
BY

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1. Introduction

The ‘Balokole’ Revival is widely recognised as one of the most significant Christian movements in eastern Africa. ‘Balokole’ is a Luganda word meaning ‘The Saved People’. This is an important reminder that, although the movement is popularly associated with Ruanda, its roots lie in Buganda and in the life of the Anglican Church of Uganda. The Revival began in the 1920s as a personal quest for holiness on the part of Simeoni Nsibambi, a prosperous Muganda landowner, who lived at Mengo, near Kampala. A partnership grew up between Nsibambi and a young English doctor of the CMS Ruanda Mission, Joe Church. This partnership resulted in a flow of young committed Baganda Christians, and Christians from western Uganda, to work at Gahini hospital in Ruanda. It was from Gahini that a full-scale ‘outpouring of the Spirit’ began in 1935, flowing back into western Uganda and Buganda itself. The Church of Uganda welcomed in theory the idea of Revival, indeed longed for it, but found the reality difficult to cope with. In October 1941 relations between Church and Revival were strained to breaking point when 26 Balokole students training for the ministry at Bishop Tucker Memorial College, Mukono, were expelled. They were dubbed bajeemu—rebels. A major schism between the Revival and the Church seemed a strong possibility. But it did not happen. By the 1950s the Revival had become an integral part of the life of the Church of Uganda. Archbishop Janani Luwum, killed during the Amin regime, and Bishop Festo Kivengere, the evangelist, are just two great Ugandan Anglican churchmen produced by the Balokole Revival.
There have been a considerable number of general accounts of the Balokole, especially from European adherents or sympathisers.² The most important autobiographical account to emerge (and unlikely to be equalled) is Joe Church’s *Quest for the Highest* (1981), a most useful source of information on the early days of the Revival both because Dr Church was such a central figure and also because he has so meticulously preserved his journals and correspondence.³ C. Robins’ PhD dissertation, *Tukutendereza* (1975), is a perceptive study of the Balokole from a sociological point of view.⁴ But so far there has been little attempt to locate with any precision the historical situation in which the Balokole emerged in Uganda.⁵ This study focuses attention on a crucial event in the early history of the Balokole—the expulsion from Bishop Tucker College of the theological students in 1941. The significance of this event has been acknowledged in general terms but has not yet been examined in any depth. Joe Church’s autobiographical account is valuable. But it is unashamedly the point of view of a major protagonist in the conflict. It does not attempt a balanced historical assessment⁶.

The sources for this study are the papers of Dr Joe Church, which contain a wealth of material and reveal nuances which are often lost in the autobiography; the archives of the Church Missionary Society in London; and material gathered over a number of years from discussions and correspondence in Uganda with participants in the events of the 1940s.⁷

2. *The position of the Anglican Church in colonial Uganda*

As a result of the Protestant victory over Catholics and Muslims in the ‘wars of religion’ of the 1890s, the Native Anglican Church (NAC)⁸ became politically the dominant religious confession in colonial Uganda. A strong alliance between the Church and the chiefly authorities grew up, enshrined in Bishop Tucker’s 1909 Constitution for the NAC and consolidated during Bishop Willis’s episcopate from 1912-1934.⁹ These political ties and the creation of a large ‘nominal’ Christian body created tensions in a Church which was the product of the Church Missionary Society, with its emphasis on the evangelical experience of conversion and personal faith. The Pilkington Revival of 1893 was an early attempt, influenced by the Keswick movement, to assert the priority of the spiritual over the political and social in the life of the Church¹⁰.