**DEOGRATIUS KYANDA KANNAMWANGI (2017/HD03/19107U)**

**FROM MISSION TO LOCAL CHURCH: A HISTORY ON THE ‘INDIGENISATION’ OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BUGANDA, 1913 - 2012**

# Abstract

The African struggle to ‘indigenize’ the version of Christianity received from Europeans is a struggle that has been on since Christianity reached the continent. It only gaining momentum in the 20th century as Africa geared up for political independence. In this study, I trace the history and extent of the ‘indigenization’ process of the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda’s central region of Buganda in the period between 1913 and 2012. The study seeks, among other things, to understand the nature and attributes of the early Catholic Church in Buganda, the official perception of the Roman Catholic Church of the notion of ‘Indigenous Christianity’, the extent to which the Bugandan Church has been ‘indigenized’, the challenges encountered and finally the implications of the ‘indigenization’ process on the same Church. The study was prompted by the absence of a comprehensive historical account on the ‘indigenization’ process in the Roman Catholic Church in Buganda and yet the struggle for an African identity is a topical issue in post-colonial Christianity in Africa.

The central question that guided the study was: To what extent had the Catholic Church in Buganda been ‘indigenized’ by 2012? The study was informed by two theories–the Elite and the ‘DuBoisian’, theories that seem to drive race consciousness, identity and agitation for political, socio-religious independence among colonized peoples. The study employed a historical research design and a qualitative approach with three data collection methods; documentary, archival and oral research to collect data to answer the research question noted above. The study breaks new ground by positing that the historical conditions that framed the initial form and the subsequent experiments of ‘indigenization’ of the Catholic Church in Buganda, unlike elsewhere, were not related to heightened political nationalism and rise of the educated elite of the 1950s and 60s. Instead, I contend that the ‘indigenization’ process of the Bugandan Catholic Church was driven by the missiological vision of Charles Cardinal Lavigerie, the evangelisation of approach of the first *White Fathers* in Buganda, the 1882–92 religio-political events that unfolded in Buganda, and the 1962–65 Vatican Council II resolutions.

Findings of the study indicate that by 2012 the Bugandan Church had not yet achieved a fuller indigenous imprint. While aspects like Church personnel and hierarchy, literature and liturgical language had been fully indigenized, others had either been partially touched or remained the same. Partial indigenization was noted in the areas of liturgy, church architecture and ornamentation, the celebration of ‘Christian’ marriage and death rites. At the same time, the study also established that several areas in the structure of the same Church still maintained their European character in entirety. Such unaffected areas include liturgical vestments, Sacramental life, liturgical hosts and wines and liturgical actions, postures and signs. The study also established that the Catholic Church’s inheritance of a westernized heritage caused a ‘cultural crisis’ among the Baganda converts. This ‘crisis’ birthed challenges on their religious doctrines and practices and resultantly caused religious syncretism. In its conclusion, the study recommends continued dialogue between Catholicism and Kiganda culture, more indigenization of liturgy, more income-generating projects and more lay participation in the functions of the Church among others. I believe that through these, the Bugandan Church would be able to achieve Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson’s ‘three-selfs’ principle of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating, which constitute the universally-accepted measure of indigenous maturity in mission churches.

Supervisors: Dr. Deo Katono Nzarwa and Assoc. Prof. Wilfred Lajul

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