

## **Religiosity, Indigenous Contributions and Martyrdom Misconstructions in the Growth Process of Christianity in Uganda**

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### **Abstract**

*The entry of Christianity into Uganda to liberate mankind from thorny cultural life challenges was initiated by Kabaka Mutesa I. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity has had colourful influences on indigenous communities, including, art, politics, family life, music, business, and the way people express their cultural thoughts. In Uganda, missionaries presented white culture Christianity that demonised the religiosity of indigenous people. They perceived black culture as primitive and religiosity of indigenous people as an empty page that had no historical encounter with the divine. This was a misconception; Ugandans were creative and well informed in all life spheres. Organized cultural and political systems that provided fertile ground for seeds of Christianity to germinate and flourish were already in place. Missionaries were God-sent to complement on the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel instituted cultural artistic works that were oscillating and had been spinning for generations. The primary seeds of Christianity germinated and had a great impact on the Ugandan society. However, indigenous people were reflected in literary works and reports as consumers of missionary programmes but not co-partners in the propagation process. Other than Kabaka Mutesa I, the voices of the parliamentarians are non-existent in European missionary literary works. Indigenous people contributed their time and skills as: guides, casual labourers, hosts, interpreters, translators, providers of meals, land donors, vernacular teachers, producers of raw materials, and consumers of imported exotic products, but their faces are not reflected in the missionary success documented works. In the process of Christianity propagation, martyrdoms were registered. The deadly scenarios were attributed to the brutal leadership of the young king, Mwanga. However, scanning through the events that surrounded martyrdoms, it is conclusive that missionaries propelled the massacres due to their inability to immerse themselves in the host culture and understand indigenous social traditions.*

**Keywords:** *Religiosity, Missionaries, Misconstruction, Kabaka, Agriculture*

### **Introduction**

Christianity surfaced in Uganda in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the invitation of Kabaka Mutesa I. By 1905, seventeen stations had been occupied by Church Missionary Society. At these stations, indigenous people were empowered with intellectual and Christian formation spiritual skills. During the British colonial takeover, local people who had attained literacy skills were employed as collaborators to ease colonial rule and missionary activities all over the country. Historical documentary research method has been relied on to show that in the growth process of Christianity, religiosity of the host community was demonized, indigenous contributions in European literary works were not reflected, and catalyst contributions of missionaries were detached from martyrdoms.

## 1. The Spread of Christianity in Uganda

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was no state known as Uganda. There were several kingdoms, namely: Bunyoro-Kitara, Ankole, Toro, Busoga, etc., and several chiefdoms that were administratively organized. Buganda and Bunyoro-Kitara kingdoms were the super powers and enemies of each other at the time of European arrivals. The Europeans hosted by Buganda Kingdom, due to their inability to pronounce the word 'Buganda,' coined the name 'Uganda.' The British colonizers amalgamated kingdoms and chiefdoms and imposed unity on the various ethnic groups to form a nation which is now called Uganda (Stonehouse, 2012, pp.86-151).

Uganda's initial contact with European Christian missionaries was through Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) who arrived in Buganda in 1875. He interacted with the kingdom leadership and admired people's social systems and felt that Buganda was a suitable environment to incubate Christianity. After lengthy dialogues, Stanley was requested by the King to send a message home inviting missionaries to come (Middleton, 2022). Christianity in Uganda, is rooted in the letter of Henry Stanley that was published in the British newspaper – the Daily Telegraph on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1875 on behalf of the King of Buganda requesting for missionaries to come and plant seeds of Christianity (Billington, 2015).

The invitation was welcomed by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1877, Lt. Shergold Smith and Rev. C. T. Wilson arrived in Uganda. On their arrival, Kabaka's parliament, which was in session, welcomed them. After a period of two years, the White Fathers from France, sent by the Roman Catholic Missionary Society, were also received in Uganda. During the subsequent years, missionaries of different expatriates were invited by their pioneers to Uganda (Billington, 2015). Fundamental missionary packages were implemented and these irrigated the mind-spinning creative abilities of Ugandans (Knighton, 2015, pp.425-427).

The declaration of Buganda (Uganda) as a British Protectorate in April 1894 created a safe atmosphere that facilitated the spread of Christianity. Several factors documented by Tom A. D. Tuma and Phares Mutibwa (1978, pp. xi, 18), Mario Cisternino (2007, p.163) and Christopher Byaruhanga (2008) made it easy for Christianity to take root. The major factors included:

**a) Political System:** The Buganda Kingdom political system was a centralized top-down society that missionaries sailed on by first converting the people of influence who in turn

influenced their subjects. The Baganda were hospitable, enthusiastic, competitive, loyal to their rulers, progressive, and eager to learn and to adopt to new life.

**b) New Knowledge:** The desire to attain numeracy and literacy skills, to mend guns, cure diseases, produce architecture, construct good buildings, etc., were seen as brain cracking innovations. Many people were attracted to attain skills that were being offered by the missionaries.

**c) Islamic Religious Initiation Rites:** Islam had found settlement space in Buganda was subjecting men to penile circumcision and people feared the painful religious initiation rite. Christianity admission was by baptism which was an easier option for one to become religious.

**d) Christian Villages:** Villages developed where special services were conducted to strengthen the spiritual lives of converts. These resulted in the building of village churches as 'Reading Centres' for teaching and worship. This made it easy for the missionaries to propagate their Western cultures and lifestyles into the people of Uganda.

**e) Social Services:** The building of health hospitals, health centres, and erection of schools attracted many people to the Christian church. These institutions demonstrated the church's loving concern for spiritual and material wellbeing of the people.

**f) Introduction of New Systems of Farming:** Demonstration farms were introduced where people could go and learn practical agricultural skills. The introduction of industrial education and the production of cotton, coffee and other crops as cash crops improved the standard of living of the people and attracted people to Christianity. Paper and metal money replaced barter trade which Ugandans were used to.

**g) Rivalries between Catholic and Anglican Missionaries:** Mission fields became competitive in that wherever the Church Missionary Society went, they were followed by the Roman Catholic White Fathers. Though this resulted into religious wars in some places, this factor facilitated Christian growth because each missionary party yearned for the converts.

**h) The Uganda Martyrs:** Martyrdoms made some Christians to go into hiding in various corners of Uganda. This facilitated the spread of Christianity in places that had never been reached.

**i) Indigenization of Christianity:** The first step of indigenization was for the missionaries to win the hearts of the local leaders. Second, they learnt the local languages and translated

scriptures into the indigenous languages. Third, they formed the church council in 1885 to take care of the nascent church affairs. This put the affairs of the church in the hands of natives. Christianity spread fast because the affairs of the church were in the hands of the natives and liturgy was in the local languages.

In 1896, six stations had been occupied by Church Missionary Society but by 1905, the number of occupied stations had risen to seventeen (Tuma and Mutibwa, 1978, pp. xi, 24).

During the British takeover, indigenous people who had attained literacy skills were employed as local collaborators to ease colonial rule all over the country. Missionary preserve Christians engulfed with arrogance and domineering tendencies, became agents of the colonial masters and these were assigned regional governance responsibilities. The most notable one was Samei Kakungulu (1869-1928), whose ambitious political leadership in the 1900s opened routes for indigenous Baganda to spread Christianity in Eastern Uganda (Ward, 2022). Van Rheenen Gailyn (1976, p.45), records that,

...the Church Missionary Society (CMS) from Buganda went to Busoga in 1882. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, outreach had spread to Toro and Bunyoro. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, CMS endeavours spread to the North and East until they established endeavours in every area of Uganda except the west Nile and Karamoja.

The Baganda Europeanised catechists were used by missionaries all over Uganda to spread Christianity. However, there were Christians who read the Bible and discovered their cultural identity in biblical sacred scriptures. They stripped themselves off white culture garments of superiority and wrapped themselves with indigenized Black Culture Christianity. The Christ-indigenous infused ones were Apollo Kivebulaya, Levi Zimbe, Semei Nyanzi, and Yohanna Kitagana (Ward, 2022; Monitor, 2021).

Kivebulaya, an Anglican priest and a church Canon, from the onset of 1895, spread Christianity in Toro kingdom, Rwanda, Burundi, and among the pygmies of Kongo. Zimbe spread Christianity in Eastern Uganda; Nyanzi spread Christianity in Northern Uganda; while Kitagana, in 1901, pioneered indigenized Catholicism in Ankole, Kigezi, and Bufumbira in Western Uganda (Ward, 2022; Monitor, 2021).

Christianity in Northern Uganda was strengthened by the Luos who had strong ties with Bunyoro cultural communities in Western Uganda (Ward, 2022). Meanwhile, Catholic White

Fathers educated Joseph Kiwunaku, who later was appointed as the the first Black Bishop in Africa. His leadership led to the spread of Catholicism in Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, upto the Atlantic Ocean. Another group of Catholics trained by Mill Hill missionaries spread Catholicism in Eastern Uganda, covering the whole of Kenya upto Mombasa. The orders regulating Catholicism in Kenya came from Uganda until 1975 when the Pope appointed Cardinal Maurice Otunga (Monitor, 2021).

## **2. Misconstructions of Buganda Religiosity**

Just like elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, when Christian missionaries stepped on Buganda soil, their intention was to Europeanise indigenous people so that they abandon their traditional religious practices. The Baganda carried out their religious ritualism through divinely appointed human mediators, deceased ancestors, divine intermediaries, and the Supreme Being. Graveyards, river banks, caves, sacred tress, consecrated stones, holy hills, family shrines, etc., were the respected points of worship. Buganda Kingdom had 72 divinities, each connected to specific ancestors to whom prayers with the help of traditional priests were directed to the Supreme Being. Missionaries viewed divinities as evil spirits and agents of the devil. Human mediators – village elders, village chiefs, witch doctors, herbalists, diviners, and priests, who received inspirations from the ancestors were castigated as liars, fraudsters, and sorcerers. Christian converts were told to denounce devilish names and take on European Christian names. Baganda were regarded as pagans, people who had no concept of biblical God and involved in superstitious devilish worship that deserved utmost condemnation. All Buganda cultural heritage sites and social traditions became targets of eradication and extermination (Hassan, 2015, pp.194-196).

Protective charms worn on arms, neck, and around the waist; planted in homesteads; and hanged in houses were seen as acts of idol worship. Christian converts were tasked to abandon polygamy, to burn shrines, to avoid traditional ceremonies, and to sidestep contact with superstitious symbolisms. Idolatrous rituals that included child naming and initiation, marriages, twin born children celebrations, funeral rites, etc., were condemned. The Baganda were likened to Baal worshippers (Deuteronomy 12:3) and the mission of Europeans was to destroy idolatrous alters, break all pillars, burn all objects of ritualism, purify defiled mind-sets and plant the concept of biblical God on empty plates (Hassan, 2015, p.197). Missionaries

.... labelled African Traditional Religion with many derogatory terminologies such as primitive or 'lower' than that of paganus, heathen,

fetish, magic, polytheistic, animistic and idol worship... In their evangelical campaigns, in their sermons, in their utterances during meetings with the indigenous agents, the missionaries and their converts condemned everything African, including their religion of the various peoples of Africa (Nmah, 2016).

African culture and customs were viewed as primitive, backward, and horrible by Europeans. Good, holy, and angelic virtues were associated with white culture while satanic, beastly, sluggish, viciousness, and stupidity virtues were associated with pagan indigenous people. Missionaries viewed themselves as humanitarian agents of civilization and indigenous people were regarded as primitive (Philips, 2005, pp.272-273).

Scenery reports about the cultural diversity of Africans were compiled. African traditions and customs such as child initiation rites, marriage ceremonies, burial rituals, food and body costume preferences, sacred worship space and symbols, religious beliefs and modes of worship, etc. were filmed, documented, and transmitted to display the progress of missionary successes (Philips, 2005, p.268). In their literary works, Europeans wrote about Africans as ignorant people without creative knowledge of the God of the Bible. They elaborated that Africans had no ancient historical heritages (Andindilile, 2016, pp.128-129).

European missionaries, using human health and dignity safety lenses were right to condemn African spirituality. Certain aspects of African social traditions and customs were barbaric. People were exposed to health epidemics. Weaklings were oppressed and the ignorant ones exploited economically. However, the negative life robbing aspects should have been swept out in a programmed staged manner but not to crush ingrained cultural heritages out of visual existence. Use of charms and traditional invocations were devotional spiritual points, boldness raisers, sources of income, stress sedatives, and social capital building tools for Africans.

### **3. Religiosity of Ugandans**

The perspective of missionaries that Africans had no concept of God and no historical heritages was faulty. From the onset, missionaries were hosted in Uganda, people were engaged in theological reflections on their beliefs, practices, values, and morals. Oral traditions expressed in songs, public speeches, teachings, prayers, proverbs, myths, riddles, wise sayings, legends, customs, and conversations handed down through generations were in place. Life instructional sources expressed in art, sculpture, music-dance-drama, symbols, ceremonies, rituals, shrines,

child naming, etc., were on display (Bota, 2009). The first settlement of missionaries in Uganda was in the court of Kabaka Mutesa 1 whose kingdom administration was structured as indicated in the proceeding table.

**Table 1: Structure of Buganda Kingdom before the arrival of missionaries**

<b>Political organization</b>	<b>Social organization</b>
1) Centralized system of administration 2) King was the political head. 3) Kingship was hereditary. 4) King was deputized by chief justice, treasurer, and prime minister 5) The kingdom was divided into counties, sub counties, parish, sub-parish, and local village. 6) Each administrative unit was headed by a chief. 7) There was a legislative council that formulated laws. 8) The king had royal guards. 9) The king received gifts from his subjects and chiefs as a sign of loyalty.	1) Chiefs mobilized people to engage in social works. 2) The kingdom was organized on clan basis 3) Every person belonged to a particular clan. 4) Members of same clan were not allowed to marry each other. 5) Each clan had a clan leader. 6) The king was the head of all clans and belonged to the clan of his mother. 7) Kingdom population was divided into classes: princes, princesses, nobles, commoners, and slaves.
<b>Economic organization</b>	<b>Spiritual organization</b>
1) Agriculture was the major activity. 2) Domestic animals were kept. 3) Fishing was carried out on the shores of Lake Victoria. 4) Iron work was carried and utensils such as hoes, knives, pangas, spears, etc. were produced. 5) Back cloth industry flourished. 6) Kingdom revenue was raised through taxation. 7) The Kingdom traded in ivory and sold slaves.	1) People believed in several gods who were consulted depending on the need of the hour. 2) The king was considered semi-divine and was the spiritual leader. 3) People believed in good and bad spirits that exist in the invisible world. 4) There were men and women who served as priests and healers of human diseases. 5) Local regalia – drums, backcloth, spears, etc., were highly respected.

8) The Kingdom was involved in raids.	6) Virginity for both boys and girls was highly cherished as a sign of good upbringing and respect.
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Source: Revisionug.com (2022)

Ugandan society was administratively structured. Everyone paid allegiance to monarchy kings and all political leaders were appointed by the king. Religious leaders were divinely chosen to respond to the different therapeutic needs of the natives. The ultimate goals of political and religious leaders were to nurture people so that they demonstrate commitment to spiritual allegiance to sacred gods, take on good health practices, display positive self-worth and healthy relationships, and work towards attaining an economically self-supporting household.

The creative religiosity concept for Ugandans to manage their life affairs was not introduced by missionaries. When we read Genesis 2:7, the writer documents that God made man out of dust, breathed life into his nostrils and man became a living soul. Man was then placed in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it (Genesis 2:15). The text implies that humanity was brought forth and within their DNA systems, skills were installed to enable them to engage in joyful and fruitful activities that would bring them satisfaction and at the sometime use their competences to nurture God's creatures. In other words, humanity was created in God's likeness so that mankind can mirror God's qualities as they carry on their family obligations, their societal responsibilities, and their professional duties. However, we are told that all causes associated with human suffering came into existence as a result of sin that defiled the selfless caring nature of man.

Viewed from the perspective of the creation story, missionaries never introduced the concept of God among indigenous Ugandans. The concept of God is inborn, manifested, and expressed in diverse Tower of Babel human languages of expression (Genesis 11:1-9). Language is the medium through which human beings translate themselves into meaningfulness. Within the language, man's historicity is radically present. It is through milk suckled language that man's artistic expressions become manifested, interpreted and understood (Palmer, 1969, pp.134-135). Hence, Ugandan cultural artistic expressions were not introduced by missionaries.

Owing to human cultural uniqueness, the Great Commission does not command disciples to go and introduce foreign cultures as European missionaries enforced, but to go and reconnect



humanity to their original state as God intended them to serve Him in their uniqueness. That is, missionaries to broadcast seeds of salvation, that, if well nurtured and inculturated, would sprout and inspire human beings to: fellowship with God, walk and talk with God, be God's agents on earth, be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, live in love and harmony with all creatures, and love God with all one's heart, soul and strength.

#### **4. Indigenous Involvement Misconstructions**

Reports written by missionaries about the spread of Christianity in Africa do not indicate the positive contributions of indigenous people. Most narratives display successful contributions of European colonialists and missionaries. Readers are not enlightened on how African social traditions, even when reported negatively, impacted European culture (Philips, 2005, pp.272-273). The diverse meeting points of two cultures might have spilled positive missiological insights. Is it possible that Europeans never adopted anything positive from African constructive cultural lifestyles? Missionary engagement with other cultures is a two-way traffic benefit. However, coming across literary works that reveal how African cultures energized the thinking acumens of Europeans to the advantage of the development of their homeland is untraceable.

The implementation of the Great Commission, if it is to be effective, is observed by Apostle Paul as a strategy that ought to be implemented using the metaphor of agricultural process. He documents, *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters, is anything, but only God, who makes things grow* (1 Corinthians 3:6, NIV).

According to Apostle Paul, Christian missionary work is a crop husbandry process where the farmer takes serious precautions to ensure that good yields are harvested. However, at each stage, there are different players who are armed with unique skills to sustain the life of the plant. Every implementer is a steward, appointed by God to complement one another in the missionary process. No party is supposed to exaggerate superiority over the other, a detrimental mentality shelved by some notorious Europeans in their literary works.

Paul's theological thinking, approached from Engel's scale of evangelism (Whitesel, 2010), is what I have adopted and theorized my line of argument to show that indigenous Africans participated greatly in the initial cycle of the propagation of Christianity in Uganda. The theoretical stages of the propagation of Christianity are displayed in the table below:

**Table 2: Christianity Propagation Stages**

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Inputs</b>	<b>Outputs</b>
Stage 1: Land preparation	Environment influence	Conscious state
Stage 2: Seed Planting	Identity Placement	Competences sprout
Stage 3: Plant care	Nurturing of competences	Hands on skills acquired
Stage 4: Harvest	Innovations	Public benefits
Stage 5: Preservation	Values rewarded	Life long lifestyles

**Land Preparation Stage:** Human beings are born in cultural environments that shape their beliefs. It is in a cultural environment that land preparation takes place, that is, the clearing of the bush and the breaking of the soils. Family heads, clan leaders, and community influential figures work towards the moral concerns that shape the living standards of everyone in the community. Community leaders devise principles, rules, laws, and guidelines that consistently examine moral convictions, and influence conscious decisions and actions as regards to what is: right and wrong, good and bad, fair and unfair, duty and obligation, justice and injustice, truth and lies, etc. People at this stage are defined by common ideologies, though, some are involved in lifestyles that are destructive to productive coexistence.

Uganda cultural lifestyles were inherent: social traditions, hospitality, structured governance, business transactions, etc., were in place. Without an organized social cultural environment, Christianity would not have been planted. It was at the stroke of a pen of the Kabaka of Buganda that missionaries were invited.

Although Kabaka’s contribution is reflected in literary works, the debates and resolutions of his parliament that were endorsed to invite and host missionaries are unheard of. European literary works rarely reflect the roles played by Kabaka’s parliament in the growth process of Christianity in Uganda. The Kabaka of Buganda never worked in isolation on matters that propelled the spread of Christianity in the entire Kingdom.

**Seed Planting Stage:** At the seed planting stage, people are traumatized by identity crises and adversities that need therapeutic interventions. It is at this stage that seeds of social transformation are planted, such seeds include a call to: abandon destructive lifestyles, adopt physical healthy styles, and take on income generating activities to solve family financial needs. Learning, health, and spiritual nurture centres are established at this stage.

It was at the seed planting stage that missionaries surfaced. Ugandan cultural traditions handed down from generation to generation had been established. The bush had been slashed and soils had been prepared to receive white culture Christian packaged seeds of development.

The key areas of concern that were affecting the community's socio-economic wellbeing were voiced to raise awareness and motivate people to come forward to acquire skills aimed at solving their critical basic life survival necessities. Staged formal and non-formal missionary programmes were initiated. Ugandans at this stage contributed as interpreters, guides, hosts, and providers of meals. Many of them had interacted with Arab merchants and were well versed with Indian Ocean trade routes and commerce transaction languages (Ward, 2022). However, their efforts towards the growth of Christianity in Uganda are thinly reflected in European literary works.

**Plant Care Stage:** Once seeds germinate, the plant is protected from external attacks, watered, weeded, pruned, and pesticides are applied to keep the plant healthy. It is the nurturing stage that if not handled well, the plant dwarfs. It is at this stage that skilled people offer relief and intellectual expertise to meet intellectual and human survival basic necessities. People are empowered with disease preventive remedies, economic self-sustaining skills, and spiritual skills to relate with their creator. Social development programmes are implemented to strengthen human rights coexistence. Hence, missionaries were in charge at this stage to ensure that the germinated seeds of Christianity mature. Natives were exposed to literacy skills, preventive and curative remedies to diseases, and Christian spirituality disciplines. Missionary schools, health centres, and churches were in place to nurture and empower Ugandans with life survival skills (Monitor, 2021).

At plant care stage, Ugandan men and women provided free land and casual labour in the construction works of health centres, schools, and churches. They served as translators, providers of meals, land donors, and vernacular teachers. They were involved in community mobilizations to encourage people to participate in missionary programmes (Ward, 2022). However, the contributions of local people towards the establishments of missionary programme enterprises are sketchy in European literary works.

**Harvest Stage:** At this stage, the products of the plant have matured. This is the stage of passing out innovators who have successfully met all the requirements of the intellectual formation curriculum. Their services are mature and ripe to be consumed by the public. The

natives who were hosts, guides, givers of free land, and providers of cheap labour were the primary beneficiaries of missionary enterprises.

The Bible, prayer book, and infancy literacy curriculums were translated in local languages by the first line Europeanised Ugandans. Ugandans attained mining and agricultural skills. Literature printed overseers, Ugandan processed raw materials exported from abroad, and imported machines were consumed by Ugandans at a cost. The consumption contributions of Ugandans boosted the economy of Europe but such constructive inputs are not reflected in literary works.

**Preservation Stage:** At this stage, the harvested and processed crops are well packaged for consumption. It is at this stage that spicy innovative ideas of graduates are felt in society and rewarded. Professionals occupy positions of honour and prestige in the community. They are exemplary figures and icons of admiration. It's these icons who again plant seeds of social transformation and the cycle goes on as new ideas are innovated to inform the present and radiate bright lights of hope to secure a better tomorrow.

So it was, the Westernized Ugandan professionals, a preserve of the hard work of missionaries were deployed. These were dispatched to reach out to their own people with Westernized intellectual knowledge but they hit hard rocks, local people's reception of "Christianity was utilitarian – that is, as long as they got medical treatment, new economic goods, or education – then Christianity was worth having" (ITHAKA, 2016).

The European spiritual garments worn by first line Ugandan missionaries had a scanty impact on the spiritual wellbeing of Ugandans. It was until when Ugandans read the Bible, internalized the teachings within their own cultural concepts, and located their place in the big agenda of God's redemption of all earthly cultures, that Christianity flourished (Pobee, 2001).

When Ugandans read the Bible in their mother tongue, they contextualized Christianity, jumped out of discriminative mainline Christianity, and established their indigenous churches. However, schizophrenic Christian worship lifestyles of Ugandans irritated the white skinned people to the extent that they documented and published their disgusts with the chief aim of crushing indigenous Christianity out of existence. Nothing could stop Ugandans who had discovered their place in biblical sacred scriptures. As time rolled, some Europeans swallowed their brutal criticism of African cherished cultural heritages and floored themselves to learning African languages and social traditions. However, the positive aspects they attained from

African cultural expressions and heritages are not reflected in European literary works (Philips, 2005, pp. 276-279).

## **5. Martyrdom Misconstructions**

Buganda as argued by Stanley, was a centre of civilization in Africa led by a progressive King, Mutesa I (Middleton, 2022). Christianity spread wings during the reign of Mutesa 1, but later on encountered setbacks due to the missionary teachings that condemned traditional practices and such included:

a) Christian converts refused to offer sacrifices to the tribal gods and the nobles felt threatened that the Christian faith might bring down the wrath of the ancestors on the kingdom. This created tension in the traditional society (Ward, 2022).

b) There were rumours of wars. Christian converts refused to train for war to protect Buganda from external threats and some Christians who engaged in military combats refused to kill their enemies and take them as prisoners of war. This annoyed Baganda elders (Ward, 2022).

c) The presence of the Arabs at the palace influenced the King. The Muslims resented Europeans because: i) Arabs didn't want to be dominated by European who were Christians. Their domination could lead to loss of independence and they feared to get orders from European, ii) Arabs feared to lose their Islamic culture and prestige i.e., dressing style, circumcision, Arabic language etc., they wanted to be in the lead, and iii) preaching and conversion of Muslims by Christians was not acceptable, so Arabs often gave false accusations against Christians (Cisternino, 2007, p.183).

d) The number of Christians converts was growing readily and Christianity was gaining more popularity as opposed to Islam. The Arabs feared that slave trade would be abolished since Christians were condemning the act. Slave trade was a lucrative business to the chiefs and many had amassed wealth. Christianity was interfering with the income of the chiefs and the King (Isichai, 1995, p.159)

e) Tension heightened when the health situation of Mutesa I deteriorated. The ill-health situation of the king was attributed to Christian converts who refused to engage in traditional rituals to avert the disease epidemic. The king died on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1884 and the cause of death was attributed to the Christian teachings that hindered the appeasement of traditional gods (Ward, 2022).

f) Missionaries taught that homosexuality and polygamy were unchristian. Mutesa 1 had tolerated these teachings but his son, Mwanga, who succeeded him, became furious when most of his homosexual pages converted to Christianity. The pages refused to commit sodomy with him and this angered the young king (Baur, 1994, p.236).

On the contrary, code-naming Mwanga as a homosexual, might have been a hate construct that was used to tarnish his name. Homosexuality is a non-African cultural heritage (Buckle, 2020) and there is no recorded information that after the executions of the pages, Mwanga took on new ones as his homosexual partners. Probably, since the lifestyle was condemned by missionaries, the king might have engaged in the act secretly.

g) In January 1885, Mackey wanted to go South of Lake Victoria, Kabaka Mwanga offered him some men to escort him. However, he turned down the offer and opted for the young men who were under his pastoral leadership. The gesture, annoyed the king. In retaliation, young Christian boys were arrested, charged with attempt to leave the kingdom without permission, and many more disobedient Christians were arrested (Byaruhanga, 2008).

h) Each week Christians held meetings at which they spoke of another kingdom; this weakened the Kabaka's position in that the pages no longer held that the Kabaka was above everything. They held that Jesus is king even above the Kabaka because He is King of kings; some of them referred to the Kabaka as their brother in Christ. When Christians refused to address Kabaka Mwanga as 'Master', 'Supreme', 'Lord,' etc., they were regarded as rebellious and traitors to Buganda (Byaruhanga, 2008).

i) Anger boiled among the kingdom elders and Buganda traditionalists after the newly baptized Princes Nalumasi, daughter of Kabaka Mutesa I, on being appointed guardian of the loyal tomb of Kabaka Jjunju, influenced by the missionaries, made a bonfire of all the pagan charms she found in the custodian's house (Byaruhanga, 2008).

Mutesa 1 was succeeded by his son Mwanga, aged 18 years. His first assignment was to affirm his authority and ensure that his subjects adhere to the cultural norms that missionaries were demonizing and he overcomes foreign attitudes that had led to the death of his father. Three young protestant subjects -Makko Kakumba, Nuwa Serwanga, and Yusuf Lugalama were tried at Kabaka's court and found guilty of defying kingly directives. They were executed on January 31, 1885 (Ward, 2022).

As time rolled, the public expressions of acquired Christian worldview among the tributary kingdom leaders raised anxiety in the political career life of the young king. Voices of dethroning his authority were ringing from every direction. During this period of despair, the Anglican Bishop, James Hannington aged 27 years, escorted with a caravan, set off from Mombasa – Kenya coast, to interact with the Christians in Buganda. When news reached the desk of the king, some commentators assert that the king sent a message to the Basoga who had arrested him to have him killed while orality and other critics have it that the king meant setting him free. The word ‘Bamute’ in Luganda means set him free but when pronounced in Lusoga accent – ‘Bamutte’, it means kill him. Subsequently, Hannington was killed in Busoga on October 29, 1885 (Monitor, 2021; Ward, 2022).

Viewed from the language literary interpretations, it is doubtful whether Bishop Hannington was given a fair trial and found guilty to be martyred, I suppose, he was a victim of mistaken identity. On thinly reliable information, some scholars hold that, it had been predicated by the King’s foretellers that a person who will overthrow Buganda kingdom would come from the East (Monitor, 2021). Such an argument does not hold weight because Buganda was a monarchy kingdom. To the contrary, there has never existed credible evidence that Bishop Hannington was leading a treasonous group that was armed with military tools to dethrone the king.

If the white man was a threat to the kingdom, then white missionaries who were residents in Buganda at the time would have been killed. And if Bishop Hannington was killed because of his confession of Christianity, then his African subjects who were his attendants, guides, and reporters would have been killed. The rightful cause of the death of Bishop Hannington remains in balance, according him a status of a martyr and associating King Mwanga with murderous approval is a misconstruction that might have been promoted by the missionaries or runaway Christian converts who were in opposition to the kingdom administration (Ward, 2022). It is hard to conclude that the kingdom leadership fought against Christianity, if at all Mwanga was against Christianity, given the authority he held in society, then with the military support of Arab Muslims, white missionaries would have been butchered.

Two weeks later, on November 15, 1885, Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, a catholic, was killed for disseminating allegations that the king was responsible for the death of the Anglican Bishop. Allegations that led to the death of Balikuddembe are baseless, there is no parallel information that shows that white missionaries in Buganda were security conscious about the

motives of the Kabaka. Balikuddembe might have been killed as a result of other unrecorded treasonous charges that were a threat to the long held traditional norms (Ward, 2022).

In the months of May and June, 1886, 42 Christians were massacred at the traditional execution site at Namugongo (Ward, 2022). The execution of 45 Christians, 23 Protestants and 22 Catholics, occurred in stages. They faced brutal death. They were subjected to public torture and humiliation, a strategy used to scare others from disrespecting their culture. They were speared, castrated, their bodies dismembered, beheaded, ravaged by dogs, and many others were burned alive (Abuyeka, 2022).

Regrettable demise of immature Christians would not have occurred if the missionaries had taken time to immerse themselves in the culture of the natives, encourage the positive aspects, and slowly chisel out the beastly ritualistic acts. Missionaries had already established friendship with the loyal family, the next action step was for them to take time to learn, understand, respect cultural values, and become assimilated in the indigenous religious community.

Respectful engagement social relationship-building aspects should have been given attention by missionaries concerning: a) the question of origin of the universe; b) the nature, meaning, and purpose of human existence; c) strongly held beliefs; d) rituals performed; e) greatest fears of the local people; f) what people think to be the causes of evil, injustices, suffering, and disorder in the community; g) major offences in the community; h) interventions taken to fix life threatening problems; i) child parenting techniques; j) role models in the community; k) words of wisdom; l) meanings of art form expressions; m) highly cherished cultural aspects; and n) people's understanding concerning life after death (Burnnet, 1992, pp.26-33 and Carlson and Pearcey, 1999, p. xiii). It is on the basis of such sober community engagement questions that gaps are identified, upon which the redemptive seeds of Christianity are introduced to indigenous communities.

However, the innovative ideas of the missionaries were channeled prematurely. Radicalism introduced by the missionaries characterized with promises of afterlife rewards in heaven and severe punishments in hell fire, made many of the subjects of the king, who were less exposed intellectually to embrace eschatological teachings, and to defy ritualistic directives that had been upheld for generations. Attributing martyrdoms solely to Mwanga is a skewed misconception that sets at liberty missionaries who in actual sense contributed to the death of innocent Ugandans. The young king is inaccurately condemned in literary works and by non-eye witnesses for the murders that were construct propelled by missionaries.



## **Conclusion**

Christianity introduced by European missionaries in Uganda demonised the religiosity of indigenous people. Natives were viewed as primitive, involved in idolatry, and people who had no concept of God. God had been at work in the indigenous society for generations evidenced through their cultural manifestations and expressions. In the propagation process of Christianity, missionaries took credit for themselves in their literary works. Ugandans were reflected as consumers but not participants in Christianity transmission process. However, local people contributed greatly as guides, casual labours, hosts, interpreters, translators, provider of meals, land donors, vernacular teachers, and producers of raw materials that were exported to Europe and later, imported exotic items consumed by Ugandans at monitory costs. Funds generated made European economies to grow stronger.

In the due course of the propagation of Christianity in Uganda, martyrdoms were registered during the kingly reign of Mwanga. The deadly scenarios were attributed to the brutal leadership of the young king. However, scanning through the events that surrounded martyrdoms, it is conclusive that missionaries propelled the massacres. Missionaries did not immerse themselves in the host culture to understand the social traditions long cherished by the indigenous society before implementing missionary programmes.

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