



## **The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda**

Samuel Mugisa has submitted a dissertation entitled "The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda" to Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. In this dissertation he analyses the challenges of the Pentecostal churches in Africa and their Gospel of Prosperity. On his chosen topic, Mugisa writes: "The central focus of this study is to investigate how the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry as experienced and proliferated in African Pentecostalism poses a theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda with regard to its holistic mission, especially its response to the scourge of poverty, exorcism and healing." (1)

The Pentecostalism or Pentecostal movement described by Mugisa is a movement that is not only limited to Africa but can be observed globally, which is characterised - especially from the perspective of the Catholic Church - by a confusing heterogeneity and which defies strict typological categorisation. In the academic context, Pentecostalism is assigned to the phenomenon of "New Religious Movements" and is characterised by the emphasis on religious experience, the appeal to the emotions, the practice of healing rituals, the proximity to psychotherapy, the influence of religious attitudes on personal, family, professional or social developments, media staging and the emphasis on personal conversion. The success of the Pentecostal movement represents an essential phenomenon of Christian modernity, which the church must face up to and find adequate answers to.

Charles Fox Parham is considered the spiritual father of the Pentecostal movement. At his Bible school in Topeka in 1901, he placed glossolalia (speaking in tongues) theologically in a pneumatological context. His theological teaching was taken up in Los Angeles by William J. Seymore. From there, numerous Pentecostal church plants started in the United States and worldwide. In the 1950s, the charismatic renewal emerged in a second development period, from which numerous Pentecostal churches were founded in Europe and the United States. In a so-called "Third Wave", there has been an explosive founding of Pentecostal churches since the 1970s, especially in countries of the southern hemisphere, some of which regard themselves as daughter churches of (mostly US) Pentecostal churches, but mostly as Latin American, African or Asian indigenous churches. This growth phenomenon can also be observed in Africa, especially with regard to the churches south of the Sahara. It can be seen that the rapid growth of Christianity that has been recorded since then is neither in the Catholic Church nor in the mainstream Protestant churches. These newly founded churches for which a uniform semantic designation can hardly be found and which, depending on the orientation of the church, can be described as "fundamentalist", "charismatic", "Pentecostal" or "evangelical", have become established as "New Religious Movements". The spectrum of this church ranges from neighbourhood groups or family businesses to mega-churches with many thousands of members and hundreds of congregations scattered across the entire African continent (or even worldwide).

With regard to Pentecostal theology, despite all the downright confusing heterogeneity, consistent constants can be identified. Despite all the diversity, six aspects can be identified that distinguish Pentecostal theologies in Africa: The emphasis on motivation; the commitment to entrepreneurship; the adherence to virtues such as diligence, sense of duty, acceptance of responsibility, integrity, abstinence, and marital fidelity; the proclamation of the prosperity gospel; the reference to the "anointing of the men of God" from whom prophetic words are to be expected and - of outstanding importance especially in Africa - the fight against the evil spirits that stand in the way of personal advancement. While motivation, the commitment to entrepreneurship and the development of personal skills are seen as factors that have a positive effect on social developments, the preaching of a prosperity gospel and the taking up of magical ideas and rituals in particular are

problematised in theological and sociological discourse as obstacles to social development.

In his dissertation "The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda", Samuel Mugisa takes up this discourse. He analyses the development of Pentecostalism with special reference to the prosperity gospel and the healing rites practised. He divides his work into four parts: After an introduction, Mugisa describes the socio-economic, religious and political situation in Uganda in the first chapter of his dissertation. In the second chapter, he deals with the situation of the Catholic Church in Uganda and the challenges posed by the New Religious Movements and sects. In the third part of his work, Mugisa focuses on the Gospel of Prosperity, before going into Healing Practices in the fourth part of the work. The work is rounded off by a final conclusion.

In his introduction, Mugisa first describes the methodology, the object of his study and the structure of his work. His central research questions are:

- Why does Prosperity Gospel appeal massively in Africa and in Uganda today?
- Is Prosperity Gospel consistent with the Gospel of Christ?
- Does the quest for healing and search for wealth have any relation to people switching from mainline to Neo-Pentecostal movements?
- How has the Catholic Church contributed to healing, exorcism and the economic empowerment of Christians? (8)

In addition, he states the two goals of his work (which are perhaps somewhat general for an academic paper):

- To raise awareness of the phenomenon of Prosperity Gospel and Healing Ministry which arise from the proliferation of religious movements in Uganda with stress on the workings of the Holy Spirit.
- To re-count that the proliferation of the Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry is a moment for the Catholic Church in Uganda to re-evaluate its holistic mission in reaching out to the poor and sick. (9)

The first chapter is entitled "Uganda's general Social-economic Religious and Political Situation". For a later publication of the work, it would have to be checked whether the author really wants to use the term "social-economic or the more common expression "socio-economic". In this chapter, the author introduces Uganda as the context of his research, helpfully emphasising the importance of material wealth and the healing practices deeply rooted in African Traditional Religions. The author describes how ordinary events in life, such as accidents or natural disasters, are traditionally attributed to evil forces from which one must constantly protect oneself. Out of fear and insecurity, people often seek the services of traditional healers. In this respect, the Pentecostal movement with its healing rites can be connected to the traditional beliefs and practices of Ugandans. The prosperity gospel preached by the Pentecostal churches also finds fertile ground in Uganda. Believers seek quick answers to their immediate needs. Instead of an encounter with the person of Christ, membership in a church is sought as access to social and business networks. This goes hand in hand with the development of an ethic of success. The author integrates the history of mission in Uganda into the chapter and combines a chronological structure of his presentation with a thematic structure. This occasionally leads to a occasionally disjointed presentation and makes reading difficult. The author's observation across the Ugandan border to the neighbouring country of Rwanda and the reference to its legislation which only recognises churches if their priests have received appropriate training, is particularly interesting (25). The use of the term "African Traditional Religion" should be problematised (26ff.). For a later publication of the work, it would have to be checked whether the author really wants to use the term "African Traditional Religion" in the singular or uses the technical term "African Traditional Religions", which is rightly only used in the plural. The description of the financial support of the church in Uganda by foreign financiers (55) seems also to be uncritical. In a critical reflection, it would have to be examined to what extent the financial practices correlate with the claim

of self Reliance (Ecclesia in Africa) advocated by the churches in Africa or, if necessary, promote assistentialist structures.

In the second chapter, Saumel Mugisa looks at the Catholic Church in Uganda and the challenges posed by the emergence of New Religious Movements and sects. He is guided by the following questions: What is the extent of the presence of sects and new religious movements in Uganda? What type of sects are these? What are the different characteristics of these sects? Is there any influence they pose on Catholics? And if so: Which group of Catholics are influenced by them and become their followers? What aspects of these sects attract some Catholics and what pastoral options or programmes could the Catholic Church implement in light of these sects and movements? (66). The author states that the New Religious Movements attract members by promising material wealth. The Pentecostal movement advocates a fundamentalist hermeneutic view of the Bible and is characterised by a cult of personality, often centred on individuals. Intensive use is made of audio-visual media as well as social media. These characteristics can be traced in the New Religious Movements in Uganda, which are characterised on the one hand by the dissemination of indigenous Christian cults and on the other hand by the promises of a future good life, prophecies and visions. The author focuses his explanations in particular on the Bisaka sect "Faith of Unity" as well as on the "Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God", whose leaders appear with unquestionable authority, which is accompanied by manipulation (feigned miracles) and deception. Nevertheless, according to the author, many people join the emerging cults to combat their current misery. In doing so, he problematises that the New Spiritual Movements and sects tend to focus more on prosperity, quick wealth and property acquisition (Ebintu) instead of focusing on the dignity of the human person (Omuntu) and humanity towards others (Ubuntu), which were the essential values that also characterised the very biblical account of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:32-35). "Ubuntu proposes the idea that people are truly human only in relation to communities in the full expression of the koinonia. This understanding is manifested in the Church, which is the space in which life in relation to God and to one's neighbour finds nourishment through worship and fellowship. The Ubuntu notion is based on the inherent value of individuals and their relationships within communities." (119) The author thereby emphasizes that human relationships could be transformed through mutual sharing and satisfaction and

that, especially in the process of real evangelisation, ubuntu (humanity towards others) would more and more flow into omuntu (human person). In doing so, the author proposes ubuntu solidarity as a value with which to counter a materialistic worldview. From this, Mugisa argues, comes a new attitude towards poverty. True poverty in the African sense is a lack of genuine relationships. Ubuntu, on the other hand, promotes the traditional view of relationships enriched by the gospel of life, allowing individuals to discover that true wealth lies in relationships rather than in the accumulation of goods.

The author's statements on the relationship between liturgy and inculturation could be problematised in the second chapter of this work (77). The thesis that a recognition of the leadership role of women has something to do with an innovative gender ideology (83) should also be reflected on before publication.

In the third chapter, the author now examines the Gospel of Prosperity (along with the Healing Ministry, which is dealt with in the fourth chapter), which is one of the two central aspects of his dissertation. Mugisa traces the origins of the Prosperity Gospel, describes the lifestyle of its preachers, examines the significance of the Prosperity Gospel for Pentecostalism and critically engages with its theology. His particular question is how the Christian understanding of salvation relates to the theology of prosperity. Among other things, Mugisa points to the promotion of a neoliberal attitude and neoliberal structures through the Prosperity Gospel. He describes "the attractive nature of the Prosperity Gospel, how it appeals to young people; the selective application of interesting Biblical texts; the avoidance of a theology of the cross (suffering and pain), and the focus on prayer and miracles. This is in contrast with the people's glaring poverty and the desire for economic survival here and now; the reality of sickness especially HIV/AIDS and the promise for healing and wholeness." (173). The remarks on neoliberalism (160 - 171) can be seen as examples of some limitations of the dissertation. Large parts of the explanations are a stringing together of statements by other authors, which Mugisa strings eclectically. This leads to a more descriptive and less explicative formulation in essential parts of the work and to the impression that the reader is confronted with a compilation rather than a composition. The reader gains a broad overview, but is left without a more in-depth analyses. Aspects that could be deepened in the context of a missiological work are

mentioned only marginally. For example he omitted the differentiation between inculturation and interculturality (167).

In the fourth chapter, Mugisa focuses on the Healing Ministry. He goes into the concept of healing in the New Testament and develops interesting Christological perspectives from there. He then switches from systematic-theological reflections to a description of the health care system in Uganda and later goes into the mission history of the missionaries' work in the health care sector. A different structuring of the thoughts would have been possible here. Many passages could have been integrated into the descriptive second chapter. It is also regrettable that the author deals with the phenomenon of healing in an intensive and sometimes very substantial way, but loses sight of Pentecostalism as the focus of his work. Despite these remarks, the author sees the challenge posed by the healing ministry of Pentecostalism: "Prevention and relieving suffering by ethical means is a core medical concern but it is uncertain whether there can be a world without pain, sadness, anxiety, despair, or uncertainty. This suggests a proper religious understanding regarding suffering." (227).

The work ends with a detailed and systematic conclusion. Mugisa summarises the essential aspects of his previous remarks so that the reader can once again understand the thought processes that flowed into the four chapters in a structured way. With regard to the possibilities and limitations of his dissertation, Mugisa rightly writes: "This work does not claim to have explored the theme of Prosperity Gospel in all its dimensions. Nevertheless, the study has drawn attention to the approaches employed by the Catholic Church earlier on regarding its response to poverty, exorcism, and healing." (241). The author has indeed succeeded in this with his study.

Regarding the remarkable dissertation I would like to ask two questions:

- To what extent did the financial support of missionaries of the Catholic Church in Africa in the past contribute to the church being experienced as a place of relative

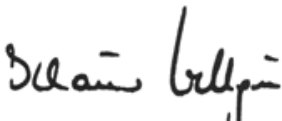
prosperity in Africa? And what effects did this have with regard to the perception of the church in Uganda?

- What are the consequences for the pastoral ministry of the Catholic Church in Uganda in view of the success of the Healing Ministry?

As a reader of the dissertation "The Gospel of Prosperity and Healing Ministry in African Pentecostalism: A theological and pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church in Uganda", I thank Samuel Mugisa for his research. I have identified strengths and weaknesses in my review. The comments and remarks presented in my review do not diminish the value of the presented work. In my opinion, the presented work meets all the obligatory requirements for doctoral dissertations. I hope that after coming back to Uganda Fr. Samuel Mugisa, already as a Doctor of Theology with a specialisation in Missiology may well serve the local Church as a very valuable specialist in this field.

Concluding, I strongly recommend to the Council of the Faculty of Theology of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw to proceed the successive stages of the doctoral procedure.

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