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## Recension of the Doctoral Dissertation of Rev. Kpudzeka Marcel Msekenyuyfo'on

In response to the convocation of the Council of Discipline Theology at the University of Card. Stefan Wyszyński (dated on 28.11.2022), I present my opinion on the doctoral dissertation entitled ***The Anthropological Basis of the Spirituality of Mother Teresa of Calcutta*** written by Rev. Kpudzeka Marcel Msekenyuyfo'on and elaborated under the direction of the Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Marek Tatar.

### 1. General remarks on the problematic of dissertation and its methodology

The dissertation contains 214 pages and is subdivided into four chapters; the text is accompanied by list of abbreviations, general introduction, conclusion and bibliography (14 pages). From a formal perspective, it is very well structured, crafted and written with accordance to methodological principles of such a type of theological dissertations. Rev. Kpudzeka Marcel Msekenyuyfo'on uses very clear, idiomatic English which makes his arguments quite easily readable. From the perspective of knowledge of primary and secondary literature, the Author proves his expertise in Mother Teresa studies, and beyond that in the very complex area of Theological Anthropology. The citations are done properly.



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The work has a precise subject and a research problem, to which the author remains faithful from its beginning to the very end. It is described by the very author as follows: „The study contends that the understanding of the human person which Mother Teresa had (Christian anthropology), inter alia, is the motive behind the way of life she established which enabled her to sacrifice herself for others. It, therefore, seeks to establish the close correlation between anthropology and spirituality. Spirituality is determined, to a great extent, by an understanding of what human nature is, the origin and purpose of life, and the end to which human life tends. The work attempts to give a fresh perspective on the study of Mother Teresa by arranging her understanding of the human being into a systematic order. Aspects of the spirituality or way of life that results from such an anthropology are also brought out. The spirituality of Mother Teresa, based on the basic Christian understanding of each and every human being as a child of God and a sibling of Jesus Christ, thus presents itself as an antidote to any form of dehumanization” (p. 10).

The subject of the dissertation is therefore an attempt to describe the vision of man that Mother Teresa had. At the same time, the task of defining and extracting this vision is important for understanding both the figure of the Calcutta’ saint herself and the essence of her social commitment. All this, however, required a kind of detective work. Since Mother Teresa did not engage in research work and did not edit scholarly volumes describing the intellectual foundation of her vision of man, which the Author of the dissertation is well aware of, the research he proposed required a special methodology. In this regard, I would call the work done by the author a reconstruction of the anthropological vision of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. An important part of it, of course, was the analysis of the spiritual writings and meditations, statements and interviews left by the Mother. This nucleus of her literary legacy was put into its broad historical, ecclesial and theological context in the reconstruction process.

Personally, I find such an attempt immensely valuable. I would like to emphasize at this point that the theological awareness of the Author of the dissertation deserves attention. It is marked not only by a very sound theological knowledge, but also by the ability to put it to practical use, if only in reconstructive studies such as the one I am describing. The author knows the essential principles of theology and is able to practically apply them in his research, which is indeed important, especially in the case of reconstructive research, where one has quite a small amount of background data, the weakness of which needs to be set in a more general context. Two such places in the dissertation come to mind, which give it research dynamics and open the way to a better understanding of the Mother's legacy: the principle of contextuality in the theology of spirituality taken from Prof. Sheldrake (cf. p. 14), and the invocation of Ratzinger on the necessity of combining metaphysical and practical categories (the priority of being over doing, cf. p. 51). Starting from both of the aforementioned intuitions allows the Author to simultaneously shape his specific research



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based on a theoretical theological premises and then helps to carefully guide his reconstruction of Mother's anthropological beliefs.

## 2. Structure and content of dissertation

As I have already mentioned, the work consists of four chapters, remaining in relations of logical succession and dependence to each other. The author puts a lot of effort into a coherent, clear and at the same time detailed analysis of the chosen problematic. In doing so, he demonstrates an awareness of the nature and structure inherent in scientific research, in which detailed, honest analyses form the basis for synthetic conclusions.

The **first chapter** is indeed heavily biographical. The author believes that a full and adequate reconstruction of the Mother's views requires prior detailed study of her life history. The chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first, the author deals with the initial, formative stage of Mother's life, describing her home, childhood, upbringing and vocation. The second part, on the other hand, is devoted to her new vocation, which was irrevocably linked to India. In order to properly embed the details of the Indian period, the author describes India from many different perspectives, from geography, turbulent history, political and economic architectonics to the religious system. The conclusion of this vast area of research is summarized by the Author as following: "Mother Teresa's upbringing endowed her with both human and Christian values; and her vocation led her to India, a multi-religious and cosmopolitan country with few very rich people and many poor people suffering all forms of want. According to the predominant India culture, the value of a person depends on the circumstances of his/her birth. But Mother Teresa knew that every human being is equal in dignity before God. Surrounded by a lot of suffering and inspired by her own concept of the human person, Mother Teresa decided against all odds to do something to ameliorate the conditions of the suffering people around her so as to uphold their human dignity" (p. 50).

In the **second chapter**, "having contextualized this study in the first chapter, The Author proceeds to look at what Mother Teresa understood by the human being. Anthropology is proposed as a hermeneutical key to interpreting her spirituality and work. (p. 51)". In this chapter, the mother's unsystematic considerations are related to the basic achievements of recent exegesis and to the data of dogmatic theology. All for the purpose of investigating "the doctrine of the human being which underlies Mother Teresa's life and work". However, the author begins his entire exploration with a strong reminder of the connection between the question of man and the question of God. Then, in accordance with the classical vision of theological anthropology, he analyzes the meaning of the creation of man and his redemption. Man is thus seen in the dual perspective of his theological-metaphysical origins (creation) and the principle of his new being (Christology and redemption). In the perspective of these two strong points of reference of Christian anthropology, the author also considers such issues as the unity of human nature, the relationality of man, the fall and



sin, and the final destiny (eschatology). Finally, the eminently important and central Christological moment is complemented by the pneumatic moment. In this way, man is understood in a Trinitarian perspective. The final outcome of his research is summarized in following way: “some aspects of her [Mother Teresa] anthropology intersect with the understanding of man in the Indian thought patterns, but there are certainly several and essential differences. Her vision of man was influenced by her Christian faith rather than the culture she found herself in. That vision which this chapter presents is at once ontological, descriptive and functional” (p. 91).

The **third chapter**, essential in the structure of the entire work, relates to the spirituality of the Mother. If in the previous one the author tried to reconstruct the theological content of the vision of man here he looks for its traces in the broad spiritual life of the saint of Calcutta. The author begins his intellectual trajectory with an introduction to the idea of spirituality as such, then examines the sources of the Mother's spirituality (here he points to the Bible, Ignatius of Loyola, Thérèse of Lisieux and the spirituality of the mother congregation). Treating the question of purpose in Teresa's spirituality, the author points out that it is not only union with God, but also concrete love of neighbor. Next, the means of helping the Mother grow in holiness, sustaining her spiritual life (sacraments, personal prayer, spiritual direction, religious vows, including the "fourth vow" of devotion to the poor, etc.) are presented. A very good part of the chapter is the one recounting the Mother's spiritual dynamics in her relationship to the supernatural virtues of faith, hope and love. It is also original in pointing out the constitutive elements of Mother Teresa's spirituality, including: the importance and centrality of the family, radical respect for human life and, above all, treating the neighbor as a representative of Christ, as "Christ in disguise."

In the **fourth chapter**, the author starts from the biblically inspired belief that a person's spirituality becomes most evident in his or her works. This “chapter is committed to examining the spirituality of Mother Teresa in practice by looking at the works of she did. [...] Underscored here is the inseparability of faith from good deeds regarding the question of whether a person is saved by faith or good deeds. The text does not gainsay that salvation comes from faith in Jesus Christ, but it is insistent that faith reveals itself in good deeds. Faith devoid of deeds is consequently considered dead” (cf. p. 153). The chapter described here subjects Teresa's motivation for leaving her mother congregation and going to Calcutta to study and elaborate. It identifies her relevant factors and specific motivations. In this way, it ultimately leads to showing how the Mother understood her own vocation and, within it, how she understood poverty, in relation to which her vocation and her mission developed. In this perspective, the author does not overlook the importance to Teresa of Calcutta such as peace or women's rights. “Conclusively, the author affirms, Mother Teresa's love and concern for the poor was so great that she abandoned Loreto, against all odds, to serve them in the slums. Assured of the providence of God who had commanded her to take him to the poor, she founded Missionaries of Charity with whom she ministered to the needs of the poor in



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Calcutta, other parts of India, and the whole world. Their work testifies to the poor of society that they too matter in the eyes of God”.

### 3. Some critical remarks

Two weaknesses of the dissertation should be pointed out. First, it is more of a intellectual/spiritual biography of the Mother than a pointed study of a fragment of her intellectual legacy. This state of affairs stems primarily from the limited research material in terms of numbers and content, which forced the Author to accept the already mentioned reconstructive task.

It is precisely in this optic of reconstruction, secondly, that a more calibrated and more descriptive research apparatus is lacking. As the author had to reconstruct out of context, the missing points of the synthesis should have been more carefully described in terms of how to select and how to examine the material outside the Mother's writing legacy.

### 4. Conclusion

**In summary, Rev. Kpudzeka Marcel Msekenyuyfo'on work is extremely relevant to theology and the Church, it is both of a high academic level and existential at the same time. Despite my aforementioned minor critique, I state that it fulfils all exigencies set before works of such type. It is well worth to be accepted and honored as a doctoral dissertation and then published in its entirety. Therefore, I am asking the departmental authorities to admit Rev. Kpudzeka Marcel Msekenyuyfo'on to the next stages of the doctoral procedures in accordance with applicable law.**

ks. dr hab. Robert J. Woźniak

Kraków 15.01.2023