

Our Lady of the Assumption Parish Church Mitala-Maria: Understanding the Virgin in the Context of the Deified Heroine

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Abstract

The dogma of the Assumption resonates with the Aristotelian argument that “Men create gods after their own image, not only with regard to their form, but with regard to their mode of life”(D’Holbach 2008:308) because it promoted the cult of the Virgin from the vantage point of hero worship that led to the creation of new deities and to deification from the cult of the person. In this study, the dedication of Our Lady of the Assumption parish church Mitala-Maria demonstrated that the parish church was an embodiment of the missionaries’ crusade to sway African believers to the Virgin as a deified heroine in the archetypal image of a guardian deity or mother goddess that resonated with the believers. The parish church absorbs meaning through three fundamental elements which resonate with its visuality that gave it character to impress itself upon believers’ hearts and minds: Titular; iconography; and, pitch. It has a parallel devotion of St. Balikuddembe, an African martyr of equally heroic stature in patronage role with mortals. The devotional images are discussed in the effort to read into the intentions for the dedications, and the study evaluates their implication in terms of a better understanding of the cult of the Virgin in Uganda popular devotion.

Keywords: parish church, Mitala-Maria, OurLady, Assumption, cult, heroine, devotional image

Introduction

Introducing a new faith to a different culture is usually a big challenge both to the propagators of the faith and to its recipients. It usually comes as a threat to the indigenous culture, and it also usually tends to portray superiority of the new faith in challenging the status quo of the indigenous one. To challenge the status quo works against building bridges and it causes more prejudice. It calls for addressing the following question: Why would the natives trust the new faith? For the Roman Catholics, the following answer would suffice: The new faith needed to have a synchronic vision which was Ugandan, Christian, and Catholic within the social structure of the believers. Such was the case in Uganda in the first decades of missionary activities in the country. Those decades not only witnessed the rivalry between Christianity and the native religion, but also denominational rivalry between the Protestants who came in 1877 and the Roman Catholics who arrived two years later. The natives had already been exposed to Islam about three decades earlier through the Arab traders, but they were suspicious of the intentions of the Arabs because of their involvement in slave trade. The Protestant missionaries were closer to the centre of power as an alternative to the Mohammedans, but they were also received with some circumspection because of African traditions that were threatened by the new Christian faith. The Roman Catholic missionaries, then, had a good chance to win over the hearts and minds of the natives because their cults of images had some parallelism between them, but they also needed to win favour with the Kabaka of Buganda. They needed to win his confidence, to win credibility with their faith, and to build the trust of the natives and of the Protestants. In Islam images were forbidden, the Protestants used few of them, and the Catholic cult of images was closer to that of traditional African religion. The Roman Catholic parish churches are, arguably, sites of the manifestation of that confidence, credibility, and trust. They were

constructed to build a community and their dedications and choice of titular were meant to build rapport with the community.

The parish churches were also command posts for ecclesiastical power and control as well as symbols for the expansive influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda. Wherever they stationed, the missionaries built parish churches as mission posts for evangelical work. A good site for a parish church was a place central in a community where they could also build a school and a health centre. That partly explains why some historians referred to missionaries as agents of colonialism through their leading role in education and health care. The survival of the parish churches is evidence to the preservation of the distinctive character of the Church that took rank with the legacy of imperialism. That influence defined the iconography of the parish church and its devotional images. The believers were actively involved in the labour work of the construction of the church. The parish church, thus, became the most important task of the Ugandan society during mission evangelism. It was a grand structure in the community so as to accommodate a large congregation, and it also served as an outreach post of the missionaries to the populace. The earliest churches were built after an ecclesiastical style not hitherto known in Uganda. The way it was built and the type of devotional images that were put inside demonstrated the power and importance of the Church in the community. One of the roles in the acquisition of new meanings in the church was to provide a community which one could trust. Going to church was also a desire to belong to the group or community one wanted to identify with. In African tradition loyalty was in the community and in the clan or family and cemented by rites. It was adapted to the Church through inculturation and shaped according to the beliefs of the congregation and of the liturgical rites such as baptism, a communal meal (Eucharist), the rite of shaking hands, the requiem mass, etc.

On October 25, 1899 Père Joseph Laane (Naani), W.F., established a parish church at Kyaniika about 20km from Kampala. He dedicated it to the Blessed Virgin Mary and renamed the village with a Luganda descriptive term of Marian territorial authority and control, “Mitala-Maria”, which translates as “Mary’s territory” in order to fix the impression on the minds of the villagers. It meant that the Virgin had defeated the spiritual forces that had reigned in that area and it was thereafter under her supreme authority. The spiritual geography of the area was, thereafter, believed to be controlled by the Virgin. “Although almost any geographical feature may become the focus of worship, mountains and hills are the features usually identified as being sacred”(Mbiti 1991:87). With the name Mitala-Maria, sacredness was subsequently seen by believers in terms of territorial dominion of Christianity in the area beyond Nature Religion’s devotional images which Africans had been conversant with. Naming the village after the Virgin Mary also inspired having a Marian titular for the village’s parish church. In 1892 the White Fathers had won a similar victory in Masaka in Kalungu and named the village that symbolized the Virgin’s dominion “Villa Maria” which meant in Luganda “*Sitaanivvira Maria*” that translates into “Leave this territory for Mary.” Villa Maria became the seat of the Victoria Nyanza Vicariate, but now it is in Masaka Diocese since 1953. In 1953 the Archdiocese of Rubaga was created and Mitala-Maria was under its territoriality. It is now in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala. In 1966 the Holy See merged Rubaga Diocese which belonged to the White Fathers, and Kampala Diocese which belonged to the Mill Hill Missionaries who controlled the Upper Nile Vicariate and had renamed their vicariate the Diocese of Kampala in 1948.

The Titular: Our Lady of the Assumption

In the Hebrew Scriptures, it is expressed that God created man in his own image (cf. Gen. 1:27), however the Aristotelian thesis that ‘men create gods after their own image, not only with regard to their form, but with regard to their mode of life’ inverts the rhetorical form of that Scripture in a way that accommodates arguing for hero worship as a mode of life which forms the basis for deification. Hero worship was influential in the creation of new deities and the deification based on cult personalities who were revered in popular devotion. The beliefs and desires which determined the moral nature of devotional images shaped the identity of the deity. The cult of the Virgin promoted variants of Marian devotional images. Among the dogmatic images of the Virgin is the Assumption (Latin: *assumptio*, taking up into Heaven) of the Blessed Virgin Mary, body and soul into the glory of Heaven. It is an extra-Scriptural narrative as part of the sequence from the Dormition to the Coronation. The Dormition of the Virgin (Latin: *dormitio*, sleep also called Death of the Virgin, *Transito*, and *Koimesis*) “is the first in a series of events often grouped together as a single scene under the title of the Assumption”(Murray et. al 2004:37). The Assumption is one of the following Glorious Mysteries: The Resurrection of Christ; The Ascension; The Descent of the Holy Ghost; The Assumption; and The Coronation of the Virgin by Christ. In the Apocryphal Gospels dating between the 2nd and 4th centuries it is stated that “Mary’s body was taken up into Heaven on the way to her burial, or according to others, three days after her burial”(Murray et. al 2004: Ibid).The Roman Catholic Church defined The Assumption, by the Magisterium, as a dogmatic truth. According to the hierarchy of dogmatic truth The Assumption is propagated basing on The Truth of Sententia Communis of Catholic theologians. The doctrine of the Assumption was formally defined in 1950 by Pope Pius XII.

“The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is the greatest of all the festivals which the [C]hurch celebrates in her honour”(Butler 1956:927). Its Feast Day is celebrated on August 15.

Our Lady of the Assumption fits in the context of the deified heroine just as was the case in Greco-Roman and a number of other religious traditions. “Sometimes a hero’s career is so remarkable that when he dies, he is allowed to join the ranks of the gods. Deification is reserved for the truly great heroes, usually people who demonstrate great bravery or supernatural strength on a number of occasions”(Wilkinson 2009:175). What was remarkable about the Virgin that accorded her heroicity to warrant hierarchical placement in Heaven was based on her being the God-bearer (Gk: *Theotokos*) that rendered her a subject of popular devotion which was responsible for the promotion of the dogma of Assumption and Coronation. In light of feminist ethics, Our Lady of the Assumption is not as appealing because her heroicity was more emphasized in the context of submission rather than of courage. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, on the deification of heroes, argued that “It was not even necessary for one to have been a great man [sic] or a benefactor [sic]; it was enough to have struck the imagination of his [sic] contemporaries, and to have rendered himself [sic] the subject of a popular tradition, to become a hero [sic]-that is to say, one of the powerful dead, whose protection was to be desired and whose anger was to be feared”(1980:140). The establishment and dedication of Our Lady of the Assumption parish church Mitala-Maria in 1899 by the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) invoked the protection of the Virgin as a deified warrior in the spiritual battle for proselytizing Kyaniika villagers. Such a deification “most often happens in cultures in which the way of the warrior is held in especially high regard – in parts of Africa, for example, and in Japan”(Wilkinson 2009: Ibid). To the African believers, The Assumption reinforced belief in life after death and it factored into the missionaries agenda of inculturation based on the cult of

deification. In the Baganda cult of deification “[t]he principal gods appear to have been at one time human beings, noted for their skills and bravery, who were afterwards deified by the people and invested with supernatural powers” (Roscoe 1911:271). Deification, thus, provided a lesson that one was guaranteed a heavenly appreciation for good behaviour on earth. Our Lady of the Assumption parish church Mitala-Maria reinforced the cult of the Virgin in Ugandan spiritual geography and it provided a promise of glory in the hereafter. The present-day parish church was reconstructed in 1960 by Rev. Fr. Martin, W.F. with the help of Rev. Fr. Chamberlain (Sambara), W.F.

The Virgin became part of the texture of Catholic life in Africa and Patroness of Africa. Marianism during the post-conciliar age favoured regenerating the cult of an African Madonna because it suited the theme of “Save Africa with Africa” (Comboni Missionaries 2017) that was the gist of Bishop Daniel Comboni’s “[*Plano*] per la rigenerazione dell’Africa” [Plan for the Regeneration of Africa](Ceillier 2011:33) in the Vicariate Apostolic of Central Africa. In 1969 Our Lady of Africa Mbuya parish church was dedicated whose female persona reflected the spirit of the age that feminized Africa. Feminizing the nation and the continent romanticized the role of motherhood that was assigned to the Virgin Mary. In popular devotion the Virgin was mobilized in the archetypal image of the mother to foster a relationship between the venerator and the Marian devotional image. She was assigned the role of a deity appealing to gendered consciousness. In a simulacrum relationship between man and woman which was passed down in Christian piety from the Middle Ages, the man is the servant of that feminized devotional image. The woman is handmaiden and object for chivalry in the devotion. However, the feminized morality of the Christian faith enables the women to play a central role as chief stewards of popular devotion. They are the instrumental fibre in the practice of faith.

The Iconography for the Parish Church

Our Lady of the Assumption parish church Mitala-Maria was built on hilly ground in Mawokota County, Mpigi, along Kampala-Masaka highway. The church was built like a hall in rectangular form. It departed from the tradition of churches with Latin cross ground plans. It faces south. It is a congregational church with thick walls from baked bricks. It has buttresses like Romanesque churches to support the walls. It has a corrugated iron roof that replaced the red tiles which missionaries used for the churches in Uganda. Its façade is simple with a large concrete-made Latin cross on the top of the façade. It has three metallic portals leading to the same nave. There is tinted glass on the upper half of the portals. Near the left hand-side portal there is an epigraph with the following centennial message: “MITALA-MARIA PARISH (1899-1999) THIS STONE COMMEMORATING 100 YEARS OF [EXISTENCE] WAS UNVEILED BY H.E. DR. SPECIOZA W. KAZIBWE VICE PRESIDENT REPUBLIC OF UGANDA IN THE PRESENCE OF H.E. EMMANUEL CARDINAL WAMALA ARCHBISHOP OF KAMPALA ON 23rd OCTOBER 1999.”

In front of the church, there is a devotional park with an approximately 4 metres plaster model of the Virgin of Grace statue. It stands on a pedestal of about 6 metres high. The Virgin is encased in glass for protection. She is in a white robe and has a golden sash around her waist. She has a green enveloping gown and a white veil. Her hands are stretched out while she looks down in sacred gaze to viewers. There is an epigraph on the pedestal with the following text: “This prayer park of Our Lady was blessed by the Auxiliary Bishop of Kampala Archdiocese Christopher Kakooza on 24th August 2014.”

In the church's interior, the walls are plastered and painted in white and cream. The windows have tint of yellow and pink colour. There are transoms below the windows to let in air. The floor is made of terrazzo to provide a feel of sanctity from the glittering glazing it provides, and the roof is supported by metal bars. The church has a sitting capacity of approximately 4,000 people. There are two altars in the church: The high altar, and the subsidiary altar to St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe. At the high altar, there is a 3 metres Crucifix on the apse. It depicts the Suffering Christ whose plaster model is on the wooden beam. On the right-hand side of the Crucifix there is a mural painting of Our Lady of the Assumption. She is standing in white and light blue clouds with her hands stretched out. She is in a white robe and an enveloping light blue gown. She has a halo of rain-bowlike colours and looks to Heaven. White rays of light from Heaven splash towards her. Below her feet there is a red inscription which provides textual gloss of the dogmatic title Our Lady of the Assumption. On the left-hand side of the Crucifix is a painting of Our Lord of Divine Mercy. The eastern side of the choir has an approximately one metre plaster model of St. Joseph with the Christ Child. On the western side of the choir there is an approximately 1.5 metres plaster model of the Virgin of the Child. She is in a white robe, a blue gown and a white veil. She holds the Christ Child with both hands. The Christ Child is in white robes and depicted with hands stretched out. The second altar in the church is: Altar to St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe. It is on the western side of the aisle. It is at the wall with a blind lancet. There is a large mural of the martyr painted as the altarpiece devotional image. He is depicted in an orant position, kneeling in a meadow and his hands folded by the chest with a palm branch as a symbol of martyrdom held within the hands. He is in a white kanzu and a red robe covers his back from the shoulders. He is dark-skinned and has short crisp hair. Beneath the white boundary that frames the mural there is an inscription of the following Luganda textual

gloss promoting his patronage role: “JOSEPH MUKASA BALIKUDDEMBE OMUWOLEREZA WA SEKIRIBA KYA TTAKA” [Joseph MukasaBalikuddembe patron saint of all people that will die]. Outside the church on its eastern side there is a secondary school named after the martyr: St. Balikuddembe Senior Secondary School Mitala-Maria.

Approximately 250 metres away from the parish church and a few metres away from the Kampala-Masaka highway there is the Lady-Chapel, Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It faces north in the direction of the parish church. It has baked red bricks and a red-tiled roof. Its windows are stained-glass, double windows with wheel windows above them. It is a simple chapel reminiscent of those of mendicant orders. It has a metal cross of approximately one metre on the tip of its façade and a wooden portal under the engaged portico. The façade has three arcaded openings to the portico and two auxiliary openings to it: The eastern opening, and the western opening. The eastern opening to the portico is covered with a large stained-glass window depicting the devotional image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help which is visible via the western opening. Another stained-glass window covers a quarter of the central entrance to the portico. It depicts the Virgin embracing Pope Pius XII. The Virgin is in a golden robe and a blue gown. She has a double halo of yellow light surrounded by a thick blue halo. The Pope is in a white cassock and a white cap. Our Lady of Perpetual Help is depicted in a wheeled window with a boundary of red, yellow, green, and blue colours. She is depicted in a dark-blue gown that envelops from the head to cover her body and a red robe beneath the gown is visible from the chest and hands. The blue gown or mantle represents her perpetual virginity while the red robe represents the Passion of the Christ. The cloaked veil represents her modesty. She has an orange diadem and a white-patterned halo. She looks towards the viewers and holds the Christ Child in her hands, who is troubled by the instruments of the Passion as he is depicted with a sandal falling off his

left foot. He has an orange crown on his head and a golden patterned halo. He is in a green robe and an orange gown.

The Christ Child looks up on his right-hand side at the frightening instrument of the Passion held by Saint Gabriel the Archangel. The instrument is a Patriarchal cross (three-bar cross) also known as an archiepiscopal cross. He is in a purple robe, has green-coloured wings and a golden halo. On the left-hand side of the Virgin there is Saint Michael the Archangel with the lance and sponge which are also instruments of the Passion. He was also depicted in the same manner like Saint Gabriel the Archangel. The Virgin was depicted as the Theotokos of the Passion that is popular in the Eastern Orthodox Church. “The Theotokos embodied two concepts vital for the context of war: Virginal motherhood, which is the source of Mary’s invincibility, and motherly sacrifice – in selflessly offering her Child to the world, the Theotokos presented a model of selfless love indispensable for any state recruiting armies”(Pentcheva 2006:61). The image of the Theotokos in connection with the ideology of victory in battle emerged as a visual strategy in Christian spiritual warfare.

The Pitch: The Social Life of the Dedications for the Parish Church

Mitala-Maria parish church was under the White Fathers from October 1899 to January 1990. The present-day parish church and the name Mitala-Maria represent the legacy of the White Fathers in the area. The parish church is now under diocesan priests.

Are there special features believers identify with in Our Lady of the Assumption parish church Mitala-Maria? The devotional images of the Virgin Mary both in the church and in the devotional park are special features for believers in the village that got its present-day name from the cult of the Virgin. The Virgin was presented to them in five different ways: First, as Our

Lady of the Assumption depicted by the altarpiece mural; second, as Virgin of the Child depicted by the plaster model at the western side of the choir; third, as Virgin of the Grace depicted by the statue in the devotional park; fourth, as Our Lady of Perpetual Help depicted in the stained-glass wheel window of the Lady-Chapel; and, fifth, as the Madonna with Pope Pius XII depicted in the stained-glass window at the central entrance of the façade to the Lady-Chapel that emphasized the pontiff as the Pope of Mary. In addition to those Marian images, St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe was accorded a subsidiary altar in the church to promote his cult as patron saint of mortals. His patronage role was proverbially expressed in the following Luganda text that would impress upon believers to internalize the Christian message: “Omuwolerezawa Sekiribakyattaka.” The proverb “Sekiribakyattaka, mpaawoatalikyambala” means that all people will die. The White Fathers learnt the local languages when they moderated themselves closer to the ordinary people so that they would incarnate the Gospel and effectively reach out to them.

What are the essential sacred stories interpreted for different problems in Uganda from the dedications for Our Lady of the Assumption parish church Mitala-Maria? The dedication of Mitala-Maria parish church to Our Lady of the Assumption expressed the Marian virtues which the White Fathers promoted to the parishioners as well as their hope in the afterlife. The Assumption provided the following hope to the believers: “The same path which conducted her to glory will also lead us thither; we shall be partners in her reward if we copy her virtues. Her example is both our model and our encouragement. From her assumption we derive another great advantage – that of her patronage” (Butler 1956: 931). The story of The Assumption was essential to the understanding of eternal life from the vantage of the Roman Catholic Church. It also enabled believers to confide in the Virgin Mary concerning their stresses in everyday life

because she was believed to have obtained hierarchical placement in the heavenly realm so as to be able to intercede for them. The following excerpt from the Prayer to Our Lady of the Assumption demonstrates the implication of devotion to her: “From the shadows of this vale of tears, we seek in you heavenly assistance, tender mercy, comfort for our aching hearts, and help in the trials of Church and country” (Papal Teachings 1961:324). The relevance of the dogma of the Assumption and its propagation as an expression of faith had a synchronic and diachronic development in popular piety. The belief was implicitly held since the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 until it was defined *ex cathedra* into the dogma of The Assumption by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950 in his Apostolic Constitution, *Manificentissimus Deus* (From Latin: The most bountiful God). It was an assurance to believers about their own victory in the afterlife but also about the Virgin’s empathy with them.

How was the devotional image of Our Lady of the Assumption adapted to the situation in Uganda in light of the beliefs and desires that shaped the dedication for the parish church at Mitala-Maria? The Church promoted the cult of Our Lady of the Assumption to the parishioners of Mitala-Maria in a way that reinforced belief in the Virgin as an equivalent to a deified heroine who was to be trusted in their spiritual lives. The nature of her heroicity which was manifested by the dogmatic devotional title centred on the belief that her body was redeemed from the corruption of the grave. That belief was subsequently adapted and Pope Pius XII later on defined the dogma as the following excerpt demonstrates: “She, by an entirely unique privilege, completely overcame sin by her Immaculate Conception, and as a result she was not subject to the law of remaining in the corruption of the grave, and she did not have to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body” (*Munificentissimus Deus*, November 1, 1950). The devotional image of The Assumption was adapted to the situation in Uganda by exalting her

above the traditional African devotional images of the mother goddess, the guardian deities, and the earth gods which the missionaries discouraged so that the Virgin would be regarded in the context of the archetypal images of the heroine whose body was believed to be not only incorruptible when she died, but that it was also taken into the heavenly realm. Her dogmatic title was conveniently chosen to convince the Mitala-Maria parishioners of the invincibility of the Virgin and to whom they would entrust their devotional needs.

The effectiveness of the dedications in Our Lady of the Assumption parish church Mitala-Maria in giving Christianity an African character: The subsidiary altar to St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe promoted his devotional image as a Uganda Martyr and a patron saint of mortals with the Luganda proverbial inscription to that effect as. Balikuddembe's martyrdom resulted primarily from asking the Kabaka to spare the life of Bishop James Hannington. Balikuddembe's courage was expressed in the following transcription of the rebuke he made to the Kabaka Mwanga II (1868-1903): " 'Your father Mutesa [1837-1884] never put a white man to death. Why, then, should you want to kill one? Do not put him [Bishop Hannington] to death because of what your chiefs have said: they will applaud any decision. Do not kill that white man, for if you do, you will have to answer for it before God' " (Faupel 2007:117). Balikuddembe tried to stem the rising tide of Mwanga II's fury and determination to kill the Anglican Bishop belonging to the Church Missionary Society, Bishop James Hannington (1847-1885), who had come for evangelic mission to Uganda via the eastern route. It was regarded as a bad omen in Buganda for the "white man", or a guest to the kingdom, to access their kingdom via Busoga the eastern route. The Bishop's using that route was received with superstition. The nature of Balikuddembe's intercession for the Bishop showed a manifestation of courage, first, by making a comparative appeal to Mutesa I's accommodation of the "white men." Second, he underscored

the King's decision to kill the Bishop as a misguided one by the chiefs who were the bastions of the traditional religion that was threatened by Christian evangelism which the Bishop came to bolster in the country. Third, with temerity, he appealed to courage and stood up for the truth which he professed by warning the Kabaka that he will face judgement before God to answer for his actions. Thus, Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe showed moral superiority and intellectual domination over the Kabaka and his martyrdom, thereafter, made him a political martyr as well as a martyr of the faith he stood for. "All superiority is odious, but the superiority of a subject over his prince is not only stupid, it is fatal" (Greene 2010:4). Balikuddembe was electrified by religious belief in a fair deity which was marshaled up by his Christian faith. "Mwanga's problem was not religion *qua* religion, but fear of having power eroded" (Muyinde Mande 1996:41). Christianity provided Balikuddembe with moral superiority over traditional African religion and that superiority also threatened the Kabaka who was custodian of traditional religion in Buganda. It threatened to erode the Kabaka's power who asserted his authority over the Majordomo Balikuddembe by ordering for his execution in 1885. "Regardless of whom or what you believe in, belief as a psychological phenomenon urges action. We act our beliefs; do because we believe. The stronger the belief, the more action takes over, the more motivated we become and the surer and narrower our justification for what we are doing" (Hillman 2004:181). The monotheistic psychology that summoned up St. Balikuddembe's courage also mobilized a martial energy to stand up for the truth which held that the object of his belief was a Supreme Deity and a fair Judge who was intolerant to different or variation in belief. "Theology of god and psychology of belief reinforce each other. On the one hand, belief is validated by the absolute superiority in the object of belief, the god or leader or idea; for who would believe in a lesser god?" argued Hillman (Ibid:182). "On the other hand, the hyperirrational extremes

attributed to the divinity fuel the faith of believers, who prove their faith by fighting ever more strongly for their cause, even if lost, just because it is beyond reason” (Ibid). The position of belief in a deity professed by Christians, and which Balikuddembe held, was a threat to the Kabaka’s moral precepts because of the former’s charisma. St. Balikuddembe was promoted by the White Fathers as appealing to the African concept of the living-dead and their relationship with the mortal. He is also the patron saint of chiefs and politicians.

How a generative discourse of socially redeeming value of Christian devotional images should be reconstructed from the pattern of veneration in the dedications for Our Lady of the Assumption parish church Mitala-Maria: The devotional park with the statue of the Virgin of the Grace and the Lady-Chapel provided additional devotional space to the parishioners. The Lady-Chapel has experiential Marian religiosity defined by the stained-glass window image of the Virgin embracing Pope Pius XII. Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) was the most Marian of the Popes because during his pontificate he popularized Marian devotion more than any pontiff had done. In the Roman Catholic Church he is well known as the Pope of Mary. Depicting him when he is embraced by the Virgin Mary implied that he also embraced devotion to her and that he led by example to popularize that devotion. At Mitala-Maria that devotion was demonstrated through a pattern of five Marian devotional images: Our Lady of the Assumption; Virgin of the Child; Virgin of the Grace; Our Lady of Perpetual Help; and, the Madonna with Pope Pius XII. They summed up Marian religiosity for the Mitala-Maria parishioners for the village to be worth its salt as a Marian village in name and in devotional experience. Those Marian images should also be seen in terms of promoting the role of women as key stakeholders in building a cohesive spirit in their communities in Uganda.

Reconstructing Our Lady of the Assumption for Mitala-Maria Parishioners

The Virgin was fitted into the role of a deified heroine. The concept of hero worship in popular devotion was marshaled to the parishioners through the image of the Virgin that the dogma of The Assumption promoted. She became the symbol of victory for the White Fathers and their proselytes in the spiritual battle against forces of evil so that the populace would pride in her deification. The old adage that history is written by the victors represented a truism to Mitala-Maria as a village named after a spiritual victory of Christian evangelism in the area which the White Fathers attributed to the Virgin. She was considered to be on the side of those who revered her and those who sought her intercession. Thus, the parishioners tended to believe what was convenient for them to believe. Devotion to Our Lady of the Assumption has dialectics between belonging to the Roman Catholic victors and of separation from the subjugated traditional African religion in the area.

Contribution to Popular Devotion as Image Maker: Mitala-Maria, a Village named after the Blessed Virgin Mary

A few famous Marian images are worth mentioning to underscore the importance of her role in popular devotion: The Pilgrim Fathers named a State, Maryland, in the United States of America after the Blessed Virgin Mary when they landed on the Feast of The Annunciation March 25, 1634 and dedicated the land to her. The French missionary priest of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, Edward Sorin (1814-1893) founded The University of Notre Dame du Lac “*L’Université de Notre Dame du Lac*” (The University of Our Lady of the Lake, or simply known as The University of Notre Dame) a Roman Catholic research university in Indiana, U.S.A. in 1842 in honour of Our Lady (French: *Notre Dame*). “Most of the French Gothic

cathedrals were built to the glory of Mary, the mother of Christ, who in French was called Notre Dame – Our Lady”(Hillyer& Huey 1966:14). Variants of “Our Lady” were subsequently developed over the years in Marian devotion. “To the medieval mind, of course, no saint was greater than the Virgin Mary”(Nystrom & Nystrom 2004:180). In Catholic visual culture, the popularity of the Virgin continued throughout the years. In the nineteenth century, the Bavarian Roman Catholics founded on December 8, 1842 Marienstadt (Mary’s City) now St. Mary’s a city in Elk County, Pennsylvania. And, in Uganda the White Fathers named a village, Mitala-Maria, after her. The image of Mary mother of Jesus Christ as a village icon characterized the strands of religiosity that stood out from the cult of the Virgin in the rural community of Roman Catholics in the area. Her image was domesticated in order to incarnate Christianity through mission evangelism in the area. The description of Mitala-Maria as Mary’s territory contributed to creating an alternative image in the spiritual geography of the area.

Conclusion

The Aristotelian thesis that ‘men create gods after their own image, not only with regards to their form, but with regard to their mode of life’ leads to a better understanding of the Virgin in the context of the deified heroine in the devotional cult of Our Lady of the Assumption. That titular for the parish church at Mitala-Maria favoured the enterprise of the White Fathers to incarnate the Gospel in the village they named after the Blessed Virgin Mary as a symbol of the victory of the missionaries in evangelizing the area. It was the first parish church in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala to have that Marian dogmatic title as its titular. It offered to the Church an opportunity of domesticating the cult of the Virgin in the area, to the parishioners it offered an opportunity to identify with the Virgin in her archetypal image of the heroine, and to the village

it offered a Marian iconic image like some other places in the world, such as Maryland, The University of Notre Dame, and Marienstadt did in the United States.

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