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Review of the doctoral dissertation of Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh  
entitled: A VISION OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY IN THE LIGHT OF THE  
DOCUMENTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CAMEROON (pp. 228), written at the  
Faculty of Theology of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Warsaw under the  
direction of Prof. Dr Krzysztof Kietliński

## 1. Introduction

In the modern world, perhaps even more than any other institution, the family has been beset by many profound and rapid changes affecting society and culture. Many families live in this situation in fidelity to those values which constitute the foundation of the institution of the family. Others have become uncertain and bewildered over their role or even doubtful and almost unaware of conjugal and family life's ultimate meaning and truth. Finally, others are hindered by various situations of injustice in realising their fundamental rights.

Knowing that marriage and family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living their family lives freely. Supporting the first, illuminating the second and assisting the others, the Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family (FC 1). This is how John Paul II expressed his great concern for marriage and family in the apostolic exhortation "Familiaris consortio". This document was an inspiration for individual Episcopal



Conferences of countries around the world to work out detailed solutions regarding the pastoral care of families.

In a way, the answer to this call is the doctoral dissertation of Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh, who studied the concept of marriage and family in the light of the Catholic Church documents in Cameroon.

## 2. Sources, purpose, problem and method of the dissertation

The author of the dissertation from Cameroon drew attention to the specificity of the crisis regarding marriage and family. Although this problem concerns the whole world, it is not homogeneous. Rightly presenting the context of the issue, he noted: "The Cameroonian society, like most African countries, suffers from the crisis in a unique way, especially in the area of polygamy, separation and divorce, cohabitation, forced and early marriages, contraception, abortion, irresponsible parenthood, single parenthood, infertility, hatred and division, disrespect, disobedience and neglect of one's parents and relatives. The irregularities have far-reaching negative consequences for this life and the life to come" (p. 10).

The subject of the doctoral thesis suggested that it would be a look at marriage and family in the light of the documents of the Catholic Church in Cameroon. As it turns out, however, the sources indicated in the title refer to the fourth part of the dissertation. In the bibliographic description, they are included in the literature on the subject, which is a certain shortcoming of the work. The sources used by the doctoral student included patristic sources, Magisterium Ecclesiae documents, especially encyclicals, papal exhortations and speeches, and documents of the Holy See, which offer specific conclusions and theological premises.

In the introduction, the author indicated the main aim of the research: "this work aims at clarifying the position of the Church, and ultimately God's will, for marriage and the family. The elaborate study of the conditions of marriage and the family of the social context (Cameroon) is indispensable for a comparative study of the Gospel and the cultural values" (p. 11).

The doctoral student is convinced of an innovative approach to the researched issue, which in turn has a chance to bring many good results. "This research, thus, seeks to make a unique contribution to the world of theology by studying the Catholic teaching on the subject side by side with the Cameroonian context, thereby identifying the meeting points as well as the points of disagreement, and attempting to resolve the tension" (p. 13).

The questions asked by the author helped to achieve the research objective. Among them was the basic question: "what are the complex moral problems with regard to marriage and the family in Cameroon, especially in the Diocese of Kumbo?" (p. 13). Apart from that, the doctoral student asked eight auxiliary questions. "The first is: what does the Catholic Church teach about marriage and the family and where can this teaching be found? The second: what are the living conditions of marriage and the family in Cameroon? The third: what can be known about some of the customs of marriage and the family in Cameroon? The fourth: what is the nature of the state policy for marriage and the family in Cameroon? The fifth: do the identified living conditions of marriage and the family contribute to the multiple moral problems of the contemporary Cameroonian society or are there other causes? The sixth: how does the Diocese of Kumbo respond to the specific moral problems? The seventh: to what extent does the Catholic vision contribute to the improvement of the well-being of marriage and the family in the Cameroonian society? The eight: what specific challenges for the functioning of the family should be addressed in the future?" (p. 13-14).

The research objective set in the introduction to the dissertation has been sufficiently achieved. The analysis of the work shows, however, that this goal was not explicitly formulated in the title of the work. The title suggested an analysis of the documents of the Catholic Church in Cameroon. The author, however, dealt with this perspective only in the fourth chapter. In my opinion, the doctoral candidate dealt with the situation in Cameroon, particularly in the diocese of Kumbo, as a case study of the implementation of the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and family. It is a pity that this was not clarified in the subject of the dissertation.

The doctoral student used analytical, descriptive and critical methods in the thesis (p. 14). However, the synthesis method played a significant role, which the author did not mention but consistently used. The doctoral candidate made generalisations through the analysis of the source material and drew conclusions that showed the multifaceted nature of the analysed issue in accordance with the synthesis method mentioned above. The author used the methods used correctly.

It should be noted that the reviewed work required great commitment from its author. This was confirmed by analyses and then a synthesis based on solidly collected research material.



### 3. Structure of the dissertation

Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh's doctoral dissertation consists of a correctly prepared list of abbreviations, an introduction (pp. 9-17), four chapters divided into introductions, paragraphs and summaries (pp. 18-195), a conclusion (pp. 196-201), from an extensive bibliography (pp. 202-215) containing a list of sources, documents of the Magisterium of the Church and auxiliary literature and three annexes. I have already presented critical remarks regarding the preparation of the list of sources.

In the first chapter (pp. 18-73), the author decided to present the Catholic foundations of teaching on marriage and family. He began with the biblical message on this subject, presenting God's plan in this regard. Then, he analysed the statements of selected Fathers of the Church and studied the documents of the Church. The author did a good analysis and synthesis. In the second chapter (pp. 74-115) of the dissertation, the PhD student dealt with the living conditions of marriage and family, with particular emphasis on the Cameroonian context. First, he undertook a historical analysis and then dealt with the presentation of Cameroon's cultural background. In his research, the doctoral student came to the conclusion that the values resulting from the native culture can enrich the Church's teaching on marriage and family. Based on the conducted research, the author indicates the possibility of a constructive dialogue with Christianity. In the further part of the research, the PhD student focused on the state policy towards marriage and family. There were also studies indicating economic and educational issues in this regard.

The third chapter of the dissertation (pp. 116-141) contains issues regarding the socio-moral reasons for marriage and family in Cameroon. The author of the movement points to a number of causal causes of the causal crises. They divided themselves into two categories: socio-cultural and socio-moral. The first one included: globalisation, gender ideology, war and emigration. The second category included: polygamy, divorce, irresponsible parenting, materialism and consumerism - the influence of people.

The authors' research shows that globalisation introduces social changes. There are some positive elements of these changes in the native culture. At the same time, there are also pejorative influences such as the disappearance of traditional values, a new mentality that undermines the functioning of the traditional family based on gospel values. In addition, during the research, the PhD student examines the problem of polygamy, divorce, and irresponsible parenting. All of this and its effects have an impact on the quality of marriage and the

functioning of the family. In this chapter, the author pointed out important contexts that should be taken into account for the kind of analysis he undertook in the dissertation.

Chapter four (pp. 116-195) attempts to apply socio-moral guidelines for marriage and family in the diocese of Kumbo. At first, the author characterises the diocese. He takes into account the historical, geographical, cultural and socio-moral aspects. He is convinced that the Catholic vision of marriage and family can be concretely applied in this specific environment. As proof of this, he points to the possibility of engaging clergy and lay workers in work for marriage and family through evangelisation, catechesis and direct accompaniment. The doctoral student gives a number of valuable tips on preparing prospective couples for marriage. The activities of the diocesan Church of the Diocese of Kumbo are a concrete response to the crisis of marriage and family. Pre-emptive and preventive actions are indicated here. They are the author's original proposals.

The conclusion of the work (pp. 196-201) is a successful résumé, recapitulating in a synthetic and essential way of "fruits" of the dissertation.

#### 4. General dissertation assessment and questions for the PhD student.

Reading the doctoral thesis of Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh allows us to conclude that the goal that has been set was achieved initially. The methods used allowed the author to answer the research-posed problems. Undoubtedly, a very important achievement of the reviewed doctorate is that the dissertation is a collection of a rich bibliography.

When evaluating Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh's doctoral dissertation, the importance of the case by the author of the issue should be justified. He collected, analysed and systematised source materials and drew correct conclusions. In addition, new research perspectives were proposed—everything to testify about his scientific maturity.

Summing up, it can be said that the author of the dissertation created a very good basis for subsequent researchers of the issues of marriage and family, not only in Cameroon but also in Africa.

Louis Mbuyeh Ngeha's doctoral dissertation generally meets all criteria of scientific work. The very positive aspects of the formal side of work include precision scientific language and correct and consistent footnotes. Noteworthy are also the very good introductions and summaries of individual chapters as well as the careful and aesthetic graphic page of the work. However, there are occasional shortcomings. For example, on page 60 in footnote 275 there was an unnecessary space. On page 86, footnote 422 is missing a period.

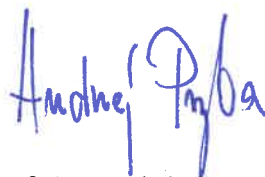
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After a very interesting reading of the dissertation of Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh the following questions arise from the reviewer:

1. What aspects of Christian family teaching are particularly difficult in Cameroon? Are detailed solutions possible?
2. In the context of work among families, are there any aspects of the teaching on marriage that stem more from European than Christian culture? Is it possible to reinterpret the Christian teaching on marriage in Cameroon in a less Europeanised version?

#### 5. Final conclusion

The whole doctoral dissertation should be assessed positively. The dissertation of Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh was written in a very mature, methodological and formal way. It is an independent scientific achievement that fully meets the requirements of doctoral dissertations. Therefore, I am asking for its acceptance by the Council of the Faculty of Theology of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University of Warsaw and admission of the PhD student to the further stages of the doctoral proceedings.



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