



Jason Bruner. *Living Salvation in the East African Revival in Uganda.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2017. 208 pp. \$99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-58046-584-7.

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This slim monograph by Jason Bruner, assistant professor of global Christianity at Arizona State University, concerns religious rupture and reorientation in Uganda from the 1930s to the 1950s. Bruner investigates how embracing the beliefs and practices of the East African Revival affected the behavior and lifestyle of Ugandan converts. He argues that the revival created “a new way of life,” designed to address the social and economic transformations wrought in Ugandan society by urbanization, migration, and the rise of a cash economy (p. 3). By “walking in the light” (p. 23)—how revivalists described their personal transformation—the converts believed that they could mitigate the effects of these societal changes on their everyday lives.

Bruner divides his monograph into six chapters. Chapter 1 explores the reasons why the revivalists, or *Balokole*, chose to remain within the Anglican ecclesiastical structure rather than break off and establish their own separatist church, given that the early decades of the twentieth century had witnessed significant “moral decline” in the Church of Uganda (p. 33).[1] Bruner argues that revivalists remained in the church because they wanted to save victims of this sad state of affairs by showing them “the superiority of the life of salvation” (p. 42). However, this goal metamorphosed into a broader desire to transform

Ugandan society—something that the *Balokole* could not achieve if they neglected one of the most powerful and influential institutions in late colonial Uganda.

Chapter 2 examines the nature of conversion among the *Balokole*. For the revivalists, conversion concerned creating a “radical break” with the past (p. 46). However, converts could only achieve rupture in their lives by publicly confessing to their “hidden” sins (p. 48). The process of exposing their sins allowed Ugandans to move from the darkness and into “the light of salvation” (pp. 46, 53, 84, 133, 107), since reflection enabled converts to put “things right” by making amends for their past sins (pp. 56, 93). This self-reflective act created the opportunity for revivalists to imagine the kind of person that they wanted to become. Confronted with transformations in Ugandan society that they could not control, the *Balokole* seized control of their own lives.

As chapter 3 demonstrates, conversion was more than a spiritual transformation. It also involved a bodily and physical one. Revivalists flouted food taboos, avoided alcohol, and gave up smoking. Such lifestyle changes often had social consequences. When women ate chicken or revivalists roasted meat that had been dedicated to the *emandwa* spirits, they provoked the ire of their neighbors. When the *Balokole* gave up alco-

hol, they abandoned the opportunity to attend beer parties, which were important to the political and social development of young men. Revivalists even changed the way they dressed and adorned their bodies. By “cutting rings off their legs” or changing how they folded cloth across their bodies, the Balokole signaled that they were living in “the light of salvation” (p. 72).

Chapter 4 explores how this religious movement interacted with larger migrations and movements of people in East Africa. The revival appealed to those who had experienced “physical, familial, and spiritual” disruptions in their lives (p. 80). In an era of labor migration, the revival offered a “portable” expression of religious fellowship, as conversion could occur anytime and anywhere with a public confession (p. 84). Once Ugandans decided to “walk in the light,” it affected job choice as well as job performance. Some employers believed revivalists were unreliable employees with “an irregular work ethic,” because they frequently abandoned their jobs if they felt moved by God to evangelize, join other revivalists in fellowship, or confess their sins (p. 91). Others, however, noted that revivalists were “more honest and reliable” employees than their non-Balokole counterparts, since they did not steal from their employers and often returned property they had stolen before their conversion (p. 93).[2]

Chapter 5 analyzes how revivalists reorganized their domestic space. Salvation changed marriage and family in ways that addressed the challenges posed by migration and urbanization in the late colonial period. In their efforts to find suitable partners for marriage, revivalists used fellowship networks to locate and vet spouses. Instead of choosing partners based on their ethnicity or ancestral lineage, however, revivalists emphasized “the state of his or her soul” (p. 106). As a result, interethnic marriages were common among the Balokole. Revivalists also abandoned the cultural tradition of bridewealth payments

and shared in covering the costs of revivalist weddings. Once married, “the life of salvation” even affected family dynamics (p. 3). Husbands and wives shared decision-making responsibilities and purged their households of sinful behaviors, such as adultery, theft, and drunkenness.

As chapter 6 shows, revivalists tried to co-opt colonial educational institutions for their own ends. Government-funded mission schools were ideal locations for the Balokole to preach their message of salvation, because the revivalists feared that their graduates were nothing more than “educated pagans” (p. 120). The revival’s vision of a new kind of community based in fellowship, however, clashed with the entrenched hierarchies of colonial schools and regularly created conflict. Indeed, many colonial officials actively sought to avoid hiring teachers who had joined the revival movement, because they feared revivalists would subvert their authority and foment rebellion. Nevertheless, it seems that some missionaries observed how students became more honest and hardworking after being “saved” (p. 129).

Bruner draws on a wide range of written sources. He conducted archival research in both the United Kingdom (the National Archives, the Church Missionary Society, Lambeth Palace Library, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and the University of Cambridge) and Uganda (the Bishop Tucker Theological Seminary Library). Bruner uses the papers of prominent missionaries, such as Joe Church, a Cambridge-educated doctor and Anglican missionary who followed the development of the revival closely and amassed a massive collection of materials on the movement, and church leaders, such as Cyril Stuart, the Anglican bishop of Uganda from 1932 to 1952. The field notes of anthropologists whose Ugandan fieldwork overlapped with the revival movement (for example, Melvin Lee Perlman and Derek Stenning), colonial newspapers, and government

documents can also be found scattered throughout the endnotes.

Bruner also uses oral data. This includes interview transcripts compiled by sociologist Catherine Robins for her 1975 doctoral dissertation on the revival, and oral histories Bruner conducted with first-generation revivalists from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, and their children in southern Uganda in 2012.[3] However, the scope of Bruner's interviews remains somewhat unclear, given that no information about these interviews can be found in the bibliography and the introduction only states that he conducted "a limited number of interviews" (p. 25). A close reading of the endnotes reveals citations for interviews with nine individuals—three women and six men. [4] Although it would have been helpful if Bruner had included more information about his oral history methodology, he cannot be faulted for conducting only a small number of interviews. Given the difficulties of locating people who might accurately remember the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Bruner was correct in his decision to develop and execute this research project primarily as an archives-based project.

Bruner's analysis of the revivalists emphasizes discontinuity with their past lives at the expense of continuity. He believes that an analysis of continuity among the Balokole would not accurately represent "the ethos, beliefs, and imagination" of the revival movement (p. 136). But while the revivalists may not have wanted to put "new wine in old wineskins," what happened to the residue of the old system is a question that it might be worth exploring in future research on the revival (p. 46, 57). At both a material and a psychological level, there are simply some circumstances that converts cannot wish into oblivion, such as abiding social relations with their half-siblings. Analyzing how converts relate to these continuous aspects of their previous lives is crucial to assessing the nature of conversion.

Bruner's decision likewise to treat the revival as a coherent movement instead of "a series of localized revivals" raises questions about the scope of his observational statements (p. 132). This monograph discounts the movement's geographical variation in an effort to articulate those aspects of the revival that transcended boundaries. However, a treatment of taboos and confessions might nevertheless demonstrate local differences. While "eating chicken" is the only transgression of food taboos Bruner discusses in any detail (pp. 71, 134), at least one of his archival sources also mentions that women were not allowed to eat goat, mutton, and eggs. Bruner also leaves unanswered the question of whether some cultural practices were considered more sinful than others, and if so, why. Exploring the variation within the revival could highlight where the practices and beliefs of the revival were flexible and where they were rigid.

Bruner also does not fully address the dilemma of causality. From an emic perspective, the revivalists certainly created "a new way of life," and Bruner interprets what this transformation entailed in the eyes of the converts. From a scholarly perspective, however, he does not explain why it is more convincing to see the Balokole as active participants in social change than to view the social and economic forces as the primary determinants.

Regardless of the issues I have discussed and the questions I have raised in this review, *Living Salvation in the East African Revival in Uganda* makes a valuable contribution to the literature on African Christianity, religious conversion, and late colonial Uganda. This lucid and discerning analysis of lived religion deserves a wide readership.

Notes

[1]. *Balokole* translates from Luganda into English as "the saved ones." The singular form of the word is *Mulokole* (p. 3).

[2]. It is necessary to point out that employers who had positive experiences with the revivalists

as employees were revivalists themselves. Similarly, those missionaries in chapter 6 who claimed that the revival improved the quality of students were also revivalists. While it is certainly possible that not every non-Balokole employer and teacher had negative experiences with the revivalists, I have been unable to find any evidence to bolster this claim in Bruner's monograph.

[3]. Catherine Robins, "*Tukutendereza: A Study of Social Change and Sectarian Withdrawal in the Balokole Revival of Uganda*" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1975).

[4]. These pseudonymous interviewees are the "retired Anglican canon" Anna (p. 43); Constance, "the daughter of an early prominent revivalist" (p. 89); Elijah, "the son of an early revivalist" (p. 56); the "elderly revivalist" Isaiah (p. 48); the "retired Mulokole bishop" James (p. 43; see also p. 137), whose father-in-law "was an early convert to the revival in Ankole, Uganda in the mid-1930s" (p. 95); the "elderly Anglican canon" Mary who lived in Mbale (p. 52; see also p. 134); and Paul, Peter, and Zechariah. I was unable to locate any descriptive information about these last three interviewees in Bruner's monograph.

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