‘Worship and Christian Identity in Uganda:
A Study of the Contextualization of Worship in the Anglican, Roman Catholic
and Independent Churches in the West Nile and Kampala areas of Uganda’

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ABSTRACT

This research develops a conceptual framework for a critical analysis of an area of
theological practice that since the coming of Christianity to Uganda has been taking
place at the ‘folk level’ in the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Independent Churches,
in the West Nile and Kampala areas of Uganda. It is a theology of culture that is
informed by insights from cultural and anthropological studies. The primary purpose
of this thesis is meaning-making. It uses Clifford Geertz’s idea of interpreting
religious phenomena and Celia Lury’s idea of cultural production in conjunction with
Robertsons’ global/local encounter in order to do a cultural hermeneutic of
Lugbara/Madi traditions and the received Christian traditions as practised in the
Lugbara language. It is interpretative and therefore theological, because theology is
meaning-making. It further uses a ‘community and critical consciousness’ approach
of Gerald West, to help communities to describe and analyse their cultural practices.

The research investigates the ways in which worship, as a cultural product, is
used as a medium of social change and exchange and how its variability reflects
socio-cultural identity. The cycle of production, distribution and reception of cultural
works in the forms of societal structures, leadership styles, religious rituals, prayers
and music are described with the purpose of making meaning. The role of technology
in making it possible for the Lugbara/Madi to separate cultural works from their
context of production for distribution and reception is also assessed. The result is a
new mobility for their cultural goods and a transformation of their mode of cultural
reproduction from repetition to one of replication. The research settles the point that
Lugbara/Madi are in varying degrees using the modern technologies to provide
unlimited copying of their cultural works to others and to copy from other cultural
groups. The rural/urban interface provides them with this opportunity and they give it
a social shape through the network of Lugbara community churches and cultural
organizations that exercise a form of copyright for these cultural goods for wider use
and circulation.

The process began when the Lugbara/Madi began to associate socio-cultural
reproduction with their socio-cultural progress. It consisted in the implicit and
explicit reception of the translated scriptures, which contributed directly to the
development and affirmation of local cultural forms that in turn contributed to the
formation of local Christian identities. The interplay and partnership between
Lugbara/Madi religious traditions, the received Christian traditions and the local
experiences of the gospel, in conjunction with the global processes that are marketed
through urbanization and information technology, have led to the construction of
these new identities. In short, the rural/urban interface is generating autochthonous
Christian practices that are beginning to render the old denominational identities – of
Anglican and Roman Catholic – immaterial. The Lugbara/Madi concept of ori’ba –
‘people of God’ for kinship, orijo – ‘house of God’ for Church and oriindi – ‘God
present’ for the Spirit generates new theological, ecclesiological and missiological
insights that are stimulating.