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“Except You Be Born of Water and the Spirit, You Cannot Enter into the Kingdom”

The Social Meaning of Baptism in Toro, Uganda 1890–1910

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Abstract

The role of rituals as forces for social change in Christian mission history can be overlooked particularly where the rituals are adopted from a Protestant church. Through the examination of the performance – setting, characters, script and sounds – of an early Anglican baptism in Toro, Western Uganda, this article illustrates how this ritual was used to enact and affect the values and objectives of a new society in its immediate context and in transnational frame of reference. The article argues for renewed historical attention to rituals as embodiments of change.

Résumé

Le rôle des rituels en tant que forces de changement social dans l'histoire de la mission chrétienne est parfois sous-estimé, en particulier lorsque ces rituels sont mis en œuvre dans des églises protestantes. À travers l'analyse du déroulement d'un des premiers baptêmes anglicans à Toro, dans l'ouest de l'Ouganda – le cadre, les personnages, le scénario et les sons –, cet article montre comment ce rituel a été utilisé pour mettre en œuvre et influencer les valeurs et les objectifs d'une nouvelle société, à l'échelle locale et dans un cadre de référence transnational. L'article plaide pour une attention historique renouvelée aux rituels en tant qu'incarnations du changement.

Keywords

baptism – ritual – Anglican – performance – Uganda

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Mots-clés

baptême – rituel – anglicanisme – performance – Ouganda

1 Introduction: Rituals and Texts

The social role of Christian rituals requires renewed attention in Protestant mission history in Africa where the connection between religious performance and societal change is less developed. This article discusses a reconstruction of a ritual of baptism that illuminates socio-political change in one African kingdom. Where Christian rituals appear to deviate from the practice of western traditions they have received good coverage. Isaiah Shembe's Nazereta, for example, have been closely studied for their contextual performance and ritualisation of biblical narratives within the broader history of socio-political change in South Africa.¹ The impact of Roman Catholic or high Anglican rituals on African societies have also drawn attention.² It seems that where church founders or missionaries have prioritized liturgical elements, scholars have followed. Among evangelical Protestants, however, a theological wariness about the direct spiritual efficacy of rituals has contributed to the neglect by historians of the dramatic ability of rituals to perform specific forms of change and continuity in those churches. This relative disregard for the social meanings of rituals like the sacraments of baptism or eucharist come despite earlier calls for identifying ritual innovation and contestation in religious expressions in Africa.³ It is also in contrast to the scholarly attention in Protestant mission history on the translation and use of the Bible,⁴ the sacred nature of converts' literacy through their engagement with religious texts,⁵ and the role of vernacular translations of the Bible and the moral discourse of the Scriptures in forming political communities as well as spiritual ones.⁶ The question by what means did converts *feel* the appeal of reading, or *hear* and *see* something that sparked interest or *sensed* a pull to *participate* in these communities lies, to some extent, in the role of ritual.

1 See Muller (1999) and also Comaroff (1985) for discussions about ritual in social change.

2 For example, the influence of Catholic rituals in medieval Kongo appears throughout Thornton (1998).

3 Ranger (1975), pp. 4–7.

4 Lamin Sanneh's seminal work *Translating the Message* (1989) was instrumental in this regard.

5 Manarin (2008).

6 Hastings (1997), pp. 195–196; Peterson (2005).

To explore this further, this article is influenced by recent anthropological work that has moved into the familiar ground of historians to take a new look at texts as a change from anthropological attention to ritual. In the words of Simon Coleman, the Bible is a fruitful, “site of comparison between cultural practices and contexts, and one that is arguably as stable or valid as such old stalwarts as ‘ritual’ or ‘the self.’”⁷ Scriptures have agency and a social life as they create communities and influence patterns of behaviour. The range of engagement – and non-engagement – with biblical texts on the African continent has been examined⁸ and the transhistorical connection that biblical stories evoked across time has been noted.⁹ This move allows for a study of a public ritual that is dependent upon the reading of written text, specifically a liturgy that refers to biblical texts and ancient prayers. The article, therefore, also draws on the ‘affective turn’ within humanities and social sciences that encourages the study of embodied and enacted affect upon individuals and the socio-political world in which the ritual takes place.¹⁰ The article provides an historical exploration of the social meaning of one Christian ritual in a particular place and time by closely attending to elements of its performance – setting, characters, scripts and sounds. Rituals, by following a familiar pattern of acts and words and by engaging the senses, have the performative capacity to connect the participants in the immediate context and also to other participants across time and space. They create local, transnational and transhistorical bonds that influence society. This is particularly so for baptism, the ritual of public initiation into a Christian community. Reconstructing a single baptism service – an Anglican rite in the Kingdom of Toro, Western Uganda on 24th March 1897 – allows for a close examination of the role of the written, read and spoken word in a ritual performance at the centre of a project by a political elite to reimagine their roles and responsibilities in a Christian framework. The baptism service was an early event in a wider strategy that saw Anglican beliefs, practices, institutions and missionaries as essential in establishing stability and unity in a kingdom that was fragmented and war torn. The project included cosmopolitan expectations of Christian fraternity that became imbricated in the renewed Toro kingdom as its rulers sought socio-political change.

7 Coleman (2006), p. 206.

8 Engelke (2007), p. 1.

9 Peel (2000), pp. 2, 9.

10 Kastfelt (2020), 182; Hunt (2014), pp. 335–338.

2 Sources

One of the reasons for the limited attention to the social role of baptism is the paucity of detailed evidence in the archival sources. Evidence is not, however, entirely absent. Records of baptisms, confirmations, attendance at church services and marriages are often found in Church registers. St John's Native Anglican Church, Kabarole, built on the hill next to the King's palace in what is now known as Fort Portal, kept a number of registers.¹¹ From the baptismal register it is possible to know the names of the baptised and the date of baptism. Missionaries used these registers and their own notes when they wrote to their missionary societies and their supporters. Scholarship often reflects the available statistical data on baptism. It is possible to chart the Christianisation of an area through examining the increasing numbers of people being baptised. Registers, however, tell us little about *how* Christianisation was effected and *why* people may have chosen baptism. There can be an implicit assumption that baptisms were performed in the same manner as the western churches from which the missionaries came and thus held broadly the same meaning for the participants. This article considers the social meaning – without ignoring the theological meaning – of an Anglican baptism through discussing its performance in some detail. It uses letters from Toro leaders and accounts from CMS missionaries to understand the context of baptism.

The baptism in question may have been recorded because it was performed in an unusual way. In the Church of England almost all baptisms were of children. They took place in a church building by sprinkling water from a font. In Toro the first baptismal candidates were adults. The eight men and six women who were baptised shortly after 9.30 am on Wednesday 24th March 1897 were fully immersed in the river. There are few descriptions of this baptism: the individual who described it at length died a few weeks afterwards. Unique or not, the account of this baptism is able to illuminate a role of Christian ritual in social change that is consonant with other primary sources. From a discussion of this one event, its setting, its dramatis personae and script, the article explains how its performance illuminates the early cultural and political influences of Christianity in Toro. It includes an attention to the Kingdom of Toro's situation in the wider world. Thus the article examines a particular confluence of socio-political context and religious rituals in which rituals purvey new ideas and practices among the Toro elite and their subjects. If Christian ritual is

11 Parish Registers, St John's Church, Kabarole. Some of these are now conserved in the archives at Uganda Christian University, Mukono.

not merely an instrument in the achievement of political or social goals some attention to the spiritual affects is required. Likewise, if the sacred informs the secular, we may expect such a public spectacle of Christian initiation to have socio-political ramifications.

3 A Baptism in Toro

The baptism service on 24th March 1897 took place about 10 months after the first baptism at Kabarole, in the Kingdom of Toro. Missionaries from the Mengo Church Council of the neighbouring Kingdom of Buganda, Petero Nsubuga, Marko Luyimbazi, Nuwa Nakiwafu and Tito Lwabikinga had first gone to Toro in May 1894. British missionaries from the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) Alfred Tucker and Arthur Bryan Fisher, arrived almost two years later on 30th April 1896 along with fifteen Baganda church teachers. Eight days later, on 8th May 1896, the first fourteen people in Toro were baptised by Bishop Tucker.¹² Fisher remained in Toro to establish the CMS mission in Kabarole and more Ganda church teachers were dispersed throughout the kingdom. Ten months later, fourteen more people had been prepared for baptism through a process of literacy and catechism. Below, quoted at length, is the longest description of the baptism of 24th March 1897. It is written by the Revd John Callis, a CMS missionary recently arrived in Toro, who baptised the candidates. Callis' record is followed by a discussion of the *mise-en-scene* of the baptism, its *dramatis personae* who participated in the ritual of crossing through the waters of baptism and its *script*, the Book of Common Prayer and hymns.¹³ The article then discusses how the performance of baptism enacted renewed notions about the kingdom in its local and transnational context.

Callis described the baptism thus:

We had a most delightful service and we felt it was a very real time of blessing. The king, his wife, his mother, and about 400 people came to the riverside, and were seated on the high-bank. We began with several hymns and then, amid perfect silence and a deep sense of the Divine Presence, I began to read the service. The candidates included several young chiefs, and some of the young girls of the Namasole's [Queen Mother's] household. They stood in from of the congregation with their witnesses,

¹² Tucker (1899), p. 19.

¹³ Bielo (2006), p. 2.

to answer the questions, which they did most feelingly. While we sang a hymn, "I am coming, Lord, coming now to Thee," they walked round across a bridge a short distance to the opposite side of the river. I then baptised them, one by one, in mid-stream, and they passed to the congregation on the shore. It was a most intensely interesting service.

Not only were the candidates themselves in real earnest, but all the congregation followed the service most devoutly. The glimpses of their faces from the river was wonderful. The Namasole embraced the girls of her household in a most loving way – greeting them afresh as true sisters in Christ. The Namasole is a most sweet Christian soul, and her influence is very great. The service ended with the hymn, "Oh happy day that fixed my choice," after which I gave the benediction, when the big congregation went home with shouts – real expressions of joy. I cannot express my thankfulness for this service – my first baptism in Africa! The candidates mostly wore white clothes, and, under the morning sun, we were soon all dry. The place we chose for the baptism was close to Captain Sitwell's fort, and he had most readily given us permission to alter the banks a little. The king had to call on him after the service, and, to the inquiry whether he had had a good time at the baptism, he [Sitwell] replied simply, "Are not the things of God all good?"¹⁴

Those familiar with biblical narratives will recognise a transhistorical performance of baptism in which the Mpanga River takes on the role of the River Jordan where Jesus Christ and others were baptised by John the Baptist. The imaginative transformation of local landscapes into Rivers of Jordan and Mounts of Sinai or Zion is a feature of many African Initiated Churches.¹⁵ Such transhistorical geographical juxtapositions also appear in mission-initiated churches: The Baganda referred to Nmananve River as the Jordan, Lake Victoria/Nyassa as Galilee and they gave other places biblical names.¹⁶ The public spectacle in which the baptismal candidates performed moving from death to life through crossing from one river bank to another was set in a geographically dramatic location and at a critical point in Toro history.

14 Pierpoint (1898) and *CMS Annual Report* (1898), p. 141.

15 Hastings (1994), pp. 499–504.

16 Manarin (2008), pp. 166–167.

4 *Mise-en-Scene*

The area of Western Uganda around Fort Portal is hilly, with lakes formed within old volcanic craters. The Rwenzori mountain range rises above the hills. Shrines and palaces, sites of political and spiritual power, were often found on prominent hills. In the worship of the Cwezi hero-gods there was a close relationship between political and spiritual power. Public gatherings to witness events of spiritual-political power were familiar: the gathering of the crown chiefs, the annual crowning of the king, or the welcome of important visitors all drew crowds.¹⁷ The Mpanga River flowed at the foot of important hill sites of power. It ran about a mile east of Kasagama's palace. In 1898 the king moved his palace to a new hill in defiance of the Cwezi divinity who had once been worshipped in that hill. He renamed the seat of the kingdom 'Bethlehem.' The hill he vacated already had a small chapel on it, and became the site of St John's Church and the CMS mission station. The Roman Catholic Missionaries of Africa or 'White Fathers' had established their mission on a smaller hill next to the hills of the CMS and the King. The Imperial British East Africa Company's (IBEAC) fort on another hill had become an outpost of the Uganda Protectorate in 1895. The Mpanga River flowed near the IBEAC fort and also close to the *Namasole* or Queen Mother's hill. The baptismal candidates crossed through the water to the side of the river near to which stood the Queen Mother's palace and chapel. Here they were greeted by the Queen Mother.

The mapping of biblical places on to the Toro landscape was not simply an exercise in geographical equivalence for spiritual rituals but a reminder of political intention. In 1897 the political scene in Toro was complex. The Kingdom of Toro was in the process of achieving political stability. It had succeeded from the Kingdom of Bunyoro to the north in the 1830s but had never been entirely independent of the larger polity. Through alliance with the large and powerful Kingdom of Buganda, Toro gained British military support and was introduced to the new spiritual power of Christianity. Conversion to Christianity among the Baganda had been rapid during the 1880s.¹⁸ In 1891, after civil wars, a new Ganda Protestant leadership emerged that wished to maintain its regional political influence. It encouraged church teachers to work in Toro as the British Protectorate of Uganda was being declared.¹⁹ If the external stability

17 Beattie (1971), pp. 93–122.

18 The Baganda also developed a close association between royal and ecclesiastical ritual and function, see for example, Waliggo (1998), pp. 80–83.

19 Steinhart (1999), pp. 47–48. Steinhart highlights the pre-colonial alliances that allowed the British Imperial East Africa Company (BIEAC) to impose its authority.

of Toro had been assured by colonial force, it was hardly unified with itself. Populations in areas over which Kasagama claimed sovereignty, often considered themselves to have significant autonomy in which, at best, Toro was simply the first among equals. Those taking part in the Mpanga River baptism were taking a spiritual journey with a political end: allegiance to the Toro royal family and their strategy for unifying the Kingdom around a renewed vision influenced by Protestant Christianity. At the Mpanga River the scene was set for bringing the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Toro closer together in the minds of the actors through the performance of the baptism. An explanation of the characters taking part in the baptism further reveals the imbrication of the spiritual and political in the change being enacted.

5 Dramatis Personae

5.1 *Kasagama and Damali*

Mukama (King) Daudi Kasagama Kyabambe had been baptised on 15th March 1896 at Namirembe, Kampala.²⁰ The liturgy of the baptism service spoke of being baptised into the Church. In Uganda, the Church was represented by two groups – the Roman Catholic White Fathers and the CMS from the Church of England – neither of whom were certain that the other was a member of the true church. Kasagama had been courted by both. He chose to be baptised by and support the endeavours of the Native Anglican Church. Every year he held a special service on the anniversary of his baptism.²¹ Kasagama took the baptismal name, 'Daudi' or 'David'. He portrayed himself as a new King David ruling from a new Bethlehem. Following the king of the Hebrew Bible he prepared to bring unruly groups together to establish a pacific rule for a united Toro.²²

His claim to the Toro throne had been supported by the neighbouring kingdom of Buganda where he had first been introduced to Christianity whilst in exile. In 1891 he was able to defeat other claimants to Toro through the superior military power of Buganda's allies, the IBEAC. Divine reign was given substance for Kasagama through the Old Testament stories of God protecting, restoring and uniting the land of Israel through David. In their interaction with Christianity, African rulers were usually mindful of their responsibilities for the well-being of their people and their aspirations to maintain their ruling positions: two elements that had previously demanded engagement with spiritual

20 Hansen (1984), p. 127.

21 Blackledge (1908), p. 71.

22 Peterson (2012), pp. 258–259.

beings. Kasagama's desire for social well-being and political order continued to be bound in the supernatural, even as there was a change in his belief and practice. During the Mpanga River baptism, Kasagama was seated prominently on the river bank with his wife, Damali. On being baptised, Kasagama had chosen one wife from among his wives to be his Queen in conformity to the monogamy required by Christianity. Like the biblical king, David Kasagama's monogamy would waiver when Damali did not immediately produce an heir. Damali was among the fourteen people who had been baptised by Bishop Tucker in May 1896. For many years she was supportive of church education and health work, particularly among women.

5.2 *Kahinju and Her Household*

Kahinju, the Queen Mother,²³ was also among the fifteen people baptised by Bishop Tucker in May 1896. She took the baptismal name Vikitolya in reference to the British monarch of the same name. The role of Queen Mother was influential in Bunyoro-Butoro culture, possibly equal to that of her son, the King.²⁴ Kahinju had protected Kasagama when he was young and had played a significant part in negotiations with the Banyankole and Baganda courts surrounding Kasagama's claim to the Toro throne. She and her large retinue became active Christians. Some women from her court would become church teachers in different parts of the kingdom and neighbouring Ankole. Others became proponents of female education in the CMS schools at Kabarole. It is likely that Kahinju helped to organise the spectacle of the March 1897 baptism, because of her prominent political role and because a number of the fourteen baptismal candidates were women in her household. They passed through the Mpanga waters of baptism to the shores of Kahinju's palace and were embraced by her as they came out of the river. Callis was touched by the affection shown by Kahinju towards her 'girls.' He considered that the hugs indicated the democratising process of baptism in which baptised women were 'sisters in Christ.' The candidates were robed in white, a traditional colour for baptism and a striking visual contrast to the green hills around. White robes in this situation, however, also denote access to bleached cotton material from the Zanzibari traders. For several decades well-to-do Baganda and members of the Toro courts had been wearing a full-length white tunic (*kanzu*) as a sign of their status. Others made do with a length of cloth tied on one shoulder. It is likely that many of the four hundred observers of the baptism were wearing

23 In Callis's account he uses the Luganda title *Namasole*. The Toro title is *Nyina Mukama*.

24 Roscoe (1923), pp. 136–145.

bark cloth. The spectacle of baptism was an opportunity to display a desirable but costly commodity associated with wealth and influence.

5.3 *Young Chiefs and Mugurusi*

Other candidates were 'young chiefs'. The Kingdom of Toro was a complex and hierarchical society. A close group of 'crown chiefs' governed the counties along with district and area chiefs.²⁵ Identification with Protestant Christianity through baptism was an effective way of performing loyalty to the King. It is possible to trace the career of one of the young chiefs, Nasanaeri Mugurusi, whose relationship to Kasagama was particularly close. From 1897 he demonstrated his accord with the new ideas for the Kingdom that were effected at baptism. Thus he provides an example of the way in which Christian commitment influenced involvement in developing a unified nation. After baptism, Mugurusi trained to become a church teacher. This was a common step for Batoro and Baganda men at court. It effectively became part of their chiefly formation. The training involved six months of instruction followed by placement for six months, then two more periods of instruction and placement. One of Mugurusi's placements was Mboga, a semi-autonomous chieftaincy with a loyalty to Kasagama, on the edge of the Ituri forest.²⁶ The peripatetic life-style of a church teacher was challenging and young chiefs often relinquished it after a few years.²⁷ Mugurusi sustained it for about two years. In 1900 Mugurusi was appointed Prime Minister of the Toro Parliament, a pre-colonial body that had been reconstituted to be – with Kasagama – the paramount conduit of the British colonial policy of indirect rule. Mugurusi and Kasagama worked with, and argued with, the colonial administration. In July 1907 Kasagama appointed Mugurusi to the county of Kitagwenda, which claimed independence from both Toro and Nyoro rule.²⁸ The ruler of Kitagwenda had been Edwadi Bulemu, previously a member of the Toro Parliament.²⁹ Bulemu had retained a measure of independence through his religious choices. He encouraged an interest in Catholicism because it brought technological novelties and spiritual power to the area without being closely associated with Kasagama's rule.³⁰ Mugurusi, on the other hand, promoted the Anglican Church in Kitagwenda. He was com-

25 The British colonial administration attempted to use a systemised version for the purposes of 'indirect rule'.

26 Pirouet (1978), pp. 57–58.

27 If chiefs wished to be ordained they were expected to relinquish their chieftaincy.

28 Steinhart (1999), pp. 120–121, 132.

29 Pirouet (1978), p. 74; Wheeler (1971), pp. 146–185 and 236.

30 Pirouet (1978), p. 67.

mitted to propagating a gospel that coincided with the extension of Kasagama's political authority. For the court at Toro, becoming Christians presented them with powerful ideas about a particular model of corporate identity. Old Testament interpretations that placed Israel at the centre of God's divine plan as "a 'Holy People,' divinely chosen but enduring all the ups and downs of a confusing history," offered a persuasive notion of nationhood.³¹

5.4 *Sitwell*

The last individual mentioned in Callis' account was Captain Sitwell of the IBEAC fort. Sitwell is, in many ways, the villain of the drama. Fort captains and, later, colonial 'collectors' or administrators only stayed for three to nine months in Toro and were considered a necessary nuisance by Kasagama and the CMS missionaries because, whilst they had originally protected the autonomy of Toro, they increasingly tried to curb the power of the King and chiefs who comprised the Toro parliament. Sitwell is viewed by the CMS missionaries and Kasagama as having an inadequate understanding of the social situation on the ground and a limited commitment to Christianity. Despite the involvement of CMS in lobbying for the British Protectorate, CMS missionaries in Uganda often criticised colonial authorities.³² Fisher regularly criticised Sitwell's insensitive and disrespectful treatment of the King and Queen Mother.³³ Callis' inclusion of Sitwell at the end of his account of the baptism acknowledges Sitwell's help. It also indicates that Callis hoped the public baptism and the visit by Kasagama might persuade Sitwell of the importance of Christian conversion. Sitwell's response to the baptism is moderate and diplomatic, "Are not the things of God all good?" Sitwell attempted to be fair and impartial to the Roman Catholic mission. The White Fathers, whose mission station was established on a hill close to St John's church and Kasagama's palace, do not feature in Callis' description. They were however, watching the baptism. Father Achte, the senior missionary, recorded his criticism of this baptism service, dismissing as ridiculous the renaming of the Mpanga River, 'Jordan.'³⁴

5.5 *Callis*

Revd John Callis was the narrator and baptiser. A new CMS missionary who had recently arrived in Toro, Callis was a colleague for Albert Lloyd, who had

31 Hastings (1997), p. 197.

32 Prevost (2010), pp. 89–90.

33 Fisher, A.B. 'Diary, Book 6: Toro 1896–1897' Unpublished. Acc 84, Church Missionary Society Archives.1–26 & 32.

34 Le Blond (1928), p. 288.

been in Toro for less than a year, and a replacement for Arthur Fisher who had returned to Britain on furlough. A week later, Callis also baptised thirteen people in Mboga, above the Semiliki escarpment, on 4th April. There is no record of how the Mboga baptism was carried out. Callis died on 24th April 1897 in Butiti. Supporters in Britain published a book in his memory, *In Uganda for Christ*, which contains large extracts of his detailed and enthusiastic letters home. His commitment to language-learning, particularly through song, is evident in the letters. In conducting the baptism he was practicing the Luganda he had recently learnt in Buganda. Many of the Toro royal court spoke Luganda because they had spent time in Buganda, but it was probably largely incomprehensible to the four hundred observers. During the three years of Christian contact, the translation of the basic literacy book with catechism into Runyoro-Rutoro had only just begun.³⁵ The language of baptism was a demonstration of a close connection of the court with the more powerful neighbouring kingdom of Buganda. This relationship would sour by 1901, by which time the court were promoting their own Runyoro-Rutoro language.

Callis, in common with his fellow CMS missionaries, was influenced by the socio-political status of the Church of England and a particular form of late nineteenth century evangelicalism known as Keswick holiness. CMS missionaries were accustomed to the close relationship between the Church of England and the state in which the monarch held the position of supreme governor of the church. Expectations about godly kingship derived from a British background as well as from interpreting the Old Testament. Their missionary work was inspired and informed by stories of the conversion of the British Isles through its regional rulers.³⁶ Thus they fully expected that the conversion of the Toro court to Christianity would produce the right societal conditions for large-scale African conversion. The conversion of many chiefs in Buganda encouraged such expectations.³⁷ Keswick piety operated in some tension to this view of a national church. From 1875, many CMS missionaries were recruited from the Keswick Convention, a non-denominational event that shared evangelical spirituality across the north Atlantic.³⁸ Keswick 'holiness' focused upon the Higher Life, a quest for improved inner piety through the sanctifying action

35 Matthew's Gospel was published Runyoro-Rutoro in 1900, Bible Society Archives /E3/3/45 4 Nyoro-Nyore, File 1 1911–1946, Minutes 2/8/1911, correspondence from CMS missionary, H.E. Maddox 12/12/1912.

36 Wild-Wood (2017), pp. 494–497.

37 Wild-Wood (2020), chapter 4.

38 Maughan (2014), p. 385.

of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ It believed that ‘secular society ... formed an alien and often hostile world.’⁴⁰ The Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* took a particular direction: The Bible, as the medium through which God spoke, was the paramount authority for life; it should be accessible in the vernacular in order that people could make an emotional response to God’s word.⁴¹ This particular form of piety led CMS missionaries to expect that conversions would be apparent in the adoption of pious individual patterns of behaviour brought about the Holy Spirit. CMS missionaries acknowledged a stark distinction between the values of the Kingdom of God and flawed earthly kingdoms ruled by sinful men whilst believing that Christian leaders had a vital role in facilitating Christianisation. Keswick holiness rejected highly ritualized forms of Christianity yet clergy in the Church of England were still expected to conduct baptism. CMS missionaries trumpeted the unity of all humanity in a theology of Christ as the fulfilment of all religious paths. Thus inward Christian conversion, enacted and visible in baptism, enabled converts to be the equal of other Christians.⁴²

Callis’ descriptions of the baptism conformed to the language of Keswick holiness. He used words like ‘earnest’, ‘devout’, ‘loving’, to describe participants. The baptism service was lively and emotive. It moved from silence to shouts of joy. He believed the Batoro participants were equally moved by the ceremony. Callis believed that the joy indicates the “Divine Presence” at work in the people who participated in the service. As a clergyman he also noted the role of liturgy, hymns, water as part of the baptism. All these elements assisted the creation of a public performance that was affective in engaging enough of the population of Kabarole with Kasagama and Kahinju’s re-envisioning of the Kingdom of Toro for it to be a reasonable success. These elements are examined below.

6 Script(ure)

The most significant script in the Mpanga River baptism was the Luganda translation of the Church of England’s liturgical text, the 1662 edition of the Book of Common Prayer. The prayer book has an adult baptism rite, which contains some notably different elements from the baptism of infants. This adult rite – already translated into Luganda but not yet Runyoro-Rutoro – was almost cer-

39 Ibid., p. 140.

40 Bebbington (1989), p. 180.

41 Engler, pp. 50–56.

42 For further information on the influence of Keswick spirituality on the CMS in Toro, particularly on A.B. Lloyd, see Wild-Wood (2010) pp. 278–281.

tainly the one which Callis used for the outdoor performance of full-immersion in the Mpanga. Although the hymns and the candidate's responses would have been committed to memory the liturgy of prayers and Biblical texts was read.

The first prayer of the service for adult baptism mentions God's saving of Noah, and God's leading of "the children of Israel they people through the Red Sea" before it mentions Christ's baptism in the Jordan. Jesus's baptism is pre-figured in the flood and the Israelites fleeing Egypt. The prayer ends with a supplication that the baptised, "may so pass through the waves of this troublesome world that finally *they* may come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with thee ..." Next, the story of Nicodemus (John 3) is read, including the words, "unless you are born of water and the spirit you cannot enter the Kingdom of God." The liturgy moves to the end of Mark's Gospel when Jesus commissions his disciples to go into the world, preaching, making disciples and baptising. Following this the baptismal candidates are asked creedal questions. They are baptised and signed with the cross. The service ends with a number of prayers for the baptised and the Lord's Prayer. These stories indicate that those being baptised by passing through water are entering into the long Judeo-Christian story. They are becoming God's rescued children, like the Israelites. They are being born again, like Nicodemus. The new relationship with Jesus by the Spirit provides the promise of eternal life marked by transformation of life lived now.

The Book of Common Prayer provided a liturgical frame to scriptural passages which mediated an Anglican belonging. The hymns came from the global evangelicalism that spread from the North Atlantic. Both hymns mentioned by Callis were sung in Luganda, and have been translated into many different languages. The first hymn, "I am coming Lord" was adopted by Ira Sankey, an American revivalist associated with Keswick spirituality, and made internationally famous in *Sacred Songs and Solos* (1873).⁴³ It speaks of Christ's suffering on the cross, and the believer being washed in the blood of Christ, an important focus of evangelical piety. In contrast, the baptism service mentions Christ's blood only once: he "shed out of his most precious side both water and blood". The Prayer Book liturgy focusses on water, not blood, as the agent which is "sanctified" at the moment of baptism for "the mystical washing away of sin." However, blood sacrifices were familiar in Toro.⁴⁴ It is likely that the resonances

43 Lewis Hartsough (1828–1919). Two of the seven stanzas are as follows: "I hear Thy welcome voice/That calls me, Lord, to Thee/For cleansing in Thy precious blood/That flowed on Calvary.// I am coming, Lord/Coming now to Thee:/Wash me, cleanse me in the blood/That flowed on Calvary."

44 Fisher (1911), pp. 130–131.

of the hymn were clear to the audience and helped to meld Toro concepts of sacrifice with those of North Atlantic evangelicalism. The second named hymn, “O happy Day”, also focussed upon the moment “When Jesus washed my sins away.”⁴⁵ The language here is of joy and gladness. The tune and rhythm are upbeat. After the solemnity of the liturgy and of entering and rising from the water (“the waves of this troublesome world”), Callis describes the congregants rejoicing, as the baptised reached the bank (prefiguring “the land of everlasting life”) and are embraced by those who have already been baptised.

It is not possible to know what the fourteen men and women thought about their baptism. However, the Batoro took their baptismal vows seriously. The baptismal candidates had been carefully prepared for baptism through literacy and catechism classes. “Readers,” as they were known, graduated from alphabet sheets to an elementary reading book that contained the Ten Commandments, the Nicene Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, selected Bible verses, and questions and answers on Christian salvation.⁴⁶ They had studied the Bible and been tested on their knowledge.

The prayer book already provided them with a daily and weekly ritual framework at Kabarole.⁴⁷ The services of Morning and Evening Prayer were said daily by the Baganda church teachers and those they prepared for baptism. CMS missionaries, influenced by Keswick holiness, tried to discourage simple repetition of Prayer Book worship, fearing that such a practice would become a meaningless ‘ritual’ with no spiritual substance.⁴⁸ The recital of the Prayer Book, however, was a new technique for engaging with the divine in which spiritual expertise connected with reading. CMS missionaries were surprised by its popularity.⁴⁹ Holy Communion was performed monthly, depending on the availability of an ordained clergyman.

The spectacle of the public baptism by full immersion in the Mpanga River enacted a significant social shift. According to the liturgy, the Batoro were moving spiritually from death to life. They were also moving from orality to literacy, being grafted into the Biblical stories and making them meaningful in their lives. In the hum-drum endeavours of instruction, literacy, catechism, translation – scripture, (public) prayer and Christian worship were being woven into

45 Philip Doddridge (1702–1751) <https://www.hymnal.net/en/search/all/author/Philip+Doddridge?t=h&n=347> “O happy day that fixed my choice/On Thee, my Saviour and my God! /Well may this glowing heart rejoice/And tell its raptures all abroad.”

46 It is likely that this book, or parts of it, was available in Runyoro-Rutoro by 1896.

47 A.B. Fisher, ‘Letter St Andrew’s Day, 1902’ *Extracts from the Annual Letters* (1903), pp. 175–176.

48 A.B. Fisher, ‘Toro,’ *Mengo Notes*, Sept 1900, p. 20.

49 A.B. Fisher, ‘Letter 30th Nov. 1901’ *Extracts from the Annual Letters* (1902), p. 237.

the fabric of Toro life, and they were doing so in Anglican form. For CMS missionaries, conversion to Christianity was outwardly evident through regular prayer and bible study, a single marital partner, eschewing alcohol etc. Such behavioural and social changes became signs of one's inner conviction. The scene and characters of this particular baptism suggested that other commitments were also taking place – to the Toro kingdom united under Kasagama and his heirs, and to an acceptance – albeit frequently contested – of British colonial rule. As has been observed with African initiated churches, there was in Toro a “complex co-existence of written text and performance,”⁵⁰ in which the written word was understood to have socio-spiritual power. Christian rituals were able “to knit their religious congregations into governable constituencies.”⁵¹ The Mpanga river baptism was a public declaration by the leaders of Toro of faith *and* of a particular project of social reform. The collective emotional propulsion of its performance was also a means by which protestant social reform appeared appealing to the hundreds who viewed the spectacle. The king was present; the chiefs stood on the banks; the newly baptised were greeted affectionately by Queen Mother; all gave exuberant shouts at the end. It is the influence of this ritual that is examined now.

7 The Kingdoms of Toro and of God

Baptism in the Mpanga River was a performance of the early stages of a project of political cohesion in which engagement with spiritual power was considered essential. Such engagement took missionary form and it entangled the Toro Kingdom with the Kingdom of God. A brief examination of the expectations of baptism, and of Kasagama and Kahinju's response to them, shows the social after-life of baptism in the re-ordering of Toro society and expectations of the place of Toro among Christian nations. The ritual would support an ethno-national project of Toro unity which placed it in an international, trans-historical arena.

The Prayer Book declares that baptism is the means to be “a member of Christ, the child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.” Those who were immersed in the Mpanga River were joining a vast company of believers and they were expected to recruit more. The prayers used after baptism in the Anglican Prayer Book ask that God send the Spirit so that those baptised may

50 Cabrita (2010), p. 62.

51 Ibid., p. 62.

continue to be Christ's servants. This means "they should go teach all nations" and "ever remain in the number of thy faithful and elect children." An early commentary of the Gospel of Matthew from Uganda gives some indication of the hermeneutics at work. Ham Mukasa's discussion on the 'Great Commission' to preach the Gospel to all, emphasises Christ's words in the preceding verse, "I have been given power over heaven and earth." Mukasa writes that Christ "conquered the whole earth. It is now his territory; he has joined it to heaven."⁵² Mukasa's triumphant tone is moderated by his frequent return to the theme of suffering in the Christian life before receiving an eternal reward along with Christians of all ages. The kingdoms of Uganda were coming under the rule of Jesus Christ through baptism and through missionary work to their neighbours. Many baptismal candidates became church teachers – even if only on a part-time, temporary basis, like Mugurusu. Some went to the neighbouring kingdoms of Ankole (to the south) and Bunyoro and the Bwamba area to the west in order to "teach all nations". They associated themselves with worldwide missionary aims, which opened to them wide vistas of geography and history. In this way, they sought new legitimation in the colonial state.

In February 1897, a month before the Mpanga baptism, Kasagama had written to CMS headquarters in London in apostolic tones, addressing his letter to the "Elders of the Church in Europe" and telling them 'God our Father gave me the Kingdom of Toro to reign over for Him'.⁵³ He ends his letter, 'we are all One in Christ Jesus our Saviour ... I am your friend who loves you in Jesus'.⁵⁴ In 1898 Queen Mother Kahinju wrote to CMS headquarters in similar terms, 'we are one with you, although we are black and you are white'.⁵⁵ Both letters asked CMS to send female missionaries. Ruth Hurditch and Edith Pike arrived in 1900 and were to establish a close relationship with Kahinju, Damali and other royal women.⁵⁶ The establishment of Toro as a Christian nation was an international endeavour for Kasagama and Kahinju. They assumed that their European friends, with whom they were united in faith, would be glad to assist. Kasagama's and Kahinju's enthusiasm for Protestant reform of Toro life added fuel to the CMS story of success in Uganda. The letters epitomised the missionary hope that nations would turn to Christ, societies would be reformed and the contingencies of race and geographical distance would be overcome.

52 Mukasa (1900), p. 81.

53 Letter to CMS, Feb 1st 1897, translated by A.B. Lloyd and quoted in *The Annual Report – Ninety-Ninth Year*, (1898), pp. 140–141.

54 Ibid.

55 A.B. Fisher, *CMS Intelligencer*, 1898, p. 833.

56 E.C. Pike, Letter Dec. 3rd, 1900, *Extracts from the Annual Letters* (1901), p. 219.

The reformation that Kasagama and Kahinju instigated in Toro can be seen in the establishment of a number of institutions. The Toro Church Council was formed in 1898. It governed church life, organised the deployment and payment of church teachers and insisted on forms of behaviour consonant with evangelical Christian mores.⁵⁷ Many of these behavioural changes, like monogamy and sobriety, were endorsed by the Toro Parliament. Parliament promoted laws that were considered consonant with a Protestant kingdom and judged those who broke the laws. Nasanaeri Mugurusi, the 'young chief' who became Prime Minister for 14 years, was a prominent member of the Toro Church Council. The Women's Church Council was formed in 1904. It was an advisory body with significant influence in the education and employment of women. Kahinju and Damali were prominent members of the council, encouraging women to be church teachers, school teachers and nurses. For over a decade these bodies oversaw significant social, political and spiritual change. Parliament achieved sovereignty in outlying areas of Toro. It doggedly negotiated its advantage with British officials and it established stronger links with the CMS.⁵⁸ The extent of the transformation was significant. In 1908, a year after he had supported the uprising of the Banyoro against the Baganda and the British, Kasagama orchestrated a recalibration of the vision for the Toro Kingdom.⁵⁹ To do so, he once again reached for the resonant symbol of baptism, giving evidence that he and his chiefs considered the sacrament of baptism to be of multivalent importance.

In 1908 Kasagama organised the first crowning ceremony (*empango*) of his reign.⁶⁰ In the past this had been an event held every year or so, and celebrated on a full moon. Kasagama chose the 12th anniversary of his baptism on which to hold the event to demonstrate his continuing commitment to Christianity. The deliberate eliding of baptism and *empango* performed a shift in his vision of the Kingdom. The *empango* was another grand spectacle, attended by large crowds, and intended to re-affirm the king's socio-spiritual contract with his people by a demonstration of his largesse show royal power and by receiving tribute offered as an assurance of fealty. During the central act of crowning, a crown of beads and colobus monkey skin was handed by the Queen Mother, Kahinju, Revd George Blackledge. The British missionary placed the crown on the king's head, seemingly relishing his role in royal pageantry.⁶¹ At the

57 Steinhart (1999), p. 237.

58 Ingham (1975), p. 106.

59 Further discussion in Wild-Wood (2020), pp. 182–188.

60 Blackledge (1908), pp. 71–72.

61 Ibid.

empango, Kasagama, Kahinju and Blackledge performed a revival of tradition, which reinterpreted with Christian rites a ritual that had been in abeyance.⁶² Kasagama had established his rule of the Kingdom of Toro through the introduction of a religious system which demanded significant change to personal and social behaviour. Eleven years later, the *empango* domesticated Christian rites and beliefs for Toro rulers. The ceremony drew upon the idioms of power of the king of Toro not the Kingdom of God. Christianity's spiritual power was repositioned from providing a radical socio-political change to being resonant with important customary values. Yet by holding the *empango* on his baptism and asking Blackledge to crown him, Kasagama signalled his continual obedience to the Christian God who had maintained him as Toro's ruler. In the *empango*, Kasagama and Kahinju were performing a theology that reinterpreted their roles as rulers of Toro for the modern, Christian age. The public performance of ritual – both baptism and *empango* – propelled shared values, narratives and systems. It facilitated the formation of the complex moral communities of the Kingdom and its external relations.⁶³

8 Conclusion

This article has argued for renewed historical attention to Christian rituals as the embodiment of complex sets of ideas whose performance in liturgy and songs may illuminate social-political and spiritual change. In examining a single performance in the Runyoro-Rutoro speaking Kingdom of Toro of a Church of England baptismal liturgy translated into Luganda and accompanied by hymns that had criss-crossed the north Atlantic for some decades, the article has also explored its social meaning and affect. The sacrament of baptism, as a ritual of Christian initiation, may open new, collective, moral possibilities for participants on earth (as well as promises of heaven) when those participants want societal change. Baptism is not always attached to the establishment of political influence and the renewing of a socio-political vision. The questions underpinning this article about the social impact of rituals can be asked in other settings. The liberative qualities of attachment to a Christian community have been seized by those with little political power. However, the Mpanga river baptism was a public enactment of Christian commitment that had particular political resonances in Toro in 1897. The collective performance of the

62 Pirouet (1978), pp. 69–70.

63 Sanneh (1991), p. 125; Peterson (2012), p. 16.

ritual had emotional and participatory purchase in the process of re-imagining a kingdom in the colonial period. Through baptism, the stories and values of the Book of Common Prayer and hymns were being inhabited by the rulers of Toro and those who wished to associate with them. This process created the modern Kingdom of Toro. The baptism helped to develop notions of transnational Christian belonging. The wider Christian world was mediated in Toro through a particular part of it: late nineteenth century evangelical Anglicanism and Ganda missionary activity. Public initiation into a Christian community through water and the Spirit had both immediate and local resonance in Toro, and a transnational, transhistorical reach.

The Mpanga River baptism provided a performance of individual and collective re-birth into a transhistorical Christian tradition that, in Toro, also marked a commitment to a particular political vision of a unified Kingdom. The Mpanga baptism cannot be reduced to a simple mechanism to establish Kasagama's rule. Its complex of biblical narratives, missionary expectations and Toro embodiment brought the Batoro into a particular relationship with a Christian universalism that had high expectations of personal piety, and also anticipated that Christian rulers would set an example for their people.

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