of the Revival is the Fellowship Meetings. These are usually held by the Brethren on separate occasions apart from the organized church. This is what Taylor refers to as not schism but separation. The Fellowship meetings provide for the Brethren what they cannot receive through the liturgy and established order of worship.

The pattern of the Fellowship Meetings is as follows. First, there is singing, mostly "Tukutendereza," but sometimes hymns also. Second, there is prayer, usually kneeling. Third, testimonies are given which focus on confession of failures and thanksgiving. This is what they call, "walking in the light." Fourth, there is Bible reading. Several verses are chosen and are read verse by verse by various individuals. People give their thoughts on the verses. "It isn't Bible study in the sense in which we usually do it. It is really devotional Bible reading, but the messages of the need of salvation, and the joy of it, of 'brokenness', and repentance, of the call to a dedicated life, and so on, are truly from the Holy Spirit...It is a bit like a little weekly Keswick."<sup>41</sup> Fifth, there is prayer again along the lines of the Scripture read. Sixth, there is another hymn. Seventh, the 'grace' is said together with the words added, "be with us all, and with all the brethren." Eighth, as they rise from their knees singing, announcements, news, and introduction of visitors takes place. Ninth, the meeting breaks up with all departing singing, "Tukutendereza", shaking hands and talking outside.<sup>42</sup>



## **7. The Revival has helped overcome Nominalism in the Church.**

The net effect of the other characteristics of the East African Revival Movement mentioned above may be briefly stated. The revival is a persisting movement of God that has continued for over fifty years since its initial beginning in Rwanda. The Revival had an awakening effect on the African Church which was deadened with self-complacency, self-righteousness and nominalism.

### **Some Question Marks**

The East Africa Revival has not been without its share of criticism. Some denominations, missions and clergy resisted the Revival because of errors which they alleged were present within the Movement. When the Spirit of God is poured out upon His people there are many responses. Some who are genuinely touched with Revival may be carried away by some extremes. Limited perspectives may prevent them from seeing the Christian faith in larger dimensions. Pride may enter in which diverts the attention away from a transformed life and improved morals. Many times the excesses of a few become the image of the whole movement in the estimation of the observer. In this regard the East African Revival is not unlike other Revivals throughout history. Extremes, excesses, and schism have frequently accompanied the moving of God. But none of these factors should nullify the obvious benefits the Revival has brought to the Church.

Max Warren in his book, **Revival: An Enquiry**, has approached the movement with a cautious and reverent spirit. Recognizing that the Revival is a work of God, that this work is continuing until this day, and that our knowledge of this movement is inadequate, he prefers to speak of "Question Marks" rather than errors or criticisms. With this same spirit we can speak briefly of some question marks arising from a study of the East African Revival.

One question often raised about the East African Revival is the practice of public confession. While confession has always accompanied true Revivals down throughout history, there has been a tendency in East Africa to divulge aspects of a sinful life which are not edifying to the believers. Instead of confessing a sin in general terms, there has been undue specificity in the details of the sin. Furthermore, in their concern for "Walking in the Light" the Brethren have looked down on those who have not felt free to engage in their kind of confession. Thus the Revivalists have been rigid in what they expected of the "saved" and "born again" believers.

Warren points out that in the African context confession is a purgative of the soul, is closely associated with the healing of the body, and is an essential part of any testimony. A testimony which stops short of a confession of sin is inadequate. Warren comments sympathetically,

The practice of 'public confession' is far more complex than

either its apologists or critics commonly understand. Both need to weigh the nature of the compulsion which in a revival makes open confession a common feature. Deep spiritual insight is needed so that what is true in the impulse is safeguarded while what tends towards mischief is duly eliminated....Here is surely a point at which we may expect that the Holy Spirit of truth will lead His people to such a practice as will in fact both edify the Church and build up the individual into the life of the Church. It may be that African experience will point towards some distinctive handling of this question which has not yet been explored elsewhere. There would seem to be good grounds for believing that in East Africa this practice of public confession is slowly but surely undergoing just such a development.<sup>43</sup>

Over-simplification is another question mark raised. The biblical emphasis is undoubtedly evangelical, as we have seen. They stress the sinfulness of man, the cross of Jesus Christ and his blood atonement for the sins of man, the necessity of repentance, the new birth and walking in the light, indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the necessity of a holy life. The question raised by some is their majoring on these truths while ignoring the "whole counsel of God". However, the Brethren cannot be understood apart from the church context in which they all live. While they repeat certain words and phrases monotonously, they have not in fact isolated a few truths to the exclusion of the whole Bible. For they continue to affirm their faith in the doctrinal teaching of the church. Rather, they have felt led to emphasize certain biblical truths which may have been neglected by the official clergy. One would hope that through a continual reforming of their minds by the study of Scripture, the Brethren would be open to the importance of all truth while continuing to stress the Gospel which has gripped their souls.

Exclusiveness is another charge leveled against many Revivalists. By calling themselves "the saved ones", implying that others are not saved, by maintaining an intimate cohesiveness for all Brethren, by cherishing their own Fellowship Meetings more highly than the regular church services, by feeling more loyal to their own Brethren than to the clergy and official leaders of the church establishment, the East African Revival Brethren communicate an exclusive spirit. But Warren wisely points out the complexity of this question. "It is eminently reasonable that a group of persons sharing some common loyalty or joining in some 'mystery' or craft would make terms as to membership. Those who conform are included. Those who do not conform are excluded. Thus viewed there is nothing inherently unreasonable if people whose loyalties and 'mysteries' are religious exclude those unprepared to accept the known conditions of membership."<sup>44</sup>

The problem arises, however, when believers insist that all people must have their particular Christian experience before they can be accepted as Brethren and fellow heirs to the Kingdom of God. A narrow-minded perspective of what constitutes the people of God can be unwholesome. This has led to what Taylor

refers to as not schism but separation as the major problem in the Revival.

The charge of exclusiveness can never be completely eliminated, for the Christian faith is exclusive and offense to those who refuse the claims of Christ. It would be hoped, however, that the Brethren could mature in their understanding that they are members of a greater Body of Christ which encompasses all those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and who demonstrate in their lives the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Legalism is another problem among the Brethren as perceived by many. Whenever a fellowship of believers establishes high moral standards with specified external requirements, there is the tendency to judge others by those extra-biblical standards. As we have seen, confession of private sins before the Brethren is a characteristic of the Revivalists. Whenever there is reluctance on the part of anyone to participate in open, public confession, they are judged to be less than spiritual. This same tendency toward legalism can be found in their requirements of dress, speech and conduct. When revival broke out in southern Uganda through the ministry of Bishop Kivengere there was spontaneity of joy and enthusiasm. Out of sheer exuberance of joy the Christians sang and danced and leaped into the air. But what began as a spontaneous response to the fullness of the Holy Spirit gradually turned into rigid, formal legalism. Eventually, the Brethren began to judge the inner spirituality of their members by the height of their leaping. "Why does he not jump as high today as he used to?" they began to inquire. "Has he lost the joy of the Lord?" "Does he have sins unconfessed?" Thus legalism has gradually set in whereby a Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ is judged by external standards which have been created by the Brethren themselves. Rigid adherence to the letter of the law (a law constructed by the Revivalists themselves) has sometimes been substituted for a life of faith in Christ by the Spirit.

Thus a separation has occurred between those who adhere to the traditions of the Brethren and those who do not. Separation is not necessarily based on one's relationship to Jesus Christ but on one's adherence to the traditions of the East African Revival.

### **Conclusion**

Today in the 1980's, fifty years after the eruption of the Spirit of God in Gahini, Rwanda, the Holy Spirit is still moving among the peoples of East Africa. Bishop Festo Kivengere of Uganda is one of the more prominent spokesmen for the Revivalists. As he ministers the Word of God to people in various missions, the warm glow of revival is reflected on his countenance and in his message.

The message is evangelical and directed to the heart of man's relationship with Jesus Christ. He calls for repentance and the new birth. He still gives the rallying cry, "Tukutendereza Yesu." Regrettably, through division and dissipation, the revival fires are not burning as vigorously

today as they have in the past.

As one who has served in East African since 1966 in a church and mission which has not participated in the East African Revival, the author can only give thanks for the evident fruit in the lives of those touched by the Revival. What had been a somewhat dead organism, a large church with little spiritual life in East Africa, has come alive by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Revival. Surely, this has been a movement of God. And we can only pray that in all our churches where nominalism and carnality have replaced dynamic spiritual living, the revival fires will fall once again. As Calderwood noted 35 years ago,

There can be no clearer proof of the genuineness of the movement than the fact that hundreds of Africans who know no church history give their testimony in terms almost identical with those of the comments of the great evangelical revival of the 18th century, or the Sankey and Moody revival in the late 19th century. <sup>45</sup>

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#### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Hewitt, 1971, 213.

<sup>3</sup> Hewitt, 1971, 221.

<sup>4</sup> Katarikawe, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Hewitt, 1971, 233.

<sup>6</sup> Hewitt, 1971, 228.

<sup>7</sup> Hewitt, 1971, 239.

<sup>8</sup> Katarikawe, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, 1950, 62.

<sup>10</sup> Katarikawe, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Hewitt, 1971, 267.

<sup>12</sup> Katarikawe, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Katarikawe, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Katarikawe, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Katarikawe, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Katarikawe, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Katarikawe, 56.

<sup>18</sup> Katarikawe, 65.

<sup>19</sup> Hewitt, 1971, 271-272.

- 20 Katarikawe, 71.
  - 21 Warren, 1954, 42.
  - 22 Warren, 1954, 43.
  - 23 Katarikawe, 79-80.
  - 24 Taylor, 1958, 15.
  - 25 Warren, 1954, 50-51.
  - 26 Welbourn, 1965, 12.
  - 27 Taylor, 1950, 99.
  - 28 Hewitt, 1971, 241.
  - 29 Hewitt, 1971, 241.
  - 30 Katarikawe, 144.
  - 31 Taylor, 1950, 101.
  - 32 Katarikawe, 164.
  - 33 Calderwood, (1951) 261.
  - 34 Calderwood, (1951) 264.
  - 35 Calderwood, (1954) 175.
  - 36 Taylor, 1950, 102.
  - 37 Taylor, 1950, 102.
  - 38 Taylor, 1950, 102.
  - 39 Taylor, 1950, 103.
  - 40 Taylor, 1950, 16.
  - 41 Warren, 1954, 120.
  - 42 Warren, 1954, 118-121.
  - 43 Warren, 1954, 71.
  - 44 Warren, 1954, 82.
  - 45 Calderwood, (1951) 265.
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