

Lessons from East Africa Revival Movement through the life of Festo Kivengere's Biography ¹

1. In a Bahima Kraal (1919-1929).

a) Short Background

- Born a grandson of the last king of the Bahororo.
- The date was not certain because civilization had not reached the rural communities in South West Uganda. There were no calendars.
- So how did Festo arrive at his date of birth? The only thing he was told by his parents was that he was born during an year when there were lots of animal death caused by the deadly rinderpest disease. From the colonial government at that time, that year was 1919. As for the date, he chose 1st of November which is the All Saints day. So Festo was born (in theory) on the first of November 1919.
- His tribe is the Bahororo found in South West Uganda near Rwanda
- He was born in a royal family of the Bahima which was the ruling class of the Bahororo.
- His mother was from the royal family and she was called Barungi who got married a 2nd time to Ntzisira (Festo's dad). He came from the royal Kyahi clan and he owned 200 cows. Both Ntzisira and Barungi had been married before. Ntzisira was widowed after the first wife died. Barungi had been married to a drunkard and fighter but her father dissolved the marriage and took his daughter back home.

b) The Social activities of the Bahororo

Brought up in the traditional ways of the Bahima, it was cow centered rituals and taboos of the Bahima. This included;

- Sending cows to Barungis family for her to be fattened. (Bahima's admired plumb women).
- Polygamy was allowed but Festo's father Ntzisira was not keen to take many women.
- There was Purification after birth called "**Okuhasirira**"
- Herding the calves. This happened when Festo was grown enough to take the cows to the grazing field.

c) The religious activities of the Bahororo

The Bahororo believed there was a God in whom the Bahima devoutly believed. They considered him to be a great creator spirit whom they called "**Ruhanga**". Kivengere later explained:

¹ Much of the below is drawn from Anne Coomes, *The Authorised Biography of Festo Kivengere*, Monarch, 1990.

“Long before the missionaries came to Africa, my people knew there was a God. And we wanted him, we desired him. We knew he was the creator, and so we tried to worship him. We sacrificed to him and we believed our security came from him. Our problem was never ‘is there a God?’ but how can we reach him? To us he seemed to be very far away, sitting up there, big and great, something threatening us.”

What was the solution to their quest for God?

- They turned to spirit worship and the occult. This included evening rituals of worship offered to an unknown spirit. Kivengere’s father would explain that this were the spirits that cared about their health, cows and the little things of everyday life. The sacrifice was simple; it included milk or a bit of dried meat put in a hut. A fire would be built with leaves before praying. This was repeated daily by Festo’s father as Festo watched. They would offer a sacrifice for the family, the cows, our good welfare, and for that of our relatives and then withdraw.

Come in the morning and there was no meat or milk. Festo would later blame big rats and big insects. However he said he recalled the father’s sincere devotion to the night sacrifice.

- Apart from appeasing the little spirit, there was a higher spirit, higher than Ruhanga called Bachwezi. Bachwezi was unreachable. While the spirits inspired confidence, Bachwezi inspired fear. At one time Kivengere was cut and bled and his blood was given to the spirit of Ahola. At times a wave of the big spirits would visit sending people into a frenzy of hysterical chanting, speaking in unknown tongues, and unrestrained worship around a fire.
- The Bahororo also practiced witchcraft which was believed to be worked against the righteous. Witchcraft was based on the belief that social relationships can determine natural events. Thus, the snake is poisonous, and the disease incurable, but someone sent them your way in the first place. Kivengere’s family used the services of a witch doctors when once another witchdoctor threatened Ntzisira with a curse.

That is the short early childhood life of Festo Kivengere.

d) The Ruanda Mission.

- The Runda mission was a missionary organization that established its base at Kabale. This mission was different from the CMS mission in that the missionaries who launched the Ruanda mission all came from the conservative evangelicals within the church of England.
- This missionaries who had a statement of faith that held the Bible to be the supreme authority for all matters concerning Christianity and salvation was taken as a definite

turning at a specific point away from one's sin, to Christ. Following salvation, one was expected to live a holy life committed to Christ. It was this tradition of a greater emphasis on the Bible rather than sacraments and church tradition that the missionaries passed on when they established their mission in Kigezi. They never emphasized the sacraments side to worship.

- In 1920s the Ruanda mission needed more help and they got the help of Captain Geoffrey Holmes (a former soldier and hockey player), Constance Hornby (a midwife), Rev. Harold Gullebaud (Bible translator) and his wife. During the same year back in London, there was an agreed split between the CMS missionaries and the Ruanda mission. Ruanda mission became an independent auxiliary. It was the same year that a young medical student called Joe Church survived tuberculosis and decided as way of thanks to God to devote his life to mission field. He felt called to Rwanda.
- In 1926, a lot for people in Kigezi area were baptized but did not have a strong commitment and many still practiced witchcraft. It seems many had not been convicted of sin.

e) The Thirst for revival

In 1928, Dr. Joe church and Rev. Bert Jackson went south near the Rwandan border to new mission station at Gahini to take over from Geoffrey Holmes. It is while on this transition that they were met with heart breaking realities. This included:

- Poverty and disease.
- Famine

In 1928, there was a great famine that hit that area and the entire Uganda. It was heart breaking yet Joe Church and His colleagues believed that ***“combating the famine would prepare them for a revival.....it played a vital part in finding that Jesus is real and satisfies in any circumstances.....It was a prelude to an outpouring of the Holy spirit, but first they had to come to an end themselves.”***

In 1929, the rains failed again and they had to seek international support through the media which was very successful.

It was a realization of how powerless the missionaries were with the whole situation that they turned to seek divine possibilities. They knew the Holy Spirit had been promised but they felt their missions lacked the spiritual power. So they resulted to long sessions of prayer and daily Bible study with the help of Scofield Reference Bibles. Many converts then took an interest and run to the meetings.

However, it wasn't until Joe Church met a convert by the name of Simeon Nsibambi at Namirembe hill near the cathedral in Kampala. The friendship changed the course of Joe's mission because he spent several days together in prayer and Bible study on the power of the Holy Spirit before going their separate ways.

However, they found that they had nailed down the cause of complacency in the church of Uganda. They were relying on "good works and mental assent to the Christian message instead of, as Joe put it, **"Surrendering all to Jesus.....quitting all sin in faith, and claiming the filling of the Holy Spirit."** And Joe saw how the problem would be solved, He would later write home and say, **"There could be a revival in the Uganda Church if someone.....could.....point these thousands of nominal Christians to the victorious life."** Many people in Kampala thought he was mad and sent him back to Gahini but Gahini had started warming up.

- It was during this period that Kivengere's father died of tuberculosis and Kivengere's mother was married by Rwabugaramu. He later became a drunkard and a wife beater and would later separate with Festo's mother and return to their earlier home.

2. A reader on the Runjumbura Grasslands (1929-1934).

- A catechist comes to Kyamakanda to start a rural church.
- Kivengere joins the little school and becomes a reader.
- He is given his first book the gospel of Luke and reads about Jesus while herding his calves.
- Prepares for baptism and is baptized as "Festo" and becomes a member of the church of Uganda. The way Festo gets his name is very interesting because there was a belief at that time that any name in the Bible is a Holy name. So after baptism and his god parents were asked to give him a name, they open up to ACTS 25 and 26 on the story of how governor Felix handed power to new governor Festus who is faced with a problem with the prisoner Paul. Festus wants to hand Paul over to the gentiles but Paul appeals to Caesar. Festus later sends him over to Caesar and makes a very famous quote, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go" When Paul talks to him about Jesus, he is baffled and Festus tells him, **"Your great learning is turning you mad"**. So they pick up that name of Festus which sounded good to them and added a Ugandan touch to it by adding an "O". So Kivengere's new name was Festo Kivengere.
- Festo also goes through what many of us have gone through. Waiting for something supernatural during or after baptism. He waited but nothing happened. He would later say, **"I expected some great power would come over me."** And as water was sprinkled on him and the local missionary baptized them and said solemnly, "With this, the old man had died, and the new man had come" and baptized him Festo Kivengere. But there was a problem, nothing new happened. So he stood there very disappointed as the local missionary went on to the next person on the line. He could only conclude that, "The new

man had crept in, "Pretty quietly". He would later blame the teaching and not the baptism. They had received a wrong teaching.

- Continues his mission schooling and leaves home for uncle Karegyesa's kraal so that he would be able to study at Kinyasano. He became a very good reader emerging the best in his class. He also started getting interested in school and Christian work going on in the school.
 - At the same time, the search for revival was still on at Gahini. The famine was behind them and there was a lot of development in terms of missionary work. Hospitals were built, over 5,000 baptisms, 300 village churches. The thirst for a deeper commitment among the Christians was evident. People used to meet at Joe Church's verandah early in the morning to pray and read God's word.
 - In 1931, Joe Church preached a message on the theme of brokenness and God in His sovereign will and time responded by filling them with the Holy Spirit. This teaching helped many come to faith and the word "Brokenness" was to become a by- word of the revival. However, Joe would later say, ***"It was a temptation to develop some special revival message such as 'brokenness', something that belongs to our mission-how terrible!- and forget that the answer is found only in, "I, when I am lifted up... will draw all men to myself" John 12:32***
- The revival started marked by several occurrences that really made a breakthrough in true Christian fellowship.
 - i. One was that two missionaries asked their African brethren for forgiveness of their wrong attitudes towards them. Never before had a white man accepted his/her mistake.
 - ii. In 1933, at a conference of African evangelists, teachers and missionaries, formal prayers suddenly broke down and conviction of sin fell upon the whole assembly. Prayer became sincere, weeping confession. Forgiveness and thanksgiving followed and prayers all over started some as early as 3:30AM.
 - iii. The members of the new movement started to be known as "Abaruwaka" which means "those on fire".
 - iv. As time went on, a new important lesson was learnt, that in order for any fellowship to last, "short accounts" would have to be kept. So at prayer meetings time was set aside for people to put things right with each other. This time was known as, "the time of light" and would become a major feature of the revival throughout East Africa. \
 - v. Mission teams started coming up and travelling all over Uganda to preach the gospel. This became another important feature of the revival.

3. **Converted in a Broom Cupboard (1935-1936).**

- Festo goes to Kigezi High school for learning.
- Mission to Kabale brings the revival teaching from Gahini led by Joe Church, Yosiya Kinuka and Blasio Kigozi. This was a turning point for Festo as he realized a totally different way in which the gospel was presented to them by the team. The team kept the preachings well organized. On Tuesday, Joe would preach on “Sin” on Wednesday preach on “repentance” on Thursday preach on “the new birth” “coming out of Egypt”-separation from the world on Friday and “Holy spirit and victorious life” Saturday. On Sunday was a praise meeting that rounded it over.
- Nothing much happened after that meeting but later on, Festo would hear of stories of people who started weeping unexpectedly, dream dreams of heaven, or cry out under conviction. This was followed by a fear of sin and the results of sin and a deep cry for their sins. This was followed by a dramatic “breakthrough” when the person would feel himself definitely forgiven and saved by Christ and overwhelmed by love and joy. This was again followed by self imposed regime of Bible reading, and prayer. This came with a deep sense of realization of the God of Love.
- Revival begins in Kabale and Festo makes a commitment in school cupboard in 1939. This was after curiously following some students to find out why they were waking up at night to do only to be met by students praying in cupboard. Then and then, they shared the good news and Festo was converted.
- He joins evangelistic teams onto Mbarara High School.

4. **Schooldays and spiritual struggles (1937-1940).**

- **Guilt and frustration, forsaking Christianity.** Festo Kivengere became a drunkard. And as if to add insult to injury, his education hopes were dashed after his dream of becoming a secondary school teacher never was. He was seconded by his sponsor to join a primary school training college where he trained as a Geography and English. After joining Mbarara High School, he immediately denied his Christian faith and denounced the Christian fellowship. He would later indulge in drinking sprees with other lads that he thought were more satisfying. But the more he engaged in them, the more he felt guilty. This continued until he finished his high school training and was asked to be a primary school teacher.
- Education hopes dashed and he joins training primary school teacher training at Bishop Turcker College at Mukono.
- **His mother dies. This came at a time when he was undergoing frustrations of career hopes that were dashed.**
- He returns to Rukungiri to teach at Kinyasano hill in Rukungiri.

- As all this went on, the revival was still advancing. It brought challenges to the church then. It brought lots of schism (breakout). Lots of services were abandoned because of mass hysterical weeping and praying. This was a challenge. The revival brought thousands of conversions and undoubted spiritual blessings, as well as, sadly, many unbalanced excesses. In many instances, villages were disrupted and it led to tensions between pagans and the new Christians. Revived, it seemed, could be a mixed religion.

5. The final battle at Rukungiri. (1940-1941).

- Back to Rukungiri. Festo Kivengere finally settles at Rukungiri as a teacher and starts to live with his niece. However, his defiance still continued of the revival and he actually started being bitter of converts who used to speak, sing and preach in public. They were not afraid of sharing the gospel. Festo continued to resist the deep conviction of sin. At one time he would say ***“Is it possible to have sins forgiven? Having failed to get an answer, I assured myself that there was no answer. Therefore I tried just to quiet my conscience by satisfying it with other things. But God’s finger still followed me, and my conscience was ill at ease. When you know the truth and rebel against it, you become strangely hard”***
- Relentless revival. As Festo continued with his struggles, the revival was spreading more and more. However, it started facing opposition and one of it was from Karegyesa-Festo’s uncle who was the leader of the Bahima. Out of his hate for the revival members, he ordered his retainers to beat up anyone who spoke of being “saved”. Some local balokole were very badly thrashed. But the results were different from what Karegyese expected. When a man who talked about Jesus was beaten, when the neater went home he couldn’t sleep. By morning, he was weeping and went off to join the fanatics. Karegyesa had to change the order and said, ***“Don’t beat them. That is dangerous. You might become like them.”***
- Finally, Festo could not resist God anymore. After one of his friends called Festo like him was converted, it shocked Festo when the news was broken to him. Out of desperation and need for a sense of belonging, Festo went to his house where he couldn’t do anything. The news of Festo’s conversion was hard on him. He was therefore convicted to pray which he did. This wasn’t any structured prayer it seems but those rare prayers. Festo would then say in page 100-read.

6. Evangelist of Kinyasano Hill. (1941-1942)

- Brokenness and walking in the light. He led the first person to the Lord in class where he was teaching geography. Two boys stood up and asked him, “Sir, how can we find what you have found?” He was speechless and couldn’t quote any scripture. He just asked them to open up their hearts and receive Jesus.

- He headed straight away to put his life in order. He went to the field to find people that he had cheated, slandered or hurt. He asked forgiveness. He repaid debts. He went to the dukkas and broke the news to his friends who scoffed and said he wouldn't last long.
- Confesses to his step-father about new found faith and his hatred towards his step father for the things he did to his mother.
- Discovery of God's grace.
- Early preaching on village outreach teams. He goes out to preach with village teams/village evangelistic teams. This was happening every weekend and he never missed any one of them. People would renounce spirits of the dead, burned their charms and ignored the threats of the witchdoctor as nonsense. This made the witchdoctor very nervous and were trying to fight back. However, some of the witchdoctors had also been converted and openly confessed how they used to con people of their money.
- Engagement to Mera.

7. Walking in the light at Kabale. (1943-1945)

- Teacher at Kigezi high school.
- Wider preaching experiences.
- Struggles with revival legalism. This was another negative aspect of the revival fellowship. There was a lot of legalism and had defined ways to behave if you were a member of the movement. For example, one would not whistle to a Christian song because you whistle to a dog, How you were sitting in church showed what God is to you, the way you shave your beard/hair was a sign of whether you were in the movement or not.
- Yearning to be full time evangelist. At this time Festo had started entertaining thoughts of being a full time evangelist. Teaching started to look very containing and he was yearning to go out and share the gospel.
- Marriage to Mera. In 1943, Festo got married to Mera at St. Peters church in Rugarama hill, Kabale.
- Call to Dodoma, Tanzania. Festo feels called to go and be a missionary in Dodoma-TZ which he responds to by faith which leaves many surprised including his own wife.

8. Discouragement in Dodoma (1946-194)

- On their way to Dodoma, on board a steamer from Uganda to Mwanza, the ship is hit by a storm in Lake Victoria. Mera is holding their 1st baby peace and is also pregnant with a 2nd child.
- They were only allowed to buy 3rd class tickets because Africans were not allowed to travel on 1st or 2nd class. 3rd class meant travelling on the deck with no shelter whether there was sunshine or storms. Unfortunately, there was storm that day. They experienced it openly while the white people in 1st and 2nd class enjoyed their dinner in restaurant setting. Later

on, Mera will say that he started thinking that Festo had gone mad. How could he take them through this in the name of obeying God's call?.

- Revival feared and misunderstood. In Dodoma, TZ, revival is misunderstood. People do not want to respond to it and are comfortable about it. This angers Festo and the other Ugandan missionary.
- Banished from preaching. Later on, after he raises questions of in-equality on the way the white missionaries were being treated with more superiority compared to the Africans such as Festo.
- Later on, God will convict him that fighting the systems might not help/change anything but that he should continue witnessing and wait for God time to change all this.
- In 1948, something happened that was forever to remain in Festo and Mera's mind. When Mera had left home to go to a mission hospital to have their 3rd child, Lydia the 2nd born developed a raging fever and convulsions. Festo put him in the box he used to and rode the bicycle to the hospital. Unfortunately, on reaching the hospital, Lydia did not survive the fever and convulsion. This happening devastated Festo and he wondered what he was going to tell his wife Mera. **(Page 155).**

9. Travels in Tanganyika. (1950-1956)

- Revival accepted followed by constant missions.
- Becomes an acknowledged leader in Tanganyika church circles.

10. First trip to Australia and Britain. (1957-1959).

- To London University and early English revival contacts and tour with William Nagenda.
- Return to Dodoma.
- Decision to return to Uganda.
- Bishop Stanway offers trip to Australia.
- He goes to the Aborigines, Solomon Islands New Guinea.

11. Winds of Change(1960-1961)

- Schools supervisor of Kigezi district.
- Schools work with Lilian Clarke.
- Translating for Billy Graham.
- Off to Switzerland for church leaders' conference.
- Cripple healed.
- Calls from Zambia, Tanganyika; call to fulltime evangelism.

12. Free at last (1962-1963).

- Preaching tour of the USA with Billy Graham, Stephen Olford.

- British, Switzerland and India tours.
- Uganda gains independence and he seeks to go for ordination.

13. Going for Ordination. (1964-1967)

- Studies in Pittsburgh.
- Ordained deacon and ordained priest.

14. The “Billy Graham” of Africa. (1968-1970)

- Festo’s fame as evangelist grows, travels worldwide.
- Meets Michael Cassidy and accepts challenge to launch African Evangelistic Enterprise in East Africa.

15. Consecrated Amid Violence. (1971-1972).

- Obote’s government falls to Amin.
- Festo launches AEE in Kampala.
- Teething problems.
- Amin violence begins and Festo’s reaction to state Brutality.
- Indonesian revival problems.
- Nominated for Bishop, consecrated and enthroned.

16. Amin’s shadow lengthens (1973-1974)

- Bishop Festo takes over Kigezi diocese.
- He faces up to Amin.
- Public executions start.
- AEE expands.
- He attends the Lausanne congress.
- Worldwide preaching.
- Violence in Uganda increases.

17. Growing ministry.....Growing terror (1975-1976)

- International preaching and bishop Festo is appointed a Saffragan bishop.
- Amin visits Kigezi.
- Festo attend EuroFest and also plans for 4th Kabale Convention.
- Central America tour.
- World Council of churches assembly.
- He pleads for ordination of women.

18. Flight from Uganda. (1977)

- Festo preaches against Amin oppression.
- Raid on the archbishop Janani Luwum.
- Bishops write protest letter.
- Amin summons all bishops, threatens them and the Archbishop Luwum is detained and later murdered.
- Festo and Mera flee for their lives.

19. Exile. (1977-1979)

- Coming to terms with bitterness as he helps the other exiles.
- At the same time, preaching worldwide.

20. Forgiving the Unforgivable. (1980-1981).

- Amin falls to Tanzanian invasion and Bishop Festo and Mera return to Uganda.
- Reconciliation and reconstruction amidst political turmoil.
- Bishop Festo visits South Africa.
- Obote returns as Kigezi diocese is divided.
- Epidemic threatens Uganda.
- British tour "From Uganda with Love" and is given the cross of Augustine.

21. Mending Broken Things. (1982-1985)

- Diocese of Kigezi growing.
- AEE expanding.
- Obote's troops causing havoc.
- International preaching engagements.
- Banyarwanda refugee crisis.
- Festo stands up to Obote and also ordains women.
- Amsterdam 83.
- New archbishop chosen as Kabale marks its golden Jubilee.

22. An elder of God's people. (1986-1988).

- Museveni takes over Uganda.
- John Wilson shot.
- During his days of sickness, he would exude lots of confidence by the following words page 461.
- Bishop Festo falls ill and later on succumbs to the illness-Leukemia.

Major lessons from the EAR

1. The gospel does not change. It is pure grace and sustenance by grace. When the movement started, it was easy for people to start coming up with other things thinking it will make the revival grow. A little of legalism here and there, and emphasized experience as opposed to God's word. Festo did not teach this and remained faithful to the call to be a church minister.
2. True revival does not happen in the way/style people worship but a daily reminder of the gospel. That we need brokenness, realizing that there is nothing we can do to earn God's grace but we reach the point of brokenness.
3. Amazing grace for salvation. This is clearly shown in the way he calls, elects and uses Festo Kivengere. A man from a spirit and cattle worshipping community to be a Christian and an evangelist.
4. God works in us to will and to guide. "When do we consider our prayers answered?" Many things in the life of Festo did not go the way he wanted but God had a bigger plan for him through all this.
5. The place of prayer, God's word and witnessing in the life of a believer. This is clearly brought out in the way the members of the revival live their life which helps to spread the gospel throughout East Africa. They also believed that they were God's witnesses in the Church of Uganda. They were committed members of the church and were very frequent in the church.
6. True revival as Festo would later put it means a renewal of the inner man and does not necessarily have to do with the way one worships of the chants that they make. This was after there was a lot of emphasize on crying during service, speaking in tongues and chanting as a sign that one was indeed converted. This almost split the balokole but Festo and others opposed the formation on a new denomination but to stay within the movement.
7. The place of taking risks/faith in missions. The life of Festo Kivengere and his family going to Tanganyika was a big risk but an important one in the face of the revival spreading to other parts on East Africa.
8. Suffering as part of a true believer: After a successful time in Uganda under the revival fellowship, he goes to a hardship area in Tanganyika. On the journey there is a storm, on reaching in Tanganyika, they are given a very small mad house yet missionaries from Australia live in better houses, he becomes bitter about how things are done and the

double standards within the mission station between the Western missionaries and African missionaries. He is rejected by the CMS missionaries in Tanganyika, he is accused of preaching a different gospel, the church rejects him too but the local people are eager to hear him speak. Does he give up? No he doesn't, God gives him the staying power.

9. More sufferings follow when his child dies of a fever in Tanganyika. In a mission field, and he loses his child, he has all reasons to be bitter towards God. But at that moment of not knowing what to do, the Holy Spirit fills his heart with peace that cannot be understood. Amazingly his wife was in hospital at the same time where he gets another child whom he names
10. There is no mission or evangelism without love. From the life of Festo Kivengere, he learnt this after he had hatred for his rejecters and God teaches him how to respond with love. This changes things in his mission field. Doors open for more evangelism and the church re-accepts him. He travels all over Tanganyika preaching the gospel. He doesn't allow the frustrations of the mission field bog him down but he focused on the bigger picture of reaching out to the community.
11. Love will later be a big message for him even after Uganda gains independence and he had to speak against brutality. He even spoke against the attack of the Wanyarwanda by Ugandans in Kigezi during the time of Obote's rule. This made him speak against his own tribesmen but to him he would say, I cannot stand with my community when it is brutally treating another human life. He sourced food for the Wanyarwanda which one local church bishop stole. He later
12. Reading was an important aspect of the life of Festo Kivengere. He read a lot and this helped him later in his world evangelism. He read so many books and also wrote others.
13. Get the doctrine right. This is very important. Passion is not everything, but be passionate about right things. I have a friend who has a deep passion for the evangelism but the doctrine they teach is questionable. Trying to show him the right things has become hard because of the passion. But the doctrine is wrong.