

RAINISOALAMBO, RAVELONJAHARY, AND
VOLAHAVANA GERMAINE (NENILAVA):
REVIVAL LEADERS OF MADAGASCAR



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REVIVAL LEADERS OF MADAGASCAR

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Rasoanalimanga from the *Dictionary of African
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**Rainisoalambo, Ravelonjanahary, and Volahavana Germaine
(Nenilava): Revival Leaders of Madagascar**

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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 Raminosa 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.

Michèle Miller Sigg

DACB Project Manager and JACB Managing Editor

Rainisoalambo
c. 1830 to 1904
Lutheran
Madagascar

In the 19th century, the revival movements spreading across Europe also found their way to Madagascar, where they came to a man named Rainisoalambo. He lived alongside the Betsileo princes in a rural village called Ambalavato in what is now the Haute Matsiatra region. He was descended from a line of diviners who were responsible for educating the princes, and he was raised in their midst. Rainisoalambo was chief of the royal guard, and he served as the public voice of the sovereign because of his great gift for witty banter and public speaking. His skill in persuasive argument led many to demand his services as a kind of lawyer. He almost always won the case he argued, and people who needed someone to speak for them frequently hired him. Rainisoalambo was also renowned as a traditional healer and diviner. Around 1892, when he was about sixty, he left his work at the court and devoted himself to agriculture (rice, in particular), hoping to earn more money that way.

The London Missionary Society (LMS) [1] had already started a church in the village of Ambatoreny. When not in use for services, the pastor used the building as a school and served as the teacher. Pastor-evangelists like him were trained in the theological institutions of the LMS. They were very disciplined, wore European-style clothing, were paid, and were not subject to forced manual labor. In fact, to the local residents, they represented a new way of living.

Rainisoalambo coveted their way of life and thought that he could become like them if he too became a pastor. He was an ambitious and intelligent man, and with the encouragement of his friends, he learned to write and to read the Bible. He was baptized in 1884 and hoped that he would become wealthy when he was ordained as a pastor. In the meantime, he did not abandon his pagan practices. After a six-month course of Biblical instruction, he was appointed as a non-salaried catechist to the parish. Disappointed, he went back to his former work as a farmer and healer/diviner.

In those days, the standard of living was very low for people in remote villages like the one in which Rainisoalambo lived. To make matters even worse, there was a famine at that time, and an epidemic of smallpox and malaria also swept through the region, killing many people. In addition to those tragedies, the Bara and the Sakalava [2] -- two tribes living in the vicinity of the Betsileo tribe -- took turns attacking and plundering the surrounding villages. People were also burdened by taxation. The king required that all adult males pay taxes to help pay the fines imposed by the French colonizers. Charms and pharmacopoeia provided no relief from poverty, malnutrition and sickness.

Most of Rainisoalambo's family perished, and soon he had only seven head of cattle left. His rice paddies lay fallow and uncultivated. He grew very sick and lived on next to nothing; his body was covered with painful sores that made it impossible for him to work. All his friends left him.

From the depths of his misery and despair, Rainisoalambo called on the God that he already knew about. That very night, October 14, 1894, according to his testimony, he had a dream. In the dream, he saw someone dressed in a white garment that was indescribably white standing next to him, telling him to throw out his amulets and abandon the things he used for divination—objects that had served both to protect him and to give him his identity as a diviner.

The next day, at dawn, Rainisoalambo carried out the order and threw away his baskets full of pieces of wood, of grain and of pearls. Right away, he felt delivered of his pain, and his strength came back. He felt like a new man. All of this happened on October 15, 1894. In his words, Jesus delivered him from the depths of the pit and freed him of his pagan chains. He repented, and immediately felt like he had been freed. Rainisoalambo washed his body then cleaned his house and his courtyard.

Since he already knew how to read, he began to carefully read the Bible, especially the New Testament. He already knew certain things about prayer and the rites of the Christian church and community, but it was after he had spent many weeks studying and meditating on the Bible that he began to spread his message.

Rainisoalambo first spoke to his family, as several of them were ill and were practicing the ancestral religion. The central theme of his preaching was that one needed to move away from idolatry and cling to Jesus Christ, the One who had appeared to him and spoken to him. He told them that if they wanted to be healed, they should throw out their fetishes. Many of them followed his advice and were healed. Rainisoalambo then went to the neighboring villages, visiting and praying for those who were so sick that they could not even pray. He laid hands on the sick, proclaiming that Jesus was the source of all healing, and they were healed. All of this took place between the end of 1894 and the first half of 1895.

On June 9, 1895, Rainisoalambo gathered the twelve people [3] who had first been healed after throwing away their idols and laying aside their pagan life. They prayed together, and they made a number of solemn commitments. They promised to learn to read and to count so that they could read the Bible by chapter and verse. They would clean their houses and courtyards, and they would also have separate cooking areas so that homes would be clean enough to meet in, honoring God. [4] The members of the group would also have their own vegetable gardens and sources of food, and they promised to start everything with prayer in the name of Jesus. Traditional burials were not only often an excuse for pagan drunkenness and debauchery, but they could also spell financial ruin for a

family. They decided that funerals should take place in nice clothes and would be times for songs, prayers and exhortations. There would be no slaughtered cattle, protecting the grieving family against impoverishing themselves on such occasions. Rainisoalambo ended the meeting with Bible reading and prayer. That small but extraordinary meeting gave birth to the *Mpianatry ny Tompo* (Disciples of the Lord).

Rainisoalambo started to teach the members of the group. As they learned, the members continued to work as farmers. Rainisoalambo taught with the help of tracts, including the Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* translated by M. Burgen, which he obtained from Théodor Olsen, a missionary from the Soatanàna ("beautiful village") Mission Station [5]. He also requested the teaching help of the pastor in Ambatoreny, who accepted and came to teach them every Monday and Thursday.

They organized themselves so that they could lead a life in community. They cultivated the fields and built houses to receive the sick. They preached the Gospel, healed the sick, and delivered the demoniacs who came to see them. In order to always have the Bible with them, they created white cotton bags that they carried slung over their shoulders.

They agreed together to live by the following principles: repentance, humility, patience, love of one another, prayer, communion, and mutual aid. In the early days, Rainisoalambo sent them out on short trips to evangelize nearby, but little by little, they traveled farther away on longer trips. His wish to have a missionary life was granted, but not as he had expected.

Near the end of October of 1895, having become acquainted with the community and their work of evangelization, missionary Théodor Olsen wrote: "Something that was cause for rejoicing happened in the village to the west of the station, because about twenty honorable pagans asked if they could be baptized. They had been coming to the Sunday worship service in the parish, and we could also see them studying the Bible and helping each other with readings and Bible studies during the week. One Monday when I went to visit them and to teach, there were about thirty or forty of them, all paying close attention to the sermon I was preaching about the love of God that He extends to sinners." [translation by the author].

Rainisoalambo's village, Ambatoreny, quickly became a magnet for many sick people. New converts exhorted them, prayed for them in loud voices and laid hands on them. Also, many of the "disciples" quickly went to their neighbors and families, telling them what had happened and encouraging them to do the same.

In 1902, due to the politics of the colonial situation, the "revival center" was moved to Soatanàna, where it still is today, so that it could be under the aegis of the Norwegian mission there and be integrated into the local Lutheran parish. Today at the revival center in Soatanàna, certain Biblical rituals are practiced, such as footwashing. All those who live there

dress in white - the symbol of purity - and all the Soatanàna *zanaky ny Fihohazana* (children of revival) rigorously follow the same life principles. Men wear straw hats with a white ribbon. It is the custom that guests have their feet washed by a resident when they arrive at the center.

Organized along patriarchal lines and submitted to rigorous discipline, the disciples of the movement profess the gift of healing by the laying on of hands. Starting from Soatanàna, the movement spread through its *iraka*, (“apostles” or “sent ones”) who went from village to village and from town to town on foot, preaching the Good News to all. In 1904, they numbered about fifty, and the number of converts kept on growing.

From the very beginning, Rainisoalambo was at the head of the revival movement. Often worried about the future of the movement because of the ever-present winds of discord, he would frequently go to pray alone near the mountain that is to the west of Soatanàna. He decided to organize a general assembly of the movement's delegations, which were spread throughout the island, and set the date of August 10, 1904. It would be a great prayer meeting, and would also serve to set up the organization of the movement. Intensive preparations began in Soatanàna for the construction of a large structure that would serve to welcome all the guests. The residents organized the rice planting as well, so that there would be enough food for everyone.

Rainisoalambo managed to direct the preparations for some time, but was eventually tired by the work, given his age. His lungs became afflicted with an illness that got increasingly worse. On the eve of his death, he asked once more to be brought to the construction site. He had to be held up on both sides, as he could no longer walk alone. The following day, some of his friends and his family came to be with him, and stayed around him singing and praying for him. On June 30, 1904, he breathed his last, praying for the movement in Soatanàna.

He was buried in Soatanàna even though his native village was not far away, so as to keep the rule of the movement, according to which one should be buried where one died. [6] The great assembly of August 10 took place without him. Soatanàna would become the first revival center in the land, and it is now a great center of yearly pilgrimage where people go for healing and prayer.

The revival movement shook up the social and economic life of the village and of the region. The number of illiterate people declined and increased respect for personal hygiene improved the general health conditions of all. The change in customs and behavior at burial ceremonies was an improvement for families. Soatanàna became a model village for the surrounding region.

Rainisoalambo is a remarkable figure. He spent most of his life as a diviner, and at first only became a Christian because he thought it might get him rich. When, however, he was at a point of desperation in his life, he

found a source of power and inspiration in the Christian faith, leading him to spearhead the first major revival movement in Madagascar.

Ravelonjanahary

c. 1850 to 1970

Protestant (Reformed)

Madagascar

Ravelonjanahary was at the head of the second revival movement in Madagascar. She lived in a time that was difficult for the people of Madagascar. The island had been under French colonial power since 1896, and all anti-colonial insurrections were firmly crushed by the military government of General Galliéni, leading to a considerable number of deaths. The colonizers subjected the conquered Malagasy to severe rules of obedience. As of 1900, men above the age of sixteen were forced to pay taxes. On July 7, 1901, *The Natives Law* was put into effect [7] in order to restrict the freedom of the Malagasy people. General Victor Augagneur, who succeeded general Galliéni, introduced atheism to the land through several newspapers [8] in order to draw people away from Christianity, which was already having a very significant impact in the country. Forced labor as well as epidemics of smallpox and plague were taking a heavy toll on people both physically and morally. There was also a religious war going on between the Catholics and the Protestants [9] and it had reached all the way to Fianarantsoa.

Ravelonjanahary's real name was Renilahy. She lived in Malonotrony, in the Iarindrano-Fianarantsoa region. She was the oldest child in a pagan family, and was called "Mama" (mother) [10] until she was married. Her father was an *ombiasa*, (wise man, healer and seer) and was very well-known in the region. People consulted him, among other things, to keep hail from falling on their rice fields or to make the crocodiles flee when they crossed rivers. Renilahy was raised and educated in a completely pagan milieu and inherited the gift of healer and seeing from her father and paternal grandfather.

She married Rainiboto, who was also called Rainidalo. They had a daughter who died at a very young age after having a little girl of her own. They took their granddaughter in, but she also died very soon. They adopted Renilahy's nephew, Ranisana. They were a couple who lived simply, and they were well-loved by those in their community.

The spirit of an ancestor possessed Renilahy, making her life difficult and forcing her to practice certain prohibitions. For example, her plate and spoon were not to be confused with those of anyone else. She wore an amulet collar around her neck and a silver coin attached to the back of her braid.

Her conversion started in 1900. It happened gradually as a result

of visions that came to her. Later, she heard a voice tell her that God had chosen her to work for Him. The job He had for her was to deliver people from whatever was holding them captive and, if they had faith in the power of God, to heal them from any sickness. If Renilahy had refused, she would have died. She asked for her husband's advice, and he advised her to accept. Another time, a voice told her to look at her hands. She looked and writing appeared. According to the voice, these were the Ten Commandments - five on each hand. The voice also told her that anyone who came to belief in God through her teaching would be healed after she laid hands on them. One Sunday, the Holy Spirit showed her all her sin, even the very least of them. She could see God's wrathful face and wanted to flee but did not know where to go. She repented, and God accepted her repentance. The amulet collar and the silver coin disappeared.

In 1910, she was about sixty years old, but still in very good health. The Holy Spirit told her that she was going to be dead for six days and that on the seventh day, she would come back to life. She told her family this news and advised them not to bury her, not to put her in an unclean house (where there were still amulets) and not to cry for her.

When the day came - a Thursday, around noon - a force carried her up to the ceiling and let her fall. She died from the fall. Her body was carried to the village where she had been born, in Lohafy, and was put in the Protestant church at Ifanda, where there was a wake with singing and praying. On the sixth day, a terrible odor came from her body, and her flesh fell off little by little, but her muscles and bones were not affected. On the seventh day, a bell rang around midnight and a pleasant odor filled the church, replacing the smell of decay. The parish pastor arrived early the next morning and found that Renilahy had come back to life and was standing next to the pulpit. She was wearing a strikingly white garment, and her flesh had been renewed, being now like the skin of a baby. She said that during her death she had been carried to heaven, where she had sat down with angels and saints.

It is also said that two years later, God took her soul up to heaven to teach her for three days. This time, her body did not die, but God put another soul in it to keep it alive. It was in heaven that God baptized her and gave her the name Ravelonjanahary ("brought back to life by God"). God taught her the Holy Scriptures and melodious songs, which are still sung today. When she came back to earth, her marriage to Rainiboto was held as a religious ceremony.

Later, the voice of the Lord told her that she was going to die another time, but that this time it would be like the death of Jesus Christ, crucified on a cross. A force took her and held her to the wall, arms outstretched, but no one could see what was holding her there. People came to hold a wake for her and sang continuously. She died on a Friday and came back to life on Sunday. That is how God prepared her for her being sent to preach the Gospel, to deliver the demon-possessed, and to heal the

sick throughout the island. She started the revival center in the protestant church of Andravoahangy Fivavahana in 1928.

Nearly the whole southern part of the region of Fianarantsoa was shaken by this revival movement. A French Protestant missionary named Siegrist attended one of the revival movement meetings held by Ravelonjanahary and reported that approximately one hundred *mpisikidy* and *mpimasy* ("traditional healers and seers") had converted and were stamping on their idols, proclaiming out loud that from then on they would only believe in Jesus Christ.

She encountered difficulties in her ministry, but never renounced the Lord. Some people who had known her before she was converted believed that what she was doing was just fakery and that she was still using her fetishes. She was taken to court for having meetings in her home without a permit and for using powerful remedies to heal people. On November 11, 1928, she was summoned to the court in Ambalavao-Tsienimparihy, which was thirty-five kilometers from Manoloitrony; she made the trip on foot. A missionary came from Fianarantsoa to help her. She answered her accuser by saying that it was God who gave her the power to heal, and that she received no money from those she healed. She was acquitted for lack of proof.

The journal called *Gazety Ranovelona*, ("Living Water") [11] which was a journal for former students of the Protestant Mission, tried to clear up the events surrounding the resurrection of Ravelonjanahary in an article which was published on January 31, 1928, in Antananarivo. The article quoted the commentary of various newspapers that had been published previously, as follows [translation by the author]:

The Malagasy newspaper *La Grande Ile* was the first to publish a report on the resurrection of Ravelonjanahary on November 17, 1927. On Friday November 25, 1927, the other papers also covered the story and people rushed to buy the papers, so much so that the police had to intervene. The next day, the rush to Malonotrony was on: wealthy people went by car, while others took the bush-taxi with their sick, hoping to get them healed. Still others were just curious.

The newspaper *La Grande Ile* published this report:

Putrefaction can only come from the dead. Was there really an occurrence of this nauseating odor that is putrefaction? If the answer is yes, then it is true that Ravelonjanahary really did rise from the dead. According to what people are saying, the blind are recovering their sight, the deaf their hearing, the mute are speaking, paralytics are standing on their feet and other ills are being healed as well. The Gospel that she is preaching to sinners is

not a shame, but rather an honor for the Protestant Church...But the most remarkable thing is that Ravelonjanahary is not asking for money from anyone...The number of people who have come to see her over the last five weeks or so is up to 871, and that number includes six *vazaha* ("Europeans"). There were also Indians and Chinese, as well as childless people who came asking to have children.

The newspaper *Gazetintsika* ("Our Paper") said:

"Amazing Healing, they said!" Here in Ambalavao, there is a woman of a certain age, already known by many, who dares to say publicly that she has been sent from God. She says that about twenty years ago, she died and her body putrefied, but that she came back to life in order to heal the sick. She is a Protestant, and it is reasonable that her co-religionists believe in her... Dear Catholic friends, why do you allow yourselves to be influenced by such things, especially you who have spent a lot of money and have come from afar to Ambalavao? Many of you have already come here - ask them if they have been healed or not. As for those of you who are sick and want to be healed, and for those of you who have sick family members and want the best for them, why are you all driving like mad to the Betsileo? The road to Tsienimparihy is worn down from so much travel... Instead of spending your money for gas, spend it on medications and spare your sick all the troubles of traveling, which will only make their sickness worse! I'm not telling you lies or falsehoods, but if you don't believe me, ask the other families who have already come, and they will tell you the truth.

According to the newspaper *Diavolana* ("Moonlight"):

If Ravelonjanahary is not telling the truth about her resurrection, then has Jesus Christ entered into a woman who is a liar? She is only doing good works in order to save souls, and she preaches only Jesus Christ... We have right here before us people who have been healed or who are being healed according to the strength of their faith, and who have received the grace of the Lord Jesus. These are people who are trusted by the state and the church, people who don't spend their time trying to think up ways to cheat and tell lies... According to one journalist, no one who was sick has really been healed. Perhaps he didn't want to hear the truth or didn't want to find out everything he could about the topic. As for me, I'd say that many of the sick have really been healed and that

others are on the path to healing. I have already met and spoken with many of them.

The newspaper *Fahasambarana* ("Happiness") said:

God has chosen Ravelonjanahary to do miracles for Him. If you don't agree, all of you doctors, theologians, philosophers, etc., that's your business. As for us, there's no disputing it - someone who is dead is dead. We don't know whether it's a scientific death, or a philosophical or a theological one... If you say that you can make mistakes, we're here to confirm that, yes, you can make mistakes. She (Ravelonjanahary) told a man who had been paralyzed on one side for five years: "Go and plunge your right hand into the first river you come to, then run it over the inert side of your body, and you will be healed." He did as she said, and he was healed. He was an Indian, and he is presently in Ambalavao. To another person who has had asthma for twenty-four years, she said, "Believe in Jesus" and the person was healed... The important thing for her is that people believe in Jesus - healing can come later. The wisdom that God has given her is quite useful and she deserves to be respected.

Finally, the newspaper *Gazety Ranovelona* ("Fresh Water") had this to say, by way of conclusion:

Based on what we have read, people have different opinions about Ravelonjanahary. But there is a great lesson to be learned from this woman: respect for everyone's conscience. She is a Protestant, but she exerts no influence on people to follow her in that. She asks that people who are already in a denomination not change their faith. She invites those who are still outside the church to enter it as they wish.

Neny Ravelonjanahary ("Mother" Ravelonjanahary - among the Malagasy people this epithet is a sign of respect for her age and her mission) always told people who came to her that she was not the one doing the healing, but that it was Jesus, if they would trust in Him and in His power. When her mission started, Ravelonjanahary received people at home. Later, as there were so many people, the evangelization meetings would take place in the church, and she would see people in her home in turn. Given how many people there were, some waited weeks for her, but they did not lose their patience. They stayed in the few small hamlets that were there, or set up tents, or waited in their cars.

Ravelonjanahary lived simply. God transformed her so that she would live in humility, in faith, and in love for other people. She was called *Ravelonjanahary, mpanetry tena, mpirovaka ho an'ny firenena* (Ravelonjanahary,

woman of humility, who prays for her country).

Ravelonjanahary died on November 8, 1970, in Manoloitrony, about 120 years old. Manoloitrony has become a place of pilgrimage and now welcomes people who come for a retreat, to pray or to be healed. Other revival centers linked to the revival movement of Manoloitrony have sprung up almost everywhere in Madagascar.

Neuilava (Volahavana), Germaine

1920 to 1998

Lutheran

Madagascar

In the course of the last hundred-plus years, there have been four revival movements [12] of national significance in Madagascar, all of which have their roots in the established churches. The first revival movement sprang out of the Lutheran Protestant Church. This movement was followed by revivals in the Protestant Reformed Church, the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church. These movements have become pillars of strength in the churches of Madagascar and have been legitimized by church authorities. Germaine Volahavana, now known as Neuilava, gave birth to the fourth Revival Movement, centered in Ankaramalaza.

Volahavana is the name she was given at birth. Her father, Malady, was from the Antaimoro tribe and was of royal birth. Both king (*ampanjaka*) and healer/seer (*ombiasa*), he was well-known and well-respected in the region. Her mother's name was Vao. The family lived in Mandronda, in the canton of Lokomby, in the district of Manakara. Volahavana had several brothers and sisters and was the third of the four girls.

Volahavana's entire childhood was spent in a pagan context, and she did not like what her father did as a healer. Sometimes she even denigrated him in the presence of his clients and told him that she did not like these gods that always needed someone to interpret them to others. This made her father quite angry.

Volahavana also used to ask, "Can God be seen?" She wanted to come to know almighty God, if he existed. She did not feel like playing with the other children but preferred being alone so that she could nurture this constant feeling. When she was about ten years old, God began to reveal himself to Volahavana before she was even a Christian. It began with dreams: every night a tall man robed in white would take her to a large stone building. He would wash her feet and dry them with a towel, and then lay her on a bed and rock her to sleep. Then, at dawn, he would take her back home. In another dream, she would see herself being caught in a net and lifted up to heaven. These two dreams came to her regularly until she was twelve years old.

After that, the dreams stopped and Volahavana constantly heard a

voice calling her name towards the middle of the day. She would run home to see if her parents were calling her, but it just made them laugh; they thought she was crazy. She would then go outside and find refuge under a tree. She cleaned up the area around the tree and spent her time there crying or thinking about this God that she did not yet know. She often went there when her soul was troubled or hurt.

When she was fifteen years old [13] she received several marriage proposals, but since she had never thought about marriage, she turned them down. Her parents were confused by these refusals, and sent her to live with her sister in Manakara. She only spent one year there, preferring to return to the village in order to not be tempted by city life.

Malady could tell that his daughter's behavior was different from that of the other children, so he consulted his *sikidy* (oracle) and was overwhelmed by the answer. He discovered, in fact, that there was a greater spirit, a supreme God, living in his child. Volahavana was the queen, and he, her father, was the slave -- which seemed completely illogical to him. He became convinced that the God of Volahavana was the supreme and just God, the God above all the other gods. From then on, Malady put his idols aside and told his family that they needed to obey the God of Volahavana. He also prophesied that he would die two years after the start of Volahavana's ministry -- and that prophecy came true a few years later.

Her parents finally tired of her constantly turning down marriage proposals and pressured her into marrying Mosesy Tsirefo, a sixty-one year old catechist who was a widower and father of several children from his first wife. Volahavana had to take catechism classes in order to be baptized, which was a requirement for her Christian marriage. She learned the catechism lessons sufficiently well in two weeks, and was baptized in 1935 in Lokomby by Pastor Ramasivelo, taking Germaine as her baptismal name. After her marriage to Mosesy Tsirefo had been blessed by the church, they went to live in Ankaramalaza, [14] where her husband continued to teach her about the Christian religion. He was also helped in this by Pastor Rakotovao and Pastor Bernard Radafy.

God called Volahavana to serve him when she was twenty-one years old. One of Mosesy Tsirefo's daughters was sick, and possessed by an evil spirit. The catechist Petera de Vohidrafy was present and was trying to exorcise her. Volahavana was busy lighting the fire for cooking, when a voice suddenly ordered her to get up and to do something for the child. When she hesitated, an invisible force shoved her and placed her in front of the girl. She put her arms around her and struggled with her for a long time in this manner. At length, the evil spirit that was in the girl said, "We are going to leave, because the One who is stronger than we are is coming." Then a miracle happened: the young girl was healed and came back to her senses.

That miracle happened on Wednesday, August 1, 1941. On that night leading to the next morning, [15] Jesus told the three people who

were present at the healing, Volahavana, Mosesy Tsirefo, and Petera de Vohidrafy to “Get up, preach the Good News to the whole world. Chase the demons out. Commit yourselves...and do not delay. The time has come for the Son of man to be glorified in the Matitanana and Ambohibe tribes. I have chosen you for this mission. I command you to carry it out.”

The two catechists accepted readily, but Volahavana refused, saying that she was still young, that she did not know the Holy Scriptures and that she would not know how to preach. Nonetheless, Jesus persisted, telling her, “Get up and spread the Good News all around.” She submitted, but made a deal with Jesus by asking Him to tell her ahead of time what she would have to say, and Jesus consented.

Catechist Petera de Vohidrafy had already begun his mission as an evangelist when Volahavana joined his work. Some from Petera's group were jealous and mockingly gave her the nickname *Nenilava*, which literally means “big mother.” They did this to make fun of her height, because she was relatively tall for a Malagasy woman. Volahavana stood her ground and made no reply, but prayed, “Jesus, I’m ready to accept this ‘Nenilava’ nickname, but may your power be proclaimed throughout the world through it.” Her prayer was answered; she came to be known by that name through her mission and miracles happened through it. In fact, many people only knew her by that name.

As for her training, Jesus did not forget his promise, and granted her the gift of tongues, also teaching her the Holy Scriptures. *Nenilava* spent three months learning to speak the languages that she would eventually use to learn the Holy Scriptures. She was taught by Jesus himself. First, he taught her the twelve principal languages of the world, then he used them to converse with her. From that time forward, she spoke all twelve of those languages fluently.

Nenilava only used the gift of tongues to speak with Jesus, and not as the basis for her teaching. In the beginning of her ministry, she often spoke with Jesus in tongues, but later, she asked him to not use that gift when she was with other people, so that people with ill intentions would not be able to imitate her or use her to their own ends.

To teach her, Jesus used a white writing board and wrote on it in white as well. He wrote from top to bottom, as with Chinese writing. The lessons were held in a calm place either at home or in the forest, and the writing board was hung on the wall or from branches. Sometimes Jesus used a large book with very fine pages on which he wrote in white writing. In order to read it, *Nenilava* knelt all the way down to the ground. During the lessons, Jesus whispered words in her ear. When Mosesy Tsirefo saw her kneeling like that at home, he thought she was in prayer.

In order to teach her the Holy Scriptures, Jesus took her up to heaven seven times in three days. First, Jesus told her that she was going to die on Friday at 11:00 AM. Right away, the faithful from all over the district were told about it, and all those who could come did so - even

distant parishes sent representatives. Pastor Rajaona Salema was present as well. There was a constant succession of Bible readings and prayers.

Nenilava lay down on a bed draped in white to wait for the appointed time. Her body was covered with a white sheet except for her face, which was left uncovered. The ascension of her soul took place slowly. All those present were around her bed praying and singing continually for three days, awaiting her return. Her parents became discouraged and thought that she would not be returning, as it seemed to be taking a long time, but the Christians who were there fasted until she came back.

After three days, Nenilava came back on Sunday at 8:00 AM. Coming down from the bed, she preached the word of God from I Corinthians 15:55, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Jesus had taught her the four gospels.

Jesus then told Nenilava that she would have to fight with the dragon in order to harden her, because her mission would be one in which there would be no rest. This fight to the death lasted for three days. Jesus was always at her side. On the third day of fighting she defeated the beast in the name of Jesus. Following that victory, she fasted for two and a half months, during which time she ate only small white balls that looked like the host from the Lord's Supper.

When her mission began, there were twenty-eight young people working with her in Ankaramalaza. She began her evangelization campaign in her own region, near Manakara and Vohipeno. Her husband worked with her until his death in 1949. After that, Nenilava was invited to come to various churches and began to leave her region, starting in Antsirabe - which is where the central headquarters of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission was located -- and continuing in that vicinity. She then went up to Imerina, the capital city Antananarivo, and the surrounding area. From there, she responded to many invitations to visit other regions - Tamatave, Majunga, and even out to the Comoros Islands. In 1973, she also went abroad to follow up on invitations from several churches. She was accompanied by Mrs. Razanamiadana, a shepherdess-evangelist. During these visits, she was able to give her witness to the word of God to various audiences.

Accompanied by her collaborators and friends, Nenilava was accustomed to working with pastors and churches. Wherever she was, people came from all around to pray, to receive care or to be exorcised, and still others brought their sick. There were miracles: blind people recovered their sight, sick people were healed, and even personal or family problems were resolved. She kept the same practices wherever she went: prayer, preaching of the good news, exorcism (*asa*) and the laying on of hands accompanied by encouraging and comforting words (*fampaherezana*) drawn from Bible verses.

In 1973, when the King of Norway asked her to describe her work, she answered: "I preach the gospel, I heal the mentally ill, I educate young

delinquents, raise up infants and the elderly."

Through her ongoing ministry, the *Toby Ankaramalaza* (Revival center of Ankaramalaza) gradually became a place where people could come. Once they had been healed either physically or morally, most people settled there, because they did not want to go back home. Little by little, the center built a school for children and a dispensary. Potable water in the form of drinking fountains along the road and electricity came later. Nenilava also built the cathedral she dreamed of building, based on a cathedral she had seen in Norway.

Gradually, annexes of the Toby Ankaramalaza were built here and there throughout Madagascar, such as the one in the Ambohibao area of the capital, built in the 1980s; and another in the French village of Pours St. Rémy, located near Charleville-Mezières, which was built in the 1990s.

After 1975, her travels gradually wound down, and she lived most of the year in her home, which was built in the Revival Center of Ambohibao.

Thanks to Nenilava's ministry, many Malagasy, Europeans and Africans received Jesus, were delivered from the grasp of sin and enslavement to the Devil, and came to the knowledge of new life and the peace and light of the Holy Spirit. Nenilava never claimed to be a prophetess, but her deeds and her words of truth bore witness to her gift.

Nenilava adopted children. These came to her from the children's biological parents out of thanksgiving for God's answers to their prayers. She not only took care of their spiritual education, but like all parents, she took care of their general education as well, so that they would be well-rounded in every aspect of their lives. Also, throughout the island, as well as elsewhere, she had spiritual children who were attached to her, and she loved them and prayed for them.

Nenilava's childhood wishes were granted: she was able to meet this Almighty God that she wanted to know, and to know his power through her mission. Her wish to go up to heaven was also realized.

Nenilava died in 1998 in her home in the Revival Center in Ambohibao-Antananarivo and her body was carried to the village where she was born. Mourners buried her within the walls of the Toby Ankaramalaza. Like a good, loving mother, she had set a good example and had left it to her children and to her co-workers to continue the work of evangelization and the works of good will that she had begun, in faith and in love for one another. [16]

Notes:

1. The LMS (London Missionary Society) arrived in the Betsileo region in 1870 through the person of Rev. Richardson, who lived in Fianarantsoa.

2. There are eighteen different tribes in Madagascar, each with their own customs and language, but they can understand and talk to each other in the official languages of Madagascar, Malagasy and French.
3. The first twelve disciples (apostles)—all men—of this revival movement were Rajeremia, Rainitiray, Razanabelo, Rasoarimanga, Ratahina, Reniestera, Ralohotsy, Rasamy, Ramanjatoela, Razanamanga, Rasoambola.
4. In Soatanàna, up until the time of the revival, and especially in the villages, houses were built with rooms open to the kitchen, so as to conserve warmth in the winter. Since people cooked on a wood fire, the ceilings were often black with soot. Chickens had also been kept inside, but were now put outside so that houses could be kept clean.
5. Soatanàna is a Norwegian mission station that was established by a missionary named Lindo in 1877. Missionary Théodor Olsen took his place in 1891, and was a witness to the birth of the revival movement (1895).
6. According to Malagasy custom, the dead were supposed to be buried in the family tomb. If someone died far from their natal village, one year after the burial, if possible, the family brought the body home to be buried there.
7. *The Natives Law* was adopted June 28, 1881. In 1887 the French government put it into effect in all of its colonies. In general terms, the law subjected natives and immigrant workers to forced labor, forbade them to travel at night, made them subject to searches and to a tax on their reserves, and subjected them to a whole range of similarly degrading measures. It was a booklet of discretionary measures that intended to make sure that “good colonial order,” the order that was based on the institutionalization of the inequality of justice, was always in effect. This code was constantly “improved” so as to adapt the interests of the colonizers to the “realities of the land.” *The Natives Law* differentiated between two categories of citizens: French citizens (of metropolitan origin) and French subjects, that is, black Africans, Malagasy, Algerians, Antilleans, Melanesians, etc., as well as immigrant workers. French subjects who were in subjection to the Natives Law were deprived of the greater part of their freedom and political rights; on the civilian level, they retained only their personal status, whether that was of customary or of religious origin. *The Natives Law* was replete with all manner of prohibitions, and infringement was punishable by imprisonment or deportation. This system of social and legal inequality lasted until 1946, which is several years after the Geneva Accords (April 23, 1938) had forbidden all forms of forced labor. (Quotation from the Web site http://www.tlq.ulaval.ca/axl/afrique/indigenat_code.html, consulted in March 2009, [“L’aménagement linguistique dans le monde,” authored by Jacques Leclerc, associate member of the TLFO]).

8. The newspaper *Mifoha I Madagasikara* ("Madagascar Wakes Up") strove to destroy superstition as well as belief in God; the paper *Masoandro* ("The Sun") also aimed to destroy the Christian faith by presenting the scientific side of things and the "scientific" truth.
9. On the war of religion between Catholics and Protestants: When Madagascar was colonized by France (1896), the Jesuits took advantage of the situation and declared that the Malagasy people should also be Catholic. They took over the Protestant churches by force, and those who continued to frequent them were required to become Catholics.
10. Concerning "Mama" or mother: in a Malagasy family, it is customary for children to have nicknames. The oldest girl is either called *ramatoa* (eldest girl), or "mama" or mother, as she is the one who takes care of her brothers and sisters, and who is responsible for all the household work.
11. *Ranovelona* is the journal of the former protestant students of the School of the Protestant Mission (Foreign Friends Mission Association, or FFMA) in North Ambohitatovo, later called Paul Minault School.
12. The four great revival movements that occurred in Madagascar are the following: the revival movement in Soatanàna with Rainisoalambo (1894), the revival movement in Manolotrony with Ravelonjanahary (1927), the revival movement in Farihimena with Daniel Rakotozandriny (1939), and the revival center in Ankaramalaza with Nenilava (1941).
13. In former times, young Malagasy girls generally got married around age fifteen. Only boys were allowed to go to school. Girls helped their mothers at home while they waited to be married. A family was dishonored if a young girl of marriageable age stayed at home and continued living with her parents.
14. Ankaramalaza is a small town located about twenty kilometers north of Vohipeno. Before that, it was a pasture and a cultivated field that Mosesy Tsirefo had asked of Malady, Nenilava's father, so that he could grow coffee, bananas, oranges and rice there. Mosesy had then built a house there for himself and his family, and another one for his workers. After the death of his wife, he married Germaine Volahavana (Nenilava), who came and lived with him there. It was only after 1953 that the place began to be called a "revival center" because a lot of sick people had already been coming there.
15. August 1 and August 2 are remembered every year at the Toby Ankaramalaza, and the 2nd of August is reserved for the consecration of future shepherds. Every year there is a significant pilgrimage there. The Ankaramalaza annex centers (toby) are represented there every year, as well as the other centers of the revival movement.

16. I [the author] am also grateful to God because although I had heard of Nenilava in my youth, it wasn't until many years later that I decided to meet her at the Toby Ambohibao in 1997. I was consecrated there as a “shepherdess: of the “Santatra” level, (“Santatra” means “first fruits”). Santatra is the name she had given to the first group, or level, of shepherds, right at the beginning of her ministry. While she was still living, she herself gave the names. After she died, starting in 1998, the office of the revival center in Ankaramalaza decided to give the subsequent groups the same names that she had given to the very first groups.

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Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

Holder Rich, Cynthia. *The Fifohazana: Madagascar's indigenous Christian Movement*, 2008. Amherst, New York: Cambria Press. \$49.99 - \$109.91. ISBN-13: 978-1604975819

“ . . . This volume provides the reader with a very clear understanding of what the Fifohazana movement is all about historically, theologically, in terms of the main characters involved, its tremendous contributions to what a Christian healing ministry might ideally be, and as it relates to the larger world of church and society. The book is strengthened by the contributions of a diverse international group of scholars and participants in the movement. This has fostered the creation of an authentic piece of research, which combines the actual voices of participants within the movement itself along with the perspectives of scholars, who analyze the movement from the external periphery. This is the first book-length treatment of the Fifohazana in English. Editor Cynthia Holder Rich has gathered contributions from authors from five countries, including several members of the movement, to offer several perspectives onto the history and current life of the movement. Articles include analysis of major movement leaders, the place of healing in the movement, history of the conflict between the missions and the movement, the significance of oral expression in proclamation and as a means of revival, the role of women as leaders in the movement, and theological issues. The Fifohazana is one of the most intriguing current instances of indigenous Christianity in the world. While the movement has greatly evolved and changed in over a century, Jesus continues to appear and raise up new leaders. Various branches of the movement have developed a variety of institutions, but the movement has not lost its power of transformation and change.” (Excerpt from description, [Amazon](#))

Holder Rich, Cynthia. *Indigenous Christianity in Madagascar: the power to heal in community*, 2011.

\$41.31 - \$78.95. New York: Peter Lang, Inc. ISBN-13: 978-1433114168
“ . . . In this volume, the movement’s strategies for caring in community are explored, particularly focusing on understandings and uses of power among the powerless. The book includes discussion of power use and abuse by colonial, missionary, ecclesial, national, and international forces, analyzes relationships between the powerful and powerless, asks theological questions about power and the Jesus movement worldwide, and invites conversation on the potential power of the building of communities of care for people with mental illness in other contexts globally, to work toward healing, justice, and health.” (Excerpt from description, [Amazon](#))

Rasolondraibe, Seth. Le ministère de 'berger' dans les Eglises protestantes de Madagascar, Fifohazana et Reforme dans le protestantisme. 2013. \$39.99. Cumbria, UK: Langham Monographs. ISBN-13: 978-1783689996

Les mouvements de Réveil ou le « ministère des mpiandry » (le premier initié par Rainisoalambo en 1894) existent aujourd'hui dans la plupart des Églises protestantes historiques de Madagascar, inspirant et influençant profondément leurs vies et leurs ministères. Ces mouvements ont toujours engendré des tensions et des conflits entre eux et les institutions protestantes. Cet ouvrage examine les différents aspects de ces conflits et s'intéresse également à l'apparition du « ministère de berger » que les mouvements de Réveil ont engendré. / The Revival Movements or the "Mpiandry Ministry" (the first of what was initiated by Rainisoalambo in 1894) exist today in most of the historical Protestant churches of Madagascar, inspiring and profoundly influencing their lives and their ministries. These movements have always led to tensions and conflicts between them and Protestant institutions. This book examines the different aspects of these conflicts and is also interested in the emergence of the "shepherd ministry" that the Revival movements have engendered. (Excerpt from description, [Amazon](#))

Skjortnes, Marianne. Restoring Dignity in Rural and Urban Madagascar: On How Religion Creates New Life-stories. 2014. \$81.95. New York: Peter Lang, Inc. ISBN: 9781454197669

Christian churches across the world such as the Lutheran church in Madagascar have long been engaged in what we would today term "development." The church has been deeply involved in humanitarian assistance and development work, especially in the areas of education and health. *Restoring Dignity in Rural and Urban Madagascar* analyzes this phenomenon and presents stories of human dignity in the lives of the people in this society, a society that survives in a context of vulnerability, both social and economic. The stories show how everyday life is lived despite unfulfilled needs and when decent living conditions are but a dream. The book is primarily concerned with a commitment to Christianity in a changing society and focuses on church members' experiences of the development work of the Lutheran church in their everyday lives. Christian faith and Christian values such as human dignity, ethics, and belonging represent added values to these people and express value systems that are tied to ethical reflection and moral action. For those who choose to participate in the church's development work and spiritual activity, therefore, new ethical standards and norms are created. This approach

challenges the traditional emphasis on cultural continuity to explain the sudden change in values that people say that they have experienced. (Excerpt from description, [Peter Lang](#))

Open Access: Theses & Dissertations

Ogilvie, Kevin Ahnfeldt. Breaking words: towards a Malagasy oral theology of homiletics. PhD Thesis, 2010.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10413/3463>

This study uncovers the underpinnings of a Malagasy Lutheran oral theology of homiletics. Using original sermons collected in the field from a cross section of Lutheran preachers and places in Madagascar this study is anchored in contextual materials. To the close readings of these materials the author brings anthropological, textual and Biblical exegetical methodologies for their analysis. Making the distinction between oral and literate composition and cultures, using the theories of Werner Kelber, Walter Ong, Eric Havelock, et al., the author demonstrates the oral structure of the socio-intellectual milieu of Malagasy society. In order to display this mindset in Malagasy theological thinking, this study sets the Malagasy exegesis of the Longer Ending of Mark's Gospel against the horizon of Kebler's theory regarding the written gospel as a "parable of absence" in the main body of the Gospel of Mark. This study makes manifest the Malagasy theology of presence, an oral theology. Framing his research with the Fifohazana (Revival) movement, the author briefly surveys the history of Christian missions in Madagascar. This history serves to demonstrate Western missionary literate culture and theology entering into dialogue with the oral culture of Madagascar and the subsequent indigenization of Christianity in the Fifohazana movement. This Fifohazana serves as a paradigm of the Malagasy homiletic and oral theology. Key leading figures of this movement, Rainisoalambo and Volahavana Germaine (Nenilava) are discussed. Extensive appendices of original Malgasy material, while not forming part of the body of the thesis, are provided for reference. [Excerpts from the Abstract]

Rafanomezantsoa, Roger. The contribution of Rainisoalambo (1844-1904), the father of revivals, to the indigenization of the Protestant churches in Madagascar: a historical perspective. Masters Thesis.

University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2011. <http://hdl.handle.net/10413/2599>

"This research aims to carry out a historical analysis of 'the contribution of Rainisoalambo, the father of revivals, to the indigenization of the Protestant churches in Madagascar' and also to enrich the field of historical research for the Church in Madagascar. The revival movement is rooted in the Protestant Church history, so this research is intended to study the concept of indigenization through the preaching, sermons and teachings of

Rainisoalambo. There are two main Protestant churches in Madagascar: the Reformed Church (FJKM) and the Lutheran (FLM). The revival found within these churches inspired me to think about the power behind the Church growth in my country. Rainisoalambo contextualized the Gospel. He used indigenization as a strategy and its principles as a source of vitality for the Malagasy Protestant churches. He did not teach a new doctrine either. He helped the people of God to express their faith in Malagasy culture. In the 20th century, the revival movement shifted from the perception of mass conversion and dramatic social changes to the revitalization of God's people. Therefore, the fundamental question is: 'What is the major contribution of Rainisoalambo as the father of revivals, to the indigenization of the Protestant churches in Madagascar?' My hypothesis is that the revival of Rainisoalambo made a major contribution to the indigenization of churches in Madagascar. Since "indigenization" is mainly the key word to be understood for this research, this study adopts a theoretical framework, which is informed by concept of cultural translation and phenomenological approach. Since this research uses a historical perspective, it is important to practice the historical methodology: data collection for primary and secondary sources, potential oral interviews, criticism of data through assessing the genuineness of information sources and the presentation of information in accurate and readable form. The analytical approach is adopted in this theoretical framework. In spite of times, the majority of data collected will be enough to accomplish this work." [Excerpts from the Abstract]

Razafimahatratra, Raymond. The sustaining power of the Bible to the martyrs during the persecution in Madagascar from 1828-1861: historical and hermeneutical analysis. Masters Thesis. University of

KwaZulu-Natal, 2011. <http://hdl.handle.net/10413/3824>

"This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter one consists of the statement of the research problem...and motivation for the research...The aim of chapter two is to give the background information of the people of Madagascar in general, and the Merina in particular. It gives a general understanding of their world. It includes a brief description of the island and its population, the location of the Merina and their origin, also their traditional beliefs and religion, the attempts of the early Catholic missionaries to evangelize the island and Radama's contract with Great Britain. Chapter three deals with the first encounters between the Bible and Merina Christians around the capital of Antananarivo. It highlights the arrival of the first LMS missionaries and their mission in and around the city of Antananarivo, the presence of the Bible in the highlands and the use of it as a text book in schools. From that moment the Merina population sensed that the Bible had power; as a result their interest to get copies of it grew throughout the capital and the surrounding villages. Chapter four provides information about the uncertainty of Christianity in Madagascar.

It was uncertain because of the death of Radama, friend of the missionaries, and the accession of Ranavalona I, an anti-Christian queen, to the throne as his successor. It continues with the dusk: a period of confirming the church, then the queen's edicts against the converts. It ends up with the edition of the Bible, translated into the Malagasy language. The focus of chapter five is the sustaining power of the Bible during persecutions. First of all it considers the causes of the persecutions, then the role of the Bible in the Malagasy language in the hands of Christians. After that it speaks of the use of the Bible by the indigenous Christians and the power they gained from it during times of persecution. It also speaks about the edict of the queen to collect all the Bibles and burn them, and how the Christians managed to save some and hide them. Then it concentrates on the three waves of martyrdom, in 1837-1842, 1849 and 1857. Lastly it highlights the courage of these martyrs until death with the Bible in their hands and the contribution of the Bible to the growth of Christianity in Imerina during the persecution. Chapter six will be the conclusion of the thesis. It underlines three aspects of the Bible and its encounters with the martyr church. It considers, in the first aspect, the effects of the translation of the Bible into the Malagasy language. The second aspect deals with the interaction of the Bible with the Malagasy culture and context; and the last is about the power of the Bible itself. The very last paragraph will try to prompt a further research on the Bible and its impact in Madagascar after Ranavalona's death." [Excerpts from the Abstract]

Open Access: Historical Works

Ellis, William. The martyr church; a narrative of the introduction, progress and triumph of Christianity in Madagascar, with notices of personal intercourse and travel in the island. 1869. [Boston, MA]: Boston Congregational Sabbath School and Publishing Society.

<https://archive.org/details/martyrchurchnarr1869elli>

Excerpt from the Preface, (p. a –iv) "The present volume is offered to the Christian public...for a more complete account than has been hitherto given of the Martyr Church of Madagascar, including the progress of Christianity in that country, from its introduction to its recent and marvellous extension among the people. . . . The present work is confined chiefly to an account of the growth of Christianity among the inhabitants of the capital and the central provinces, its reception by the sovereign, many of the government officers, civilians, and general population..."

Freeman, Joseph J. and David Johns. A narrative of the persecution of the Christians in Madagascar; with details of the escape of six Christian refugees now in England. 1840. London: J. Snow. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924029350034>

Excerpt from the Preface, (p. a2) “. . . The following narrative has been drawn up in compliance with the suggestions of many valued friends, who have wished to be in possession of a succinct and authentic account of the circumstances connected with the Christian church in Madagascar and especially with the escape of the six refugees who have been now nearly a year in England. . . .”