

Bishop Alfred Robert Tucker and the Establishment of the African Anglican Church, Christopher Byaruhanga

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Christopher Byaruhanga is an ordained priest in the Church of the Province of Uganda. He is also a professor of historical theology at Uganda Christian University. In his book, *Bishop Alfred Robert Tucker and the Establishment of the African Anglican Church* (2008), he successfully introduces Alfred Tucker (1849-1914), the third and last bishop of the so-called diocese of Eastern Equatorial Africa, which lasted from 1884 to 1897, as the most successful and illustrious European missionary in the twentieth century in Eastern Africa. In turn, the diocese of Eastern Equatorial Africa covered the present day Kenya, Northern Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. While Tucker is the third bishop of the so-called diocese of Eastern Equatorial Africa, James Hannington (1847–1885) was its first bishop, and Henry Perrot Parker (1852-1888) was its second bishop. Due to the success of Alfred Tucker, the diocese grew rapidly during his primacy that began in 1890 and ended in 1897, after which it was sub-divided into the diocese of Uganda, now under Alfred Tucker, and the diocese of Mombasa under Bishop William George Peel (1854–1916).

According to Byaruhanga (2008), Tucker, who was educated at Oxford University and later Cambridge before ordination to priesthood in 1882, was sent by the Church Missionary Society to spearhead the Anglican activities in Eastern Africa after the sudden death of Bishop Henry Perrot Parker, who died of a heavy bout of malaria while on his way to Usagara near Mwanza in northern Tanganyika (renamed Tanzania) in April 1888.

According to Byaruhanga, Tucker's major contribution is in his bold move to Africanise the Anglican Church in Uganda and tropical Africa. This he did through various approaches that included the building of schools, churches and other facilities where Africans were tasked to

steward. Byaruhanga also sees Tucker's attempt to create an African Anglican Church through ordination of Ugandan Africans as priests in as early as 1896. Having been the bishop of the entire diocese of Eastern Equatorial Africa since 1890, he began to prepare African men from Uganda as priests of the Anglican Church even before the vast diocese was subdivided into two in 1897. As a result, there were ordained Ugandan-African priests as early as 1896—indeed a rare feat in those dark days of the African history. As he took over the Ugandan side of the now subdivided diocese, Tucker began it on a high note. It is no wonder that the erstwhile British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, dubbed Uganda “The Pearl of Africa” in 1907, due to its holistic growth that could be traced from Alfred Tucker's illustriousness. While still a young Member of Parliament, Winston Churchill in 1907 remarked thus:

The kingdom of Uganda is a fairy-tale. You climb up ... and at the end there is a wonderful new world. The scenery is different, the vegetation is different, the climate is different, and, most of all, the people are different from anything elsewhere to be seen in the whole range of Africa ... I say: “Concentrate on Uganda.” For magnificence, for variety of form and colour, for profusion of brilliant life—bird, insect, reptile, beast—for vast scale—Uganda is truly the pearl of Africa. (<http://pearlof africa.tv/the-pearl-of-africa>, accessed 26/05/18)

As such, the first elementary schools had been established in Uganda as early as in the 1890s. In 1913, Bishop Tucker Theological College was established in Mukono, a year before the death of the bishop on 19 June 1914. Tucker Theological College was eventually expanded to become the current Uganda Christian University (UCU), Mukono. Tucker's trend of Africanising the Anglican Church of Uganda was closely followed by other European missionary bishops who led to the establishment of the Province of Uganda and Rwanda-Urundi in 1961, a phenomenon that saw Leslie Brown as the first archbishop. Interestingly, Brown was succeeded by Erica Sabiti in 1966 as the first African-Anglican archbishop, though Rwanda and Burundi were elevated to a separate province in 1980. All this phenomenal growth of the church is easily attributed to the solid foundation that was set by Alfred Tucker.

On the whole, Christopher Byaruhanga has provided seven solid chapters. Chapter one introduces Bishop Alfred Robert Tucker who is “the most successful missionary bishop in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and yet he is one of those few important people in the history of African Christianity who have escaped the serious scholarly attention of both European and African church historians” (p.5). The introductory part of the book shows that Tucker commissioned six African catechists in 1891, a year after his first arrival in Uganda. In 1893, Tucker ordained seven African men as Anglican deacons, while in 1896 he ordained six Africans as full Anglican priests. By the time he retired in 1911, he had established Mengo hospital by 1897, opened Mengo School by 1905, and introduced a pro-African church constitution among other great strides. Interestingly, Byaruhanga introduces another dimension hitherto unknown in the history of Bishop Tucker. He says that it is Alfred Tucker who personally sought to come to Eastern Africa. He says:

In 1890, Bishop Tucker wrote to the Church Missionary Society (CMS), asking if there was any position available in East Africa for which he might be suitable, as an ordinary

missionary. In response to his request, Benson, the Archbishop of Canterbury nominated him to fill the vacant bishopric of Eastern Equatorial Africa. The first bishop, James Hannington, had been murdered by orders of Kabaka (King) Mwanga of Buganda, while the second, Henry Perrot Parker, had died on the way to Uganda (p.13).

As the leader of Eastern Equatorial Africa, Bishop Tucker encouraged dialogue between African culture and the Gospel of Christ. According to Byaruhanga (2008), Bishop Tucker chose to work with the African culture rather than trying to replace it with European attitudes. He argued that for “African churches to have autonomy and it was clear to him that in a few years, the church in Uganda would grow in number ... He figured out that even if there were to be ordained men from Britain for missionary work in Africa, no European missionary could be expected to present the Gospel with fullest effect to the African Christians” (p.15).

In the second chapter, Byaruhanga (2008) analyses Bishop Tucker in relation to his counterparts in the nineteenth century. In particular, Byaruhanga (2008) compares the CMS missions with the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS), the Basel Society, the Berlin Society, the University Mission, the Mission of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, and the London Missionary Society (LMS). All these missionary societies had several ongoing activities in tropical Africa. In the third chapter, Byaruhanga (2008) narrows down to Tucker and the church in Uganda. First, he addresses himself to the evangelical background of the Anglican Church, especially due to its CMS roots. From page 43-47 he addresses the meaning, the practices, concerns and dictates of evangelical faith that informed the church in Uganda under Bishop Tucker. He then gives an in-depth discussion of the establishment of Christianity in Uganda in general, while retracing the tension between Anglicans and Catholics in Uganda—a phenomenon that continues even in the 21st century.

In his fourth chapter, Byaruhanga (2008) deals with “Bishop Tucker and the Establishment of the Anglican Church in Uganda.” Here, Byaruhanga (2008) points out that Tucker mounted a vigorous colonisation campaign and indeed encouraged Britain to assume direct control of Uganda. This act appears to confirm the variously spoken assertion that European missionaries were agents of imperialism. In turn, this forms a clear critique of Alfred Tucker. Was he indigenising the church while ironically having a low opinion of the African populace? In the fifth chapter, Bishop Tucker deals with “The Consolidation of the Native Anglican Church in Uganda.” Such consolidations are seen in Tucker’s establishment of schools, dispensaries, churches, and the promotion of African leadership in various facets of the society among other things. The sixth chapter deals with “The Anglican Church in Uganda: A Model of an African Ministry.” It is here where Tucker’s Africanisation of the Anglican Church became the model of tropical Africa and beyond. Byaruhanga (2008, 169) says thus:

Bishop Tucker’s model of an “African ministry” culminated in the consecration of the Reverend Aberi Balya of Toro in October 1947, as the first African Anglican bishop in East Africa. Although he held the title of assistant bishop, he was in-charge of all Western Uganda and the region of Mboga. He was not only a good administrator, but he was also a good pastor. During his Episcopate, he concentrated on the training of African Christian teachers. When the diocese of Uganda was divided into five in 1957, the Reverend Hosea Shalita was

consecrated as assistant bishop in May that year and was in-charge of Ankole and Kigezi. Upon the retirement of Bishop Aberi Balya in March 1960, the Reverend Erica Sabiti was appointed bishop of the diocese of Toro-Bunyoro-Mboga which came to be known as Rwenzori diocese. In 1966, Sabiti became the archbishop of the Church of the Province of Uganda. Thus, the church in Uganda slowly moved from an African congregation of the Church of England to the Anglican Church in Uganda. This was the fruit of Tucker's vision of an African ministry.

The last chapter (seven) deals with "Bishop Tucker's Ministry and its Impact on the African Anglican Church in Uganda." In this chapter, Byaruhanga (2008) demonstrates successfully that the Africanisation of the Uganda Anglican Church is the work of Alfred Tucker. Without Tucker, the history of Uganda, as we know it today, would be different. As Byaruhanga (2008) notes:

Bishop Tucker was not only a determined missionary, but he was also physically a very strong man [but] like most of his CMS colleagues at the time, Tucker did not elaborate a precise theology of mission. Rather, he believed that his whole life was a mission and throughout his Episcopal ministry he committed himself to be a living witness to an apostolic zeal. His commitment to missionary work in Uganda is more remarkable given the fact that for all this time, he was separated from his wife and family, who decided to remain in England. (Byaruhanga 2008, 204)

Byaruhanga's (2008) book nevertheless drives us to pay more interest in a manner that empowered Africans more than any other known missionary operative, while ironically supporting colonial dominance. Was he a white supremacist in disguised form? Was he just interested in colonial governing structures that would provide security for the missionaries? Was he realistic in disguised ways? Such queries drive all scholars of all persuasions, especially in human and social sciences, to read the book. It is a necessary reading for all researchers in human and social sciences.