

Ugandan Christian Devotional Images At The Crossroads: A Case History of Dedications for Parish Churches in The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala, 1879 - 1997

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Abstract

In this study, the thrust of the argument is that Ugandan Christian devotional images encountered crossroads because of the dynamics of their character and social life of the dedications for the parish churches in relation to the vicissitudes of time. The presence of the crossroads was incidental to the Ugandan cultural milieu, and a better understanding of the role of the devotional images emerges through a consideration of the parish churches that shaped the dedications in communities where they were established. The dichotomies of traditional Western theology of devotional images and traditional African visual piety were upheld at the crossroads in some aspects, but they were also undermined in some others. To prompt this investigation the following question was crucial: Are there special features believers identify within African Catholic churches? Dedications for parish churches in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala were witnesses to a legacy of diverse features of imported Christian devotional images whose dynamics of social life were re-examined in this study in relation to time, space and place. The investigation of this study “A case history of dedications for parish churches in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala, 1879 – 1997” was designed to answer that question.

Keywords: Ugandan; Christian devotional images; parish churches; Roman Catholic; visual piety

Introduction

When the imported Christian devotional images took on the characteristics of dogma they subjugated the meaning and vitality of rival images in traditional African visual piety. There emerged a need to underscore the emancipation of African believers from conservatively convenient values of imported Christian devotional images to their redeeming social importance in Ugandan visual piety in aspects that are contemporaneously relevant in the inculturation of the Roman Catholic faith in the country through assimilations, innovations, and adaptations in particular evidence from dedications for parish churches. The real evidence of assimilation lies in those images themselves. They are the silent witnesses to inventions, innovations and borrowings. The images speak of parallels and symmetry. Parallels, therefore, speak of syncretism. Their witness is of proselytism and assimilation. It is also of power and resistance to power. Inasmuch, is this power justified? There was and is resistance which might have been a good thing or not so good thing. In that vein of power relational to the politics of identity and acceptability, this study demythologizes the legacy of missionary evangelism in Uganda in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala.

Study objectives

The study was based on the following five objectives: First, to examine special features believers identify within African Catholic churches. Second, to determine the essential sacred

stories interpreted for different problems in Uganda from dedications for the parish churches in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala, 1879 – 1997. Thirdly, to analyze the adaptation of Christian devotional images in Uganda in light of the beliefs and desires that shaped the dedications for parish churches in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala, 1879 – 1997. Fourthly, to synthesize the effectiveness of assimilated devotional images in giving Christianity an African character from the dedications for parish churches in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala, 1879 – 1997. Finally, to reconstruct a generative discourse of socially redeeming value of Christian devotional images from their pattern of veneration in dedications for parish churches in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala, 1879 – 1997.

Methodology

The study was empirical historical research with a synchronic and diachronic analysis of the images based on an ideographic approach. It uses a poststructuralist design in the reading of those images in a modern and post-modern spirit as a site in which extra-subjective forces nest or fight rather than the centre that limits the structure. It modernizes and extends Carl Gustav Jung's classic work of neo-analytic psychology by applying archetypal images from collective unconscious theory to the devotional images in the context of their idiolect and dialectics which open them up to alternative meanings in Ugandan popular devotion and light of the Roman Catholic beliefs and teachings. It uses Léon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance theory to provide an explanatory framework that leads to a better understanding of how the Roman Catholic beliefs were maintained to support the Church's doctrine and dogma.

Key findings

In general, the study establishes that the images are closer to native beliefs, and are an accessible route to rethinking inculturation and that the parish churches gained heritage value in Ugandan civil society. The parish church was the evidence of the community's social standing in society, and the crossroads around which the devotional images pivoted established contours leading to a better understanding of the presenting problem to the dynamics of the times and their influence on the cult of images in the country. The images are pregnant with significance and they provoke devotees to the morality of the Roman Catholic Church and its ethos of evangelism. Missionaries used them to communicate their knowledge, thoughts, and imaginations to the believers and to redefine the intellectual values of visual piety in Ugandan civil society. The cult of images was frontier devotion between Roman Catholics and practitioners of traditional African religion in terms of archetypal images and their instrumentality to the lives of believers.

Recommendations

This research would be a rich vein of aggregate knowledge contributing to an emerging multidisciplinary movement of Visual Medical Humanities through the psychotherapeutic and psychosocial use of the images as threads of relevance to that province, and to Catholic Studies that would synthesize art history, Liturgical Theology, Religious Sociology, and Religious Visual Culture. The sacred texts have not changed and the moral lessons derived from them are still pertinent. However, Catholicism also has to find answers for the urgent needs of the present otherwise it may be abandoned and replaced by more suitable religions in response to the attendant needs of the folks.

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