

**“The Thing Behind the Thing”:
The role and influence of religious leaders on
the use of traditional practices of acknowledgement in Uganda¹**

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The use of traditional practices as a means of socially acknowledging past abuses is not yet fully understood. In places like Uganda, it has recently become fashionable to urge the use of traditional mechanisms. Yet little is understood about how or why such practices work or whether their use ought to be supported. As one piece of a larger study of traditional practices in Uganda, this paper considers the role and influence of Uganda’s religious leaders on the use of traditional practices.

The paper considers the history, landscape, and relevance of religion in Uganda. It also contemplates the use and role of traditional practices. And then it considers the stands of each of the seven major faith groups on the use of such traditional practices, before turning to their consideration of the use of neo-traditional practices.

Methodology

As part of a larger, on-going study, I have been engaged since 2004 in an examination and analysis of the use of traditional practices of acknowledgement in Uganda. I am specifically interested in the role that these processes play in a society’s acknowledgement of past crimes and

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abuses. And how they are able to succeed where other “Western” approaches, like the truth commission, have failed.³

The “wave” of research that focuses on religious leaders is the sixth of eight distinct inquiries into traditional mechanisms in Uganda. Each is a qualitative survey of the manner in which customary practices could be and are being used, and focuses on a different aspect of these instruments, and particularly on the opinions of various stakeholder groups in their use. Some of the data that supports the arguments made in this paper has been collected in interviews with members of other stakeholder groups, including conflict-affected women, government officials, and traditional cultural leaders. This particular wave focuses on the attitudes of religious leaders toward traditional practices, and the difficulties that the use of such practices face.

In total, 56 interviews were conducted with religious leaders in Uganda. 18 were conducted in September and October 2008, which was the main “wave” focusing on religious leaders. Several interviews were conducted with religious leaders on previous research trips: 10 in October and November 2004; 16 in May and June 2006; 9 in July and September 2006; and 3 in June and July 2008. Together, these interviewees represented the following faith groups: Roman Catholic Church, Church of Uganda (Anglican), Seventh Day Adventist Church, Orthodox Church of Uganda, Pentecostal Church, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, Presbyterian Church, Africa Inland Church. Other faith-based NGOs were also represented: CARITAS, Uganda Joint Christian Council, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, Scripture Union, Africa Inland Mission, World Vision, Mission for National Reconciliation, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Church of Uganda Peace Desk, and the Centre for African Christian

³ See Joanna R. Quinn, “The Politics of Acknowledgement: Truth Commissions in Uganda and Haiti,” (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University 2003).

Studies. The interviews were conducted in English. Unless specified, direct quotations are those of people who wished their interviews by the author to remain anonymous. The study also draws on written materials, including pastoral letters, media interviews, and academic dissertations written by clergy members from various faith groups and the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative.

Religion in Uganda

History

Islam arrived in Uganda as early as 1844.⁴ The later arrival of Christianity in Uganda was largely coupled with colonialism. In 1875, explorer Henry Morton Stanley placed an advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph*, asking for missionaries to evangelize the Kingdom of Buganda;⁵ in response to the ad, Anglican missionaries from the Church Missionary Society arrived in 1877. Catholic White Fathers from France arrived in 1879.⁶ The Uganda Orthodox Church emerged in 1925.⁷ And although the British protectorate “did not encourage other religious groups,”⁸ the Seventh Day Adventist Church arrived in Uganda in 1927.⁹

Conflict has been a influential factor in shaping both the prominence and role of all of the churches in Uganda. Idi Amin banned all churches except the Church of Uganda, the Roman Catholic Church and the Uganda Orthodox Church, and carried out a number of “anti-Christian

⁴ Sir John Gray, “Ahmed bin Ibrahim: the first Arab to visit Buganda,” *Uganda Journal* 11.2 (1947): 80-97.

⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, Nov. 15, 1875.

⁶ Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its public role in Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999), 57.

⁷ In the 1920s, Reuben “Spartan” Mukasa and Obadiah Basajjakitalo, formerly of the Church of Uganda, founded the Uganda Orthodox Church after reading an article by Marcus Garvey in *Negro World* advocating the creation of an African Orthodox Church. “In 1932, one of Garvey’s bishops traveled to Uganda and ordained [Mukasa] and Basajjakitalo priests... [Several years later, they discovered] the church was not really Orthodox... when a Greek expatriate in town came to baptize a child and told him he had the rituals all wrong. Worried correspondence with Alexandria ensued and, after some confusion, all links to Garvey’s church were severed, and [Mukasa] travelled to Egypt to be ordained by Patriarch Christophoros II. The Ugandan Orthodox had Alexandria’s recognition.” See Andrew Rice, “Orthodox Africa: Orthodoxy finds fertile ground in Uganda,” *ONE Magazine*, 32.2 (2006): 1-6.

⁸ Paul Gifford, *African Christianity*, 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

acts” while in power, although Islam was promoted during this period.¹⁰ Similarly, the role of the churches was minimized under Milton Obote.¹¹ The churches were restored under current President Museveni, although he “keeps a critical distance from the churches,”¹² which have, in the past, caused division and sparked conflict within the country.¹³ Since that time, other churches, including the Presbyterian Church, and the Mormon Church have come in, largely funded and directed from outside the country. Other churches, including the Pentecostal Church and the Africa Inland Church, have emerged from within Uganda from the seeds of the evangelical *balokole* (revival) movement that swept East Africa in the 1920s-1940s.¹⁴

Religious Landscape

The religious make-up of Uganda is as follows, according to 2002 census data:

- Roman Catholic 41.9%
- Protestant 42% (includes Anglican 35.9%, Pentecostal 4.6%, Seventh Day Adventist 1.5%)
- Muslim 12.1%
- Other 3.1%
- none 0.9%¹⁵

While many of the country’s faith groups claim adherents across the country, some faiths predominate more in certain areas than others. For example, based on data collected in the 2002 Census, more Ugandans claim membership in the Church of Uganda than any other faith group in districts in the far west and in central-eastern Uganda. In the Greater North, membership in

¹⁰ Henry Kyemba, “No One is Sacred,” in *A State of Blood*, 2nd ed. (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1997), 179-192.

¹¹ Gifford, *African Christianity*, 63.

¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³ M. Louise Pirouet, “Religion in Uganda Under Amin,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 11.1 (1980): 15.

¹⁴ F.B. Welbourn and B.A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home: A study of two independent churches in Western Kenya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 8-20. See also Mark Winter, “The Balokole and the Protestant Ethic—a critique,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14.1 (1983): 58-73; Kevin Ward, “‘Obedient Rebels’—The Relationship Between the Early ‘Balokole’ and the Church of Uganda: The Mukono Crisis of 1941,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 15.3 (1989), 196-227; and Joshua Kitakule, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, interview by author, 24 Sep. 2004, Kampala.

¹⁵ Uganda Bureau of Statistics, *Uganda Population and Housing Census 2002* (Kampala: Government of Uganda, 2003).

the Roman Catholic Church far outweighs any other faith-based memberships. Islam's stronghold is in central-eastern Uganda, and in the three districts that border Sudan and DRC in far north-western Uganda, although its spokesman claims a membership of more than 9,000,000.¹⁶ Smaller Christian churches' members are concentrated in far fewer districts: The Seventh Day Adventist Union of Uganda, for example, claims more than 1% of the population of a given district as members only in seven districts in central and western Uganda. The Uganda Orthodox Church, similarly, claims more than 1000 members in only 10 districts, scattered throughout central and western Uganda.¹⁷

Relevance of Religion in Uganda

“In any African society, religion plays an important role in peoples' conduct. It is the strongest force that unites people into community and gives individuals a sense of identity.”¹⁸ In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, “the Christian church is probably the most powerful institution.”¹⁹ “Black Africa today is totally inconceivable apart from the presence of Christianity.”²⁰

This is especially true of Uganda. As demonstrated in the census data, more than 99% of the population claims adherence to a particular faith group—mainly Christian, although with a strong Muslim presence. And churches, particularly evangelical or “born-again” (as they are called in Uganda) and charismatic churches, are growing dramatically. Even the wife of President Museveni is “born-again, even speaking at crusades.”²¹ Whether in response to this

¹⁶ Haji Nsereko Mutumba, Public Relations Officer, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, interview by author, 02 October 2008, Kampala.

¹⁷ Uganda Bureau of Statistics, “Religious Affiliations by District,” document sent by email correspondence, 01 October 2008.

¹⁸ Peter Kasenene, *Religious Ethics in Africa* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1998), 18.

¹⁹ Gifford, *African Christianity*, 1.

²⁰ Adrian Hastings, “Christianity in Africa,” in *Turning Points in Religious Studies*, ed. Ursula King (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 208.

²¹ Gifford, *African Christianity*, 67.

movement, or as a result of it, older, long-established churches such as the Church of Uganda's All Saints Cathedral have become "very pentecostal" in their character and activities.²² "[C]hurches in Uganda are increasingly tied up with the survival, jobs, health, schooling, prospects, travel and advancement of countless Ugandans."²³

For many of the churches, community development is explicit in their programming. "During the years of chaos, Ugandan churches offered shelter and survival."²⁴ As such, different churches and faith groups have been involved in providing a number of programmes to deal with the obstacles and dangers faced by their members. In the most recent conflict, the Catholic Church (RC), whose adherents make up as much as 75% of the population in conflict-affected districts like Gulu in Northern Uganda, has been at the helm of societal repair. For example, clergy members from the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative were among the first to communicate directly with Joseph Kony of the Lord's Resistance Army and participated directly in the Juba Peace Talks—spurred in large measure by Catholic missionary Rev. Carlos Rodriguez. Throughout the talks, from July 2006 to November 2008, the Catholic relief organization CARITAS supplied food to the LRA at the request of the mediator.²⁵ And the Catholic bishops have been active in promoting peace, unity and harmony through pastoral letters, for example, which have called on Ugandans to "fully embrace a culture of peace, peaceful resolution of conflicts, tolerance, genuine forgiveness and reconciliation... [and to] build strong institutions for peace in the country and in every community."²⁶ The Church of Uganda (COU) and Roman Catholic Church have supplied aid to IDP camps across the Greater North.

²² Ibid., 121.

²³ Gifford, *African Christianity*, 99.

²⁴ Ibid., 124.

²⁵ Samuel Richard Egadu, "Uganda probes alleged supplies to LRA," IWPR ICC-Africa Update No. 211, May 8, 2009.

²⁶ Paul Bakyenga, *A Concern for Peace, Unity and Harmony in Uganda: Easter Message of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda: Pastoral Letter* (Kampala: Uganda Catholic Secretariat, 13 April, 2004), 14-15.

Other churches have established programmes in Gulu, the epicentre of the recent conflict; Kampala Pentecostal Church, for example, has established a *Watoto* (children's) reception centre to receive ex-combatants and other children affected by the conflict.

A number of para-church organizations have been working on related issues of peace and justice as well. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), for example, conducts parish-level training for priests and lay teachers about issues related to peace and justice, such as conflict resolution, focusing on insecurities as they arise throughout the country, and advises its various bishops on social issues through pastoral letters.²⁷ The Church of Uganda maintains a Peace Desk which, although less significantly advanced in its work than the CCJP, conducts research and coordinates the church's position on issues such as justice and compensation.²⁸ World Vision, an international Christian NGO, runs the Gulu Children of War Centre, which provides "abducted children with temporary shelter, HIV and AIDS education, food, medical treatment, psychosocial counselling, vocational training, spiritual nurture, and facilitates a smooth reunion of the children with their families. More than 15,000 children and adults have passed through the center."²⁹

In fulfilling these roles, alongside their role as spiritual guides, the people of Uganda have come to rely on the leaders of their faith communities for other aspects of daily life. The high levels of adherence to these faith groups claimed by the people of Uganda speaks to the importance of these communities and their leaders in the lives of Ugandans.³⁰ These leaders provide moral hope. They also provide suasion on complicated and politically difficult issues.

²⁷ Sister Specioza Kabauma and Godfrey Onentho, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, interview by author, 24 August 2006, Nsambya, Uganda.

²⁸ Jessica Nalwoga Baguma, Church of Uganda Peace Desk, interview by author, 24 September 2008, Kampala.

²⁹ World Vision, *World Vision's Work in Uganda*, available from http://www.worldvision.org/worldvision/wvusufso.nsf/stable/globalissues_uganda_wvwork?Open&lid=Uganda_WVwork&lpos=main; accessed 28 April 2007

³⁰ "People listen more to officials in the church than anyone else." Laurent Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), 79.

The faith communities recognize and capitalize on their ability to mobilize people at the grass-roots, parish level.³¹ As such, the faith communities and their leaders are some of the most influential opinion leaders in the country.

Traditional Practices of Acknowledgement

As I have written elsewhere, traditionally, cultures and societies around the world had highly complex, highly developed systems for dealing with conflict and conflict resolution—and for dealing with the social deficits brought about by conflict. In traditional times, these systems carried out a number of functions, including mediation, arbitration, adjudication, restitution, and punishment—the same retributive elements included in the kinds of systems familiar in “modern” justice. They often also included elements of restoration and reconciliation.³² And these elements typically functioned in tandem.

In many parts of the world, these practices were shoved aside to make way for modern, Western ideas and practices. Colonial rulers disparaged such traditional customs, and allowed only “natives” within the colonies to utilize them, setting up separate mechanisms for use by “non-natives,” effectively creating a dual system.³³ In Uganda, traditional practices were officially prohibited in 1962, at the time of Independence, in favour of a harmonized court system modeled on the British system.³⁴ The 1967 Constitution, promulgated by Obote, outlawed the many Kingdoms and traditional cultural institutions across the country. Yet the kingdoms and other traditional cultural institutions remain, and traditional practices have

³¹ Jowad Kezaala, Secretary-General, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, interview by author, 12 May 2006, Kampala.

³² Joanna R. Quinn, “Tried and True: The Role of Informal Mechanisms in Transitional Justice,” a paper presented at the International Society of Political Psychology Annual Meeting, Toronto, 6 July 2005.

³³ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1996), 109-110.

³⁴ The British Colonial Office, *Report of the Uganda Relationship Committee*, 1961.

continued to be used in different parts of the country.³⁵ Traditional cultural institutions themselves have special status under Article 246 of the Constitution.³⁶ Traditional practices are now further provided for under legislation including Article 129 of the 1995 Constitution, which provides for Local Council Courts³⁷ to operate at the sub-county, parish and village levels;³⁸ and the Children Statute 1996, which grants these courts the authority to mandate any number of things including reconciliation, compensation, restitution, and apology.³⁹ And the Government of Uganda subsequently included these practices in the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation and the subsequent Annexure, which emerged out of the Juba Peace Talks.⁴⁰ Although these mechanisms broadly fit within very different approaches to justice, whether retributive or restorative, and fulfill different roles within their respective societies, from cleansing and welcoming estranged persons back home to prosecution and punishment, what they have in common is that they draw upon traditional customs and ideas in the administration of justice in modern times.

³⁵ Briggs, *Uganda*, 22.

³⁶ Government of Uganda, *Constitution*, 1995.

³⁷ The LC Courts were formerly known as Resistance Council Courts and “were first introduced in Luweero in 1983 during the struggle for liberation. In 1987 they were legally recognized throughout the country.” See John Mary Waliggo, “The Human Right to Peace for Every Person and Every Society,” a paper presented at Public Dialogue organized by Faculty of Arts, Makerere University in conjunction with Uganda Human Rights Commission and NORAD, Kampala, 4 Dec. 2003, author’s collection, 7.

³⁸ “Uganda: Constitution, Government & Legislation,” [article on-line]; available from <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/world/uganda.htm>, accessed 30 April 2005.

³⁹ Government of Uganda, *The Children’s Statute*, 1996.

⁴⁰ These documents form one part of a five-part agreement that was signed in June 2007 and February 2008, respectively. Although the agreements were signed, at the time of writing, the final agreement has not been signed and both parties have walked away from the talks. See Joanna R. Quinn, “Accountability and Reconciliation: Traditional Mechanisms of Acknowledgement and the Implications of the Juba Peace Process,” a paper presented at the conference, “Reconstructing Northern Uganda,” held by the Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict Research Group, The University of Western Ontario, London, ON: 9 April, 2008. The Government of Uganda, through its Justice, Law and Order Sector Transitional Justice Working Group, is, at the time of writing, trying to determine the modalities of the inclusion of these practices within the War Crimes Division of the High Court and elsewhere. Christopher Gashirabake, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, interview by author, 04 July 2008, Kampala and Hon. Jus. James Ogoola, Principal Justice, High Court and Chairman, Transitional Justice Working Group, interview by author, 25 Sep. 2008, Kampala.

These institutions are still widely used throughout the country by many of the 56 different ethnic groups.⁴¹ Among the Karamojong, the *akiriket* councils of elders adjudicate disputes according to traditional custom⁴² which include cultural teaching and ritual cleansing ceremonies.⁴³ The Acholi use a complex system of ceremonies in adjudicating everything from petty theft to murder;⁴⁴ in the current context, at least two ceremonies have been adapted to welcome ex-combatant child soldiers home after they have been decommissioned: *mato oput* (drinking the bitter herb), and *nyouo tong gweno* (a welcome ceremony in which an egg is stepped on over an *opobo* twig).⁴⁵ These ceremonies are similar to those used by the Langi, called *kayo cuk*, the Iteso, called *ailuc*, and the Madi, called *tonu ci koka*.⁴⁶ The Lugbara, in the northwest of the country, maintain a system of elder mediation in family, clan and inter-clan conflict.⁴⁷ And in 1985, an inter-tribal reconciliation ceremony, *gomo tong* (bending the spear) was held to signify that “from that time there would be no war or fighting between Acholi and Madi, Kakwa, Lugbara or Alur of West Nile.”⁴⁸ A similar ceremony, *amelokwit*, took place between the Iteso and the Karamojong in 2004.⁴⁹

In some areas, however, these practices are no longer used regularly. I posit that traditional practices are, in fact, used far less widely in the “greater south” and among Ugandans

⁴¹ For a more in-depth discussion of the use of traditional mechanisms in Uganda, see Joanna R. Quinn, “What of Reconciliation? Traditional Mechanisms of Acknowledgement in Uganda,” in *Reconciliation(s)*, ed. Joanna R. Quinn (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 174-206.

⁴² Bruno Novelli, *Karimojong Traditional Religion* (Kampala: Comboni Missionaries, 1999), 169-172, 333-340.

⁴³ Peter Lokeris, Minister of State for Karamoja, interview by author, 18 Nov. 2004, Kampala.

⁴⁴ See Thomas Harlacher, Francis Xavier Okot, Caroline Aloyo Obonyo, Mychelle Balthazard, and Ronald Atkinson, *Traditional Ways of Coping in Acholi: Cultural provisions for reconciliation and healing from war* (Kampala: Thomas Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, 2006).

⁴⁵ For an excellent description of *mato oput* see Sverker Finnstrom, *Living With Bad Surroundings: War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland in Northern Uganda* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology no. 35, 2003), 297-299.

⁴⁶ Government of Uganda and Lord’s Resistance Army/Movement, “Annexure to the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation” (Juba, 19 Feb. 2008), Art.21.1.

⁴⁷ Joseph Ndrua, “A Christian Study of the African Concept of Authority and the Administration of Justice among the Lugbari of North Western Uganda,” (M.A. diss., Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa, 1988), 42-56.

⁴⁸ Finnstrom, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 299.

⁴⁹ Iteso focus group, conducted by author, 31 Aug. 2006, Kampala.

of Bantu origin.⁵⁰ From time to time, however, the Baganda use the traditional *kitewuliza*, a juridical process with a strong element of reconciliation, to bring about justice.⁵¹ Among the Bafumbira, land disputes, in particular, are settled through traditional practices, with Local Council officials adjudicating.⁵² The “Annexure to the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation” also lists those mechanisms used by the Ankole, called *okurakaba*⁵³—although I have uncovered only weak anecdotal evidence of their continued use.⁵⁴

People from nearly every one of the 56 ethnic groups in Uganda have reported to me that “everyone respects these traditions,”⁵⁵ and that reconciliation continues to be an “essential and final part of peaceful settlement of conflict.”⁵⁶ But many, particularly young, educated Ugandans who live in the city, have also reported to me that they have never participated in such ceremonies.⁵⁷ Even still, a common understanding of these symbols, ceremonies, and institutions, and their meanings remains throughout Uganda—even in those areas where such practices are no longer carried out.

One element of these practices that is often overlooked⁵⁸ is the spiritual dimension which these practices often also address. Indeed, religion in Africa encompasses both the “imported” religions delineated above, as well as African Traditional Religion (ATR)—by which I mean a

⁵⁰ See Joanna R. Quinn, “Here, Not There: Theorizing about why traditional mechanisms work in some communities, not others,” a paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 06 June, 2007.

⁵¹ Waliggo, “The Human Right to Peace for Every Person and Every Society,” 7. Also, idem, “On Kitewuliza in Buganda, 3 May 2005,” author’s collection, 1.

⁵² Hon. Jus. Patrick Tabaro, High Court Justice, interview by author, 14 July 2008, Kampala.

⁵³ Government of Uganda and Lord’s Resistance Army/Movement, “Annexure,” Art.21.1.

⁵⁴ G. William Katatumba, *Enganzi* (Prime Minister), Ankole Kingdom, and Chairman, Nkore Cultural Trust, interview by author, 24 June 2008, Kampala.

⁵⁵ Confidential interview by author with Sabinu man studying at Makerere University, 7 Nov. 2004, Kampala.

⁵⁶ Waliggo, “The Human Right to Peace for Every Person and Every Society,” 9.

⁵⁷ Northern Uganda focus group, conducted by author, 23 Aug. 2006, Kampala.

⁵⁸ “[S]cholars... tend to emphasize its religious role and not, as in many anthropological works, its social function... African scholars... usually pay less attention to phenomena which have been labelled magic, witchcraft, and soecery than do Wesetrn anthropologists.” David Westerlund, “‘Insiders’ and ‘Outsiders’ in the Study of African Religions: Notes on some problems of theory and method,” in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (St. Paul, Minn: Paragon House, 1991), 17.

set of beliefs; practices, ceremonies and festivals; religious objects and places; and values and morals.⁵⁹ Mbiti further emphasizes that African religion is often wrongly understood as ancestor worship, superstition, animism/paganism, magic/fetishism.⁶⁰

This understanding pervades the understandings of many of the Ugandan religious leaders I spoke with, who equate traditional worship with satanism and spirit worship. “The common traditions all involve sacrifice and slaughter. Christians do not practice that kind of sacrifice because Jesus sacrificed once and for all. If I were to attend a traditional ceremony, I couldn’t be sure that they are not hiding some kind of sacrifice behind that thing. I would want to find out, for example, if 100% of the meat is eaten, or if some is left behind to hang on a tree for the gods, or if some of that blood is sprinkled to the gods.”⁶¹ As such, many Christian and Muslim leaders are reluctant to discuss the role and use of traditional practices of acknowledgement because of their association with the spirits. For them, because these practices have customarily been carried out within ceremonies of ATR, that link, and the traditional religious significance that many attribute to it, prevents them from continuing their use.

Particularly in Northern Uganda, scholars have attempted to include the role of ancestral spirits and spiritualism in their analyses of traditional practices of acknowledgement.⁶² Yet most social scientists have tended to sidestep the poorly-understood importance of the spiritual in attempting to understand the social importance of traditional mechanisms of acknowledgement. This is problematic, since

[r]eligion... in Africa, if it is involved in everything, is also confused with everything: with laws and received customs, feasts, rejoicing, mourning, work and business, events,

⁵⁹ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd rev. ed., (Kampala: East African Educational Publishers, 1991), 11-12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁶¹ Rev. Canon Job Bariira Mbukure, retired Bishop, Church of Uganda, interview by author, 02 October 2008, Kampala.

⁶² See Finnstrom, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 270-272. See also Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda 1986-97* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999).

and accidents of life... it is included under the general expression “customs”—what is received from the ancestors, what has always been believed and done, the practices which must be observed to maintain the family, the village, the tribe, and whose neglect would bring about certain misfortunes.⁶³

In fact, “traditional values, beliefs, practices... continue to be revered and manifested in almost all spheres of life and co-exist with modern values and values of the other three religions [Christianity, Islam, Baha’i], producing an interesting and complex mixture.”⁶⁴ And yet the consideration of the spiritual is something typically avoided by social scientists.

Mbiti argues that

[e]very African people has a set of beliefs and customs. Beliefs are an essential part of religion. Customs are not always religious, but many contain religious ideas. Religion helps to strengthen and perpetuate some of the customs; and in turn the customs do the same to religion. Beliefs and customs often go together. They cover all areas of life. Beliefs generally deal with religious ideas; customs deal with what people normally approve of and do.⁶⁵

As such, understanding the spiritual dimension, whether through the lens of “imported” religion, or ATR, is critical to understanding opinions about and reactions to traditional practices of acknowledgement.

What They Said

It is clear that all of the religious leaders to whom I spoke have some knowledge, both explicit and implicit, of the kinds of traditional practices of acknowledgement detailed above. Especially with the recent focus on such practices in Northern Uganda, Ugandans, generally, are conversant with such mechanisms. Yet the responses to my questions about the opinions of these religious leaders toward traditional practices of acknowledgement were clearly divided, in ways that

⁶³ Bishop Alexandre LeRoy, *La religion des primitifs: Études sur l’histoire des religions, no.1* (Paris, 1925 [sic]), 57-58, cited in Vincent Mulago, “Traditional African Religion and Christianity,” in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (St. Paul, Minn: Paragon House, 1991), 127.

⁶⁴ Kasenene, *Religious Ethics in Africa*, 18.

⁶⁵ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 29.

surprised me: on one hand, Catholics, joined with less fervor by Anglicans and Orthodox worshippers, support these kinds of practices; on the other hand, the “evangelicals” (including some Church of Uganda priests, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, Presbyterians, the Africa Inland Church and other groups) and Muslim clerics, are against what these practices might represent, and have some difficulty in supporting these practices, because of the “spiritual” attachment these ceremonies have traditionally had. These divisions and distinctions are explored and elaborated below.

Roman Catholic Church

The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has explicitly embraced a doctrine of *inculturation*: “the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly “feel at home” in the cultures of each people.”⁶⁶ In Uganda, Catholic leaders have sought to “critically engage society and church leaders in debate, and encourage them to keep the indigenous values and ideas”⁶⁷ And so “the church [has adopted] some of the rituals used in crowning Kings in Buganda and Ankore, for example, in the liturgy of the feast of Christ the King.”⁶⁸

Regarding traditional practices of acknowledgement, the Roman Catholic Church is clear in its support of such practices—although this support has been clear only since the early 2000s.⁶⁹ From the ground up, Catholic leaders have embraced their use. “At the diocesan level, there is no resistance to traditions in our training manuals and that kind of thing. Often, we use

⁶⁶ Rev. Fr. Dr. John Mary Waliggo, “Making a Church that is Truly African,” in *Inculturation: Its meaning and urgency*, ed. J.M. Waliggo, A. Roest Crollius S.J., T. Nkéramihigo S.J., J. Mutiso-Mbinda (Kampala: St. Paul Publications, 1986), 12

⁶⁷ Rev. Fr. Dr. John Mary Waliggo, interview by author, 09 Nov. 2004, Kampala.

⁶⁸ Laurent Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 77.

⁶⁹ Robert Lukwiya Ochola, “The Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative in the Battlefield of Northern Uganda: An example of an integral, inculturated and ecumenical approach to pastoral work in a war situation,” (M.A. diss., Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck, June 2006), 127-128.

traditional methods as a starting point, then move to Christian practices, because our participants are more familiar with traditional practices than Biblical ideas.”⁷⁰ Under the umbrella of the Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative, for example, Catholic priests regularly participate in the *mato oput* ceremony:

This reconciliation is achieved through the intertwining of the Christian... reconciliation ceremony together with that of the Acholi tradition... For the returning abducted children and/or rebels, this ceremony is preceded by a Church ceremony of reconciliation where a Catechist, a priest or whoever is leading the ceremony reads from the Bible, gives a homily stressing the point of reconciliation and *metanoia* and then performs a ceremony of reconciliation... That this practice is allowed and even accepted by the Church in Acholiland must be seen against the background of the early missionary and Church’s attitude towards any of the cultural practices where all cultural practices were uncritically and wholly condemned as ‘satanic’.⁷¹

As a number of Catholic priests have urged, “[t]he culture of traditional reconciliation and the modern way of life should aid each other for the real peace, progress and the common good of man.”⁷² “Aware of divergences between Ugandan traditional reconciliation, illustrated in *mato opwut* [*sic*], and the Scriptures, we honour the similarities...”⁷³

The Catholic bishops’ pastoral letter of 2004 explicitly supports the use of such practices in conjunction with Christian practices: “We need to build strong institutions for peace in the country and in every community, using fully both the good traditional means and the modern ones and particularly the Christian means of peace making, forgiveness and reconciliation.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Godfrey Onentho, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, interview by author, 26 September 2008, Nsambya.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷² Vincent Emmanuel Okot Oburu, “Reconciliation: A Moral Therapy for Uganda: A Search for Peace and Unity in the Socio-pastoral Teaching of Ugandan Catholic Bishops,” (Ph.D. diss: Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 1987), 75.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁴ Bakyenga, *A Concern for Peace, Unity and Harmony in Uganda*, 15. This letter was “no initiative from the side of the bishops, but a response to the invitation of the priests of the then diocese of Gulu to the Uganda Episcopal Conference as early as 1996... [T]he priests went further to implore the Chairman ‘to ask the Bishops’ Conference from Uganda to do more about the conflict in Northern Uganda. We request the Bishops’ Conference writes a pastoral letter about the dramatic situation of Northern Uganda before we are totally annihilated. We are also ready to provide the necessary material and information that might be needed for such a letter.” Letter of the Priests of

This approach was endorsed by the Vatican when, in an audience with the Ugandan bishops in 2003, Pope John Paul II said, “As Bishops you have a serious duty to address the issues of particularly importance for the social, economic, political and cultural life of the country to make the Church even more effectively present in those areas. Working out the implications of the Gospel for Christian life in the world and applying it to new situations is crucial to your ecclesiastical leadership...”⁷⁵

Church of Uganda

“The Church of Uganda believes that traditional culture has a contribution to make to the Church.”⁷⁶ The Archbishop has likewise recognized this: “Darkness has come upon this country that even young people don’t know their culture.”⁷⁷ Although it is not nearly as strongly stated as within the Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion’s official position is that

[t]rue inculturation entails a willingness to incorporate what is positive, and to challenge what is alien to the truth of the Christian faith. It has to make contact with the psychological as well as the intellectual feelings of the people. This is achieved through openness to innovation and experimentation, an encouragement of local creativity, and a readiness to reflect critically at each stage of the process - a process that, in principle is never ending.”⁷⁸

Gulu Diocese, Gulu Deaconry, to the Chairman of the UEC, Bishop Paul Kalanda, 02 August 1996, as cited in Ochola, “The Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative in the Battlefield of Northern Uganda,” 129.

⁷⁵ Address of Pope John Paul II to the Ugandan Bishops, 27/9/2003, as cited in Bakyenga, *A Concern for Peace*, 7.

⁷⁶ Rev. Canon Job Bariira Mbukure, retired Bishop, Church of Uganda, interview by author, 02 October 2008, Kampala.

⁷⁷ The Most Rev. Henry Luke Orombi, Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, *The Dawn of a New Era*, 2nd ed. (Kampala: H.L. Orombi Publications, 2007), 10.

⁷⁸ Victor Atta Bafoe and Luke Pato, “Proposition 3,” *Six Propositions for Anglicans* (Ecumenical Affairs Commissions Inter Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, The Anglican Communion Official Website); available from <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/commissions/iatdc/docs/2002propositions.cfm>; accessed 14 May 2009.

Yet “[a]lmost all African Christianity is fundamentalist [and] nearly all African Christians approach the Bible rather uncritically.”⁷⁹ And so a division exists between Ugandan Anglicans on the role of culture and faith.

Still, some, such as the Bishop of Luweero Diocese, argue that “if it is bringing in a cultural method of reconciliation, let it come. Kony, when deciding to fight, consulted with the traditional elders, who blessed him. So if we can still use that tradition to resolve the conflict, we should. The Church of Uganda applies African theology, to see where is the will of God in this.”⁸⁰ Certainly, this has been the approach of retired Bishop Macleord Baker Ochola, who has played an integral role in the activities of ARLPI throughout Northern Uganda, including the “settlement of grave criminal offence [*sic*] through traditional means of reconciliation (*mato oput*).”⁸¹ Others, and particularly those whose faith is influenced by the *balokole*, the *tumutenderize* (born-again within the Church of Uganda), “reject these traditional things altogether.”⁸²

Uganda Orthodox Church

The position of the Uganda Orthodox Church on the use of traditional practices of acknowledgement, as articulated to me by the Metropolitan, is straightforward:

Jesus took over humanity, not to remain man, but to make man become God. So when coming to culture, this does not mean that the Gospel must remain culture, but that the culture must become Gospel. Many things in Buganda have come in to Christianity and people understand very well when they begin those cultural things. Some things must be

⁷⁹ Gifford, *African Christianity*, 42.

⁸⁰ Bishop Evans Mukasa Kisekka, Bishop Luweero Diocese, Church of Uganda, interview by author, 30 September 2008, Luweero Town.

⁸¹ Rt. Rev. Macleord Baker Ochola II, “Hope in the Storm: Experience of ARLPI in Conflict Resolution of the Northern Uganda Armed Conflict,” a paper presented at the Swedish Seminar on Northern Uganda Organized by the Mission Church of Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden, 15 April 2004.

⁸² Joshua Kitakule, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, interview by author, 24 September 2008, Kampala.

cleaned up and reformed and can be accepted after cleansing. So any culture that does not fit with the Gospel does not go.⁸³

Although the Uganda Orthodox Church is a member of the ARLPI, this is due solely to the presence of the Church's one priest in the North, Julius Orach. Outside of Father Orach, it is clear that the UOC has little understanding of the conflict in Northern Uganda, and is disconnected from Ugandans outside of its slim membership in the Western and Central Uganda. The Metropolitan articulated that the UOC's "work in Northern Uganda is proceeding very differently, but I have discovered a certain tribe that is going to work, the Acholi. We went first to Langi, but they don't have love. But the Acholi are very good, almost like whites."⁸⁴ Even its support of the Uganda Joint Christian Council and its peacebuilding initiatives is tenuous: "Because of certain issues in Uganda, we will be seen to be participating."⁸⁵ Similarly, the UOC has adopted a complicated position with regard to its involvement in the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda: "In the IRCU, it is difficult to find consensus, since it is not based on the Christian faith"⁸⁶—the implication being that the UOC chooses not to support issues IRCU on which it disagrees.

Pentecostal Churches

The Pentecostal Churches in Uganda are divided into several denominations, all "externally influenced" by Pentecostal churches in Canada, Singapore, U.S.A., and Kenya.⁸⁷ Yet the leaders and members of the various Pentecostal churches have a common view on the matter of using traditional practices of acknowledgement, as on many other matters, "rejecting any assimilation

⁸³ His Eminence, the Metropolitan of Kampala and All Uganda, Jonah Lwanga, Uganda Orthodox Church, interview by author, 30 September 2008, Namungoona.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Gifford, *African Christianity*, 100-102.

between the church and the world, and between Christianity and African custom.”⁸⁸ Said one pastor, “If there is an opportunity for cultural involvement, it should come in through the church.”⁸⁹ As another pastor explained,

The bottom line is that we want to support a Jesus culture. The challenge with those traditional practices is *the thing behind the thing is the thing*. Traditional practices facilitate traditional worship and that’s where we part company. So in Uganda, there is a rise of talking about our culture—that’s about cultural worship, and traditional gods... The biggest challenge with traditional peace practices is a resurgence of traditional worship, which pushes people toward syncretism. So we try to steer clear of these.⁹⁰

Another pastor echoed this thought: “Cultural institutions are not the problem. The differences between Believers and non-Believers rests on the issue of rituals. And some rituals should be thrown out because Christianity can offer better ceremonies. Being discernful [*sic*] and looking into traditions can offer better redeemed tradition and culture. Even with diversity, the only culture we will follow is God’s.”⁹¹ The prevailing evangelical sentiment is that “the only way to be faithful to Christian commitments is some form or other of withdrawal to constitute a superior Christian culture.”⁹²

Presbyterian Church

As with the Pentecostal Church, detailed above, the Presbyterian Church is divided into several different associations. While all are evangelical at their root, their stated positions on the use of traditional practices of acknowledgement are similarly divided. On one side, a reformed Presbyterian pastor told me that “there are still some kind of practice between those who live in a life of misfortune, who consult the witchdoctor who demands money, slaughter cows, give

⁸⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁸⁹ Pastor Jonnes T. Bakimi, Mission for National Reconciliation, interview by author, 19 November 2004, Kampala.

⁹⁰ Pastor Franco J. Onaga, Kampala Pentecostal Church, interview by author, 01 October 2008, Kampala.

⁹¹ Pastor Patriot Jonan Kasango, Mission for Reconciliation, interview by author, 19 November 2004, Kampala.

⁹² D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 80.

fetishes and drugs. We can see no logic in it. Even funeral rites have become attached to some kind of spirits. So the Church does not go through these ceremonies to pay homage to the spirits.”⁹³

Yet other Presbyterian pastors are more willing to consider the incorporation of traditional practices of acknowledgement. “Evangelical Christians in Africa were more colonized and therefore alienated. So they will not have anything to do with it. Some evangelical churches are led by those without any formal training [and so are ill-equipped to deal with such things]. Other evangelical pastors have responded to people’s needs. For example, they pray for people’s cows or their coffee trees. What they get from the Bible, they now bring back to earth and speak it at the common level.”⁹⁴

Seventh Day Adventist Union of Uganda

As with the other evangelical faith groups in Uganda, the Seventh Day Adventists “do not discard culture completely. But if the cultural trait is satanic, we discard it. The prayer of the witchdoctors would be rejected, but slaughtering [an animal as a representation of reconciliation] and eating together would be okay, since eating together allows us to draw near and begin to be together. The SDA works for replacing cultural things with God, and the power of God is okay. If you want people to reconcile, you invite God to be in your midst.”⁹⁵ The President of the SDA Union agreed:

Seventh Day Adventists believe that at salvation, a person parts with some things from his old life. The SDA believes when we wrong each other, as Christians, we must ask forgiveness from God, who will forgive all sins; after you are clear with God, you can go

⁹³ Pastor Emma Kiwanuka, Dean, Westminster Theological College and Seminary, interview by author, 03 October 2008, Kajjansi.

⁹⁴ Hon. Rev. Dr. Kefa Sempangi, First Presbyterian Church, interview by author, 18 November 2004, Kampala.

⁹⁵ Pastor William Bagambe, Deputy Director of Stewardship Ministries and Church Development, Seventh Day Adventist Union of Uganda, interview by author, 29 September 2008, Kampala.

to your brother and discuss. If you agree on that level, and make a declaration that my faith does not go into the sacrifice [of an animal for slaughter in a reconciliation ceremony], we can share a meal together. Some traditional practices are good, because they bring the communities back together.⁹⁶

Africa Inland Church

The Africa Inland Church was founded out of the *balokole* movement when revivalists “def[ie]d the authority of the [Anglican] church... [because they] found several practices within the [Anglican] church objectionable.”⁹⁷ As such, the AIC was founded by Africans and run by Africans in line with contemporary African thinking.⁹⁸ It was, therefore, among the first of the African churches to allow the “free use of spontaneous African music” and other cultural practices.⁹⁹ Its contemporary pastors, however, are not as keen to sanction traditional practices of acknowledgement: “If people want to do that and believe in traditional methods, we will also teach them the Word of God. We want to start with known ways to build peace and then move to the unknown. Evangelicals know that traditionally people have been doing these things, but want the Bible to shape their lives. We are trying to allow them to use symbols of peace, and then change them with Christ.”¹⁰⁰ Still, that same pastor allowed that “some traditions are not bad. They should not be rejected entirely, but harmonize them.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Pastor John L. Wani, President, Seventh Day Adventist Union of Uganda, interview by author, 01 October 2008, Kampala.

⁹⁷ Welbourn and Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home*, 34-35.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93-94, 99-100.

¹⁰⁰ Wilson Waswa, Africa Inland Church, interview by author, 18 November 2008, Kampala.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Uganda Muslim Supreme Council

The Uganda Muslim Supreme Council takes a very similar stand as the evangelical Christians in Uganda:

We detest superstitions, and don't have any, any, any place for them, or for anyone other than God. But any method that brings cohesion, we don't have a problem with that. We have *dwa* (prayer) where we go and meet different families, pray together and eat together as a gesture of friendship. Even modifying those traditions is not acceptable to us. There is no point slaughtering a goat if you have forgiven—it's *haram* (outside). We have our own ways of reconciling people. We should counsel and reconcile with each other. And there is no problem with that.¹⁰²

“If a traditional believe is not based on the Koran or the Hadith, it cannot be incorporated into Islamic practices. Only the authentic sayings and practices of The Prophet can be used. If it is in conflict with the Koran or the Hadith, it cannot be used.”¹⁰³

Understanding the Complexities of the Positions of the Faith Groups

One complicating factor, of course, is that although respondents to census questionnaires may nominally claim adherence to one particular faith group, there is no way to properly gauge their commitment to this faith. This is important for two reasons: First, it is difficult to tell just how much influence the policies and practices of the religious leaders have on their respective populations.¹⁰⁴ Second, it is quite common for Ugandans to adhere *both* to their stated faith community as well as to African Traditional Religion, which is not reported. There is significant evidence, anecdotal and otherwise, to suggest that Ugandans carry out the requisite ceremonies of both faiths on important matters, “just to be sure.” For example, “in many cases still... after

¹⁰² Haji Nsereko Mutumba, Public Relations Officer, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, interview by author, 02 October 2008, Kampala.

¹⁰³ Jowad Kezaala, Secretary-General, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, interview by author, 12 May 2006, Kampala.

¹⁰⁴ The Uganda census provides no measure of religiosity, such as church attendance, to judge the importance of religion to respondents.

[church] baptism the parents of twins visit traditional healers for protection rituals.”¹⁰⁵ Even Vice Presidential candidate Prof. Gilbert Bukenya, who claims membership in the Roman Catholic Church, prayed publicly at a witchdoctor’s shrine to “ask his ancestors for peace and to grant President Yoweri Museveni a third term in office.”¹⁰⁶ The census data do not reflect this duality of faith and practice.

There is also, as I have written elsewhere, a disconnect between those who are affected by conflict and those who are not.¹⁰⁷ This is important for peoples’ understanding of traditional practices of acknowledgement. “Those who have been through the conflict have a better idea and can witness cleansing ceremonies.”¹⁰⁸ This was articulated by many of the religious leaders to whom I spoke. And there was some recognition that the responses of religious leaders in conflict-affected communities in the North was necessarily different because of the affect of conflict in those communities. “Bishop Odama’s experience [in Kitgum] is different. His view is from an experiential perspective, whereas Fr. Waliggo’s [a Kampala-based priest and academic] is from an intellectual perspective.”¹⁰⁹ “If I were in Northern Uganda, I would allow it. But then when they have done this, I would sit with them and demonstrate the sufficiency of the blood of Jesus to cleans much better.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 81.

¹⁰⁶ Eddie Ssejjoba, “Bukenya visits shrine for third term,” *New Vision* 08 December 2004.

¹⁰⁷ The disconnect is at a number of levels, but also significantly between Bantu Ugandans in the South and Nilotic Ugandans in the North. See Joanna R. Quinn, “Here, Not There: Theorizing about why traditional mechanisms work in some communities, not others,” a paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 06 June, 2007.

¹⁰⁸ Sister Specioza Kabahuma, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, interview by author, 25 September 2008, Nsambya.

¹⁰⁹ Godfrey Onenth, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, interview by author, 26 September 2008, Nsambya.

¹¹⁰ Rev. Canon Job Bariira Mbukure, retired Bishop, Church of Uganda, interview by author, 02 October 2008, Kampala.

Modification: A Possibility for Unanimity?

While there is no common position among the religious leaders I spoke to, as demonstrated above, on the use of traditional practices of acknowledgement, it seems to me that one possibility might be the modification of some elements of the traditional practices to make them acceptable across the board. Indeed, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda “wants to support a hybrid model.”¹¹¹ And so I also asked the religious leaders about this.

For example, I inquired about the possibility of holding common services of prayer. This has been done with high levels of participation from Ugandans in Luweero and Soroti¹¹² and across the Greater North,¹¹³ and elsewhere. Roman Catholic, Church of Uganda, and Uganda Orthodox Church officials indicated that they would be pleased to participate, and that they had done so. Other religious leaders, however, were more or less supportive. Pastor John L. Wani, President of the SDAUU, for example, said, “We have no problem praying for others. We believe that there is a God who listens to all religions. God’s serious concern is for all people, so we can pray together.”¹¹⁴ One Pentecostal pastor said, “If there is a joint service, [our church] will join to say we are together in this course.”¹¹⁵ A Muslim spokesperson agreed: “We have *dwa* (prayer) where we go and meet different families, and pray together...”¹¹⁶ Not everyone, however, was in agreement. One reformed Presbyterian pastor expressed his discomfort praying

¹¹¹ Joshua Kitakule, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, interview by author, 24 September 2008, Kampala.

¹¹² Pastor Jonnes T. Bakimi, Mission for National Reconciliation, interview by author, 19 November 2004, Kampala.

¹¹³ Gilbert M. Khadiagala, “Case Study Two: The Role of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in Peace Building in Northern Uganda,” in *Greater Horn of Africa Peace Building Project*, (Mar. 2001), 3.

¹¹⁴ Pastor John L. Wani, President, Seventh Day Adventist Union of Uganda, interview by author, 01 October 2008, Kampala.

¹¹⁵ Pastor Franco J. Onaga, Kampala Pentecostal Church, interview by author, 01 October 2008, Kampala.

¹¹⁶ Haji Nsereko Mutumba, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, interview by author, 02 October 2008, Kampala.

with non-Believers, saying “We would go to a common prayer, but if a Muslim offers prayers, we would not say Amen.”¹¹⁷

I also asked about the possibility of holding communal meals to demonstrate that reconciliation has taken place. This has roots in African Traditional Religion.¹¹⁸ “Worldwide, to eat together is a symbol of common union among people; and if these people had previously been at odds and perhaps harming one another, the shared meal clearly says that they regret this and wish the alienation to cease.”¹¹⁹ Yet not all of the religious leaders were in agreement: The Seventh Day Adventist Church advocates a cautious approach: “Eating together would be okay. Eating together allows us to draw near and begin to be together.”¹²⁰ “Slaughtering as a feast to celebrate coming together to share a meal is okay. Slaughtering is not okay to appease the spirits.”¹²¹ The Uganda Muslim Supreme Council agreed. “*Mato oput* is already in Islam, as is eating together to demonstrate reconciliation. Anything good is Islam. And I haven’t heard any opposition.”¹²² One Pentecostal pastor said, “Anything that fosters peace in the community, it would be good for us to participate, mindful of these barriers. Seeing the churches cooperate on reconciliation is a good thing.”¹²³ Even the multi-faith UJCC is in agreement: “We want to pull

¹¹⁷ Pastor Emma Kiwanuka, Dean, Westminster Theological College and Seminary, interview by author, 03 October 2008, Kajjansi.

¹¹⁸ For example, in Tooro, it was common for former enemies, “after talking, to sit together for a meal, eating from the same dish, drinking from the same pot, to signify that now we are together.” Sister Specioza Kabahuma, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, interview by author, 10 November 2004, Nsambya. In Acholi, after the conflict is resolved, “both sides begin eating together. After eating inside the house, the lower jaws of both sheep are taken by both sides, and the heads of the clans will take and carry back to their homes to be put safely away as a living testimony that the blood of the sheep had cleansed the once-hostile clans.” Geresome Latim, Ker Kwaro Acholi, interview by author, 22 November 2004, Gulu Town. In Busoga, “reconciliation would end up with a meal contributed to by both sides.” Fr. Richard Kayaga, Director, Cultural Research Centre, interview by author, 23 September 2008, Jinja.

¹¹⁹ Bernard J. Cooke and Gary Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 111.

¹²⁰ Pastor William Bagambe, Seventh Day Adventist Union of Uganda, interview by author, 29 September 2008, Kampala.

¹²¹ Pastor John L. Wani, President, Seventh Day Adventist Union of Uganda, interview by author, 01 October 2008, Kampala.

¹²² Jowad Kezaala, Secretary-General, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, interview by author, 12 May 2006, Kampala.

¹²³ Pastor Franco J. Onaga, Kampala Pentecostal Church, interview by author, 01 October 2008, Kampala.

out what is good. We can eat together, and that sort of thing. Those who use them should explain their practices to those who don't understand so we can sit together.”¹²⁴

The Metropolitan of the Uganda Orthodox Church, however, expressed a contradiction, saying, “the Orthodox Church is not able to be active within a system of ecumenism.”¹²⁵ This is somewhat puzzling, since the UOC is a founding member of the UJCC and co-President of the IRCU. A reformed Presbyterian pastor said this: “I hesitate to sanction it. We can eat with Muslims and Catholics and others. But when traditional ones are involved... [we can't].”¹²⁶

As such, there is relatively strong agreement between and amongst the various religious groups about common symbols and rituals that might be jointly adapted and then adopted. It is, then, possible to imagine that these kinds of elements might be adapted in the development of “neo-traditional”¹²⁷ symbols and ceremonies to be used in furthering peace, justice and reconciliation.

Conclusions

Religion is important in Uganda. Fully 96% of the population claims adherence to either Christianity or Islam. And these faith communities are active throughout the country.

The disagreement between the various religious groups surveyed in this study, however, is not as broad as it initially seems. 77.8% of the population adheres either to the Roman Catholic Church or to the Church of Uganda, both of which are strong proponents of the

¹²⁴ Stephen Kisembo, Uganda Joint Christian Council, interview by author, 02 October 2008, Kampala.

¹²⁵ His Eminence, the Metropolitan of Kampala and All Uganda, Jonah Lwanga, Uganda Orthodox Church, interview by author, 30 September 2008, Namungoona.

¹²⁶ Pastor Emma Kiwanuka, Dean, Westminster Theological College and Seminary, interview by author, 03 October 2008, Kajjansi.

¹²⁷ Stephen Brown, “Forging National Unity in Rwanda: Government Strategies and Grassroots Responses,” a paper presented at *Reconciliation*, a conference held by the Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict Research Centre at The University of Western Ontario, May 14-15, 2005. See also Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 192.

incorporation of traditional practices of acknowledgement.¹²⁸ The other remaining Christian faith groups discussed above (SDA, Pentecostal, AIC, Presbyterian) amount to only 7.4% of the population—and on issues of adapted, updated, neo-traditional practices, many of these agreed that they could be part of such activities. The same holds true for Muslim adherents, who number 12.3% of the population.

All of this is relevant, of course, because these kinds of ceremonies continue to provide a common basis of understanding for nearly all people across the country. As such, it is important to utilize those kinds of systems in which people trust, and that they understand—contrary to the results of the use of “Western” mechanisms like the truth commission in Uganda and elsewhere, as I have written previously. The promotion of social acknowledgement is a necessary condition for the successful rebuilding of any community.¹²⁹ And so the “blessing” of the religious leaders in a modified use of customary practices to work toward such a goal seems promising.

¹²⁸ When the Uganda Orthodox Church’s membership is added, this figure climbs to 77.94%.

¹²⁹ Joanna R. Quinn, “The Politics of Acknowledgement: Truth Commissions in Uganda and Haiti,” (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University 2003).