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**Review of the doctoral dissertation by Ft. Constantine Rupiny, M.A.,
entitled *Alur Customary Marriage in Light of the Catholic Sacrament of
Marriage* (231 pp.),**

prepared under the direction of Fr. Professor Jarosław Różański, Ph.D., Dr. Hab.

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This opinion is divided into three parts. In the first, I deal with the subject of the study and indicate the chosen research objectives and questions; I refer to the structure and content of the dissertation as well as the methods used in the analysis. In the second part, I present the evaluation of the research and dissertation and formulate some inquiries. In the final, third part, I present the conclusion.

1. The subject of research and its scholarly character

The subject of research falls within theology, specifically dogmatic theology. The doctoral thesis of Fr. Constantine Rupiny is a case study of the marriage tradition of the Alur people (who live especially in Uganda) in light of the Catholic sacrament of

marriage and is part of broader studies of traditional¹ African marriage in relation to Christian marriage. The selection of this original case for research can make a significant contribution to the theology of the sacrament of marriage, especially in a condition – as Fr. C. Rupiny points out – of the existence of a dichotomy in doctrine and practice between the Christian marriage and the traditional marriage of the Alur people (p. 1).

The author has formulated the following objective for his research: “an attempt to present the Catholic doctrine of the sacrament of marriage (...) for a faithful evangelisation of the Alur by entering into a dialogue with their culture so that Christian marriage does not appear foreign to them”. The author also aims to offer the Church the possibility of doctrinal and canonical inclusion into the Christian marriage preparation, celebration, and postmarital support of some elements of the traditional marriage of the Alur people, “while being aware of the need for further studies in this subject matter” and avoiding syncretism (p. 2).

The research was based on two basic questions: 1) Is the Church open to borrowing from cultures of people some of their valuable customs and traditions which can authentically contribute to the Christian life and the glory of God? And 2) Which elements of Alur customary marriage are compatible with Catholic doctrine and practice of marriage and can be borrowed by the Church to contribute to the Christian life and the glory of God? (p. 2). The questions framed in this way are in direct correlation with the adopted research objectives.

Let me now synthetically refer to the structure and content of the dissertation. In the Introduction (pp. 1-5), the author explained and presented the choice of the scholarly subject, research objectives and questions, research methodology, sources, the structure of the dissertation, and the boundaries set for the study. In Chapter One (pp. 6-69), the Christian understanding of marriage is demonstrated. In Chapter Two (pp. 70-122), the culture of the Alur people and their specific marriage customs and

¹ The author of the dissertation uses the term “customary” and has the full right to do so. I allow myself to use the adjective “traditional”, being aware of the shortcomings that are sometimes blamed on this term in relation to African cultures. On the other hand, one of the most famous contemporary African thinkers Paulin J. Hountondji proposes to use the term “endogenous” in the African cultural context. See, for example, Paulin J. Hountondji, *Producing Knowledge in Africa Today*, in: P.H. Coetzee, A.P.J. Roux (eds.), *Philosophy from Africa: Second Edition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, p. 505 and Paulin J. Hountondji, *Introduction: Recentring Africa*, in: P.J. Hountondji (ed.), *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails*, Codesria, Dakar 1997, pp. 16-17. On these kinds of terminological problems in the analysis of African cultures, see also Patrick Chabal, *Africa: The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, Zed Books, London 2009, especially p. 66.

rituals are explained. These two chapters form the foundation for Chapter Three (pp. 123-178) which perfectly copes with an analysis of the Alur traditional marriage in view of Christian theology. In Chapter Four (pp. 179-220), pastoral and liturgical proposals for Catholic-Alur marriage preparation and celebration are offered. The main body of the dissertation ends with a general conclusion (pp. 221-222). Detailed conclusions close each chapter of the dissertation (p. 68-69, 122, 177-178, 220).

The dissertation falls within the research approach of inculturation understood in the sense of adapting Christian teachings and practices (here specifically Catholic) among people who join the Christian faith. This adaptation takes place with respect for their native traditional cultures. Inculturation should be understood even more broadly as a process of mutual, gradual cultural transformation taking place among peoples undergoing Christianization, as well as within the Christian faith itself, which by adjusting the liturgy to a given culture and tolerating its traditional practices, takes on a more local expression. In other words, inculturation through the presentation and implementation of Christian teaching in terms and forms typical for a given culture causes a certain reinterpretation of both. If we tried to look for a (distant?) analogy to social sciences here, the term "inculturation" is closer to integration and further to assimilation.

In light of the objectives adopted by the author, it can be assumed that the analyses and conclusions contained in the dissertation are aimed at facilitating the process of inculturation among the Alur people, taking into account the importance of the institution of marriage.

The author of the dissertation has used doctrinal-pastoral and liturgical approaches in the analysis of the core of the research problem. Especially when analyzing the evolution of some elements of the traditional Alur marriage, a historical approach has been employed. Parts of the thesis are intended to introduce the main research problem and explain it and as such must be descriptive.

Regarding the selection of research sources, the main ones are of theological and anthropological nature. Among the theological sources, the following are of major importance: selected – in terms of the research problem – documents of Church councils, synods, and Vatican Congregations; certain papal documents; and the theological works of particular theologians. The thesis includes references to Sacred Scripture.

The author of the dissertation comes from the Alur people. He grew up in their culture and is familiar with the marriage among the Alur. As an observer and participant in the traditional Alur marriage practices, he is a primary source of knowledge about them. This is significant and valuable, especially considering that the Alur culture has not yet been studied in depth by many anthropologists.

However, to describe the Alur cultural system of Alur, the author has sought available sources in the field of anthropology, including the essential work entitled "Alur Society: A Study in Processes and Types of Domination" by Aidan William Southall.

The author of the research and dissertation offers some pastoral and liturgical solutions aimed at inculturation, particularly in the field of preparation, celebration, and post-sacramental catechesis of marriage. However, he is aware that both the research he has carried out and the proposals presented in the dissertation do not fully exhaust the research problem.

2. Evaluation of the research and dissertation

My assessment of the research and dissertation is high. The content of the dissertation allows me to state with full responsibility that Fr. Constantine Rupiny has passionately conducted original and needed studies. His analysis develops knowledge both in the field of inculturation in sub-Saharan Africa and in the area of traditional cultures and their duration in modern times in general. It is worth noting that the problem of inculturation in sub-Saharan Africa has long been in the sphere of the principal research interests of the promoter of the reviewed doctoral dissertation, Fr. Professor Jarosław Róžański.²

I consider the case of the Alur marriage selected for research to be particularly valuable in the perspective of the hitherto relatively modest scholarly knowledge relating to both the Alur marriage practices and the process of inculturation among the Alur people. I find the author's considerations profound and dependable.

² See, for example, Jarosław Róžański, *Inkultuacja Kościoła wśród ludów Środkowego Sudanu* [*Inculturation of the Church Among the Peoples of Central Sudan*], Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, Wydział Teologiczny, Poznań 2004; Jarosław Róžański, *Wokół koncepcji inkultuacji* [*Around the Concept of Inculturation*], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Warszawa 2008; Jarosław Róžański, Głównie dziedziny inkultuacji [*Main Realms of Inculturation*], "Studia Theologica Varsaviensia" 2011, No. 2, pp. 43-78; Jarosław Róžański, Założenia inkultuacji [*Assumptions of Inculturation*], "Lumen Gentium. Zeszyty Misjologiczne" 2013, No. 1, pp. 7-33.

The subject of the research has been appropriately established within the framework of the issue of inculturation. The author of the study has proved knowledge of the methodology of theological sciences and the proper use of appropriate specific methods for the implementation of the adopted research goals. These goals have been fully achieved. The research was based on a carefully and adequately selected source basis. The bibliography of the dissertation (pp. 223-231) should be considered comprehensive.

The author maturely builds in the dissertation a cause-and-effect relationship between the successive issues he analyzes. Consequently, it must be noted that the work structure forms a coherent and logical whole. The author's argument is fluid.

The research and the conclusions drawn from them are exploratory and even – taking into account the presented proposals – innovative. It is worth recalling that in the last part of the dissertation, the author presented pastoral-liturgical proposals specially for Catholic-Alur marriage preparation and celebration.

In my opinion, the dissertation is a successful attempt to demonstrate the possibility of incorporating some elements of the traditional marriage of the Alur people into the Catholic marriage preparation, wedding celebration and catechesis, and pastoral assistance.

This attempt presents some foundations for this inclusion, well-established conceptually. As the author of the dissertation proves, the inculturation of Christian marriage is possible due to the compatibility of some elements of the traditional marriage among the Alur people with Christian marriage, especially the specified values that are characteristic of both models of marriage.

It is worth highlighting that the author of the dissertation displayed knowledge of both the Christian doctrine of marriage and the marriage customs of the Alur people. As he points out, the ultimate goal of the presented proposals is "to have a Christian marriage which is inculturated into Alur culture, but without losing the sense of the universality of the Church." (p. 221). I am convinced that the findings and propositions made by the author of the dissertation may be useful in the perspective of the development of dialogue between Christianity and the culture of the Alur people.

It is also worth noting that the author is fully aware of the existence of certain elements in the Alur culture that are incompatible with a Christian marriage and cannot be included in the Christian lifestyle if only to avoid syncretism. The author points to further research possibilities, including in this regard. This author's approach proves his scholarly maturity.

The assessed dissertation, although very rich and complete, can be treated, just like any other study, as an introduction to further considerations. The author of the research and dissertation analyzes the issue of traditional authority (kings, different categories of chief) in the context of the traditional marriage of the Alur people. However, he does so from a historical and anthropological perspective (see especially pp. 71-73, 83, 91, 95, 98, 119-120, 170-171). I would like to learn more about the possible role of the traditional authority in the process of inculturation. In this domain, I would have a few questions, namely:

- What is the attitude of the traditional authority towards the reform of the institution of marriage in the context of inculturation?
- Does this authority already play a role in this transformation? If not, what role may it play?

Moreover, I wonder if the institution of marriage among the Alurs in the Democratic Republic of Congo has any other attributes than among the Alurs in Uganda?

- And how is the process of inculturation going there?

I do not see these issues as weaknesses of the study that need to be supplemented. The answer to these questions can rather be treated as supplementary material, serving to obtain an even better effect in the publication perspective of the reviewed dissertation. These issues can also be treated as my inquiries in the perspective of defending the dissertation by the author.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, I shall state that the reviewed dissertation meets the requirements of the application process for obtaining the Doctoral Degree in Theology (Dogmatic Theology), which, as a consequence, qualifies Fr. Constantine Rupiny, M.A., to continue the further stages of the Doctoral Degree process.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Constantine Rupiny', is centered on the page.