

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 79: African Apostles: Black Evangelists in Africa

The African Apostles: Did You Know?

The rapidity of Africa's twentieth-century baptism was stunning. There's no better place to see the future of the global church.

As of 1880, the vast majority of Africa remained mysterious, elusive, and untouched by the West. But by the turn of the century, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, and Italy had carved up nearly every one of Africa's 10 million square miles and divided a population of 110 million Africans, many of whom had no idea they were now "ruled" by ambassadors from another continent.

In 1900, there were 8 to 10 million Christians in Africa, which amounted to 8 to 10 percent of the total population. Today, there are 360 million—nearly 50 percent of the continent.

Philip Jenkins, in his book *The Next Christendom*, said that the heart of global Christianity will be Africa, not Europe or North America. What this means, says Jenkins, is that "in 50 or 100 years Christianity will be defined according to its relationship with that [African] culture."

There are between 40 and 50 million Anglicans in Africa. There are 25 million Anglicans in England, but only 800,000 frequent the pews. If current trends hold true, by 2025 the Anglican population in Nigeria alone will outnumber that in England by nearly 9 million.

Here are some of the countries most radically changed during the period 1900 to 2000. These statistics (derived from David Barrett) represent professing Christians:

	% Christians in 1900	% Christians in 2000
Congo-Zaire	1.4%	95.4%
Angola	0.6%	94.1%
Swaziland	1.0%	86.9%
Zambia	0.3%	83.4%
Kenya	0.2%	79.3%
Malawi	1.8%	76.8%

In the twentieth century, there have been some 1.8 million Christian martyrs in Africa.

Zionist churchgoers in southern Africa (p. 35), whose church bears no relationship to the Jewish movement of the same name, can be easily identified by their white clothing with blue or green sashes, wooden staffs, and worship that incorporates many different elements of charismatic expression. However, this large indigenous movement traces its origins to the Chicago suburb of Zion, Illinois. There, Australian preacher John Alexander Dowie led a theocratic commune that emphasized the spiritual gift of healing. While he never ventured to Africa himself, Dowie commissioned a number of his followers as missionaries to the southern region of the continent, where their evangelical message and emphasis on spiritual gifts found a receptive African audience. Soon many "Zion" churches sprang up across Africa that had no connection to the original Dowie-linked groups except for the name.

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Anatomy of an Explosion

It's an indelible image: the white missionary venturing into deepset Africa. But the real story is what happened when African converts relayed the gospel message in their own words.

Taking a close look at the explosion of Christianity in twentieth-century Africa, we meet a remarkable group of colonial-era (roughly 1890 to World War II) apostles who were born, grew up, and ministered in sub-Saharan Africa. We have been inspired and challenged by their stories. We hope you will be, too.

While the story of Christianity's spread in Africa is nothing less than awesome, it is also nothing more than the work of God, who always uses the foolish things of a sin-scarred world as the building material for his body.

Western missions in colonial Africa proceeded by slow, painful steps. The missionaries' best efforts were often hindered by cultural misunderstandings, economic abuses, political agendas, and racist presuppositions. While missionaries were picking their tortuous way through the colonial period, indigenous African evangelists and teachers exploded onto the scene like dynamite. Yes, they worked on the same confused, conflicted landscape as the missionaries. Nonetheless, something happened when the gospel was proclaimed under African sponsorship. It revolutionized the continent.

Within a few short decades, out of the seeds first sown by the missionaries came a profusion of indigenous roots and branches, laden with a lavish variety of flowers and fruit.

How Christianity became African

To help us understand the cultural and spiritual landscape of colonial Africa, we interviewed Dr. Ogbu Kalu, Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity and Mission at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. Kalu, an elder in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, came to McCormick in 2001 from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he had served as professor of Church history for 23 years.

What was the relationship between the African Christians who wanted to live a truly African faith and the colonial churches?

African Christians clearly worked from a position of reaction against colonialism. But there were several kinds of reaction, from those who largely worked within the mission churches; to those who stayed in but agitated for change, like the Ethiopianists (pp. 14 and 39); to those who struck out on their own, like the Aladura churches in the West (p. 35) and the Zionists in the South.

It is important to understand the chronology here. Colonialism was actually a very short-lived phenomenon in Africa—it lasted only the span of a single human lifetime. What we call the colonial enterprise did not gel until 1900. By 1914, when the continent was fully carved up, the European powers were on the verge of World War I, which distracted them and drained their resources. Between 1919 and 1939, you have the turbulence of the interwar years and the Great Depression. By 1945, the European countries were exhausted by World War II. That's why the French wanted to pull out of Algeria by 1957, followed by the British receding from Ghana, and so forth. Colonialism was effectively dead by 1960.

Certainly it was a very powerful phase in African history, which had physical, mental, psychological, economic, and religious import. But since the colonial governments at no point had enough European administrators to achieve effective rule in their African colonies, they left local cultures and leadership structures intact. In fact, they used a system of almost entirely indigenous rule to keep order.

The missionaries, however, operated in just the opposite way. Although most of them—especially the Roman Catholics—did train

indigenous helpers, they generally dragged their feet on ordaining Africans. The story of Crowther (p. 10) was highly unusual for its time, and Kiwanuka (p. 16) came later and in a different regional situation.

African Christians recognized early on that if they were to build the church with their own leaders, they would have to assert their distinctiveness from the mission-built denominational structures.

Many stopped short of full separation—the Ethiopianist church movement grew out of Africans willing to work within missionary structures, but critiquing those structures. Some Ethiopianists did think you should divest yourself of English names, start your own schools and your own churches, and reject all funding from white missionary groups. But others, like James Johnson (p. 14) saw something in Western civilization that Africans should capture and use in prosecuting their spiritual and political goals. Their goal was not to separate for the sake of separating, but to build an African church lifting up its hands to God.

What was it about the missionary way of doing Christianity that was so distressing to their African converts?

African Christians experienced at every turn the scientific racism that the mission churches had absorbed—this was simply the dominant theme in Western thought about other cultures.

This ideology presumed the inferiority of African intelligence, African cultural forms, the African way of life. And it translated into a strict distinction between African culture and Christian culture: African culture was ruled by demons in the form of native spirits. Christian culture, on the other hand, was Western culture, full stop.

When the Presbyterians translated the Bible into Efik in Southeastern Nigeria, for example, they did not want to use the local words for spirit to indicate the Holy Spirit. They were afraid the people might think this was the same as one of their tribal spirits. So they simply left the Third Person of the Trinity untranslated.

Missionaries rejected absolutely all the African ways of talking about and handling the spirit world. They did not study the indigenous worldview, but rather used dismissive terms like "fetish," "heathen," and "pagan." This has only begun to change recently, as missionary scholars like Andrew Walls, who are faithful Christians but believe you should know indigenous cultures from the inside, have used instead terms like "primary worldview" and "traditional religion."

Because African converts were not allowed to enter fully into a Christianity they could recognize as their own, they began to work towards indigenous churches.

When Africans did begin to make Christian faith their own, how was that indigenous African Christianity different from Western forms?

First, we have to acknowledge the success of the missions effort: the Africans did indeed absorb the missionaries' teachings! They picked up their biblicism—their high view of Scripture. They picked up their emphasis on conversion. They pursued social activism on the missionaries' evangelical model. And they followed them in strongly emphasizing the person of Christ and eschatology. They even heeded the proscriptions against "fetishes."

But they also drew out of Scripture different emphases than had their teachers.

The missionaries read the Bible through the lenses of the Protestant emphasis on Word over Spirit and the Enlightenment desacralization of the universe.

The Africans, on the other hand, read the Bible through their own traditionally "charismatic" worldview: they knew there were spirits in the sky, the water, the land, and the ancestral worlds. Only, now, they proclaimed the power of Jesus over these other powers.

For example, when confronted with illness, the Africans read their Bibles and came up with a straightforward belief in healing. They were used to seeing illness and health as spiritual matters. They had always accepted witchcraft as the source of illness.

Another example is the African Christian view of evil. For the African, evil not only dehumanizes people and separates them from God. It also causes sickness, poverty, untoward events. Therefore the traditional religions revolved around manipulating or dealing with the good and powerful forces to protect one from the evil forces.

This "precarious vision" of the world found its echo in the Christian language of a personal Devil. The Devil is very present in the theology and practice of even mainline African churches.

Closely related is the matter of the "prosperity gospel" now so widespread in Africa. Africans appropriated Christian teaching on prosperity and poverty not because they were gulled by televangelists, but because the televangelists were addressing a deep vein in the indigenous worldview.

Africans have always known poverty as a dire threat, and they have attempted to explain and deal with it from a religious rather than a secular economic perspective. When they read in their Bibles promises of spiritual power that can deal with issues of wealth and prosperity and protect people from the devastating effects of poverty, then these elements became dominant in their theology.

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The Prospect Terrified Me

Apolo Kivebulaya, a convert from Islam, bravely preached to witch doctors, hostile chieftains, and Pygmy tribes.

Steven Gertz

The Ugandan mother had given birth to twins—and for her people, this signaled impending sorrow. Someone else in her family would soon die. She must hide the children from sight so the village would not share her misfortune. Then, baptized Christian though she was, she must visit the witch doctor to propitiate the spirits.

But then an evangelist arrived at her hut. He picked up the twins and presented them openly to the village. The people stood frozen. Surely the spirits would punish such outrageous behavior with death. But nothing happened. The children—and the rest of the village—lived.

The evangelist knew exactly what he was up against. Born in 1864, Waswa Munubi had survived the death in infancy of his own twin brother. He wrote, "If a twin dies, the parents do not weep. They announce the death by saying the child has gone back, and everyone knows what that means."

Waswa grew up the son of peasants in the country now known as Uganda. His parents apprenticed him to a witch doctor, but when he discovered the man tricking people out of their possessions, he left him to learn about Islam, recently brought to the chief's court by Arab traders.

"Our father first began to learn to read in the days of Mukabya from the Moslems," Waswa wrote. "Kabaka Mutesa commanded all his chiefs and people to read from the Moslems and to keep their fasts."

"Chief Mutesa, I presume?"

But when Waswa turned 13, H. M. Stanley, who had discovered David Livingstone in 1872, paid a visit to Mutesa's court and persuaded the chief to begin "reading" in the Christian religion. The chief was probably more impressed with Stanley's guns than with his Bible, for Mutesa had already parted ways with the Arabs and now needed protection. But the chief's welcome opened the door for his people to embrace Christianity.

Stanley's expedition opened the way for other missionaries too, notably Alexander Mackay, who arrived in 1878. Waswa credits Mackay with planting seeds of belief in his life. "When I looked at the European," he wrote, "his eyes sparkled with kindness." Mackay organized a church, and members of the chief's court began attending his classes.

But then the chief rejected Christianity and put Mackay under house arrest. When Mutesa died in 1884, his son Mwanga unleashed a violent persecution on the infant church. No one knows how many perished, but in a single vicious rampage in 1886, Mwanga ordered the execution of 32 Christians—the famed "Uganda Martyrs" whose memory is still preserved in an Anglican and Roman Catholic feast day.

Mwanga lost his people's support, however, and together Muslims and Christians seized power from the chief. Predictably, the alliance dissolved, and as Waswa was still considered a Muslim, he was forced to join their army—now raiding the countryside. But his heart was not in it; when his companions

began setting villages on fire and burning their victims, he abandoned them and took up residence among the Christians.

Waswa briefly flirted with hemp smoking, but when he began attending Christian classes, he quit the practice. Shortly after this, he converted to Christianity.

Waswa requested baptism in 1894 and took a new name—Apolo Kivebulaya. "Apolo" honored the evangelist of Acts 18:24-25; and "Kivebulaya"—meaning "the thing from England"—was given to him because he wore a suit under his long white garment.

Shortly after this, Apolo's fiancée died. He later viewed this as providential, as it freed him for missionary work.

Meanwhile, the Christians with British military aid expelled the Muslim armies, and the call went out for missionaries to enter the recently stabilized region of Toro, or western Uganda. Apolo answered the call and began planting a church there. But in a series of unfortunate incidents, Apolo was accused of storing the chief's belongings and arrested and imprisoned by the British in Kampala.

Facing the Mountain

Eventually Apolo was released without trial, and soon he set out for a new mission field, accepting the challenge of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to evangelize a tribe in the Belgian Congo. Blocking his way were the snow-capped Ruwenzori mountains. Intimidating though these were, Apolo trekked across them into the winter. Finally he crested the ridge and glimpsed his continent's heartland for the first time.

"I stood and looked far away to the Congo. The prospect terrified me." But the pull of the Great Commission and his compassion for lost brothers and sisters urged him on. In December 1896 he began ministering in the town of Mboga.

At first the work went well. But as Apolo's influence among the people grew, the chief (or Tabaro) resented the intruder and began slandering the Christians.

"There is no God," said the Tabaro. "Let them bring back the charms and incantations." When the Tabaro's sister accidentally fell on a spear intended as building material for Apolo's church, the chief accused Apolo of murder and had him escorted back to the English authorities in Uganda.

In this darkest hour of Apolo's life, Jesus appeared to him in a dream. Apolo heard him say, "Be of good cheer; I am with you." He answered, "Who is speaking to me?" And he heard, "I am Jesus Christ. Preach to my people. Do not be afraid." From that day, Apolo's spirits revived. Soon CMS members intervened for the imprisoned missionary and secured his release.

The Belgians, meanwhile, contested the Congolese border with Uganda, and Mboga changed hands. This temporarily closed the door for further ministry in the Congo, and Apolo returned to Uganda for 20 years of productive ministry. In 1903, the CMS ordained him a priest on Namirembe Hill in Kampala, and he began planting numerous churches across Toro, traveling hundreds of miles annually by foot and bicycle. The people soon said that Apolo's big flat feet with spread-out toes enabled him to walk anywhere—he never wore any shoes.

Word of his ministry spread, and CMS missionaries came to visit him. They praised him: "[Apolo] never had the opportunity of theological training in the ordinary sense of the term, but his devotion, his saintliness of life, his understanding of men, and his missionary passion have made him one of

the strongest forces in the diocese."

Apolo gave rigorous attention to the spiritual disciplines, waking early for prayer and Bible study. He cared deeply for his congregations, taking in children from the village to live at his home and building a house for widows and deserted women. He lived simply, owning only two coats and giving nearly all his pay to his teachers.

People also told stories of Apolo's near miraculous powers. When a famine broke out in 1913, one witness reported that Apolo "went to Kitagweta to give Holy Communion and told them to be patient in Jesus and He will even give you rain. ... [He] prayed and it rained straight away." Once, Apolo sailed onto Lake Edward to visit an island when a storm blew up. Apolo sang, and to his companions' surprise, the storm quieted.

Those who met Apolo spoke of his contagious joy. One missionary wrote, "His face is an inspiration, and he is greatly beloved by us all for his simple wholeheartedness and desire to win souls." Apolo sang hymns as he traveled and led exuberant crowds to welcome bishops or missionaries who approached his home in Kabarole.

Back to the Congo

With Christianity firmly established in Toro, Apolo's thoughts returned to the church in Mboga. The Belgians had loosened their restrictions on travel, and in 1915, Apolo traded a well-earned year's leave in Kampala for a renewed term of service in Mboga. He arrived to find the missionary outpost in shambles. "When I reached Mboga, I found some of the Christians possessed by an evil spirit. Some were practicing witchcraft. Some had three wives, some two, and there was too much drinking of beer."

Apolo set about rebuilding the church and reviving his classes. The new chief clashed with him, falsely accusing him of stealing from the village. Apolo had to face down Chief Sulemani's challenge. In church one Sunday, the missionary publicly rebuked the chief: "Sulemani has turned his back on God," he said (the chief had flirted with Catholicism and then reverted to tribal religion), "and God will turn his back on him!" Sulemani contracted leprosy and died later that year.

Sulemani's son, Enoke, was no better. He accused Apolo of not paying his taxes to the Belgians, though the attack fell flat, as Apolo was on good terms with the Belgian government. Delivering yet another prophetic barrage, Apolo predicted Enoke would lose his kingdom and "dig potatoes" in exile. When Belgian authorities later found Enoke stealing ivory, they removed him from his chieftainship. Enoke ran away to Toro where on his food plot he did indeed dig potatoes.

Singing with the Pygmies

Soon Apolo received another vision, this time directing him to the forest of the Pygmies in the Congo. The Pygmies stood no taller than 4 feet, 8 inches, and were known for their skill as forest trackers and for their accuracy with bow and poisoned arrow. Some tribes accused the Pygmies of cannibalism, though the evidence is inconclusive.

Apolo hired the freed Pygmy slaves to interpret for him, and he put together a team of teachers. In 1921, they entered the forest. Three years later, Apolo baptized his first converts. In the early 1930s, near the end of his life, he was visiting 14 different forest tribes every year.

One witness told how Apolo, when first meeting a Pygmy tribe, would sit among the people and sing to them. This greatly amused them, as they respected Apolo's old age and loved to sing themselves. Apolo also brought with him salt—a prized commodity for the Pygmies—and told his teachers to "lend" their possessions to the people, though they knew the Pygmies had no concept of returning

things. Thus, the missionaries befriended the tribes.

Final years

In 1927, Apolo was called to Kampala and elected vice president of the CMS. It was the culmination of a life's work: in 1890, one church with 200 members stood on Namirembe Hill; in 1927, Uganda could boast 2,000 churches with nearly 185,000 members. According to a missionary at the ceremony, "Apolo said he knew now he was a member of the great CMS council, and felt very honored; his dear old face was shining with the light of God. ... I felt like kneeling down and asking him for his blessing."

The day Apolo died, he wrote this final prayer:

"O God our Father/ And the Son Jesus Christ/ And the Holy Spirit/ May you give me a blessing while in this world/ While you lead me through the forests/ Through the lakes and the mountains/ So that I may do your work among your people./ Grant that I may be loved by you/ And by your people./ Amen."

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A Soul of Fire

William Wade Harris - a Liberian activist - left an unsuccessful local ministry to trail across the Ivory Coast. In 18 months, he baptized 100,000 converts.

Elizabeth Isichei

In 1910, a middle-aged African sat in a jail cell in Liberia. Locked up for political activism, he now found his mind turning to God. He little suspected something was about to happen that would make him one of the most effective evangelists Africa has seen and the founder of an influential denomination.

According to William Wadé Harris's later testimony, what happened was that the angel Gabriel entered his jail cell. With a sound like gushing water, the Spirit descended on the incarcerated Episcopalian.

"You are not in prison," the angelic messenger assured him. "God is coming to anoint you. You will be a prophet. Your case resembles that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. You are like Daniel." Gabriel instructed him to replace his western clothes with a white gown and to shun alcohol.

Harris's wife, Rose, hearing the news, assumed her husband had gone mad. Overcome by grief, she fell ill and died.

Who was William Wadé Harris, and why was he in jail?

Harris was a member of the Grebo ethnic group, a people of southern Liberia, closely related to the Kru. The Kru were famous as seamen. For centuries, every ship coming to trade on the West African coast would stop to take on board Kru seamen, who were fearless, skilled, and loyal. Wadé, pronounced Woddy, was his Grebo name. He was born between 1860 and 1865, and to understand his life we must know a little about the history of Liberia.

Liberia's ruling class were free black settlers from America. Only a relatively small number of African Americans ever took this step—17,000, some of whom were forced to emigrate, since they were freed on this condition. (There were about 200,000 free African Americans in the States in the early nineteenth century, and most of them chose to stay in the nation they and their forebears had done so much to build.)

The invisible Liberians

The first settlers arrived in 1822. In 1847, Liberia became an independent black republic; it was the only African nation to retain its independence throughout the colonial period. (Ethiopia, the other exception, was ruled by Italy for a short time.) The founders originally intended to call the capital of their new state "Christopolis," but in the end it became Monrovia, after the American president of the day.

The new state mirrored American political institutions—Capitol, Senate, and all. It had many weaknesses, some of them economic in origin. Under the True Whigs, who ruled from 1878 until a military coup in 1980, the settlers monopolized political power and controlled the economy. They rendered the indigenous peoples of Liberia invisible in the motto on their national crest; "The love of Liberty brought us here."

Meanwhile the Grebo and Kru, in particular, welcomed both Christianity and western education. Since the settlers were Christians already, white missionaries concentrated on this field, encouraging literacy both in English and in local languages. The Kru and Grebo were hostile to the settlers and their monopoly of power. In 1873 they had attempted to found an independent Christian state under the motto "In God We Trust." This was the world into which young Wadé was born.

His father was not a Christian, but he was brought up by an uncle who was a Methodist pastor. Harris became literate in English and Grebo. The name he adopted and the lifestyle of his uncle's household show how much the settlers and educated indigenous people had in common. Harris signed on as a sailor and made several coastal voyages as a youth, and in his old age would refer to himself humbly as a "Kru boy."

In 1881 or 1882, Harris was soundly converted in a Methodist meeting. In 1888 he became an Episcopalian and began working for that church as a teacher and catechist, and for the government as an interpreter. He lost both jobs because of his political activism. He landed in prison for raising the Union Jack. The Kru and Grebo hoped that their region would become a British Protectorate, though this never happened. When he was in jail, in fact, there was an unsuccessful Grebo uprising.

Drumming up a crowd

For several years after his vision, Harris preached in Liberia but had little impact.

Then on July 27, 1913, he set out on a remarkable missionary journey to the east. His goal was the French colony of Ivory Coast. A mosaic of ethnic groups, the colony was at that time primarily a Catholic mission field—but that church had had little impact.

Harris traveled with two female companions: Helen Valentine, an educated widow, and Mary Pioka, who later bore him a son. The women drew audiences by singing songs as they beat time with gourd rattles (see photo, p. 5).

The man who had once, as a respectable Episcopalian, ordered his shoes from the States now went barefoot. He wore the costume revealed to him—a white gown, with black bands or straps, and a white turban. Such distinctive garments, often though not always white, are characteristic of many African prophetic churches, a symbol of purity and a transformed life, and of separation from an unregenerate world.

Wherever he went, Harris also carried a Bible (the English Authorized Version), a cross-like staff, a gourd rattle, and a bowl for baptism. The staff may have been an echo of Moses; it was adopted independently by many other African prophets. Harris sometimes destroyed his staff and got a new one, afraid people would begin to worship it.

Harris's message was simple, much the same as that taught by the mission churches, but he struck a deep chord among his hearers. He asked them to burn the images of their traditional gods—"God has sent me to burn the fetishes," he said. Harris emphasized avoiding work on the Sabbath (Sunday) and keeping it holy.

Most important, he offered his hearers immediate baptism—a privilege denied by the mission churches. These churches required years of study and preparation before baptism, which meant that the new Christian felt vulnerable, without the protection offered by his old religious practices on the one hand, and by baptism on the other. During a single 18-month period during 1913-14, Harris baptized between 100,000 and 120,000 new Christians.

Power evangelist

William Wadé Harris was larger than life—a biblical prophet in modern Africa. Many stories are told of his "power encounters" with the land's traditional religious specialists (diviners or priests of ancient divinities). His miracles of healing entered legend. It was said that he could call down rain from the heavens, and that he inflicted madness on some who resisted his message. On one occasion, people hid some of their religious statues in the bush, to avoid the bonfires—only to see them destroyed by a mysterious fire.

How did Harris communicate with these villagers? He did not speak French, but neither did they. Pidgin English was the lingua franca of the coast, even in French colonies, and he made much use of it. But he usually preached through interpreters, often young men living locally and working as clerks for trading firms. He relied on them to continue his work after he left, and he appointed twelve Apostles in each congregation.

The prophet and his companions got as far as Axim, in the far west of what was then the Gold Coast. It was there that he met a famous African lawyer and nationalist, Casely Hayford, who was so impressed by Harris that he wrote the first book about him, published in 1915. Said Hayford, "He is a dynamic force of a rare order—It seems as if God made the soul of Harris a soul of fire."

Many African prophetic leaders founded churches. Harris, however, did not intend to do so. Wherever he went, he told his followers to wait for "Christians with Bibles." Some who responded to Harris's message joined the Catholic missions—which saw their 80 baptisms in 1914 jump to 6,700 per year from 1917 on. In 1924, Methodist missionaries reached Ivory Coast. They found to their amazement that they were welcomed by thousands of Harris converts. Today the Methodist church there dates its foundation, not from 1924 when the missionaries arrived, but from 1914 when Harris did. Harris Christians contacted the Prophet, who sent a message urging those he had baptized to join the Methodists, not the Catholics.

Soon some difficulties developed. The missionaries, attempting to build up self-supporting churches, insisted that Christians pay a tithe—not an easy thing for an impoverished villager who also had to find money for taxes. The missionaries also opposed polygamy, and they questioned Harris closely on that issue (see sidebar, p. 25).

Precious legacy

The Prophet and his companions turned back at Axim and retraced their steps along the coast. By this time World War I had broken out, and colonial officials were anxious about potential disturbers of the peace. Ministering where his heart led him—in the Ivory Coast—Harris was stopped by authorities and deported to Liberia. Through the following years, he would make at least eight attempts to return. Always, he was turned back at the border.

Harris continued to preach in Liberia and made several missionary journeys to Sierra Leone, but he never again had the success of his Ivory Coast days. He continued to wear his distinctive dress and to marvel at what God had achieved through a "Kru boy." A missionary who met him in 1926 said, "He lives in a supernatural world in which the people, the ideas, the affirmations, the cosmogony and the eschatology of the Bible are more real than those he sees and hears materially."

William Wadé Harris died in his daughter's house, in extreme poverty, in 1929. Harris would live until 1929, but his prophetic mission lasted just those 18 months. This pattern—a brief but hugely effective ministry ended by the intervention of a colonial government—also characterizes the ministries of two great prophets who were his contemporaries. Garrick Sokari Braide, in the Niger Delta, was called by God in 1912, imprisoned in 1916, and died in 1918. Simon Kimbangu (p. 32), in what was then the Belgian Congo, had a public ministry that lasted less than a year, and spent the last 30 years of his life in prison. His followers compared this with Jesus' 30 years of hidden life and three years of public

ministry.

Not all his spiritual children became Catholics or Methodists. In 1979, it was estimated that Ivory Coast, with a population of 5 million, had 1 million Muslims, living in the north, 200,000 Protestants, and 500,000 Catholics. (Most Ivorians were still traditionalists.) There were also 100,000 (the figure is now closer to 200,000) members of Harrist churches—strongest near the capital, Abidjan.

The largest of these was founded by amalgamating a number of different congregations under the leadership of John Ahui. Grace Tani (Thannie), who died in 1958, founded the Church of the Twelve Apostles in western Gold Coast. She was a traditional religious specialist whom Harris converted, and she considered herself one of his wives. This church strongly emphasized healing, and it carried on Harris's practice of denouncing traditional religion. It used the Bible in rituals (though it did not read Scripture in services) along with the cross-staff, rattles, and Harrist hymns.

The Deima Church, founded in 1942 by Marie Lalou, who died in 1951, is the second largest Harrist church in Ivory Coast. Lalou saw herself as Harris's spiritual successor; she believed that he had driven witchcraft away, but that it had returned, and that she was the one chosen to expel it again. Like Harris, her followers destroyed traditional cult objects.

William Wadé Harris was without a doubt the most successful missionary in West Africa's history. Unlike some other African church leaders, he concentrated totally on the conversion of non-Christians. His own favorite hymns, according to his grandchildren, included "Jesus Lover of My Soul" and "What a Friend we have in Jesus." A "shout" preserved from his public ministry runs like this:

"Let's try hard, so we will conquer
The devil and his kingdom,
That when Jesus comes
We will wear white robes."

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A Hunger For Holiness

East Africa's second generation Christians faced that age-old spiritual problem - dullness of hearts. Simeon Nsibambi's message of a victorious life sparked a revival that continues today.

Mark Shaw

His dream was to study abroad. So he applied for a scholarship, finished filling out the form, and placed the envelope carefully in the mail. With the posting of that letter, in ways he could not imagine, he was about to become the leading figure in the East Africa Revival, a 40-year awakening that changed the spiritual map of Eastern Africa.

Simeon Nsibambi was born in Uganda in 1897 to Walusimbi Kimanje, a chief of Uganda's most dominant tribe, the Buganda. He received his formal schooling at Mengo High School and King's College Budo. During World War I he joined the African Native Medical Corps and was decorated for his distinguished service. After the war, in 1920, he was made Chief Health Officer in the Bugandan king's government. He excelled as an athlete in both football and wrestling, and as a singer and artist. But it was his natural leadership abilities that would loom largest in the future.

Nsibambi became a Christian in 1922, three years before his marriage to Eva Bakaluba, with whom he would have 12 children. But education—the one thing necessary to cement his status as one of Uganda's elite—seemed to occupy this young rising star more than the gospel. Study abroad, in his mind, was essential.

The reply to his application finally came. He was turned down. His best hope for advancement had been dashed.

Deeply frustrated, Nsibambi turned to God for answers. A vision came. God spoke to him and asked him a troubling question. What value did a scholarship to study abroad have compared to what he already had been given, that pearl of great price, the gospel of salvation? Nsibambi was disturbed by this vision. Ashamed and repentant, Nsibambi began to preach on tree-studded Namirembe Hill, overlooking the busy center of Kampala, Uganda's capital. On the street corners near the great Anglican cathedral of St. Paul the Apostle with its rounded dome, he proclaimed the themes of brokenness and renewal. With those sermons in the streets, the first leaves of revival began to stir.

Bigger winds of change were blowing across African Christianity in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of the change was a reaction to a missionary Christianity that many African adherents felt was too Western and too rigid. In 1929, Reuben Spartas left the Anglican church of Uganda in reaction to perceived abuses by white leaders and founded the African Orthodox Church. Similarly in West Africa, the Aladura (praying) churches of Nigeria stressed the role of supernatural evil and healing in reaction to the mission churches that emphasized moral evil and personal justification. These churches were founded by African prophet figures dissatisfied with the missionary churches in which they had found their own salvation (see p. 35).

For African Christians like Nsibambi, however, the greatest challenges to faith did not come from missionary imperialism, witchcraft, or ancestral spirits. For a growing number of second-generation African converts in the 1930s and 1940s, the main issue was spiritual dullness. They confessed a Lord who rose from the dead. Yet many felt rigor mortis rather than resurrection power was the normative experience in their churches and in their souls.

A church with "higher life"

After his scholarship crisis and God's call to preach, Nsibambi still struggled with an inner emptiness of soul. He longed to know the power of the divine will and a full experience of divine grace. Help came in the form of a white stranger.

J. E. Church, Joe to his friends, was a new medical missionary with the Rwanda Mission (an offshoot of the Church Missionary Society), working at Gahini Hospital in Rwanda. Like many who worked in the Rwanda Mission, Church was an Anglican deeply affected by the "higher life" teaching of the British Keswick revival, and openly critical of the spiritual state of the church in Uganda and Rwanda.

Keswick teaching had its roots in the 1875 Dwight L. Moody revival in England. It taught that the power of indwelling sin in a believer can be broken by a strong faith experience in which the believer both internalizes the death of Christ and surrenders to the control of the Holy Spirit. This faith experience, it taught, took place after conversion. After this experience, the believer enjoyed "victorious Christian living." Without it, the believer lived in defeat as a carnal Christian.

In 1929, finding himself in a state of acute spiritual dryness, Church took some time off in Kampala. There he encountered Nsibambi.

Church wrote in his diary of the meeting with Nsibambi that would change his missionary career. "Yesterday a rich Muganda ... in government service rushed up to me at Namirembe and said he had heard me speaking ... about surrendering all and coming out for Jesus. He said he had done so, and had great joy in the Lord, and had wanted to see me ever since. And then he said in his own words that he knew something was missing in the Uganda church and in himself, what was it? Then I had the great joy of telling him about the filling of the Spirit and the Victorious Life." Following this conversation, Nsibambi met with Church again to go over the Scofield notes on the filling of the Spirit and prayed to "quit all sin in faith." After several days of prayer and Bible study with Nsibambi, Church returned to Gahini Hospital "in the power of Pentecost."

The change in Nsibambi was visible and permanent. He quit his job as a public health worker and devoted himself full time to preaching and renewal. When Church returned to Kampala several months later he was confronted by an irate missionary who demanded, "What have you done to Nsibambi?" Church enquired what the problem was. She replied, "Oh, he's gone mad and is going around everywhere asking people if they are saved. He's just left my gardener." She insisted Africans were not ready for this new teaching about sanctification and the Holy Spirit.

Revival fires

More and more Africans became attracted to Nsibambi's message of total surrender to Christ and joined with him. Among these was his younger brother, Blasio Kigozi, who joined Church at Gahini in 1931 and began challenging his African colleagues to seek a deeper Christian life. But the message was not well received. One of Kigozi's most vocal critics was Yosiya Kinuka, a hospital worker who resented being called a "Laodicean" or half-hearted Christian.

Kinuka was the son of a chief of the Ankole tribe. He was proud of his ancestry and resistant to the message that spoke of his sinful nature and demanded repentance. Yet he could not get the message out of his mind. Upon the urging of Kigozi and Church, he agreed to visit Nsibambi in Kampala. Kinuka described their meeting: "I had never seen such a fervent Christian before. We kept talking about the subject of being born again. Simeon had heard that the spirit of the hospital was bad and he asked me the reason. When I began to tell him he turned to me and said that it was because of sin in my own heart, and that that was the reason why the others on the staff were bad. ... My sins became like a burden upon my back, and I yielded to Christ."

Kinuka publicly confessed his sin of nominalism and spiritual pride. By doing so, he established a characteristic pattern of the East Africa Revival.

After Kinuka surrendered to God, Nsibambi and Kigozi spoke at a church convention at Gahini in 1933. At that convention revival fires began to blaze. A new kind of African Christian was born—the **abaka**, those on fire. From this convention, teams of revivalists carried the flame to neighboring countries. They were called the **balokole**, the saved ones.

The revival at Gahini in 1933 was a prelude to a greater outbreak of spiritual fervor at Kabale, Uganda in 1935. Kigozi, Kinuka, and Nsibambi shared the stories of the **abaka** of Gahini. Many confessed their sins publicly and sought the second birth.

Tragedy struck soon after. Kigozi traveled to Kampala in January 1936 to challenge church leaders with the need to **zukuka** (awaken). Before he could deliver his message he was struck down by tick fever. He died on January 26, 1936 and was buried on Cathedral Hill, in a crowded funeral ceremony officiated by Nsibambi. Inscribed on Kigozi's tombstone was the word **zukuka**.

Despite the death of a key leader, the revival grew. In April 1937, Church and Nsibambi led a convention just outside Nairobi, Kenya. They sensed that the deepest corporate sin of the Kenyan church was hatred and mistrust between black and white. The team preached to responsive crowds, and many publicly confessed sin. As one participant said: "I have never before seen any white man admit that he had any sins."

Nsibambi's preaching at revival meetings emphasized two themes. The first theme was echoed in the oft-repeated phrase: **Ekibi kibi nyo**, "Sin is Sin." The ugliness and destructiveness of sin was so clear to him. But of equal emphasis was the softly spoken **ekissa**, Luganda for mercy. The bridge between dealing with sin and receiving mercy was public confession of such sins as "debt, dishonesty, immorality, and hatred of Europeans."

Meanwhile, the expanding revival was receiving mixed reviews among the missionary community back in Uganda. Many feared it was simply religious froth. Some thought public confession of sin was scandalous. Others worried it would split the church. The head of the Church of Uganda, Bishop Simon Stuart, was generally sympathetic, though sensitive to the voice of missionary critics. He envisioned the Church of Uganda's diamond jubilee celebrations in 1937 as just the platform to promote the revival in the Ugandan church. Bishops, however, are not always prophets. Instead of an outbreak of renewal, a new wave of opposition broke over the church.

The Mukono Incident of 1941

The full force of that wave crashed upon one of the newest leaders of the revival, William Nagenda, a brother-in-law to Nsibambi. The timing of Nagenda's emergence was critical. In 1941 Simeon Nsibambi fell sick with an undisclosed illness that Church simply described as a "weakness." Nsibambi was to remain an invalid, confined to his home near the Namirembe Cathedral, until his death in 1978. Though he would continue to exercise an enormous role in the course of the revival, it was Nagenda who emerged as the heir apparent.

In 1941 Nagenda was a student at Bishop Tucker Theological College in Mukono, Uganda, where he became campus leader of the pro-revival faction. He gathered a group of about 40 students who prayed for revival and spoke out bluntly against the immorality, theological liberalism, and high church worship on campus—all of which they saw as evidence of spiritual deadness. John Jones, the warden of the college, felt that he was the personal target of much of this criticism. He responded by banning revival meetings and preaching from campus. The **balokole**, Jones declared, were **bajeemu** (rebels). Nagenda

and his disciples drafted a letter in December 1941 replying to the charges. They were not rebelling against school policies, they wrote, but against the modernist spirit at Mukono that "minimizes sin and the substitutionary death of Christ on the Cross, and mocks at the ideal of separation from the world to a holy and victorious life." Jones expelled Nagenda and 29 others. The Church of Uganda polarized.

Bishop Stuart initially took the side of John Jones, whom he called "St. John," and supported the expulsions. He removed the licenses to preach from a number of revival leaders including Nagenda and Church. These were not restored until 1944, after much debate over the Bishop's 14-point plan of restoration. Many pro-revival Ugandans saw the document as just another expression of an authoritarian church attempting to destroy the revival.

On top of such criticisms, Nsibambi was soon faced with rogue elements of the **balokole** who began claiming they had reached a state of sinlessness. He opposed this group and was able to counter its teaching before it discredited the mainstream of the revival.

Nsibambi saw at the root of all perfectionism an inadequate view of the cross. When Nagenda visited Nsibambi and complained about his inability to crucify the old nature and achieve perfection, Nsibambi replied, "Don't you know, William, that your old man was crucified for you, long ago, at Calvary. ... Go home and rest ... in the finished work of Christ." Characteristic of Keswick teaching is the emphasis on overcoming sin through internalizing the death of Christ by faith. Nagenda's striving for power over sin was doomed to fail, Nsibambi discerned, if he kept looking at himself rather than his Savior. Nsibambi had seen even in the search for sanctification a desire to develop a righteousness of one's own, apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ.

The events at Mukono pointed in the direction of an inevitable split of the Anglican church in Uganda. As the tension reached its climax in 1943, Bishop Stuart issued a memorandum of reconciliation, published as **The New Way**, complete with a set of guidelines by which the revivalists and anti-revivalists could find common ground and avoid schism. Both sides agreed, averting division and ushering in the richest decades of revival yet.

Widening scope and enduring legacies

During the 1950s the revival reached its peak. Nagenda and Church traveled to India, America, Europe, Brazil, and all over Africa with the message of brokenness before the cross. Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya remained the epicenters of renewal.

Church writes that "leaders of Christian work and visitors to Kampala would not leave without a visit to Nsibambi, and would often return home with a new challenge and blessing." Upon his death in 1978, Nsibambi was the patriarch of a movement that had altered East African Christianity. Millions of Christians had been touched by the revival, representing a new, vital Christianity, shaped by African leadership.

Sadly, the specter of separatism persisted, and some denominations broke apart. One prominent revival faction that emerged in Uganda in the 1970s called itself the **Okuzukuka** or Awakening. Leaders began to condemn as sources of spiritual coldness many indifferent things—business, insurance, farming, dogs, joining in cooperatives, and even certain kinds of dress and hair fashions.

More positively, the East Africa Revival served as forerunner to Africa's explosive late twentieth- and early twenty-first century charismatic awakening. The humble beginning of this "next Christendom," as Philip Jenkins has called it, can be seen in Tanzania. There, in the 1940s and 1950s, a leader named Festo Kivengere presided over an awakening marked by revivalists, open-air preaching, and conventions. Though many traditional denominations resented these new structures of renewal, they prepared Tanzania for the wave of Western Pentecostal missions that came in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Pentecostal preachers began new churches—rivals to the older churches. And once again, struggle between the faith of the older generation of saints and the new winds of the Spirit dominated the landscape of Christian East Africa. Simeon Nsibambi would have felt right at home.

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Ethiopia: "The Country Blessed of God"

Jeremy Wells

"Although scarcely known by Westerners, the Ethiopian church offers one of the most heroic success stories in Christianity," writes Philip Jenkins in *The Next Christendom* (Oxford, 2002). Jenkins was thinking, perhaps, of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians' tenacious survival in the face of Islamic conquest during the Middle Ages. But Ethiopians endured persecution from Europeans too. In 1936, Mussolini's army captured the capital, Addis Ababa, and the following year expelled all Protestant missionaries from the country, including those from the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). SIM missionaries feared for the fledgling ministry they had started in southern Ethiopia. They had hoped to create an indigenous church that propagated and supported itself. But the work was less than ten years old and still small and seemingly reliant on the missionaries.

With only 150 members, the church faced an uncertain future and suffered harsh persecution by the Italians, who saw it as potentially subversive. Despite these circumstances, however, the church thrived and developed its own local character under the occupation. Popular songs reveal the intense emotion of this period. One Christian imprisoned by the Italians sang, "Why should we not suffer a little while here and now ... We will reign with him through all eternity." Another songwriter proclaimed, "The medicine is Jesus." In Walamo, one of the two cultural/geographic areas SIM had focused on before being expelled, a woman whose husband and three sons had been killed composed a hymn expressing the hope forged under persecution:

Understand, men! Understand, men!
Our house is that which is in heaven.
Our father is that which is in heaven.
Our children are those who are in heaven.

Throughout the occupation SIM received no word from Southern Ethiopia. Then in 1941, a former SIM missionary, Laurie Davidson, arrived along with the liberating British army and relayed the unthinkable news: The struggling remnant of 150 had grown into a church of around 10,000 believers.

Four years later, he reported on the Walamo congregation in particular, which had continued to expand: "The membership today stands at somewhere around 15,000 baptized believers, and its remarkable history comes a grand second to that recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles." Describing the unique organization and worship style of the Walamo Christians, Davidson commented, "Let it be emphasized that this organization is wholly indigenous, and was built up when there was no missionary in their country to exercise what he loves to think of as his indispensable guidance to the work of God."

Although missionaries eventually returned, the church retained much of its indigenous character and independence and grew into the Kale Heywet ("Word of Life") Church. It now numbers over 4 million believers—the largest evangelical church in Ethiopia today. As with the Chinese church under Communism and other indigenous Christian communities around the world, a church left alone in the heat of persecution did not die but exploded in growth and came into its own.

One can hardly find a better expression of this blossoming Christian identity than a song that became popular in Walamo after the Italian occupation had ended:

The country blessed of God,
Walamo the flower like Galilee.
There is Jesus' teaching place.
O, children, come to the teaching place.
Men, come to the teaching place.
Everyone, come to the teaching place.

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