

Catholicism in Buganda: Exploring the Early History of the Indigenization of the Mission, 1879-1913¹

*Deogratius Kyanda Kannamwangi**

‘The event [ordination] was an event of immense significance for the Catholic Church in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa. It acted as a spur to other Catholic missions showing that the impossible could be done and Africans could achieve Catholic priesthood.’ (Pirouet 1971:10).

Abstract

The ordination of the first two Baganda priests: Bazilio Lumu and Victorio Womeraka Mukasa at Villa Maria (Buddu County) on June 29, 1913 has been hailed in much of Uganda’s Christian historiography as the ‘beginning’ of the indigenization of the Catholic mission in Buganda and Uganda as a whole. In this article, I use a historical and descriptive approach and draw on archival sources, field interviews to argue that the indigenization of the Catholic mission in Buganda began almost as soon as the first Catholic missionaries arrived in the country in 1879. I further argue that the early indigenization achievements of the Catholic mission in Buganda were occasioned by the vision, attitude, and evangelization methods of Charles Cardinal Lavigerie and members of his *White Fathers*’ Congregation, the zeal of the first Baganda Catholic converts who were ready to evangelize their kinsmen and the religio-political events that unfolded in Buganda between 1884-92. The article illustrates the earliest intersection of Kiganda culture and Roman Catholicism, and how this shaped the unicity of the mission that emerged in Buganda in the first three decades of the Catholic missionary presence.

Keywords: Indigenization, Mission, Roman Catholic Church, Catholicism, Buganda

¹ The research reported in this article comes from my CHUSS-Gerda-Henkel Foundation funded PhD. Consequently, I would like to express my profound gratitude to CHUSS and Gerda-Henkel Foundation for the fellowships that made my PhD and this article possible.

* **Deogratius Kyanda Kannamwangi** is an Assistant Lecturer of History at Kampala International University. He is also a Gerda-Henkel Foundation PhD Fellow at Makerere University and his research explores the history and intricacies of the indigenization journey of the Roman Catholic Church in Buganda in the period between 1913 and 2012. Its central thesis is that unlike in many parts of Africa where political nationalism and the rise of educated elite informed the crusade to Africanise mission Christianity, in Buganda it was the missiological vision of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie and the 1882-87 religio-political events in Buganda that shaped the initial forms of the same process in the area. Kannamwangi’s other research interests are in African cultural and social history and the history and dynamics of mission and African Christianities.



Introduction

Since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been renewed interest on the African continent to 'indigenize' the form of Christianity received from European missionaries. All Christian churches on the continent have been searching for a true African identity in Christianity. Secondly, the multiplicity of African Christianities and the growing numbers of African Christians have turned Africans into key actors in the World of Christianity and also increasingly made the African continent the heartland of Christianity (Oladipo 2016). Despite this, much of the genre of African Christian historiography associate the desire for a viable and distinct African breed of Christianity to the wave of political decolonization on the African continent and the rise of the educated elite in the 1950s and 60s (Strang 1991).

Buganda, the central region of Buganda in Uganda occupies a special place in Uganda's Christian history. The first Christian teachers belonging to the Church Missionary Society, from England, were received in Buganda at Kabaka Muteesa's court in as early as 1877. These were two years later followed by Catholic missionaries; Fr. Simeon Lourdel and Bro. Delmas Amans from France. From the latter half of 1879, Buganda became the centre of three competing groups of foreigners competing for influence, namely: Arab Muslims, French Catholics and English Protestants with their alien

creeds; on top of Buganda's tradition religion.

Whereas the first decade of the Catholic presence in Buganda was somehow consumed by the pressures of rival religionists, especially the Protestants, a bigger effort was directed towards establishing a church that would fit into the socio-cultural set up of the Baganda. In this way, the Catholic mission in Buganda was to trailblaze the indigenization of the version of Christianity received from European missionaries in the entire Uganda.

Key among its huge milestones was the ordination of the first two 'black' priests in modern times south of the Sahara in the persons of Victorio Womeraka Mukasa and Bazilio Lumu at Villa Maria mission in Buddu County (Masaka) on 29th June 1913. This was a historic and defining moment in the long and strenuous trajectory of the growth of African priesthood in Buganda, and, more broadly, in the indigenization of the Catholic Church in Buganda and Uganda in general. However, in this article, I contend that there were key indigenization milestones before the creation of native priesthood in Buganda. These included the vernacularization of the language and books of religious instruction, the emergence of a voluntary group of lay evangelizers that later morphed into a formal indigenous ministry of catechists, the translation of Church music into Luganda among others.

Indigenization, as used in this article, refers to the process by which

the earliest missionaries and their supporters allowed the natives of Buganda to experience, express, and propagate the new Christian faith within their local context. I adduce evidence in this article to show that as soon the mission was established, Fr. Lourdel and his conferrers began to vernacularize the language and literature of the religious instruction as well as allow their first converts to propagate the new faith they had just acquired. The central question posed in this article is: What were the early indigenization leaps that were registered by the Catholic Church in Buganda before the ordination of the first two native priests in 1913?

Methodology

This qualitative research employed a historical research design to investigate the history of the early Catholic mission in Buganda and its journey to fit into the cultures of the natives. This design was suitable because of two of its advantages. Firstly, it allows the researcher to investigate and report on a single historical phenomenon or a few cases. Secondly, it allows the use of different sources to understand past historical events. In this regard, the researcher used both primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources included both written and unwritten materials produced by those who were involved in the indigenization process either as participants or as witnesses. The unwritten primary sources included first-hand accounts of information

from people's personal recollections and these were collected through interviews between January 2018 and December 2019. The written primary sources include manuscripts, correspondences between amongst the different stakeholders, pastoral instructions and records of the early African priests, their speeches, diaries and memoirs as well published materials like such as ethnographic books, essays, pamphlets, newspapers and magazine articles, autobiographies.

This data was obtainable from institutional and private archives including Makerere University Archives (Africana Section), Kampala Archdiocesan Archives at Lubaga, the diocesan archives at Lugazi, Masaka, Kiyinda-Mityana and Kasana-Luwero. These are some of the places where key documents on the Catholic Church in Buganda are preserved. Secondary works such as books, monographs, journal articles, scholarly essays, pamphlets and conference papers with narratives related to the history of the Catholic Church in Buganda and Uganda or specifically on the subject of indigenization were also instructive in this study.

Mission Buganda: The Inspiration and Early Indigenization Leaps in Buganda: 1881-1913

From its initial formation, the Catholic Church that developed in Buganda acquired an African imprint. It was

an 'African Church'; evangelized in Luganda and built by the Baganda themselves.² This was possible, in part, because the Catholic missionaries who arrived in Buganda in early 1879 tried very much to adapt themselves and the Gospel to the mentality and cultures of the Baganda.

To understand where this effort was coming from, one must have a clear understanding of the missiology and theology that informed those who brought Catholicism to Buganda. The changing times and more specifically the new age of enlightenment in the late 19th century Europe appeared to favour a new missiology; something that Buganda seems to have benefited from. In the centuries before the 19th century, evangelization in mission lands aimed at wiping out whatever people originally believed including their cultures. No wonder most of the early overseas missionaries aimed at creating a *tabula rasa* kind of mind on which the new Christian notions would be implanted.

The new missiology propagated by Msgr. Charles Lavigerie and Bishop Daniel Comboni viewed evangelisation as 'civilisation' within a people's social milieu. Thus, by 1879 when the first Catholic missionaries arrived in Buganda, the unfortunate stereotyping of Africa as a 'dark continent' with 'heathen Negroes' had started to fade. This somehow informed the evangelization approach

of the first batch of Catholic missionaries to Buganda.

Monsignor Charles Lavigerie's insistence to members of his White Fathers' congregation to master and communicate in the language of the local communities among whom they would reside was one of the marks of his conviction about how mission work could best be indigenized (Duval 2012). This was part of his philosophy, which was of the view that evangelization must take place within the peoples' political and cultural setup and that potential converts must be approached directly through a language they best understand understood but not through interpreters. Thus, as early as the 1890s, all Catholic missionaries who were supposed to work in Buganda had to pass a Luganda examination to demonstrate their mastery of the language. Church historian and priest, Fr J. Bouniol explains this key instruction from Lavigerie:

Nervousness or hesitation of speech is a great handicap to a preacher, and therefore the hard study is required of newcomers at a mission; they must be prepared, at the end of six months to undergo an examination on their knowledge of the local language (Bouniol 1929:84).

The White Fathers had gained a certain level of competence in Kiswahili on their way from the coast by the time they made their first contact with the natives of the

² Field interview, St. Joseph's Rest House, Kitovu Cathedral Parish, Masaka Diocese, 26 November 2019.

kingdom of Buganda.³ Their interest in Kiswahili soon waned when they discovered that very few natives of Buganda understood it, they shifted to Luganda. Father Leon Livinhac, one of the first five missionaries in Buganda and his confreres soon identified the basics of Luganda and its relationship with other languages like Kiswahili.

They got the initial insight into Luganda through Dallington Muftaa, a Zanzibari, who had arrived in Buganda with explorer Henry M. Stanley in 1875 and had lived in Buganda for some time. He also helped them acquire familiarization with the many traits and customs of the Baganda.⁴ It was from him that the missionaries heard, for the first time, the word *Katonda* (creator).⁵ This was despite the fact that Kabaka Muteesa had instructed his people (and impliedly Muftaa) not to teach the missionaries Luganda for fear that learning the language would enable them to follow the developments in the kingdom (Ssettuuma 2013). Therefore, as soon as the first Catholic missionaries arrived in the country, they began to linguistically accommodate and apply Luganda in their clerical and other interactions with the local population.

³ They actually started their preaching in Kiswahili and Arabic and this handicapped their ministry in a major way because very few Baganda knew the two languages. See Ssettuuma (2013).

⁴ Muftaa who had previously worked with the English (the Anglican CMS), shifted and got attached to Catholic missionaries, voluntarily agreeing to give them lessons on Luganda and the culture of the Baganda.

⁵ See *Rubaga Diary*, 23 November, 1879

It was, for example, exclusively used in the introduction of the faith to the people, instruction of the catechumens and the application of the sacraments (Meeuwis 1999). The prayers and doctrines of the faith were also taught in Luganda. We can, therefore, say that by 1913, Luganda had fully become the language of apostolic works and educational tasks and this was a significant indicator of the missionary commitment to the creation of a fully localised church in Buganda. We can, therefore, say that by 1913, Luganda had fully become the language of apostolic works and educational tasks and this was a significant indicator of the missionary commitment to the creation of a fully localised church in Buganda.

Lavigerie in his other pressing recommendations had also asked his the missionaries, under his charge, to devote their spare time to the study the indigenous peoples' cultures and ways of life by keep keeping a journal of the history, religions, and the local customs of the natives among whom they worked (Bouniol 1929). It was because of this that as soon as the first Catholic missionaries in Buganda settled down, they did not only begin to study the fundamentals of Luganda but also write wrote down its grammatical rules and lexical repertoire.⁶

They coded and preserved it along with the other Kiganda culture that they considered less oppositional

⁶ Field interview, Kiyinda-Mityana Cathedral Parish, Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese, 8 January 2019.

and contradictory to the Christian doctrine. The earliest of the White Fathers' feats in this field was the composition and publication of a Luganda catechism, which was published under the title: *Petit Catéchisme en Langue Kiganda* (Matheson 1965). Its manuscript was ready by the end of December 1879. It is noted as the first Luganda publication and the first ever catechism in an African language (Lukwata 1991).

The tiny but historic text of 44 pages had been carefully prepared by Fr. Lavinhaac and Fr. Lourdel with the help of Muftaa. The language in the text was a mixture of Latin / French and Luganda expressions (Lukwata 1991). It was presented in a question and answer format. Meanwhile, by the time Lavinhaac was appointed Vicar Apostolic, he had made good progress in compiling the first Luganda Dictionary and this came out in 1883. It had between 6,000 and 7,000 words (Lukwata 1991).

In 1885, Lavinhaac produced yet another important text, a Luganda grammar – *Essai de Grammaire Ruganda* and later (1921) produced *Grammaire Luganda* that carried a section of some local legends and stories (Meeuwis 1999). These texts provide us with the early White Fathers' interest and perceptions about Luganda, as well as their linguistic contribution to its mechanisms and structures.

In 1890, the White Fathers produced another text for Christian instruction entitled “*Katekismu Ruganda - Kitabu Ky'Abasoka*”

(Luganda Catechism for Beginners). This second publication was smaller than the first one (only 35 pages) but still had two parts. Its first part carried the Biblical creation story as reported in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis and the second part had prayers: morning prayers, meal prayers, angelus, and night prayers.⁷ A year later, the Catholic mission in Buganda published its third catechism book titled: “*Katekismu Ruganda – Kitabu Ky'Abafuna Batismu*” (Catechism for those who received Baptism).

This new publication meant for the baptized was the biggest of all (86 pages) and was basically a revision of the 1890 text. In 1902 another catechism - “*Katekismu ya Masaakramentu*” (Catechism of the Sacraments) was printed. It was also in question and answer form and gave a detailed explanation of the sacraments and prayers accompanying them.

Earlier in 1894, the first Luganda Bible translation of the Gospel of Mathew was produced.⁸ The publication was distributed to converts in Buganda to deepen their faith, with some preferring to make their own handwritten transcriptions of it for their own sharing in their villages (Lukwata, 1991). During the same time, there were efforts by the Catholic missionaries in Buganda

⁷ Field interview, Diocesan Headquarters, Kasana-Luweero Diocese, 10/ January/ 2019.

⁸ White Fathers, *Evangile Selon St. Mathieu* (Matthews Gospel in Luganda) Marseille, 1894.

to revise and enrich the texts of the catechism booklets.

The improved texts facilitated a better understanding of the Catholic faith and its doctrines. Still, during the late 19th century, certain key terms were specified: *Eklezia* for a church, *Yezu Kristu* for Jesus Christ, *Omuokerisitu*, for baptized Catholic, *Sande* for the Lord's Day and *kusoma* for participating in liturgy or praying.⁹

From 1894, the realm of evangelisation in Buganda was aided by the installation of a printing press at Villa Maria (Buddu County). It was brought from Carthage together with a copying press. Later a binding section was added. The printing press which could print between 3,000 and 4,000 sheets a day was later moved to Kisubi (Kyaddondo County). This press was to play a vital role in the printing and diffusion of the catechisms and prayer books throughout Buganda (Lukwata 1991).

In 1904, another catechism book specifically for children was published. It was titled: "*Katekismu ey' Abaana Abato*" (Catechism for children). It simplified the Catholic doctrine to the mentality and understating of the children through questions and responses. It carried the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments and prayers with an introduction to guide the teacher. These same themes had appeared in earlier catechism booklets.

Therefore, by 1910, a series of catechism texts to cater for the different categories of people had been produced and many more were to come. These were defused throughout Buganda. They became so popular with the converts because they carried a section for secular learning. Thus, within the next few years, a native catechumen in Buganda could read, write and do some simple arithmetic courtesy of these catechism texts.

Later, there were efforts to translate the ritual of Mass originally in French (*Livre de Prières et des évangiles du Dimanche*)¹⁰ into Luganda and the result was a bilingual text (Luganda and Latin) titled: *Ekitabo ky'Essaala n'eky'Ekyenjili za Dominika*. "Dimanche" here presented as *Dominika* is the word for Sunday – it was thus 'A Book of Sunday Prayers and Gospels'. It contained all the essential parts of liturgy as celebrated at the time: the Roman calendar, the solemnities, the movable and fixed feasts, the saints, the saints of the liturgical year, the prayers for Mass with the celebrant's and people's parts clearly set out in Latin and Luganda (Lukwata 1991).

From 1911, the White Fathers' mission in Buganda initiated a monthly periodical, *Munno* (Your Friend), in order to inform the population better and on a more regular basis on matters of the church and other peri-apostolic

⁹ Streicher, H., *Extraits des Lettres Circulaires*, pp. 22ff.

¹⁰ White Fathers., *Ekitabo Ky'Essaala n'eky'Ekyenjili za Dominika*, Typographie Adolphe Jourdan, Algiers, 1891.

activities such as health and education. For this influential newsletter too, the White Fathers were conscious to use Luganda throughout (Bouniol, 1929).

Therefore, the vernacularization of the books of religion was the other key milestone, in addition to the study and use of Luganda that was registered by the early Catholic mission in Buganda even before it could harvest its first native priests.

The Role of the Lay People

Other than Lavigerie, the other shapers of the process of indigenization of the mission in Buganda, before 1913, were the native lay people. Since Muteesa I had vetoed the evangelization of people outside the vicinity of the palace, the missionaries did not have much contact with the people in the countryside. Their first acquaintances and converts were, therefore, members of the king's court and the few helpers assigned to them by the king.

It was this small group that was to play a key role in localizing the faith they had just received from the white missionaries. They instructed their fellow natives about a faith they had hardly mastered themselves even when they had no formal training. In this way, Christianity was now being spread by the Africans themselves. Fr. Lourdel is quoted by Attwater as noting this edifying work of African evangelising volunteers in early 1880s:

We often see a former catechumen coming up to the mission followed by a dozen or more proselytes,

whom he has won over to Jesus Christ. 'Here are some people I have taught' he says, 'and there are thirty more in my village. I will bring them another time.' Then he makes his pupils recite passages from the Catechism and prayers, to show me that they really know something about religion" (Attwater 1937:202).

The other factor that led to the emergence of lay evangelisers in Buganda before 1913 and subsequent localisation of the Church was the religious persecutions of 1885-92. The first two years of the Catholic mission presence in Buganda were marred with religious persecution. There was pressure from both traditionalism and Protestant followers. There was also increased suspicion from the kabaka or King (Muteesa I), and hostility from his chiefs and Arab visitors.

With all the above vexations and rumours, the missionaries were convinced that they were out of favour with the king. As a result, on 7th November 1882, they took a voluntary self-exile to Bukumbi and later Kamoga, both in Tanganyika (Tourigny 1979). The little flock of Catholic adherents they had collected during the first years in Buganda went underground for security reasons. However, what is critical to this part is how this small group of believers, during this time, reorganized and took over the young church left by the missionaries (Nolan 1972).

In a meeting convened on Sunday 12th November 1882, chaired by Yozefu Mukasa Balikuddembe in

Lubiri, several resolutions were passed. One of such resolutions was that none of the catechumens was to change their faith, and that every member was to do his job in the best interest of the young Church and for the sake of God. The other was that delegates would periodically be sent to Tanganyika to receive further instruction and guidance from the self-exiled priests.¹¹

In the same meeting, four Catholic teaching centres were created. The first one was to cover the royal palace and its environs and this was entrusted to Mukasa Balikuddembe assisted by Jean-Marie Muzeeyi. The area outside the Lubiri was placed under the care of Andrea Kagawa of Kigoowa and Matayo Kisuule, while the rural community in Mityana was to be served by Matia Kalemba Mulumba assisted by Luka Baanabakintu and finally Kitanda in Bulemeezi County was to be under Kaloori Lwanga. Lastly, they agreed to use all possible means to convince the Kabaka to recall the priests from their exile in Tanganyika (Nsobyia 2006).

Mukasa Balikuddembe tried not only to keep the Catholic adherents together but also used his privileged position as one of Muteesa's trusted pages to promote the Catholic faith with zeal. The neophytes and catechumens did not lose their fervour. Thirty crossed to Kamoga at one time to check on their priests,

receive sacraments and further instruction. According to Fr. Faupel, a surprised Fr. Girault, who was then the Superior of Komoga Kamoga mission wrote thus on receiving one of them:

In spite of this despot [referring to Mutesa], the mustard seed develops in Buganda and will soon become a great tree. Sengoba, one of our former catechumens, has managed by sheer luck and perseverance to leave Buganda and come here ... Sengoba has given us the most consoling news. He says that since our departure, not only have the catechumens behaved well, but have gained many followers. Already the Baganda instructed in our Holy Religion are very numerous ... The chiefs themselves say our religion is the only true one. Even proud Mutesa has invited us to return to Buganda (Faupel 1962:49).

The absence of the priests created a challenge but with this was also a great opportunity. This was not only the first test of African leadership in the young church but also an opportunity for its first converts to exhibit the depth of the faith instilled in them by the missionaries. Every convert seized the opportunity of teaching the catechism to their friends and relatives.

They continued the work to spread the Gospel without an ordained minister even when the majority of the converts would have still been under instruction as catechumens. The energy and zeal they put into the work demonstrated an evangelization

¹¹ Bro. Tarcis Nsobyia's book: *The Uganda Martyrs are our Light*, Marianum Press Ltd, 2006, pp. 35-39, provides details of these resolutions.

approach to keep the faith alive. They said the Lord's Prayer, recited the Rosary and read texts from the scriptures and prayer books that they would later reflect on.¹²

This arrangement was repeated on Sundays when catechists organized assemblies. Majority of Catholic homes, on a daily routine, said morning and evening prayers before going to bed. A family Rosary always followed these prayers. The more committed ones went for prayers every Saturday. This is how they came to be called *Abasomi* - 'those who pray' or literary the 'learners' or 'readers.' They baptized those that were dying, especially of plague, and were also able to venture into areas where the missionaries (due to the restrictions of the king) had never ventured. This was an element of immense indigenization of the leadership of a church that was still in its infancy.

Bishop Henry Streicher and the Indigenization of the Mission

The most towering figure among the missionary bishops who contributed immensely to the growth of an autonomous local church in Buganda, in the early days, was the French priest Henry Streicher. It was Streicher and his colleagues who had been sent by Bishop Joseph Hirth to evangelize Buddu, who transformed the voluntary and spontaneous group of native lay evangelizers into

a formal ministry of catechists in Buddu County. After its successful experiment in Buddu, the White Fathers' Vicariate, it was extended to the Mill Hill and Verona Vicariates.

The missionaries had five intentions in their creation of this lay order: firstly, was the need to put into practice the missionary vision of their founder; Cardinal Lavigerie, who believed that "the evangelization of Africa would be done by Africans themselves" (Lavigerie 1950:78). Secondly, there was a need to keep at pace with the CMS Anglicans who had sent out their first six lay evangelizers in 1891.

Thirdly, the 1911 Synod at Katigondo in Buddu, had resolved that the mission should carefully select able men among the converted to serve as catechists. Fourthly, Rome constantly reminded the different Catholic missionary societies world over to raise capable candidates among their neophytes to serve in the apostolate as catechists. Fifthly, the ministry of catechists was to be the practical solution to the shortage of priests to meet the pastoral needs of the growing church. It was also considered not only cheaper but also much easier to train catechists than train priests. These catechists did a fascinating job, rare and unequalled elsewhere in pre-colonial eastern Africa in converting several people either from traditionalism or Protestantism (Waliggo 2010).

Streicher had also realised that a big number of those who had learnt

¹² Field interview, Katigondo National Major Seminary, Masaka Diocese, 26 November 2019.

the catechism from Buganda's capital were enthusiastic and eager to spread their new faith to their relatives and neighbours. In his view, such people who even knew the local language and customs than the European priests would be well-received as preachers in their own communities. He was so impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment. With no training at all they (lay faithful) had taken it upon themselves to instruct and become non-ordained 'priests' to their fellow Baganda.

Broadly, they enlisted inquirers and catechumens, worked as fore-runners of the missionaries and lastly as the intermediary between the missionaries and the natives (Lukwata 1991). They had enough initiative and knowledge to do so the work with marked success. Soon, Streicher and his colleagues, were convinced that the use of lay people in their pastoral work would be of great value. They decided to start formation centres to train a formal class of catechists.

In a space of less than 20 years since 1891, Streicher had been able to turn Buddu into a strong Catholic base in Buganda with a vibrant and unique breed of Catholicism with the help of these supportive catechists and to a small degree the Catholic chiefs. Their work was to become the formidable foundation for the formation of the same type of Catholicism in other parts of Buganda and beyond. The first school to train catechists was established at Biikira in Buddu in the late 1890s. It, however,

underwent a series of transfers; first to Lubaga in March 1902, Villa Maria in August 1902, Mitala Maria in 1903, and back to Biikira until 1925 when it was transformed into a teacher training college.

The Mill Hill mission founded Namilyango College in 1902 with a two-fold purpose: one was to train catechists and the other was educate sons of Catholic chiefs in Buganda who would later serve either the Buganda government or in join the colonial service as clerks (Ingham 1958; Kannamwangi 2016). In the next few years, the section for training was transferred to Nyenga. Another Catechist school was also set up at Nazigo (Gillan 1981). The missionaries picked those assumed to be dedicated and exemplary among the converted to attend these catechetical schools. The purpose of starting these schools was to give a better formation to the Catechist-teacher and Catechist-missionary in terms of evangelization methodology and catechism explanation (Waliggo 1981). The second purpose was to create uniformity in the nature of their work that had hitherto been dogged by wide diversity and variations in the different parts of the Buganda mission. Their products soon found quick employment as 'teachers' in the many 'formal schools' that were slowly evolving at the time.

From 1893, the Baganda catechists (together with some Catholic chiefs) began to extend their evangelization work beyond of Buddu. The first

areas they catechized were Ssesse, Mawokota and Buweekula. Others were registering tremendous success in the missions in the neighbourhood of Buddu including Kooki, Bweera, and Mawogola and in the counties of Busiro and Kyaddondo.

From the early 1900s, the Baganda catechists were evangelising areas outside Buganda. Such areas included Ankole, Kigezi, Busoga, Toro, Bunyoro and Acholi (Waliggo 1981). Names, such as like Yowana Sebalijja, Guste Kapere, Matayo Kayonza, and Yosefu Lwanga feature prominently in the early evangelization of the many parts of Western Uganda. These catechists made friends with the local chiefs in the areas where they went and instructed catechumens and looked for prospective places where new missions would be established.

Many of these lay catechists preached the Gospel to new converts, presided over none Eucharist Sunday services in their villages, taught the neophytes reading and writing among other roles with little hope for material gains since they were not paid.¹³ Save for a few that were in the service of the kabaka (and a section in the British civil service), the majority were simple men recruited by the priests for the service of the church. The age of consolidating the faith saw the separation of the role of the catechists from that of the political chiefs. This practice began in 1910 and henceforth, the former became

agents of the priests.¹⁴ Chiefs kept to their administrative duties (Waliggo 1981).

Other than becoming great lay auxiliaries, and translators, they became indispensable co-workers to the White Priests in the spread of Catholicism in Buganda and beyond, the catechists assumed leadership at the parishes or in the remote areas and the outposts to the parishes to which they were attached. They repeated the lessons taught by the priests and helped in the teaching of reading and writing.

In their out-stations, they wielded considerable responsibility as the priests watched their activities from at a distance. For the most part, they lived on the property of the church although a few of them had their own property. However, the constant transfers from one place to the other made it hard for them to accumulate property. Perhaps the most prominent Muganda catechist of this period was Yowaana Kitagana, who abandoned the prestigious chiefly position of being the *Kayima* (the County head of Mawokota) to become a missionary catechist in Bunyoro and Kigezi until the first members of the White Fathers arrived in the area in the 1920s.¹⁵

Fredrick Tusingire (2003:110), quoting from Streicher's Annual Report of 1910 to his superiors in

¹⁴ Field interview, St. Joseph's Rest House Kitovu, Masaka Diocese, 26 November 2019.

¹⁵ When he died in Western Uganda, still on his evangelization crusades, he was buried in the cemetery of Rushoroza Parish, now the seat of Kabale Diocese

¹³ See The White Fathers' Directory, 1952 in WFGA, p. 140.

Algiers, summarizes the contribution of these catechists in the period up to 1910 which included “at least 3,000 baptisms of those in danger of death, instruction of 11,160 catechumens, responsibility for over 812 chapels and 400 agricultural schools.” The village catechist, with his poor qualifications, had thus become the real hero of Catholicism in Buganda in the first thirty years of the Catholic presence.

Some diaries of early missionaries carry a few names of African catechists. Benedict Ssettuuma (2013:77), quoting Tourigny, claims that a Mill Hill Diary “carried catechist names, such as Cyprian Kyakwambala who went to Kyaggwe in 1895, Masiale the catechist of Makerere and Yoana Basitali who was an early catechist in Mulajje. Other catechists, as already observed above, including Yowaana Kitagana, Yowana Sebalijja, Guste Kapere and Yosefu Lwanga were noted to have served the church with distinction. Of course, there were many more Baganda lay evangelizers in the early life of the church whose names we could not trace. What is important to note is that other than the system of the catechumenate, the ministry of these devoted lay catechists turned out to be the second key characteristic and success of the young church in Buganda in the period between 1879 and 1913.

In 1897, Monsignor Henry Streicher succeeded Bishop Guillermain as the Apostolic Vicar of Northern Nyanza Vicariate. He

was consecrated by Bishop Jean Joseph Hirth on 15th August 1897 at the small church of Our Lady Kamoga in Bukumbi (Tanganyika). The few years Streicher had spent in Buganda had created a conviction in him that Africa could not replicate European Christianity but instead must be helped to grow its version of Christianity. A version of Christianity that would be sensitive to the African worldview; their cultures, religious experience and thought systems.

Buganda had provided him with the best experience of the African attachment to their cultures. Therefore, from the early days of his episcopacy, Streicher, set out to actualize his dream of consolidating and promoting the growth of a local church in Buganda. This church would be one that the Baganda would own, minister, finance and manage. He had already built a vibrant class of catechists in Buddu and partly because of the gains already registered by the Buddu mission; he transferred the seat of the bishop from Lubaga (Kyaddondo County / Kampala) to Villa Maria (Buddu County/Masaka).

There were also voices especially among the Catholic chiefs and exiles who wanted Streicher to reproduce the ‘political kingdom’ the Catholics had lost at the capital to the Protestant party in Buddu. Streicher promptly replicated the royal architectural designs at the capital in the new Christian village created at Villa Maria. Besides, the way he was perceived at Villa Maria also pointed to more

than being a spiritual leader but also a civil one. To make matters worse, he assumed some royal Kiganda trappings in his costume. Chiefs also sent their sons to his court akin to what was being done at in Mengo - the seat of Kabaka's government.

Streicher's enthusiasm in creating a native priesthood was perhaps his biggest contribution to the early indigenization process of the church in Buganda. He carried a strong conviction that the Baganda must be evangelized by their sons and that their training must also be within the local setting and environment. It was for this reason that he was against the idea of training priests in Europe and instead opted to consolidate the efforts of Bishop Hirth who had reopened the seminary at Villa Maria in 1893. He was to see this seminary through its formative and turbulent years and finally the ordination of its first native priests in 1913 in the persons of Victorio Womeraka Mukasa and Bazilio Lumu.

Streicher's heart was not merely on training native priests but first-class priests comparable to their European counterparts. According to Ssettuuma (2013: 91):

Bishop Streicher shines brightly among the missionaries of his time for his clear vision and his consistent and stubborn insistence on the local clergy, for him having a single indigenous priest was more important than converting ten thousand people.

In the same period, Streicher registered yet another huge milestone

in the indigenization of vocations. He started a postulancy in November 1908 at Villa Maria for native Baganda girls. The novitiate started humbly under the direction of Sr. Mechtilde, one of the White Sisters, helped by two of her colleagues, Sisters: Dorothee and Roseline. The three formed the initial staff. Among the first set of twelve girls that were selected for probationship was Angela Kyabalongo (daughter of Buganda regent, Stanislas Mugwanya) and Anne Kirivaamuuki (the daughter of Matayo Kisuule) and their friend Irisa. The three had been transferred from the novitiate for catechists that had been established at Lubaga. Irisa later dropped out.

Two years later, the remaining eleven novices, together with seven juniors took their vows and received their religious habit on 3rd December 1910. The ceremony of their profession was presided over by Bishop Streicher who was excited about the fruition of his dream. Deogratias Muwemba (2014:147), basing on Sr. Gertrude's unpublished work *The White Sisters in Uganda* captures the event thus:

The big church at Villa Maria was filled by an enthusiastic congregation of relatives and friends of the chosen ones, and a host of those, to whom they had taught catechism, or served in other ways. In the front row, the Regent Stanislas Mugwanya and his wife, Maria, radiated with joy. God had accepted their daughter Angela. The Vicar Apostolic celebrated a Pontifical Mass ...

and declared that henceforth, these Bannabiikira would be called “Maama” in the missions where they would work, like the White Sisters. The newly confessed Sisters received their first appointments to the following mission stations: Narozari, Mitala Maria and Nandere.

Stanislas Mugwanya’s daughter, Angela Kyabalongo became Sister Restetuta and Anne Kirivaamuuki, became Sister Aloyzia. This marked the birth of the first congregation of local Sisters—The Daughters of Mary (*Bannabiikira Sisters*); the first of its kind, in modern Africa south of the Sahara. The creation of a local Sisterhood was a huge step in the early indigenization of the church in Buganda. Streicher registered more impressive strides in the localisation of the church in the later years, including the foundation of the first congregation of African Brothers (*Bannakaloori* - named after the leader of the Uganda Martyrs, Kaloori Lwanga), and eventually the episcopacy of Dr Joseph Nakabaale Kiwanuka as the first ‘black’ bishop, south of the Sahara.

The White Fathers’ Devotionist Approach and the Culture of Processions

The early missionaries promoted the culture of commitment to devotions while still trying to fit the Catholic faith into the cultures and understanding of the natives of Buganda. The oldest and evidently most popular of these was the devotion to the Virgin Mary.

The Virgin Mary occupied a special place in the life and spirituality of the White Fathers from Cardinal Lavigerie to his priests. In this regard, the whole mission of Uganda was dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin Mary. A small statue of Our Lady was placed in the makeshift chapel erected around where the current St. Mary’s Cathedral Lubaga stands.

The Saturday Masses in this chapel were some of the special attractions to the early Catholics in Buganda. The following years were thus dedicated to the promotion of the devotion of to Mary and this to the early French missionaries was motivated by the apparitions of Our Lady to Catharine in Labouré in 1846 and later to Bernadette in Lourdes in 1858 (Tusingire 2003). The early missionaries through their preaching also emphasized Mary’s role in the redemption work of her son - Jesus Christ. Several missions and religious institutes they set up were put under her patronage.

A Similar trend and vigour were replicated in the Mill Hill Fathers’ area of operation. The missionaries tried to fit the devotion and veneration of the Virgin Mary into the understanding of the Baganda using the role of *Nnamasole* (the Queen Mother) in Buganda whom the Baganda highly respected. The Virgin Mary, therefore, was introduced to many of their faithful as the *Nnamasole* – the mother of the King – Jesus Christ; – a mother full of love and encouraged many of them to seek her intercession.

They taught the faithful that Jesus Christ would not fail to answer a prayer sent through His Mother - the same way the Buganda king would not fail to grant a favour asked by his mother. This amounted to use of a traditional cultural practice to explain a new Christian concept. It also marked the beginning of the tradition of giving articles such as rosaries (*ssappule*), scapular (*sikapuulari*) and medals (*midaali*) to the newly baptized, not only as a way to increasing the bond among them but also encouraging them to live the life symbolized by the Virgin Mary.

Other than the devotion to Mary, there was also early veneration of the 'Uganda Martyrs'. Their veneration had started shortly after they were declared "venerable" 1912 by Pope Pius X marking their first step to sainthood; this was followed by their beatification in 1920, way before their canonization in 1964. Their persecution and subsequent martyrdom had somehow turned them into heroes of the faith.

In a society that already had a cultural trait of venerating ancestors, it was very easy to develop the veneration of such men who radically lived the faith they had professed to the point of dying for it. This necessitated the formulation of relevant petitions, intercessions, litanies, novenas and hymns for them. The natives were urged to imitate and follow the example of their commitment and martyrdom. This soon became a paradigm on which

the missionaries and their African cohorts based to construct an African church in Buganda

The young mission too was soon to adopt the Kiganda practice of processions. In traditional Buganda, processions were a common practice and formal reception of high-profile visitors. According to Yves Tourigny (1979:42) the first Catholic missionaries in Buganda were received at Muteesa I's court on 27th June 1879 in this kind of manner. He further adds that when the missionaries returned from the self-exile in Tanganyika on 12 July 1885, the same arrangement was repeated:

The Kabaka sent a special envoy to meet the party on their way from Entebbe to Rubaga; a long procession left the court, banner in front, trumpets sounding, a hundred soldiers or so forming a guard of honour, the king's special envoy, Joseph Kaddu, walking under a dais, the mass of people increased whenever a new village was reached until they met the returning missionaries about a half away from the capital.

Thus, the culture of processions shortly became part of the church's liturgical life in Buganda. The Feast of *Corpus Christi*, [Body and Blood of Christ] with its long processions, accompanied by drumming, became one of the most important events on the liturgical calendar. The other popular practice that also picked on the tradition of processions was the *Feast of Assumption* marked on 15th August. This was typically a French Catholic devotion custom that

became prominent during the reign of King Louis XIII after he directed that processions be made every 15th August of a given year in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The French missionaries introduced this practice in Buganda and it became popular among Baganda Catholics and those outside Buganda. In this way, it can clearly be seen that a custom with roots in France, was easily integrated and readily accepted into the Catholic practices of the native Baganda. In the later years, the feasts of Christ the King and All Souls on 2nd November also became popular in Buganda and were marked by processions.

Early Luganda Musical Compositions and Translations

Whereas there were limited efforts to indigenize sacred music in the early years of the Catholic mission in Buganda, a noticeable shift began to emerge a few years to 1900. Missionaries began to make some Luganda compositions – but these tunes were basic and simple translations of the Latin, English or French hymns. They thus sounded more European than African since Luganda words were simply being put to French or English melody and poetry. Although the Catholic converts in Buganda were understandably uncomfortable with this hybridity, they withstood the situation because of their obvious love and affinity for their new faith. This kind of difficulty was still apparent by 1904 when the

very first official Luganda hymnal was published (Lukwata 1991). It was a seventy-two-page booklet titled: *“Akatabo Ak’Ennyimba”* [Livre des Cantiques-Luganda]. It contained various Latin and Luganda hymns commonly used in the liturgy at the time.

The faithful were supposed to learn these hymns during intensive post-baptismal instruction at the parish. Many did, (owing to Ganda love for music and singing), but others did not. The limited command of Latin made many sing these hymns in a broken way. This added to the difficulties the natives were already facing because of being made to sing hymns that did not reflect Kiganda poetic sensibilities.

There were more translations of hymns into Luganda as the church moved towards its 30th anniversary in Buganda. Most importantly, voices began to emerge of Africans who wanted an African hymnody and instrumentation incorporated into Catholic worship. Music was taught in the seminaries and some seminarians composed local songs. These, according to Lukwata, were used “only outside liturgy as recitals or for entertainment” (1991: 289).

Although there was limited indigenization of church music in the early years, the little milestones achieved cannot go unmentioned because they were the foundation of the bigger evolution of indigenous liturgical music in Buganda in the later years. This came especially

after the Second Vatican II Council (1962-65) that shaped the Universal Catholic Church liturgy towards local paradigms.

Conclusion

The foregoing historical sketch has displayed how the early Catholic missionaries in Buganda tried to adapt themselves and the church to the cultures of the Baganda, almost, as soon as they arrived. This article has illustrated the role of a seemingly tiny group of Baganda converts that gallantly seized not only the leadership of the young mission after the self-exile of Fathers in 1882, but also demonstrated the unicity of the Bugandan Catholic Church and precisely its earliest indigenization efforts before 1913.

The article has discussed the effective use of Luganda in apostolic

works, the vernacularization of church literature and the ministry of indigenous catechists. It has sketched out seminal figures and events that shaped the nature and subsequent heritage of this mission in Buganda by 1913. It has shown how Lavigerie's instructions, the attitudes of the early missionaries and lay evangelizers shaped the type of Catholicism that emerged in Buganda in these years. All these have adduced ample evidence to the effect that even before the first native priests, Bazilio Lumu and Victorio Mukasa were ordained in 1913, the Baganda laity had already taken up an active role in the life of the faith they considered theirs. However, we must appreciate that this was just the beginning; the next fifty years of the Catholic Church in Buganda were to witness more impressive indigenization leaps.

References

- Attwater, D. (1937). *The White Fathers in Africa*. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd.
- Bouniol, J. (1929). *The White Fathers and their Missions*. London: Sands and Co.
- Faupel, J. F. (1962). *African Holocaust, the Story of the Uganda Martyrs*. St. Paul Publications.
- Gillan, N. (1981). "Catechists in Uganda." In J. M. Waliggo (Ed.), *Rethinking the Church's Mission in Uganda in the 1980s*. Kampala.
- Ingham, K. (1958). *The Making of Modern Uganda*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Kannamwangi, D.K. (2016). Catholic Secondary Education in Uganda: The Case of Masaka Diocese, 1893-2007; 1963-2007, Kyambogo University.
- Lukwata, J.M. (1991). *The First Hundred Years of the Bugandan Church and Her Worship*. Pontificium Athenaeum S. Anselm De Urbe.
- Matheson, E. M. (1965). *An Enterprise So Perilous*. London: Mellifont Press Ltd.
- Meeuwis, M. (1999). "The White Fathers and Luganda: To the Origins of French Missionary Linguistics in the Lake Victoria Region." *Annales Aequatoria*, 20 (January 1999), 413-443.
- Nolan, G. (1972). "History of the Catechist in Eastern Africa." In *Missionaries to Yourselves*, Editors; Shorter A., Kataza E., and Chapman G, London.
- Nsoby, A. T. (n.d.). *The Dramatic Calendar of Early Christianity in Uganda*. Marianum Press, Kisubi.
- Oladipo, C. O. (2016). African Christianity: Its Scope in a Global Context. In *Review & Expositor*, 113(1), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637315624897>
- Ssemuju, C. (1981). Categories of Catholics. In *African Theology in Progress: Rethinking the Mission of the Church in the 1980s*, Katigondo, Masaka, Unpublished.
- Ssettuuma, B. (2013). *Coming of Age in Priesthood: A Centenary of Indigenous Catholic Priests in Uganda*. Kampala: Uganda, Angel Agencies, Ltd.
- Tourigny, Y. (1979). *So Abundant a Harvest*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Tusingire, F. (2003). *The Evangelization of Uganda, Challenges and Strategies*, Marianum Press, Kisubi.
- Vilhanova, V. (2006). "Biblical Translations the Early Missionaries in East and Central Africa II Translations into Luganda." In *Asian and African Studies*, Vol 15 (2).
- Waliggo, J, M. (1981). "The Catholic Church and the Signs of the Times." In J. M. Waliggo & Byabazaire, M. D. (eds.), *African Theology in Progress: Rethinking the Mission of the Church in the 1980s*. Katigondo, Masaka, Unpublished.
- Waliggo, J. M. (2010). *The Catholic Church in Buddu Province of Buganda. 1879-1925*. Kampala: Angel Agencies Ltd.