

**GROWING IN FAITH**  
THROUGH  
**POPULAR PIETY**

A Case Study of Uganda

Lit 86

Simon P. Kyambadde

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# INTRODUCTION

Have you got a devotion? If so and if you wanted to persuade someone about your devotion how would you go about it? What do you find attractive in your devotion? What spiritual benefits does it give you? Are you one of those who have had different devotions over time? How does your devotion relate to your liturgical practice? Does the devotion nourish and enhance your liturgical life, or does it make you feel divided; having a sense of wasted time when you celebrate liturgy; time you could have used to pray in a manner more nourishing to your soul? Is your devotion preferable to traditional liturgical prayer?

I do not quite recall how I became devoted to St. Jude Thaddeus. I only remember that I was still a small boy in primary three, of ten years. Nor do I recall what I asked him and obtained through his intercession. (By that time I did not know the difference between praying *to* him and praying *through* him). I think I prayed to him, but my prayer was answered anyway. Then I chanced to overhear a conversation between my mother and an old lady who was also a relative. She was narrating to mom some desperate problem over which she had tried everything. With the simplicity of a child I told her that the only reason why she had not obtained what she needed was because she had not tried St. Jude, the patron of hopeless cases. I did not know that she took me seriously; adults did not do that often. Nor do I recall what her need was, and I cannot find out now that she is long dead, God rest her soul. But I do recall that every since then, whenever I saw that woman, even after so many years, she always thanked me for the favour I had done to her, as if I had sent Jude Thaddeus

personally to come to her rescue. Every year on the feast of St. Jude she made the pilgrimage to Naggulu. (I am ashamed to confess that I have never done the same). For a long time I too remained devoted to St. Jude, so much so, that when I received a chain letter a year after, I wrote 24 others as was required and disseminated them among my peers, as saying as praying the required prayers. It was not after many years when I had joined the seminary that a priest taught me that such chain letters which also included a threat to one who failed to fulfil the accompanying obligations did harm rather than good to the name of the saint through whom God wanted to show is love and not instil fear. But the priest also taught me that to have fulfilled the obligation in the belief that I was the correct thing was good in itself.

I also recall how devoted my mother, like so many other people, was to St. Anthony. One particular incident comes to my mind when after she had lost her favourite knife for a week, and while she was in the banana garden, she said a spontaneous prayer to the saint, in words like: “St. Anthony, you have never disappointed me, why won’t you help me find my knife this time?” As she said these words she poked through rubbish with a stick, and there was the knife.

In the third year of my priesthood when I visited one who had been my benefactress during seminary training I received a thick book. It was one of the five volumes in English of the life of our Lord written by Maria Valtorta entitled “The God-Man.” I accepted it out of politeness but inside me I said that this was nothing more than cheap piety. In fact I did not open the book for more than a year. Then one day as I was going on a long train journey of over eight hours, I picked from the book shelf at random

and in a hurry something to read along the way. It was Maria Valtorta. I have never stopped reading it since then, and by now I have gone through all the volumes for a number of times. What I find most fascinating is the way this book makes the gospel stories warm and familiar. It brings each of the characters in the gospels closer, as if I knew them well and they are old friends. The narrations are so vivid, so artistic, that even if one doubted the divine origin of the work, and considered it merely as a work of art, it would still be an invaluable masterpiece.

Unless you have or have had a devotion of your own, the study of Popular Piety is likely not to be much more than an intellectual exercise for you. The tendency is to judge with an intellectual measure a reality that appeals more to the heart than to the intellect.

You may not have had a particular devotion of your own, but you might know someone or some people who have.

This work which is based on, and in part adapts the structure of the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* which was promulgated by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (published by the Catholic Truth Society in 2002), aims at evaluating the situation of popular piety in Uganda in the light of the guidelines set out in that book. The purpose is three-fold. In the first place it is intended to guide those who follow one devotion or another and who sometimes slide into error on the proper nature of devotional prayer in relation to liturgy. Secondly, it is meant to persuade people who may be very earnest believers, but who lack conviction in popular piety and consequently might consciously or unconsciously look on those who are devoted with a slight amount of contempt and condescension, of the benefit entailed in popular piety. And thirdly it is also intended for

pastors whose proper understanding of popular piety is a duty, (whether they themselves are members of a particular devotion or not) in order for them to guide the faithful under their charge, or at least to procure guidance for them from those who are competent.

## Value of Popular Piety



# **GUIDELINES FOR POPULAR PIETY**

**POPULAR PIETY AND THE  
LITURGICAL YEAR**

# DEVOTION TO JESUS

**DEVOTION TO THE HOLY  
SPIRIT**

**DEVOTION TO THE  
FATHER**

# VENERATION OF MARY

# VENERATION OF SAINTS

# **SHRINES AND PILGRIMAGES**

**NAMUGONGO**

**OTHER SHRINES FOR INDIVIDUAL  
MARTYRS**

KATOOSA

KYEBANDO

KIGUNGU

MUNYONYO

BUGONZA

**KIWAMIREMBE**



# CONCLUSION