Chapter 11

Performing *Baakisimba* Dance during Mass: Negotiating, Contesting and Politicizing the “Sacred” in the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda

Sylvia Antonia NANNYONGA-TAMUSUZA
Makerere University

**Abstract:** In this chapter, I examine how the Second Vatican Council liturgical reform of the Roman Catholics has been interpreted, contested, negotiated and politicized to constitute liturgical dancing during Mass in the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda. Focusing on *baakisimba* dance (of the Baganda people from Central Uganda) and basing on Article 112 of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* to inform the definition of sacred music in the Roman Catholic Church, I interrogate the “sacredness” of performing *baakisimba* during Mass. Since *Baakisimba* dance is performed not only during Mass, but also at beer parties, marriage ceremonies, political rallies, as well as animating the indigenous ancestral worship rituals of the Baganda, the pertinent questions include: 1) Why is a dance, with “secular” origins, performance contexts, costumes and motifs that communicate the would-be “secular” meanings in light of the Church’s definition of the “sacred”, be performed during Mass? And 2) How is the Church negotiating the “sacred” in *baakisimba*, a dance initially considered profane and indeed, declared inappropriate for performance in the Mass? I argue that the interpretation and appropriation of the Second Vatican Council liturgical reform is informed by the colonial and national politics, which have through history shaped the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda.

**Keywords:** Catholic music, Baakisimba dance, Liturgical dance, Kiganda dance, Vatican II Reform

1. Introduction
When the Roman Catholic Church was introduced in Uganda in 1879, the White Fathers (missionaries from France) discarded the music and dances of their new converts as profane. The missionaries declared the indigenous music and dances as immoral and unfit for performance during Mass, the officially approved sacred liturgical worship of the Roman Catholic Church. As was the case
throughout the world wide Roman Catholic Church, the missionaries established the Gregorian chants—although in Latin, a language not known in the local communities—as music befitting this liturgical worship (see also Tovey 2004: 108–109). However, the rapidly changing and pluralist mission world\(^1\) of the twentieth century called for reform not only in the liturgical music but also in other Church doctrines, if the Roman Catholic Church was to remain relevant. The Church had to recognise the need to “keep abreast of the times by adapting its ceremonies to the necessities of the individual nations and peoples” (Rynne 1968: 56). Consequently, Pope John XXIII established the Second Vatican Council in 1962 to lead this reform, and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC) (Flannery 1997: 21–55), issued on 4 December 1963, became the official authority on the reformed liturgy. However, the Church also later issued several other documents, which were intended “to expound more fully certain relevant principles of the Constitution on the Liturgy” (Music in Liturgy, Musicam Sacram [MS], Article 2, Flannery 1997: 88). And yet, the Church did not discard the earlier documents; the Council refers to Pius X’s document on sacred music as one that has “explained more precisely the ministerial function supplied by sacred music in the service of the Lord” (SC, Article 112, Flannery 1997: 48).

The reforms pertinent to this discussion are those that relate to 1) the active participation of the congregation through, among other activities, singing and dancing (SC, Article 30, Flannery, 1997: 30); 2) the promotion of indigenous musical traditions of the mission lands (SC, Article 119, Flannery, 1997: 49) and 3) the creation of new compositions that have “genuine sacred (emphasis added) music… in conformity with the Catholic doctrine” (SC Article 121, Flannery, ibid.).

In this chapter, I examine how the Second Vatican Council liturgical reform has been interpreted, contested, negotiated and politicized to institute liturgical dancing as part of the Mass celebration in the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda. Focusing on baakisinba (a dance and its accompanying music of the Baganda people from Central Uganda), and based on Article 112 of the SC, which provides the definition of sacred music in the Roman Catholic Church, I interrogate the “sacredness” of performing baakisinba during Mass. Baakisinba is performed not only during Mass but also at beer parties, marriage ceremonies and political rallies, as well as animating the indigenous ancestral worship rituals of the Baganda. The research questions are the following: why is a dance which has “secular” origins, performance contexts, costumes and motifs that communicate would-be “secular” meanings in light of the Church’s definition of
the “sacred,” performed during Mass? How does the Church negotiate the “sacred” in baakisimba, a dance initially considered profane and, indeed, declared inappropriate for performance during Mass?

In negotiating the performance of dances such as baakisimba, several Catholics in Uganda have argued that indigenous dances and music should undergo “purification” to be admitted into Church practices. This argument is also documented in the *Music and Sacrament* (Article 61, Flannery 1997: 101–102). As such, “the relationship of the Church to [the mission cultures] is therefore one of purification... the Church is seen as a vessel that brings this purification” (Tovey 2004: 115). The Church argues that this “purification” of culture, which is conceptualized as “inculturation,” is an encounter “whose outcome is a convergence that does not replace either of the cultures... Both parties to the inculturative exchange undergo internal transformation, but neither [is supposed to lose] its autonomous identity” (Angrosino 1968: 825; emphasis added). The questions again are the following: is it possible that cultural contact can exist without the identities of the interacting cultures being changed? What is the process of this “purification” and how is baakisimba purified to acquire the sacredness defined by the Church doctrine?

In this discussion, I argue that, while the reform of the Catholic liturgy was indeed necessary, this inculturation discourse was the Vatican’s strategy to maintain power over the mission lands in the wake of the political resistance and cultural renaissance movements of the mid-twentieth century that were spreading like wildfire across those lands, especially in Africa. To think of a cultural exchange without the internal transformation of either culture, and the maintenance of an autonomous identity, is indeed a myth (see also Bakic-Miric 2007) that mostly served to maintain hegemonic power in post-colonial mission lands at a time of crumbling colonial power. Any cultural interaction usually results in dialogical change, and in the case of Uganda, this has led to a specific Ugandan-Roman Catholic liturgical music, with its own negotiated “sacredness,” which stands apart from the imagined sacredness of the Roman Catholic Church. My discussion proceeds as follows. 1) I examine the background and nature of the Second Vatican Council inasmuch as it relates to the present performance of baakisimba during Mass; 2) I present a comparative conceptualization of the sacred in the Roman Catholic Church and among the Baganda and 3) I question whether performing baakisimba during Mass is “sacred” dancing or a performance of politics. I conclude that the inculturation project masks the realities behind the tensions that are continually being negotiated, contested and politicized within the Roman Catholic Church and mission lands.
My discussion is informed by research among Catholic priests, nuns and religious brothers, church musicians, composers, members of the congregation and baakimba traditional dancers, some of whom were not Catholic, as well as my personal experience as a former church musician and dancer outside the church context for over 20 years. However, because they are not allowed to express personal opinions on the Church’s teachings and doctrines in public, many of my informants, particularly the priests, nuns and religious brothers, requested to remain anonymous. To contextualize this discussion, I now briefly examine the nature of the Second Vatican Council.

2. Liturgical Reform of the Second Vatican Council
By the second quarter of the twentieth century, not only had pressure to reform Christianity in the mission lands heightened within the Roman Catholic Church but also the demand had intensified for a closer link between the Church and cultures of the mission lands, which had previously been echoed in other Christian churches. As early as 1929, Edwin W. Smith, a Lutheran missionary, stressed that “as long as Christianity is presented to people in European terms, under the European forms, it must remain an exotic faith to them” (quoted in Weman 1960: 147; see also Tovey 2004: 3). Specific to the Roman Catholic Church in Africa, in 1961, the Bishops of Zaire (now renamed Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC), emphatically called for reform of the Catholic liturgy during the Conference Episcopale du Cong by stressing that

The liturgy introduced in Africa is not yet adapted to the proper character of our population, and therefore has remained foreign to them... The return to the authentic tradition of the liturgy greatly opens a way to a fundamental adaptation of the liturgy to the African environment. (Quoted in Egbulem 1992: 227)

Consequent to the various voices calling for the reform and, in particular, targeting the mission lands, on 4 December 1963, Pope Paul XXIII promulgated the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC), a document that became the official authority for redefining the liturgy of the Church. The liturgical reforms were “both praised by the progressive-minded bishops as an important step toward the modernization of the church, and condemned by the traditionalist bishops as undesirable, with a number of them manifesting a determined opposition to any change in the church’s rites and insisting especially on the retention of Latin in the mass as a guarantee of the church unity” (Rynne,
For instance, Anthony Milner (1964: 29) wrote, “this document [SC]... represents the triumph of currents of thought in the Catholic Church which have been successively ignored, derided, misunderstood, resented and bitterly attacked.” He continued, noting that “as one who has been engaged for some years now on the problems of chant adaptation and making new music, I find [the reform] both stimulating and beneficial” (1964: 31). Similarly, liberals such as Bishop Elchinger of France celebrated that “the church was in the hands of the youth of today... It was not possible to attract them by useless traditions or narrow conservatism... prayers or ceremonies, no matter what historical importance might be attached to them, only bored the present generation” (quoted in Rynne 1968: 70). And yet, Elisso Rufini asked, “to what extent does the proposal (of inculturation) help the people more easily to attain holiness and express it in their lives?” (Quoted in Ssonko 1999: 87–88). The debate has lingered on.

Pertinent to this discussion is the reform’s call for “full, conscious and active participation” of the faithful (SC, Article 14, Flannery 1997: 27). Yet, it would have been futile to hope for full and active participation if the faithful were expected to sing only Gregorian chants, the language of which they did not understand and the style was so alien to them. Similarly, Xavier Rynne (1968: 59) reports that “quite apart from its use in the liturgy, Latin as a medium of communication at the council proved to be less than a success. Experience showed that many of the fathers did not understand spoken Latin well enough to grasp what was being said.” As such, the constitution declared that, while Gregorian chants “should be given pride of place in liturgical services... other kinds of sacred music... are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations, so long as they accord with the spirit of the liturgical action as laid down in Article 30 [the promotion of active participation]” (SC, Article 116, Flannery 1997: 48). Therefore, the Council endorsed the performance of indigenous music during Mass (SC, Article 119, Flannery 1997: 49). In addition, the Church approved dancing and endorsed that “the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations... as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attributes” [dancing] (SC, Article 30, Flannery 1997: 30). And yet, simultaneously, the Reform emphasized that all cultural adaptations must conform to the “qualities proper to genuine sacred music” (SC, Article 121, Flannery 1997: 49) as defined by Catholic doctrine. However, the Church reserved the “right to pass judgment on the arts, deciding which of the works of artists are in accordance with faith, piety, and the laws religiously handed down, and are to be considered for sacred use” (SC, Article 122, Flannery 1997: 50).
The implementation of these reforms came to be called “inculturation,” although this term does not appear in the Second Vatican Council documents (see also Egbulem 1992: 232). However, the earliest known use of the term inculturation in the Church was in 1959 during a debate on Mission and non-Christian cultures during the 29th Missiology Week at Louvain (Egbulem 1992: 231). Inculturation is a loaded term with no agreed-upon definition, but generally, “it sits alongside ‘adaptation,’ ‘indigenization’ and ‘contextualization’” (Tovey 2004: 1). Explaining this cultural interaction, Pope John Paul II stressed that “inculturation signifies ‘an intimate transformation of the authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity and the implantation of Christianity into different human cultures’” (Adoremus 1994 n.p.). However, this interaction should not interfere with the sacred nature of the liturgy. At this point, I turn to an interrogation of the Church’s doctrine of sacred as compared with the Baganda’s conceptualization of what is secular and sacred.

3. Conceptualizing the Sacred in the Roman Catholic Church and among the Baganda

The notion of what is sacred is very fluid: it not only varies between cultures but also is very unstable, contextualized and relative within cultures (see also Basoga 2012; Knott 2005). Indeed, while “the sacred is commonly associated with religion, [it] may occur inside as well as outside of religious institutions and in secular as well as in religious contexts” (Kraft 2010: 59; see also Anttonen 2003). Similarly, Cardinal Arinze of Nigeria has emphasized that “African religion intimately penetrates all the manifestations of social life. There is no dichotomy between the spiritual order and the material order, between the religious and the temporal, between the sacred and the profane” (quoted in Amadi 2008: 29; see also Kidula 2008: 46). This equivocal nature of the concept of the sacred makes it difficult to draw a line between what the mission cultures should consider as sacred, and therefore allow into the Church and, what they should discard. And yet, throughout history, the Church has also struggled to define the “universal” nature of sacred music that is suitable for the sacred liturgy.

The SC defines sacred as those “things set apart for use in divine worship” and qualifies sacred as being “truly worthy, becoming, and beautiful, [with] signs and symbols of the supernatural world” (Article 122, Flannery 1997: 50). Defining Catholic sacred music, H. T. Henry (1915: 108) has clarified that “dance music, military/march music, ‘sentimental’ music… [and] once music has served secular uses, however, it may not appropriately be used in the church if for no other reason than that it may intrude [worldly] thoughts, through the
associations of ideas, into minds that wish to consider heavenly things.”

However, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (later, Pope Benedict XVI) (1986: 13) emphasized that “although liturgy and music are by nature closely linked with each other, their relationship has always been a difficult one... It is thus no surprise that today the question of the right form of music in worship is once again disputed.”

Yet, the concept of the sacred as something set aside is foreign to Baganda belief. The boundary between the secular and sacred “is not absolute because in studying Ganda traditions [the traditions of the Baganda], it is hard to tell with certainty where religion ends and social custom begins” (Lugira 1970: 115). For instance, “ritual utensils [do not differ] in shape from those in ordinary use” (Lugira 1970: 117). Similarly, bækisimba dance and its accompanying drum music that are performed in the traditional indigenous worship ritual are built upon the same dance motifs and musical structures as those performed during a wedding ceremony, a celebration of the birth of a new life or even during the coronation of a king. However, there may be some variations (although not always) in the song texts to capture the specific context. Yet, “the Baganda have always been a religious people, most zealous in their observances of the rites and ceremonies connected with their religion” (Lugira 1970: 118).

The fluidity of sacredness, as in the case of the Baganda, is a challenge to the inculturation mission of the Church. Undeniably, in 1967, hardly five years after endorsing the liturgical reform, the Vatican published MusicamSacram (MS), a document to guide the implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and address the numerous challenges, such as the fluidity of sacredness. The MS notes, “but the new norms concerning... the active participation of the faithful have given rise to several problems regarding sacred music and its ministerial role” (Article 2, Flannery 1997: 88). Moreover, Elisso Rufini bemoaned the “transforming [of] churches into museums... religious feasts into pagan feasts and neither sacred time nor sacred space reserved for God” (quoted in Ssonko 1999: 86). Similarly, Richard Schuler (1991: n.p.) mourned

The attack on the “sacred” was aimed directly at sacred music. Many denied the existence of anything that could be called sacred... We have become used to secular tunes, secular instruments (piano, guitar, drums), secular performance practices as musical combos and performing soloist and dancers; all found their way into the liturgy, not enhancing its holiness but directly destroying the sacred quality.
Focusing on the Baganda’s constructed meaning of baakisimba, in the next section, I examine how the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda has interpreted, contested, negotiated and politicized the sacred during the Mass.

4. Performing Baakisimba during Mass: Sacred Dancing or Performing Politics?

When one attends a High Mass that is celebrated by a Catholic bishop after one participates in a kasiki (spinsters’ farewell party) or even a concert by a renowned dance troupe, one is forced to question the boundaries between the sacred Catholic liturgy and secular rituals among the Baganda. Such as these secular events, High Masses not only in churches in Buganda but also other parts of Uganda are usually characterized by dancing. Moreover, the same performance practices, including costuming, dance motifs and performance roles, are adapted in both contexts and supported by similar communal participation.

Baakisimba was officially admitted in the Catholic Church in 1964, during the canonization of the Uganda Martyrs at St. Peter’s Basilica, although dancing during the liturgy only became popular in the late 1980s (Nannyonga-Tamusuzu 2005). Referring to the Masaka Diocese (in Buganda), Adrian Hastings (1989: 74) reported that “probably in no part of Africa was there less desire to introduce drums, dancing or African hymn tunes into church” (see also Ssem pijja 2012: 134). Mainly promoted by the spirit of a cultural and identity revival, and the introduction of indigenous music into the school curriculum, dancing has since the 1980s become a prominent part of the liturgical celebration in the Catholic Church. However, because baakisimba is a dance among the Baganda, it is most commonly performed in the dioceses within Buganda.

In general, dancing has come to define the High Mass celebrated by bishops on special occasions, such as the annual Martyrs’ Day on June 3 in Uganda. On that day, the Catholic Church worldwide commemorates the Ugandan Martyrs who were burned alive in 1884, and a pilgrimage is made to Namugongo, the shrine where the majority of them were killed. Because of the importance of this day, and because Roman Catholics constitute slightly more than 40% of the population, the Ugandan government declared this day a public holiday. The liturgical celebration on this day is important not only because it attracts pilgrims from all over the world but also because the Pope sends a special representative from the Vatican. More than 300 clergy attend, and the Pope’s representative concelebrates the Mass with no fewer than 30 priests, most of whom are bishops. As such, the liturgy must be of the highest quality before the Pope’s representative, who carries the Pope’s message and authority. As such, whatever
is performed during that Mass must be in line with the accepted standards of the Catholic Church. Therefore, the Church establishes a special liturgical committee, which must be led by a member of the clergy, to determine the liturgical music for that day, and each year, a different diocese is chosen to lead the liturgy.

The Mass that was celebrated on Martyr's Day on 3 June 2000 is an example to articulate my discussion. During this Mass, baakisinba dancing predominated because the Liturgical Committee of Masaka Diocese, from Buganda (region of the Baganda), organized the liturgy. Baakisinba was performed during the entry procession, which precedes the reading of the Gospel and during the thanksgiving (te dum) after the Holy Communion. Explaining why baakisinba was performed during these parts of the Mass, Joseph Namukangala, a Roman Catholic priest and member of the Liturgical Committee said,

In Buganda, if we were to welcome the Kabaka [King], who is the leader of the Baganda, we would perform baakisinba dance in a procession until he is seated in the chair specifically organized for him. We would perform baakisinba to welcome our King. As such, it would be equally befitting for us to perform baakisinba to welcome our Lord Jesus Christ to be part of our celebration. Again, baakisinba is appropriate when welcoming the Gospel, the Word, which is Jesus among us. [And yet], baakisinba is appropriate as a thanksgiving symbol (interview, 3 June 2000, Namugongo).

A brief description of the dance at this point grounds my discussion. The basic movement is in the soft wriggling of the waist, with the upper torso, hands, chest and head held still to highlight the focus on the waist, which the footwork facilitates. One of the hand gestures, which is called esi mire mire (Buganda is at peace), involves facing the thumbs down and parallel to the waist, with the thumbs pointing to the wriggling waist. Explaining the significance of this gesture, Tereza Kisolo, a former court dancer, said, “we want this place [the waist] to be distinct: ‘you see how I was designed!’… When the thumb points to the waistline, it stresses the focal point of the dance. The thumb[s] draws one’s attention to the beauty of the dancer [who in most contexts is a woman]” (quoted in Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2005: 156). Generally, baakisinba dance aims to communicate the women’s sexuality, and the soft wriggling of the waist is related to sexual performance (Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2005). While the nature of the costume worn by the dancers depends on the choir’s choice, the dancers always wear around their waists ekikoyo, an Indian sheet-like fabric, as a skirt, on
top of which they wear a raffia skirt, before finally tying on an animal skin with fur (usually from a monkey or goat). See Picture 1.

This type of costume accentuates the dancers' hips and rear ends, which the Baganda believe define sexual beauty. As such, baakismba forms a site through which Baganda women are constructed as sexual objects (Nannyonga-Tamusuza & Nattiez 2003; Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2005). Indeed, from my interviews, most
of the informants, including religious persons, associated baakisimba with sex. In fact, Fr. Kiwanuka (pseudo name) admitted that, while priests are religious figures, they have normal sexual desires, and as such, they have to be cautious about the activities in which they get involved to not get tempted, and he acknowledged that baakisimba can be sexually arousing (anonymous interview, 15 July 2007).

A closer examination of the procession that preceded the Gospel during the Namugongo Mass of 2000 shows how the sacred is negotiated and politicized. Secondary school girls between ages 15 and 17 wriggled their waists as they followed behind a priest who held the missal book (from which the Gospel is read during Mass) for the entire congregation to see. Meanwhile, another priest, waiting at the podium to read the Gospel, faced the congregation, the raised missal book and the wriggling dancers. The congregation, which attentively watched the dancers, clapped and applauded in great excitement and shouted loudly as the dancers proceeded to the podium. As Deogratias Lawrence Ssonko (1999: 430), a priest and former chairperson of the Liturgical Committee in Kampala Archdiocese, has written, “to many... the question of dancing during worship is still disputable. For some it just gives the impression of entertaining those present and generates a show in which the liturgical assembly is reduced to spectators who enjoy watching the style of those performing the dance.” Similarly, when I asked Brother Majera Nsubuga, a reverend brother of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, whether he attends the annual Namugongo celebrations of the Uganda Martyrs, he said, “it is about dancing; it is fun and nothing serious. I cannot go there if I want to pray” (interview, 8 July 2007). Similarly, a former Catholic choir conductor lamented that the pilgrimage to “Namugongo [is only a tour] because people have no chance to meditate. [In fact], when different dioceses organize the pilgrimage, the liturgical songs are mainly in their languages, and those who do not speak the language are left out” (anonymous interview).

Commenting about the aforementioned Namugongo Mass, Fr. Musoke (pseudo name), whom I interviewed after the Mass, said “it is not appropriate for women to wriggle their waists while the congregation is supposed to be preparing to listen to God’s message” (interview, 3 June 2000, Namugongo). Under the General Instruction on the Roman Missal, the Reform is very clear, “when sacred scriptures are read in church, God himself is speaking to his people, and Christ, present in his word is proclaiming his Gospel. Hence the readings from God’s word are among the most important elements of the liturgy, and all who are present should listen to them with reverence” (Article 9, Flannery 1997: 160).
Further, Fr. Musoke asked, “as a priest waiting to read the Gospel, what am I supposed to focus on, the Gospel or the wriggling waists of the dancers? We should not pretend [referring to fellow priests]. This dance is explicitly sexual, and has no place in the church’s liturgical celebrations.” Fr. Musoke advocates a sacred space with no intrusion of sexual (“earthly”) images “into the minds that wish to consider heavenly things” (Henry 1915: 108). The thought of sex in such a context is even more sacrilegious for someone who has vowed to live a celibate life. For priests such as Fr. Musoke, there is a big challenge in promoting the full and active participation of the congregation while maintaining the sacredness of the liturgy. Having recognized the constructed sexual meaning of baakisinba, Fr. Musoke rejects an inculturation discourse, which indeed ignores the sexual connotation that baakisinba has within and outside the Church, and which, as such, is not suitable for the liturgical celebration. Another priest commented, “I think we have lost the meaning of the liturgy; people were dancing, shouting as if we were at a beer party. While it is great to sing and dance in our local styles, there must be a boundary between secular and sacred” (interview, 2000). Indeed, Thomas A. Kane (1984: 115) has explained that a “liturgical dance must clearly be prayer and not performance. It is intended to involve all the participants in the ritual action. In ritual, there are no spectators: all participate.” Similarly, when I asked a former member of the Catholic Centenary Memorial Choir, “you love baakisinba dance and you are also a devout Catholic, what do you think about the performance of baakisinba in the liturgy?”, he answered, “while I enjoy the dance and actually if I knew how to perform it, I would dance for the Lord, it does not enhance my praying if it is performed in the liturgy. I stop meditating and concentrate on the dance. The dance creates contexts other than those that would enhance communication with God. The dance has its appropriate context, but not in the church” (anonymous interview). As such, if the liturgy is to remain “true” to the Catholic sacred tradition, then the music and dance of the Ugandan people cannot be transplanted wholesale into the Mass without an understanding of the roles of these arts in contexts outside the Church and their appropriateness. Further, Ssonko (1999: 85–86) also contended that

This quality of the sacred or holy should be considered in evaluating all variables like dance, postures, art and language expressions that can be possibly proposed for liturgical use. Liturgy must always express, along with the truths of the faith, the grandeur and holiness of the mysteries that are being celebrated. One would, therefore, ask whether the dancing, clapping of hands or any other bodily [movements] in liturgy, demonstrate easily the holy things, which they are intended
However, the members of the Church (both clergy and laity) who support the performance of baakisinba during Mass support their position based on several arguments. First, they evoke the Biblical Scriptures, and especially Psalm 150: 4, “praise him [God] with drums and dancing” (American Bible Society 1992: 573). Moreover, the Second Vatican Council reform legitimizes their argument, “the sacred scripture, indeed, has bestowed praise upon sacred song” (SC, Article 112, Flannery 1997: 47). Further, the proponents of the dance argue that it is appropriate as an offering of a gift to God because the performance contexts of baakisinba are related to celebrations and thanksgivings. Other arguments emphasize that, because baakisinba was performed before the Kabaka, the king of the Baganda, it is even more appropriate that it should be performed before the overall Kabaka, God, who is the King of all kings. Moreover, the proponents of baakisinba performance have very strong ethnic sentiments. They have argued that, as most Baganda dances focus on the wriggling of the waist (for example, mbaga, the wedding dance, nanka, muwoola and magamu), if their dancing were excluded, the Baganda would have nothing to offer to the inculturation reform.

Fr. Musisi asked, “do you want to suggest that the Baganda cannot worship God through their cultural dancing?” In other words, what would be the contribution of the Baganda to the inculturation project? Fr. Musisi is re-echoing what Joseph-Albert Cardinal Malula is said to have remarked during the opening of the International Colloquium on African Religions and Christianity in Kinshasa in 1978, “the incarnate Word came to dwell among us Africans… not to destroy the religion of our ancestors but to perfect it” (quoted in MacGaffey 1981: 259). However, Pope John Paul II warned that “liturgy and sacred music should be free from the clutches of political or ideological agenda” (quoted in Plunno 2010: 83).

One of members of the Liturgical Committee of the Kampala Archdiocese told me that there was a huge debate over whether baakisinba should be performed during the High Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II when he came to Uganda in 1993. Because the majority of the members on the Committee were Baganda, they wanted to perform for the Pope baakisinba, a dance from their culture. Eventually, analoyo, a dance from Karamoja (northern Uganda), with no waist movement, was performed instead. Why, then, has baakisinba persisted in the liturgical repertoire? Baakisinba represents an important articulation of historical memory in relation to the formations and disruptions of ethnic identities that have redefined Buganda since the introduction of Christianity in
the late nineteenth century. As such, the performance of baakisimba during Mass is seen as a way of renewing and maintaining the Baganda ethnic identity, which indeed is important because Christianity, in general, and Catholicism, in particular, entered Uganda through Buganda because this area played a role in spreading the Catholic faith (see also Gifford, 1999). As Paul Gifford (1999: 78) has rightly observed, “the dominance of Buganda has proved intractable. It is the fact that Christianity is such a part of Baganda identity that makes ethnicity such an issue for the churches.”

Further, several Catholics interviewed for this study spoke of the “purification” and “cleansing” aspects of the dance. Referring to the Ad Gentes Divinitus, Philip Tovey (2004: 115) explains that “through the missionary activity of the church, which includes the preaching of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments, the church ‘purges of evil associations those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples… it restores them to Christ their source who overthrows the rule of the devil.’” In other words, if a truthful inculturation is to be realized, there must be a process through which indigenous cultures are “purified” before they are brought into contact with the Catholic sacred culture. However, none of the priests or laity interviewed could explain the procedure that was used to “purify” baakisimba or any other indigenous music and dance before they were admitted into the practices of the Church.

The discussions thus far illustrate numerous shortcomings in assumptions about the inculturation discourse (see also Tovey 2004: 108; Gorski 2004: 60). Indeed, Kurt Poterack (1998: 15) has noted that, “inculturation... [is] a notion which is both superficial and potentially dangerous.” First, as Richard Barrett observed, “contemporary Catholic inculturationists assume that culture is a more or less unified whole and that it is identified with nation-states or other political units rather than with self-identified ethnic communities” (cited in Angrosino 1968: 827).12 It is impossible to have a genuine, full participation of the entire congregation when baakisimba is performed during Mass, which may attract people from the 65 ethnic groups of Uganda, and from even more diverse cultures during the Uganda Martyrs celebrations. And yet, not all Baganda know how to perform the dance. Moreover, when baakisimba is performed during the liturgy, it is not a free dance; it is choreographed, and therefore attracts spectators because only a few people can be selected to perform.

Second, as Fiona Bowie (2001: 67) has noted, “the rhetoric of inculturation implies that [t]here is something which can be recognized and defined as ‘true Christianity’ and a local culture on which it can be in some way grafted.” The notion of inculturation ignores the complexity and fluid nature of cultures. No
culture is static; plurality and fragmentation characterize the nature of any culture. Third, inculturative exchange presupposes that it “can occur without fundamental transformation of the parties in the exchange” (Angrosino 1968: 827). To ignore the conflict that baakisinsha creates when it is performed during Mass is to underestimate the power of the symbols for which baakisinsha stands and the role that it plays among the Baganda. As such, “the Vatican strategy of inculturation relies overmuch on the interpretive meaning of symbols and not enough social forces that dispose people to act on the message imported by the symbols” (Angrosino 1968: 828). Franz Xaver Scheuerer rightly asks, “if cultures are symbolic systems of meaning... is it possible to transfer meaning from one culture to the other” (2001: xix) without altering the original meaning?

Fourth, the advocates for inculturation ignore that “separating theological truth from cultural package is easier in principle than in detail; the demands of theological universalism [more often] oppose those of cultural relativism” (MacGaffey 1981: 259). Indeed, Hastings reminds us that total conversion “is only made tolerable at all by some sharp distancing from the symbols and sacraments of one’s former convictions” (quoted in Taylor 2001: 25). At the time of his death, Joseph Kyagambiddwa, who played a major role in introducing the baakisinsha musical and dance style in the Catholic Church in 1964, had been excommunicated from the Catholic Church. To Kyagambiddwa, composing baakisinsha “church” songs was simply an extension of his indigenous worship music repertoire. He was simply using the “Catholic” language to “worship” his ancestral gods. Kyagambiddwa was well informed about liturgical rules because, although he never managed to attain the priesthood, he trained in the seminary. It is because of this background in Catholic theology that Bishop Joseph Kiwanuka, the first indigenous bishop, commissioned him to compose the Uganda Martyrs’ Oratorio in 1964.

Fifth, inculturation discourse ignores the integral relationship between religion and culture among Africans. As Hastings (1989: 24) has stressed, the Baganda had “an absolutely integral relationship between religion and culture.” As such, “it is impossible to apply sensibly the classical missionary principles devised, for instance, by the Roman congregation of Propaganda Fide about being careful not to change the culture but only to reject the religiously erroneous” (ibid.). Therefore, it is fairly common to find people who claim to be Christians, but who at the same time comfortably and publicly subscribe to indigenous ancestral worship (okusamira). One interviewee, who considers himself a Christian and has trained many church choirs, is also a “priest” at an ancestral shrine. He told me, “the ancestral spirits do not care whether you go to
a church or a mosque, or sing Christian songs or whatever you do, provided you
fulfil the rituals and all their requirements” (anonymous interview). Similarly,
John C. Sekamwa (1967: 31) noted that “when Christianity came in the last
quarter of the 19th century it made an attack on witchcraft. It soon had followers,
but witchcraft continued as well... and is not limited to only pure pagans [...] you
can find it even among... the Christians.” Indeed, some Catholics maintain the
family shrine, continue to pray to their ancestors, and in the event of sickness,
they seek the services of the diviner.

Sixth, as John Piumno (2010: 82) has also noted, “inculturation, and how
Sacrosanctum Concilium is interpreted and implemented are different matters.” In
fact, while Brother Nsubuga was in support of the reform, he was disappointed
because, according to him, “the information was left in the documents; there was
no training, people were not given instructions about the reform” (interview, 8
July 2007). Similarly, one former choir conductor also lamented that “there is no
training in sacred music in the seminaries, and yet the seminarians are the
potential bishops of the future who will determine what should be appropriate
for the liturgy. Moreover, there is limited investment in research on indigenous
cultural music and dance and therefore, various music and dance types are
invited into the church without examining their meanings in the cultures from
which they emanate. Besides, Catholics are not supposed to be critical; there is a
gap between the laity and the clergy and the priests and the bishops”
(anonymous interview, 6 July 2007). Undeniably, given the inadequate training of
Catholics who are involved in the liturgy and the limited research that has been
done on indigenous music and dance, there is bound to be a liturgical crisis.

5. Conclusion
While it is true that the reform of the Roman Catholic Church was indeed overdue,
as discussed here, it can be concluded that the inculturation project was primarily
targeted at the mission lands. As Ronald Kassimir (1999: 249) has noted, “Vatican
II appropriated inculturation as an evangelization strategy in the mission lands”
(see also SC, Article 39, Flannery 1997: 33). Indeed, the inclusion of dancing within
the Mass is not universal to the entire Roman Catholic Church. According to the
1975 document of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the
Sacraments (CDWDS) (Article 2, 1994: n.p.), an authoritative point of reference for
every discussion on [dance liturgy], “the same criterion and judgment cannot be
applied in the Western culture. Here dancing is tied with love, with diversion, with
profaneness, with unbridling of sense; such dancing, in general, is not pure.” In fact,
the document strongly states that “dance has never been made an integral part of
the official worship of the Latin church’ (ibid.). Although dancing may be allowed in church buildings during occasions of feasts, such performances “[should] always take place outside the liturgical services” (ibid.). This document has created a great deal of controversy, especially among Catholics in the United States. For instance, Kathryn Mihelick, a dancer and teacher from Ohio, has written a 16-page position paper seeking clarification and guidelines on liturgical dancing from the bishops and the Vatican. She stresses that “the laity will continue to be ‘confused’… having seen sacred dance during papal masses around the world, yet being told this form of worship is forbidden in their parish” (quoted in Lafevere 2004: 10). As Van Parys also demands, “I want what’s happening in the church in Africa and elsewhere to be reflected in our church here [in the United States]. I want us to be a global parish” (quoted in Lafevere 2004: 11).

Indeed, Philip Jenkins (2002: 108) definition of inculturation as a “means [of] interpreting the Christian proclamation in a form appropriate for particular cultures, usually with the implication of non-western cultures” is suspicious. But why did the Vatican focus on the mission lands? The answer is that Christianity and colonialism are closely linked—“Christianity entered African life across colonization [although] it was by no means restricted to that colonialism” (Hastings 1989: 4). Therefore, when many colonies had gained independence by the early 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church had to rethink its hegemonic strategies. In fact, “by the time the Council began, it was clear that the European dominance of Africa was over and the post-colonial period was about to begin” (Tovey 2004: 113). Inculturation is an ideological Africanization of the Catholic Church. The dwindling political power of the missionaries and colonialists alike in the missionary lands called for a review of the traditional ideologies of the Roman Catholic Church in general. In fact, Melissa J. Wilde (2004: 576) refers to inculturation reform as leading to the official renunciation of the Roman Catholic Church’s “claims to power in relation to nation-states.” However, beyond post-colonial discourse, the “perceived threat to the mission churches from the African independent churches and Western fundamentalist churches [Pentecostal churches], as well as Islam, also contribute to a sense of urgency in the search of new solutions [to the liturgical discourse]” (Bowie 2001: 67).

Inculturation as a post-colonial discourse provides possibilities for a cultural renaissance. The Church strategized that by participating in the revival and promotion of the lost identity of the mission land, which had been suppressed by the patronizing mentality of the missionaries, it would retain the old membership and attract a new one (see also Pavlick 2010: 11), and thus restore its hegemonic power. However, because hegemony is never completely achieved and completed,
there is always some resistance, some counter-hegemonic process (Gramsci 1999). Therefore, the mission lands, on becoming independent from the colonial powers on which the Catholic Church relied, regained their negotiation powers. The inculturation reform conferred upon the indigenous bishops’ conferences the power to define the sacred (SC Article 22, Flannery 1997: 28), and indeed, baakisinba cannot be performed during Mass unless the Catholic bishops in Uganda, the majority of whom are Baganda, have consented. As Tovey (2004: 107) has noted, “the African theology movement and the attempts at the indigenization of worship are movements against neo-colonialism in the church.” Therefore, inculturation is a dialogical post-colonial discourse. On the one hand, it is a political strategy by which the Vatican can retain power over the mission lands with negotiated consent, while on the other hand, it is a decolonization of the Western institutionalized ritual and as such, is counter-hegemonic. The discourse of inculturation points to the rejection of missionary/colonial hegemony, while, it articulates the fluid, unstable nature of any cultural product, in this case, the liturgical ritual, which is always in process and contingent on shifts in the structures that are constructed by it. By politicizing the sacred, the Baganda Catholics have redefined Catholic sacredness, a counter-hegemony, one in which the Baganda negotiate and contest the Vatican’s definition of what is sacred.

Notes
1. The terms “mission world” and “mission land,” which I use interchangeably, refer to those places, nations and cultures where Christianity, and in this case, the Catholic Church, was introduced, especially from Europe.
2. See also Hastings (1975: 9).
3. However, a Catholic music composer contended that “In my opinion, there is no sacred music. This is a subjective construction. [In other words, sound on its own can only carry meaning if people assign meaning to it]. I can agree that the text can be sacred especially if it is relating to God” (anonymous interview, 3 July 2007).
4. Adrian Hastings was a Catholic priest, theologian and researcher who worked in the Masaka Diocese from 1958 to 1966. Therefore, he participated in the church’s activities before and after Vatican II.
5. Similarly, the introduction of folk music in the Roman Catholic Church in Zambia faced resistance (Mapoma 1969). See also Tovey (1988: 17).
6. The dioceses in Buganda include Kampala (Archdiocese), Kasana-Lwero, Kiyinda Mityana, Lugazi and Masaka.
7. For details about King Mwanga and why he killed the martyrs, see Nannyonga-Tamusuzza (2005: 166, 211–218).
9. However, the issue of celibate life among Catholic priests is highly contentious, and not only in the Western world but even more so in the mission lands.
10. References to dancing in the Bible include Exodus 15: 20–21; 2 Sam 6: 14, 20–22 and Psalm 149: 3. However, not all dancing was acceptable in God’s sight (Exodus 32: 1–19).
11. However, it is paradoxical because, while the movements are not focused in the waist, analeyo, a female-male couple dance is also sexual, as the males dance while acting as if they are “playing with’ the females” breasts.
12. Of course, ethnic politicizations of secular performances in the sacred liturgy exist elsewhere in Catholic communities. For example, Robert Walser has reported that, beginning in the early 1970s, polka masses developed in Catholic churches in the United States among congregations with strong ties to ethnic polka cultures, including the Polish, German, Slovenian or Czech (1992: 196) cultures.
13. Similarly, Mutumba Mainga has noted that not only the missionaries imposed Christian values but also the Western cultures did so as well (1972: 104). Specific to Buganda, “Kakungulu [one of the Baganda chiefs] and his soldiers not only established their military superiority by defeating Padhola soldiers, they also attempted to show the superiority of their religion by first arresting Majanga, the chief priest of Bura and then erecting the new Christian shrines throughout the territory” (1972: 131). Moreover, “[t]he relationship of the missionaries to colonial authorities was complex. The Anglicans supported the British and the Catholics the French” (Tovey 2004: 109). See also Peter Kanyandongo (2001: 99–100).

References


—252—
Tovey, P. 1988. Inculturation: The Eucharist in Africa. Bramcote, Nottingham, Grove Books.
Tovey, P. 2004. Inculturation of the Christian Worship: Exploring the Eucharist. Aldershot, UK and Burlington, USA, Ashgate.
