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Rev. Prof. Sławomir Nowosad
Faculty of Theology
John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

A Review of the Doctoral Thesis

***A Vision of Marriage and the Family in the Light of the Documents of the Catholic Church
in Cameroon***

written by Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh

(Warsaw 2022, pp. 228)

Any study and research in marriage and family issues is of highest importance, particularly in the contemporary context of a widespread anthropological and moral confusion. This allows to express an initial acknowledgement of L.M. Ngeh's thesis supervised by Rev Prof. Krzysztof Kietliński and submitted here for evaluation.

1. An outline of the contents

L.M. Ngeh's thesis deals with the understanding of marriage and the family as it is presented and promoted by the Catholic Church in Cameroon. This work is made up of four chapters supplemented by Abbreviations (p. iii), Table of Contents (iv-viii), General Introduction (9-17), General Conclusion (196-201), Bibliography (202-215) and Appendices (216-228).

Chapter One (18-73) presents the fundamentals of the Catholic vision of marriage and the family. It first points to the biblical message on the subject, then explores the rich Catholic teaching, and finally focuses on the moral dimension of this concept.

The point of interest of the following chapter (74-115) is the Cameroonian context in its many dimensions. First it is about a cultural as well as historical issues that resulted at the contemporary situation. What follows is the state policy concerning marriage and family life. The third subchapter here explores an economic aspects of family life in Cameroon.

In Chapter Three (116-141) the author endeavours to identify the principal reasons for the serious crisis of marriage and family life in Cameroon. Hence, this part of the thesis refers both to cultural influences (like globalization, gender ideology and war and immigration aspects) and to social and moral risks (polygamy, divorce mentality and practice).

Chapter Four (142-195) is an attempt at resolving and healing the crisis based on an example of the Cameroonian Diocese of Kumbo. This part of the thesis first outlines a social and ecclesial characterization of the diocese, then it points to principal moral and social issues that bring about the most significant manifestations of the marital and family crisis. Finally, all the many aspects of pastoral engagement in the diocese, dealing with the crisis, have been put forward.

2. An assessment of the thesis

The title of the thesis is clear in its formulation though in some way not fully exhausting the researched issue. The term “vision” tends to point to a concept or an idea rather than aiming at covering the whole problem with its practical (moral) dimension, as the thesis does. Hence it might have been more accurate to define the title as, for example, “Marriage and family life...” . However, the author makes it clear that his aim is to “address the moral problem of marriage and the family” (11) or “this work aims at clarifying the position of the Church [...] for marriage and the family”. It is all well clarified on p. 13-14 when posing several questions that are crucial for the research and thesis, particularly when Fr Ngeh claims that his research “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” (13). Additionally, Fr Ngeh states elsewhere that his fundamental goal is to “offer a Catholic moral vision of marriage and the family to the Cameroonian society, especially in the Diocese of Kumbo” (17). Perhaps one could add to this that the vision presented in the thesis is also doctrinal and pastoral, not just moral.

The structure of the thesis is appropriate and generally well balanced. All its main parts correspond to the researched issue. Both the four chapters and their subchapters fit together into a harmonious whole. All chapters and subchapters have their own introductions and conclusions which proves the author continues to be in control of his work. The author is aware of the methods he chose to use in his work (14). The thesis in its entirety certifies that those methods have been properly used in order to reach the main goal.

The thesis is based on relevant ecclesial teaching on the subject, both of the universal Church and of the teaching of the Cameroonian bishops, including of the Bishop of Kumbo. Fr Ngeh is, too, aware of other important international literature (11-12). However the author might have been clearer in stating in Introduction which Church documents and relevant theological literature are to be regarded as the main sources. The General Conclusion is an appropriate summary of the whole project in which the author proves to be fully aware of his objectives throughout the thesis and how he has managed to attain them.

The language of the thesis is stylistically and grammatically correct, very frequently even sophisticated, with a rich vocabulary. No doubt the author has written his thesis carefully and with utmost attention. No major linguistic errors have been spotted. Only on rare occasions cases of ineptitude need correction like 10: “the widespread of divorce” – “widespread” is an

adjective; 59: “A few of these concerns shall highlighted” - ?; 75: “Atlantic Ocean” (rather than Atlantic Sea); 82: “with regard to” or “as regards”.

Both in the bibliography and in footnotes Fr Ngeh has consistently followed one bibliographical rule. The structure of Bibliography is correct. Only infrequently one can notice some omissions or inconsistencies in bibliographical descriptions: 50, 59: while in most cases the first reference to a papal document gives its full details (e.g. p. 54, 57) sometimes it is different (note 222, 271, 549 etc.); 11, 12, 24, 28 etc. (and in Bibliography e.g. Bam, Cheka, Fenske, *Human Migration*, Luxmoore; Ruppel, Sanosi): some capital letters in English titles missing; 12: “the first-degree dissertation” in 2028?; 29: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* – 1994?, on p. 202: 1997?; 33: footnote 133 – ‘ibid., n. 2’ - ?; 54: one should not call John Paul II’s *Letter to Families* “a forty-three page document”, it may and does vary due to its publication format; 57: the accurate title of *Donum Vitae* is *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation*; 58: the link in the footnote 268 is mistaken as it refers to Pope Benedict’s address to the Pontifical Council for Culture; 97: “p.” and “pp.” missing; 202: pages missing for the *Decree for the Training of Priests*; 202: *Gaudium et Spes* – pp. 903-1001; 203: *Amoris Laetitia* issued on 19.03.2026?; 205: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace – no italics needed here; the same further down Diocese of Kumbo and other names (of institutions as authors), and in several footnotes; 206, 2010, 2011, 214: several entries not in an alphabetical order; 207, 208 etc.: capital letters not needed in Polish titles. The books by A.L. Sikali, J.B. Sourou, C. Lukong, mentioned in General Introduction, are missing in Bibliography. Bp Nkuo’s homilies and other texts from Appendices missing in Bibliography. The popes (papal teaching) should be put in a chronological order, rather than alphabetically (202-204). It is unclear why in case of editors or translators their Christian names (initials) follow the surnames (in several instances). It is better to start page numbering from 1 in each chapter.

Fr Ngeh’s thesis is a serious and scholarly mature study. The entire thesis is marked by a clear and precise argumentation. A high number of references in footnotes is very useful and helps to understand the author’s reasoning. Chapter 1 has been very well elaborated, and it adequately documents the development of the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family, including biblical and patristic sources. In one case (57-58) it seems doubtful that, beside *Deus Caritas Est*, just one address of Pope Benedict XVI could be considered as having “a special bearing on marriage and the family” (57). Some accounts, though well written, seem too detailed (for example in Chapter Two or Chapter Four). It would be more welcome to devote more room for the Church’s attempts to deal with irregularities, challenges or clearly mistaken practices in the local ecclesial context. Those attempts could take the form of a committed proclamation of Catholic faith, a deepened Christian formation, family catechesis and sacramental practice. The author seems to be aware of this when he writes, in the context of divorce, that “divorce is a manifest sign of the loss of faith, hope and love” which as “the theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity” (166).

Though a short one (visibly shorter than others), Chapter Three correctly describes the major phenomena that can be regarded as the causes contributing to the widespread crisis of marriage and family life. Those include gender ideology leading to “the fluidity of gender”

(120) and in fact “ridicules the institution of marriage and the family” (122), globalization that “leads to the substitution of traditional values with foreign ones with little or no value for the local people” (117). Among those causes there are also war and immigration that provoke an ever more frequent marriage and family breakdowns which result in a separation of couples and of children: “Husbands and wives are torn apart either by the death of one or the other, imprisonment, or escape for safety. [...] children are separated or distanced from their parents” (125). Among other reasons of the serious family crisis “social-moral threats” like “polygamy, divorce, irresponsible parenthood, materialism/consumerism and third-party influence” (127ff). While some of those phenomena are not unknown to other nations and cultures, some are more locally characteristic. It is interesting how the in-laws, in the context of the patriarchal African family, may lead a marriage to a breakdown. Fr Ngeh quotes Cardinal Tumi who says that when “the mother-in-law lives with the married couple there is a significant chance that the marriage will end in failure” (140).

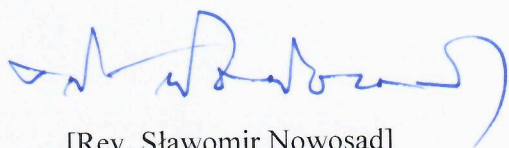
I believe Chapter Four is of a unique interest for an European reader. Particularly how the Church manages with issues like for instance polygamy or divorce. A much-needed solution in the form of the Association of Traditional Rulers seems to be effective: “A monogamous Catholic who has become a traditional ruler would be assisted to adopt a different relationship towards the wives of his predecessor” (165). It is an obvious truth that the root cause of any moral crisis and rejection of Christian morality is the crisis of faith. This chapter, particularly in its third subchapter, shows how much it is vital for the Diocese of Kumbo to educate young people to be responsible adults and conscious Catholics, above all in the sphere of marriage and family life. Fr Ngeh himself is committed to let the reader find out how his local Church in Kumbo endeavours to guide men and women to mature Christian parenthood. Marriage preparation courses as well as retreats for married couples and families must be leading to an authentic integrity of marriage and family life of the faithful. Very interesting are the author’s remarks about the diocesan programmes of education for disinterested love, chastity and fidelity (186ff).

In order to complement Fr Ngeh’s study I would like to pose one question to the author of the thesis: You have spent not a short time in Poland and are now capable of comparing Cameroon and Poland, their cultural and ecclesial situations, corresponding threats and challenges in both countries. What can Poland (and Europe) learn from Cameroonian Catholic Church in the sphere of marriage and family life, family ministry etc., and what can Cameroon learn from Poland? Is it possible to have, in this sense, an exchange of gifts between the two Churches and nations?

Having taken into account all the above-mentioned and highlighted elements Fr Louis Mbuyeh Ngeh’s doctoral thesis *A Vision of Marriage and the Family in the Light of the Documents of the Catholic Church in Cameroon* both in its content and structure is a methodologically correct and mature scholarly work. As such it is original scholarship that complies with the scholarly criteria, ethical and legal regulations and norms that concern doctoral dissertations. Consequently, I recommend that Fr L.M. Ngeh be accepted for further

stages of the doctoral procedures at the Faculty of Theology of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University.

W przekonaniu recenzenta praca doktorska ks. L.M. Ngeh pt. *A Vision of Marriage and the Family in the Light of the Documents of the Catholic Church in Cameroon* spełnia merytoryczne, formalne i etyczne wymogi stawiane tego typu pracom. Stąd stawiam wniosek, by ks. L.M. Ngeh został dopuszczony do dalszych etapów przewodu doktorskiego.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Sławomir Nowosad', written in a cursive style.

[Rev. Sławomir Nowosad]