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The *Fifohazana* Revival on the great island of Madagascar is the focus of this month's journal. One of the earliest indigenous Christian movements in Africa, the *Fifohazana*—or "Awakening" in Malagasy—is an independent, self-governing and self-sustaining renewal movement with a two-fold mission of outreach to traditional religionists and of revival within the established churches. Women play an extraordinary role as they make up eight out of ten of the movement's evangelists or "shepherds." The *Fifohazana* originated in 1894 and has continued to this day, under the leadership of four nationally recognized leaders. This issue features the stories of three of the revival leaders, the founder, Rainisoalambo*, and two women, Ravelonjanahary, and Volahavana Germaine (Nenilava)* (*pictured on the cover).

Christianity came to Madagascar in 1818 with the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries, David Jones and David Griffiths, from the London Missionary Society. An earlier attempt by the Portuguese to establish a Catholic missionary outpost on the island failed. Jones and Griffiths first started a school then a church and, by 1835, they had translated the entire Bible into Malagasy. That same year, antagonized by the outspoken new converts, Queen Ranavalona I expelled the missionaries and outlawed Christianity during her thirty-year reign. Despite persecution, the number of converts continued to increase. The growth continued throughout the rest of the 19th century thanks to the solid foundation laid down by the missionaries, the availability of the Bible in the vernacular, strong Malagasy lay leadership, and the inspiring witness of the suffering Christians. By 1900, Christians numbered one million, which represented 39% of the population. The 20th century saw a more gradual increase in both Protestants and Catholics. Today, Madagascar's population is composed of 58% of Christians, 2.1% of Muslims, and 39.4% of Ethnoreligionists (figures from the World Christian Database).

The *Fifohazana* began in last decade of the 19th century in the Betsileo region, south of the capital city of Antananarivo, during a time of terrible turmoil and conflict. The people were suffering from famine,

disease and heavy taxation. At this time, an indigenous movement called the *Menalamba* uprising (Red Shawls) was spreading all over the country. Several missionaries were killed, among them Catholic father Jacques Berthieu and Protestants Benjamin Escande and Paul Minault. However, unlike the *Menalamba,* the *Fifohazana* was not a political movement with the potential for subversion that invited repression by French colonial authorities. Nor was the *Fifohazana* the result of a polarization between missionaries and indigenous church leaders, as in the *Tranozozoro* movement in 1893, which led to the formation of an independent church.

Initially, the revival movement encountered Protestant missionary resistance. But soon Lutheran and Reformed (LMS) churches began to multiply, thanks to the efforts of the first evangelists who called themselves the "Disciples of the Lord," following the example of their leader Rainisoalambo. Missionary Élisée Escande, who came to Betsimisaraka, along the east coast in 1907, reported that in the southern part of the area there were fourteen churches in 1915. The Disciples of the Lord arrived sometime before 1922 and by that year there were 64 churches. In 1924 there were 113, and by the next year, 124.[1] After Rainsoalambo (ministry 1894-1904), three other leaders continued the work of the revival throughout the 20th century: Ravelonjanahary (ministry 1900-1970), Daniel Rakotozandry (ministry 1946-1947), and Volahavana Germaine (Nenilava) (ministry 1941-1998).

How does one explain the extraordinary longevity of this movement? Some Malagasy Christians believe the *Fifohazana* is a response to the desperate hardships the country has suffered since the 1890s as a result of colonialism, endemic poverty, failed leadership, and the shameless exploitation of the country's natural resources by corrupt local and foreign powers. The *Fifohazana* has created a space to address the concerns of the local people—questions that traditional churches have mostly failed to address such as witchcraft, exorcism, the

[1] Charles Forman, "A Study in the Self Propagating Church: Madagascar," *Frontiers of the Christian World Mission since 1938; Essays in Honor of Kenneth Scott Latourette*, ed. by Wilber C. Harr (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), 156; Laurent W. Ramambason, *Missiology: Its Subject-Matter and Method: A Study of Mission-Doers in Madagascar* (Series: Studies in Intercultural History of Christianity; Vol 116. New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 66, 67, 184.

supernatural, burial rituals, and other indigenous practices. In addition, the *Fifohazana* has given women a place to exercise spiritual leadership.

The movement also seeks to provide places of healing in response to what some see as a rise in demon possession and illnesses of all kinds in recent years. The evangelists/shepherds of the revival understand the message of the gospel holistically: for them, physical healing and the restoration of good relationships in community are integral to the work of salvation. Therefore, the shepherds are called to be healers as much as teachers. They consider that any illness, whether physical or mental, always has a spiritual component and is the result of some form of sin.

There are many communities of healing on the island associated with the *Fifohazana*, mostly concentrated in the southern region. The sick, who are often banned from their villages, are welcomed into these *toby* (healing villages) where they are required to attend the daily healing and exorcism services. They live with the shepherds who take them into their families and care for them, sometimes at the risk of their lives. The willingness to use Western medicine in addition to exorcism is a unique feature of the *Fifohazana* movement that sets it apart from many independent churches elsewhere.

The author of these three biographies, Berthe Raminosoa Rasoanalimanga, the former director of the National Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ (FJKM), is herself a shepherd and therefore writes as an insider. She, like many others, wonders who might emerge as the next national leader of the *Fifohazana*. There is a new prophet named Mama Christine, from among the Bara people in southern Madagascar who received her call to ministry in 1998, the year of Nenilava's death. Could she be the one? Only God knows.

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