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Review of the PhD thesis by Samuel Mugisa entitled:

***THE GOSPEL OF PROSPERITY AND HEALING MINISTRY IN AFRICAN
PENTECOSTALISM: A THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL CHALLENGE TO THE CATHOLIC
CHURCH IN UGANDA***

written under the supervision of Rev. Wojciech Kluj OMI, PhD hab., prof. UKSW
(auxiliary supervisor: Mariusz Boguszewski, PhD),

Warsaw 2021, pp. 287.

It is believed that the twentieth-century achievements in the field of theological methods is the basis for reflection on Revelation in the existential context of man. Today we know that good theology cannot limit itself to describing catechism truths or seeking new, abstract interpretations of dogmas but must answer the questions posed by its addressee, take into account their desires and anxieties, and bring hope into their everyday life. Among other things, this is where the popularity of the texts by Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, as well as the attractiveness of the teaching of Pope Francis, comes from. This is probably also the key to effective evangelisation and re-evangelisation. The necessity of practising a bottom-up theology, contextualised, sensitive to local conditions, is very well expressed by the Holy Father in the exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, where we read: *Since 'time is greater than space', I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary*

in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth (cf. Jn 16:13), until he leads us fully into the mystery of Christ and enables us to see all things as he does. Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For 'cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied' (3).

In the context of those challenges within the Church, Samuel Mugisa analysed the situation of the local Church in Uganda, researched a wide range of sources and wrote a 287-page-long dissertation entitled 'The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda'.

1. Aim of the thesis

In the introduction to his thesis, the author defines a few research problems. At page 8 he states: *The study probes the following questions: 1) why does Prosperity Gospel appeal massively in Africa and in Uganda today? 2) Is Prosperity Gospel consistent with the Gospel of Christ? 3) Does the quest for healing and search for wealth has any relation to people switching from mainline to Neo-Pentecostal movements? 4) How has the Catholic Church contributed to healing, exorcism and the economic empowerment of Christians?* At page 9 he presents two objectives of the research: *1) To raise awareness of the phenomenon of Prosperity Gospel and Healing Ministry which arise from the proliferation of religious movements in Uganda with stress on the workings of the Holy Spirit. 2) To re-count that the proliferation of the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry is a moment for the Catholic Church in Uganda to reevaluate its holistic mission in reaching out to the poor and sick.* Analysing the table of contents of the dissertation, we see that half of it concerns the context of the problems outlined. At first glance, therefore, it seems that the content does not fully correspond to the title. However, a more careful reading convinces us that the content of even these contextualised parts is strongly related to the objectives and necessary for an adequate

diagnosis. The problem, then, is not the content of the chapters, but their titles which do not always seem adequate. I will elaborate on this remark later in the review.

In order to reach his objectives, the author decides to use *a descriptive research design* (p. 9). The method is used accurately and consequently.

Undoubtedly, the contents of the dissertation match the title: ‘The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda’.

Reading the dissertation, one is under the impression that the author looks at the issues at question from a very broad perspective. It proves that the PhD student is well-prepared and broad-minded.

2. Structure of the thesis

Samuel Mugisa’s dissertation consists of a list of figures and abbreviations, an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and four appendixes.

In the 11 page-long introduction, the author included research questions, methodology, objectives of the research, structure of the work, the main argument. All these elements meet the criteria described in methodology coursebooks.

The first chapter ‘Uganda’s general social-economic religious and political situation’ provides context for further considerations. In three steps, the author guides the reader through the historical and contemporary paths of development of the Ugandan society, the main problems it has to face, and the origins and current activities of Christians in that area. This part of the dissertation is written synthetically and communicatively. Both the selected information and the scope of its presentation, on the one hand, provide the reader with knowledge about Uganda, and on the other hand, the data is correctly selected, without unnecessary details or lengthy encyclopaedic analyses.

At this stage, it is worth signalling one significant advantage of this chapter, two shortcomings and one doubt. The advantage is the editing of the introduction. It contains information that strongly links the chapter's content with the whole dissertation topic, which makes it a context rather than an autonomous part of the presented work. Let us move on to the shortcomings. I consider the title of the first paragraph, ‘Uganda's present

situation', to be inadequate to its content. I find it too broad and too general in referring to the information it presents. In my view, the listing of the point 'Persecution of Christians' in paragraph three is also a shortcoming. This is the only point in the paragraph, and it is standard practice not to list it in this way. It is questionable to put issues in the first paragraph that seem to fit better in the second paragraph. I am referring to the content of 1.1.6 - 1.1.11. Presumably, different titling of the first paragraph could have solved this problem. As we will see further on, this kind of doubt also applies to the subsequent chapters.

The second chapter is entitled 'Catholic church in Uganda and the challenge of new religious movements and sects'. The author main aim was to *discuss the new religious movements in an attempt to answer the following questions: what is the extent of the presence of sects and new religious movements in Uganda? What form of sects are these? What are the different characteristics of these sects? Is there any influence they pose on the Catholic? Which group of Catholics are influenced by them and become their followers? What do these sects have that attract some Catholics and what pastoral options or programmes are possible on the side of the Catholic Church in light of these sects and movements?* (p. 66). In his search for answers, Mugisa first presents a map of the problems that are associated with the functioning of the Church in the context of new religious movements and sects. Among other things, he draws attention to the role of Christian testimony, evangelisation of the youth and new evangelisation, the formation of leaders of religious communities and erroneous inculturation in the liturgical field, or issues in biblical formation in a broad sense. While there is no doubt that the content of this paragraph corresponds to the theme of the chapter, the question arises as to its full relevance to the title of this paragraph: "Some Considerations regarding New Religious Movements". This doubt arises from the fact that the title is worded in such a way that it is not clear what to expect from the contents. In the following section, the author characterises The African Independent Churches, Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God and The Bisaka sect - "the Faith of Unity" (FoU). The fifth paragraph deals with Pentecostalism in Africa and the sixth focuses on Uganda. The reflection ends with a presentation of characteristics and trajectories of African Pentecostalism. In conclusion we find an

interesting consideration of the need to move from OMUNTU (dignity of the human person) to UBUNTU (humanity towards others).

The third chapter ‘The Gospel of Prosperity’ directly addresses the main objective of the thesis. This part of the work is the only one without its introduction, which needs to be added. The author first characterizes the roots of the Gospel of Prosperity, the lifestyle of the preachers and the tools they use. In the second part, he considers how much liberating the Prosperity Gospel is, and how it differs from the theology of salvation. He also analyses the manipulations and fallacies of approaches to faith. Finally, he turns to Biblical implications. It is valuable to highlight that a significant weakness of the Prosperity Gospel is its selectivity in approaching the sources of Revelation. Behind such an attitude, there is often self-interest of leaders rather than a concern to help the faithful.

The last section, entitled ‘The healing ministry’, provides an appropriate response from Catholic theology to the challenges associated with the Gospel of Prosperity. As we read: *The Church welcomes the sick not only as the recipients of her loving care, but also by recognizing that they are called “to live their human and Christian vocation and to participate in the growth of the kingdom of God in a new and more valuable manner”* (p. 175n). Samuel Mugisa develops this idea in six steps. He first focuses on healing in the Old and New Testaments to show the source character and continuity of the healing mission in Christianity. The next three steps present the Church's contribution to health care in Uganda, both in the past and nowadays. The final step is a look at the ministry of the priest as a healer. The conclusion raises a crucial point about perspectives on the issue at hand: *it is necessary to make a theological discussion about the perception of evil in Africa; Exorcism should not be trivialized and everyday misfortunes should not be demonized* (p. 228).

The whole dissertation concludes with a 13 page-long general conclusion. This part is followed by conclusions stemming from the contents of particular chapters. Finally, the author presents not necessarily research perspectives but recommendations for the next generations of bishops, priests and young seminarians in their pastoral approaches in parish communities, as well as for the religious and lay faithful. This part of the thesis is a very individual contribution of the author.

The last section of the thesis is the bibliography. Its division meets the methodological criteria. A very detailed division in the first part - under the documents of the Magisterium of the Church - is questionable. Considering the issues dealt with in the work, it seems that a listing of the Magisterial Documents, without additional divisions, would be sufficient.

After the bibliography, we find four appendixes. They do not bring anything new to the substantive part of the dissertation, but they illustrate and complement its content in an interesting way.

3. General content-related and formal assessment

While talking about the strong points of Samuel Mugisa's doctoral thesis, one needs to stress the importance of the issue discussed by the author. Using the example of Uganda, he addressed a problem which is relevant to many other countries in Africa (and not only there). The issues of poverty and illness are so painfully present in the existence of many people, and affect their emotions in such a powerful way, that they are an easy field for manipulation, especially in the field of religious commitment. Just highlighting these issues and giving examples of abusive approaches to them present in various religious movements would be a valuable contribution by Samuel Mugisa, and this is only part of the work he has done. He is not only able to accurately analyse and systematize source materials, but also to arrive at insightful conclusions and develop research perspectives. He does this with personal passion, which, in my opinion, adds to the value of the dissertation.

A partially positive aspect of the dissertation is the use of broad contexts for the matters described. It proves the author's broad intellectual horizons and far-reaching interests. He presents not only theological content, but a rich social and historical background, touches upon political themes and ethnographic issues. Within theology itself, ecumenical, biblical and fundamental-theological perspectives meet in the reviewed dissertation. Once again, it is worth emphasizing that both the content and the bibliography prove Mugisa's broad interests and very good research skills. Why I consider this aspect of the thesis as 'partially positive' will be explained in the section devoted to critical comments.

The literary style of the dissertation is undoubtedly its strong point, however, inconsistencies in spelling occur (e.g. *A descriptive research resign (design) will be used to help provide answers to the questions of the phenomenon – p. 9*).

It is worth stressing once again, that both the introduction and the conclusion include all necessary elements.

However, there are a few disputable issues. I would like to discuss two of them.

As I have mentioned before, a lot of research areas are touched upon in the dissertation. This makes the division into chapters and paragraphs a difficult task. It seems that the author has not quite met this challenge. The social context is intertwined with the religious context and appears in many places. While describing the contents of individual chapters in the conclusion, the author partially sees and addresses this problem by referring to the same ideas in different parts of his work. At times one can get the impression that the contents are mixed up, which is more in line with an essayistic activity than a presentation of scientific research. From a systematic reflection on a given topic, one can expect a more precise division into contexts, a description of the current state of affairs and perspectives for the future. One might also think about a structure with a more clear division, at the level of chapter or paragraph names, between the Catholic Church's teaching and the views of other religious communities. To some extent, a justification for such an approach by the author of the dissertation is the method applied in it, which partially allows for such differentiated descriptions. However, the presented way of systematising the content makes reading difficult.

The second remark is connected with the first one and concerns the naming of chapters. I have already mentioned in the description of the dissertation content that they are not always fully adequate to the information presented there. I encourage more precise naming of the research areas dealt with in particular parts of the dissertation.

4. Questions for debate

I would like to pose two questions for discussion.

The first of these is a provocation. The paper states that *the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) movement is a way of fostering spiritual activities in the Catholic Church*. The author argues that participation in these movements can keep the faithful in the Catholic Church, and prevent them from moving to Pentecostal communities.

Meanwhile, in many Catholic local churches, we observe that the rise in popularity of charismatic movements does not stop but contributes to the faithful's migration to Pentecostal communities. How to involve the faithful in such movements to respond to the spiritual needs of Catholics, on the one hand, and avoid the danger of their conversion to Protestantism on the other? The Pentecostal movements seem to be more attractive because they offer even more opportunities for lay involvement than the charismatic Catholic communities (e.g. the involvement of women mentioned in the dissertation).

Four times throughout the dissertation, we find reference to the theology of hope (p. 164, 173, 239, 241). In this context, the phrase *What we seem to need is a theology of hope* appears. What specific theological thought does the author have in mind? What is the relationship between the designations of the theology of hope in the author's dissertation and the theology of hope in contemporary theological literature (e.g. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Waclaw Hryniewicz and others)? Is it the same theological paradigm or only convergence in nomenclature?

5. Final conclusion

Summing up, I would like to stress that the dissertation reviewed is a very successful attempt at a scientific investigation of how the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry, as experienced and proliferated in African Pentecostalism, poses a theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda. The thesis contains many additional considerations, inspired by the topical issue, which the author brings out, develops and comments on. Thus, it can be an important contribution to the endeavours of theologians concerned about the credibility of Catholic theology in the context of an encounter with African cultures. From the formal point of view, the dissertation is well-edited and contains a lot of logical inferences and justified conclusions.

I am convinced that the dissertation by Samuel Mugisa meets the criteria defined for a doctoral thesis and can serve as the basis of further registration and conferment procedure for a doctoral degree.

I put forward a proposal to the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University Discipline Council of Theology to admit Samuel Mugisa to further stages of the registration and conferment procedure for a doctoral degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Damian Wąsek". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

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