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Lublin, May 21, 2021

Review of the Doctoral Dissertation:

***The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism:
A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda
(Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw 2021)***

by Fr. Mgr. Lic. Samuel Mugisa

(Specialization Missiology)

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On May 5, 2021 Theological Sciences Discipline Council of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw Faculty of Theology appointed me a reviewer of the doctoral dissertation written by Fr. Mgr. Lic. Samuel Mugisa under the title *The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda*. In relation to this decision, which I have found as a very distinctive one, I present my review.

INTRODUCTION

First of all, I would like to congratulate to Fr. Mgr. Lic. Samuel Mugisa on his doctoral dissertation, which in my view, is an important achievement in the field of theology (specifically speaking: ecclesiology, missiology and pastoral theology). I also offer Fr. Dr. Habil. Wojciech Kluj, prof. UKSW as supervisor and Fr. Dr. Mariusz Boguszewski as auxiliary supervisor my congratulations. I would like to express my sincere respect to the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Faculty of Theology, for hosting the Theology Studies in English course which allows to obtain a PhD in Theology to English-speaking students. For many years I have been personally involved in teaching at the same course at The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. It is my unquestionable honor to have been a writing supervisor of three doctoral dissertations: by Fr. Dr Edwin Chukwudi

Ezeokeke under the title *The Identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland, Nigeria* (2018), by Fr. Dr Casmir Ikechukwu Anozie under the title *The Contemporary Catholic Theology of Miracles* (2018) and by Fr. Dr Michael Nnamdi Konye under the title *Person as Constituted by Dialogical Relationality According to Joseph Ratzinger* (2020). I have been honored to meet multi-talented, wholeheartedly (and ‘wholemindly’) dedicated to theology and spiritually mature students from Africa, mostly from Nigeria. Fr. Dr Dr Michael Nnamdi Konye, who during the 2019/20 academic year earned two PhD titles: one in philosophy (metaphysics) and one in theology (systematic theology), is and will be the best example.

Introducing my review of Fr. Mgr. Lic. Samuel Mugisa’s doctoral dissertation I shall present the beautiful ‘description’ of the early (and as some say: ‘young’) Church in the Acts of Apostles (some scholars named this Book ‘the second part of the Lukian Gospel’ which is from theological point of view very proper name). In chapter 2, in only few sentences (42-47), we find – as Joseph Ratzinger noticed in his outstanding ecclesiology – all constitutive features of the Church as one (as community, *communio*), holy, universal, and apostolic. This ‘description’ of the early Church in the Acts 2 is and should be always standard and normative for the Church (for all Christians if they are truly Christians) in history. As we read in verses 44 and 45: ‘All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.’ One of many signs of the beauty (and the highest credibility) of the Church is ... sharing material goods with those in need which obviously comes from new Christian love (which itself is a sign of the new humanity started by Jesus Christ and in Him). Not becoming individually richer and richer, not any ‘prosperity gospel’, not individual success forgetting others (sometimes against others), but simple and pure sharing from the bottom of heart is what really matters. This is why the ‘prosperity gospel’ is and will be irritating to all who read the Bible and believe in Jesus. This is why all who call themselves Christians and are not willing to share anything with anyone are only ‘Christian-like’ (the term present in Joseph Ratzinger works). And the Church they create is only ‘Church-like’. How much we miss the Church was described by the Acts of Apostles. Joseph Ratzinger has written that missing such a Church is probably the deepest (and purest) desire of many people today and in the same time it is also the most important reason for some leaving the Church, because they do not experience such a Church. Is the beautiful ‘description’ of the Church in the Acts of Apostles romantic? Is it pure romanticism and only utopia? I shall be a witness at this moment and say this: the parish I work in Lublin (The Holy Trinity Parish) was established about 30 years ago only because

one couple (Stefania and Longin Stępniewscy) shared a big part of their property with the particular Catholic Church in Lublin. They wanted a church built on their land and a Catholic parish established there. And it has happened. The Acts of the Apostles became reality, again. I understand that Fr. Mgr. Lic. Samuel Mugisa's doctoral dissertation came from the same spirit – the purest part of ecclesiology and Christianity.

STRUCTURE AND THE CONTENT OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The whole dissertation consists of the following parts: Table of Contents (iv-vii), Acknowledgements (ix), Abbreviations (x), Introduction (1-11), four chapters (12-228), General Conclusion (229-241), Bibliography (242-273), and four Appendixes (274-277). The structure of the dissertation has got all required parts, hence it is proper and standard.

In Introduction Fr. Samuel Mugisa specified the following issues: Research Questions, Methodology, Objectives of the Research, Structure of the Work and Main Argument. It is a proper initiative, probably very frequent among English-speaking students. It is very helpful in reading and understanding a scholar work. In contrary to this, among Polish-speaking students it happens very rarely.

Chapter One (12-65) is entitled *Uganda's General Social-Economic, Religious and Political Situation*. It comprises three main parts: Uganda's present situation, Christian mission and Evangelization in Uganda, Competition and Disillusion among religions in Uganda. Conclusion is the last part of Chapter One. As a matter of fact, Chapter One underlines the present situation in Uganda in many different but strictly connected fields: social-economic, religious and political. The issues of so-called the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry (the main topic of the whole dissertation) are becoming more and more popular in Uganda and are responsible for the numerical growth of new religious groups. It is also one of the factors that Catholics are switching to these new religious movements and sects. The poverty which continuously takes different forms and is fanned by systematic structures continues to be a challenge to the Catholic Church's mission of evangelization in Uganda today. As a result of his research Fr. Mugisa says that too much attention on 'Prosperity Gospel' teaching as a remedy for existential challenges gives little room for profound doctrinal catechesis on faith. It also leads Christians to see God from an economic perspective. There is a need for proper interpretation of the Bible. A good catechesis is also a target to aim at. The religion taught by missionaries of Africa was not a religion of the Book, but a religion of personal

devotion, and this was the secret of its success. Foster commitment and devotion among Catholics in Uganda today are craved for.

Chapter Two (66-119) is entitled *Catholic Church in Uganda and the Challenge of New Religious Movements and Sects*. It consists of seven main parts: Some Considerations regarding New Religious Movements, The African Independent Churches, Movements for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, The Bisaka sect – “the Faith of Unity” (FoU), Pentecostalism in Africa, Pentecostalism in Uganda, Characteristics and Trajectories of African Pentecostalism. Conclusion constitutes the last part of Chapter Two. According to Fr. Mugisa the Catholic Church in Uganda is experiencing the proliferation of doubtful religious movements and sects. Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements have given attention to the young generation. This is mostly only one reason that young people are joining them: quick money and other material resources. Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism make a big mistake (or an error): biblical literalism. In such religious movements and sects teaching is centered on Divine blessings and people’s needs ‘here and now’. Fr. Mugisa says that Uganda is also experiencing the proliferation of indigenous Christian cults. These revolve around, promises of good life ahead, prophecies, and visions. Their indoctrination is one of the biggest challenges to the growth of the Catholic Church. As the best examples Bisaka Faith of Unity cult as well as the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God are discussed specifically: their recruits are taught to surrender material possessions, leaders rule with unquestionable authority. This goes along with different kinds of manipulation: so called fake miracles, selling off “miracle drink”, “holy rice”, “holy water” and “holy oil” as a basis of the great blessing of protection from evil forces and blessing for healing, wealth and happiness.

Chapter Three (120-173) is entitled *The Gospel of Prosperity*. It comprises four main parts: pathways of the Gospel of Prosperity, Pentecostals and the Prosperity Gospel, the dim side of the Prosperity Gospel, Biblical implications of the Prosperity Gospel. As the last part of Chapter Three is conclusion. Chapter Three is indeed focused on ‘the Prosperity Gospel’. It portrays wealth and riches as the fulfillment of the Divine promise. It is a conviction that God wants believers to be rich and enjoy good physical health. Fr. Mugisa reminds that in their early period Pentecostals strongly stressed the significance of terrestrial wellbeing. Their fourfold preaching included: Divine healing, personal salvation, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and signs of Christ’s soon coming. Consequently, they understood salvation inclusively as encompassing spiritual, eschatological, psychological, and physical aspects of human

existence. This means that one's salvation can only be meaningful and complete when both the spiritual and physical principalities and powers are dealt with. Therefore, liberation from clutches of poverty is needed, and this is the task 'the Prosperity Gospel' preachers have taken upon themselves. Fr. Mugisa, as a response, reminds Pope Francis who has often warned against the perils of such 'theology' which can easily and dangerously "overshadow the Gospel of Christ". Such 'theology' as a basis for the Church (if only the term 'Church' can be used in such case) ends up being run like a business in a misleading way that keeps people away from the mystery of Christian faith and Christian Gospel.

Chapter Four (174-228) is entitled *The Healing Ministry*. It consists of six main parts: Healing as presented in the Old Testament, Perspectives of healing in the New Testament, Health Care in the Ugandan Context, Healing and the early Missionaries in Uganda, The Present quest for Healing, The Ministry of the Priest as a Healer. Conclusion constitutes the last part of Chapter Four. The whole Chapter Four is focused on the topic of the healing ministry. As Fr. Mugisa underlined, sickness, suffering, pain, and death touch the very root of human existence. In African tradition society healing was done through specialists in medicine, known as herbalists or traditional 'doctors'. This has relation to a strong link between faith and healing. Faith was put in deities who could heal and provide protection. As Fr. Mugisa reminded the Old Testament shows God as a Healer of sin, sickness and infirmity, mental affliction, spiritual fatigue or emotional suffering. In the New Testament Christ is the Healer, Liberator, and Savior. He extends His healing power on His disciples – to His Church. Fr. Mugisa presented the Catholic Church's contribution to the health care system of Uganda since the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries and this part of Chapter Four deserves the highest appreciation. Fr. Mugisa also mentioned that new religious movements and Pentecostal Churches (better to say: communities) with their dynamic style of worship that focus on experience and healing have partly impacted some Catholic movements especially the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement to the effect that "healing Masses" and prayers for deliverance and cleansing have been witnessed in recent times.

The structure and the content of Bibliography will be discussed more specifically in a different part of this review.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The main achievement of Fr. Mugisa's doctoral dissertation could be expressed as follows: his dissertation is dedicated to a very serious and complicated real problem which deserves not only attention, but above all, a profound scholar research. This problem is clearly named in the title of the dissertation: the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism as a theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda. Fr. Mugisa has indeed looked thoroughly into the matter. He has investigated the problem from different perspectives and – what must be underlined – has used many adequate scholar sources. The quantity and quality of literature chosen by Fr. Mugisa is an evidence for this. The total number of footnotes is 1278. Plenty of footnotes contain important information and enrich the main body of the work. In addition, Fr. Mugisa's dissertation is logically structured which must characterize every good scholar work. It fully deserves to be accepted as a scholar monograph. Although Fr. Mugisa was able to find many sources for his research it must be said that in the whole picture of Christianity in contemporary world such phenomena as: Neo-Pentecostalism, 'the Prosperity Gospel', Healing Ministry, mega-'Churches', and 'pastors-businessmen' are simply missing. Many Christians and scholars living in different from Africa parts of the world are completely unaware of such phenomena. For example *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity* (edited by Lamin Sanneh and Michael J. McClymond, Hoboken: Wiley 2016) containing 758 pages does not say a word about those phenomena.

On the contrary, Fr. Mugisa has precisely researched and described those phenomena as a professional scholar who is 'on the ground' himself and also uses adequate academic sources to be objective. This is true especially about 'the Gospel of Prosperity' and this 'Gospel' preachers. Fr. Mugisa is convinced that many people in Africa and Uganda (among them many Catholics) join new emerging sects as a means of combating their present misery. These sects tend to focus more on prosperity, quick riches, and property acquisition. This may lead to manipulation which jeopardizes the dignity of a human person. The 'Prosperity Gospel' preachers claim to have the ammunition and spiritual tools that can intervene to protect and deliver believers from evil attacks. For them, these problems can only be solved if the believer performs the prescribed rites of "sowing seed" (giving some money to pastors for a prayer). In those new religious movements there is a growth in using the "occult" to deal with problems. People seek quick answers to their immediate needs. The "get-rich-quick" mentality is gaining favor over the teaching of the Cross which is still present in the Catholic Church and other old Christian Communities (Protestant). The paths that are enhancing the 'Gospel of

Prosperity' include the lifestyle of 'Prosperity Gospel' preachers. They thrive because of mob psychology - crowd mentality that polls more followers to a preacher simply because he has a massive following. This partly explains why 'Prosperity Gospel' is perhaps the most visible phenomenon on the contemporary mega screen. Music is also a tool to enhance it. 'Prosperity Gospel' preachers have used music with diverse rhythms, lyrics, and tunes to propagate their message. Music attracts both young and old who in varying ways feel economically and socially deprived. Prosperity songs provide resilience, energize the vulnerable to fight back, sustain a sense of hope in despair, and enhance cheerful dispositions amidst despondency.

Fr. Mugisa's dissertation main goal was to propose the Catholic Church in Uganda adequate and effective 'prescription'. This 'prescription' is itself a long list of suggestions. On the top of the list Fr. Mugisa has put Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR). According to Fr. Mugisa evangelization in Uganda ought to instill the idea of *Ubuntu*: being human towards others. Human relations should be transformed through mutual sharing and satisfaction. In Christian reality, *Ubuntu* is linked with the biblical account of the early Christian community, where none lacked anything. Fr. Mugisa's study proposes *Ubuntu* solidarity as an antidote for too much preoccupation with material gain. With this, a new attitude to poverty comes. True poverty in the African sense is a lack of true relationships. But this understanding seems to be eroded by modernity and global culture, which defines poverty in terms of lack of material goods. As a consequence, individualism, greed, grabbing and embezzlement have cropped in creating a gap between the rich and the poor. *Ubuntu* fosters the traditional view of relationships enriched by the Gospel of life and fosters individuals to discover that true wealth lies more in relational than cumulative goods. This truth is also found in Jesus Christ who is the life and true Sacrament of authentic relationship in the life of the Trinity that is a model for authentic human existence. Fr. Mugisa has discovered that some Christians have developed a negative attitude towards modern medicine. They tend to resort to prayers and fasting for healing. Some spend much of their time praying, fasting, attending retreats, as they hope for God's blessings of accumulated material and financial wealth. His study noted the importance of the ministry of a Catholic priest who acts in the name of Jesus the Healer in the Sacraments of the anointing of the sick, penance, and the Eucharist.

Undoubtedly a positive aspect of the doctoral dissertation by Fr. Mugisa is that he has looked at the researched problem from a very wide perspective (or perspectives). He dedicated a long

part of his work to African Traditional Religions and their impact on the problem. According to Fr. Mugisa Charismatic Pentecostalism resonates with indigenous religious tradition. Pentecostalism seems to tap into many Ugandans' socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Ordinary events in life such as accidents or natural disasters are attributed to evil forces that one must constantly protect himself against. Because of fear and insecurity, people often patronize the services of medicine men. Before the advent of Christianity, Africans had evolved ways of dealing with adversities like diseases, sorcerers, witches, enemies, and retrogression in life, however, the missionaries asked converted indigenes to do away with these methods of charms, local medicines, incantations, divination, sacrifices and other cultural ways of protecting, healing and liberating self from evil powers.

Fr. Mugisa has paid a tribute to all Christian missionaries in Ugandan history: not only Catholic missionaries, but also Anglican and Orthodox. The most impressive and positive part of his study is a presentation of the Catholic Church's contribution to the health care system of Uganda, practically since the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries. The White Fathers found themselves among rural dwellers in Africa, people whose oral traditions were interwoven with references to the flora and fauna of the African countryside. The medicine people successfully treated different kinds of diseases with the help of herbs, colored soil, leaves of plants, birds' feathers, plant leaves and roots, reptiles. However, these medicines were ignored by Western doctors and some missionaries who did not understand them. Missionaries fostered the devotion to the Virgin Mary, distributed religious articles of faith to the Christians (medals, scapulars, rosaries), these became tools of prayers used by Africans to counteract evil forces. Today the Catholic Church in Uganda is a 'champion' in providing the health care. Some religious are qualified medical personnel and have been instrumental in serving in health centers. Some being recognized with prestigious awards.

WEAKNESSES IN THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

I have perceived some kind of chaos in Fr. Mugisa's doctoral dissertation which is unfortunately present on a few important levels. First of all, the multitude of perspectives Fr. Mugisa had taken into account has created a problem to him. Plenty of detailed information he has given and plenty of research sources (monographs, articles, dictionaries, lexicons) on so many topics Fr. Mugisa wished to explore (history of Uganda, African Traditional Religions, history of missionary activity in Uganda, health care system in Uganda in the past

and today, history of Religions, sociology, sociology of Religion, economics, biblical studies, theology, Magisterium teaching, pastoral theology perspective) have caused a little chaos on the level of research effectiveness. The main problem the dissertation takes up belongs to theology in a broad sense (including pastoral theology and interdisciplinary research). However, because Fr. Mugisa has given too much attention (and trust) to non-theological perspectives and knowledge (historical, sociological) he sometimes ‘misses the (theological) point’. This is why in his dissertation Neo-Pentecostal ‘Prosperity Gospel’ phenomenon is sometimes called ‘Churches’, sometimes ‘communities’, sometimes ‘new religious movement’, and sometimes sects. It should be noted that the topic of Fr. Mugisa’s dissertation does not contain any specific name for this phenomenon. The first part of the topic says: *The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry* [but at once the fundamental question arises: what is it? *Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry: tendencies?, trends?, movements?, sects?*] *in African Pentecostalism*. I do not insist that for English-speaking people the topic as it is does not sound clear, but also English-speaking people would appreciate if the Author is scholarly (theologically) precise from the beginning. I can bet that the Catholic Church in Uganda would greatly appreciate if Fr. Mugisa’s dissertation answers the following questions: what is a Catholic evaluation of ‘the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry’ phenomena in African Pentecostalism? What name (category) should be given to it by Catholic understanding of the Church (and Christianity)? Taking into account some unjust and unfair methods ‘the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry’ preachers use, is this still a part of Christianity or not? Can we find in the history of the Church (Christianity) any analogy to ‘the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry’ phenomena (how about ancient gnostic movements, ancient mysterious cults? How about heresies?). I can bet that the Catholic Church in Uganda would greatly appreciate if Fr. Mugisa would include in his methodology some innovative methods, like for example in-deph interviews (for example with young people who left the Catholic Church and joined those new religious movements; with people who joined those movements and left them because had become disappointed). It would lift up the level of research results.

Language (grammar) hesitations have caused some kind of already mentioned chaos. Very often Fr. Mugisa writes the words ‘church’ and ‘gospel’ in small letters, and very often in big letters. He hesitates how to name (and put on paper) the terms: ‘the Gospel of Prosperity’ and ‘Healing Ministry’. On page 157 he decided to say: so-called prosperity gospel, but he took it after Fr. Donald Zagoré. If we understand the Gospel as it is comprehended in main Christian

Churches, 'the Gospel of Prosperity' must be put in brackets. Chaos and total freedom in 'the Gospel of Prosperity' preachers' minds must not effect a clear mind of a theologian. A non-parallel structure of Chapters Three and Four has caused some kind of disarray. Chapter Three deals with *The Gospel of Prosperity* and Chapter Four with *The Healing Ministry*. However Chapter Four begins with the Holy Scripture perspective, when Chapter Three mentions that perspective at the end.

As it has already been mentioned Bibliography collected by F. Mugisa is very extensive (pp. 242-273) and impressive. However there is a little chaos and mistake in it. Fr. Mugisa has put 'Other Ecclesiastical Documents' in Bibliography (on page 242) between conciliar documents and papal documents which is not – according to Church documents authority hierarchy – a proper solution. In addition, he has put 'Other Magisterial Documents' (on page 244) where he 'repeated' some documents from 'Other Ecclesiastical Documents' part of Bibliography.

I have also detected some other small mistakes and weaknesses. On the front page we can see the topic of the dissertation. The first part of it is written in bold characters. How about the other part which is written in non-bold characters? Does it not belong to the topic? There is a small mistake in Chapter Two title: *Uganda's General Social-Economic [a 'coma' is missing] Religious and Political Situation*. What Fr. Mugisa wrote on page 12 is a repetition of some parts of Introduction. In General Conclusion we find some repetitions taken from previous parts of the dissertation. On page 165 Fr. Mugisa wrote 'Redemptoris Hominis' (Encyclical Letter by John Paul II) instead of 'Redemptor Hominis'.

All weaknesses discovered in Fr. Mugisa's doctoral dissertation does not effect this dissertation final evaluation which is definitely positive.

QUESTIONS TO FR. SAMUEL MUGISA (to be asked at the public exam):

1. According to Catholic theology (ecclesiology) what is a theological difference between the following terms: 'Church', 'Christian Community', and 'Christian movement'?
2. Analogically, what is a theological difference between Christian Community (or Christian movement) and a sect?
3. Is so-called theology of liberation (theoretical – European or practical – South-American) known in Uganda and its neighbor countries?

FINAL CONCLUSION

In final conclusion, on the basis of what has been presented above, I affirm that the doctoral dissertation: *The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda* (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw 2021) written by Fr. Mgr. Lic. Samuel Mugisa meets all requirements for doctoral dissertations according to *The Act of Higher Education* in the Republic of Poland (in Polish: *Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym*) Chapter 2, Part 1, Art. 187. Specifically speaking: Fr. Mugisa's doctoral dissertation is a scholar monograph (Art. 187, nr 3), Fr. Mugisa's doctoral dissertation presents the general theoretical knowledge of the Candidate in the field of theology and his ability to conduct scientific work (Art. 187, nr 1), the subject of Fr. Mugisa's doctoral dissertation constitutes an original solving of a scientific problem (Art. 187, nr 2).

That is why I appeal to Theological Sciences Discipline Council of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw Faculty of Theology for an admission Fr. Mgr. Lic. Samuel Mugisa to further stages of gaining a doctoral degree procedure.

Rev. Krzysztof Kaucha

Rev. Dr. Habil. Krzysztof Kaucha