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Review of Doctoral Dissertation in the Discipline of Theological Sciences  
by Walter UKURIKIYIMFURA: *Les aspects culturels des apparitions mariales à Kibeho (1981-1989). Une approche missiologique* produced under the scientific direction of Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Jarosław Róžański, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Faculty of Theology, Warsaw 2025, pp. 387.

#### I. Research Objective, Method, Sources of the Dissertation, and its Content

The research subject of the thesis can be defined in several key points: 1. Historical and cultural context: The study deals with the socio-political and religious context of Rwanda from 1981 to 1989. The necessary elements are the ethnic tensions between Hutu and Tutsi, as well as the influence of Christianity in the region. 2. The nature of the apparitions: An analysis of the testimonies of the visionaries (Alphonsine Mumureke, Nathalie Mukamazimpaka, and Marie-Claire Mukangango) and the messages attributed to the Virgin Mary, especially their spiritual, cultural, and prophetic content. 3. A missiological approach: Show how the revelations have affected the mission of the Catholic Church, both locally and internationally. This includes the impact on religious practices, pilgrimages, and official recognition by the Church in 2001. 4 Cultural aspects: Examine how local beliefs and traditions have shaped the reception and interpretation of the apparitions. For example, how Rwandans have incorporated the events into their own religious culture.

To analyze the research topic in more depth, the author of the dissertation gives some indications and formulates relevant questions: a. To analyze the Rwandan cultural and sociological aspects that have influenced the Marian apparitions at Kibeho, primarily through traditional beliefs, local rituals, and perceptions of spirituality; b. To assess the impact of the Kibeho apparitions on Rwandan culture; c. To explore inculturation in the Marian apparitions at Kibeho; d. To explore the missiological dimensions of the Marian apparitions at Kibeho. To explore the missiological dimensions of the Kibeho apparitions; e. To analyze the theological-cultural message of the Kibeho apparitions as a response to the cultural and spiritual needs of the Rwandan people in the years 1981-1989; f. To contribute to Marian theology and Christian mission. a. What are the most important Rwandan cultural aspects of the Marian apparitions of Kibeho and how do they influence how they are perceived and interpreted? b. What is the impact of the Kibeho apparitions on the Rwandan culture? (p. 18).

The author of the dissertation declares and uses the following methods of research in the description of the work: critical analysis, cultural and historical inspiration, participatory observation, seeing, judging, acting and comparing (p. 19).

The author has drawn on relevant and diverse sources of documentation to address the historical, cultural, religious, and theological dimensions of the research topic. As far as sources for Rwandan cultural aspects are concerned, the author has drawn on works dealing with Rwandan culture and beliefs. To this end, he has consulted adequate books and cultural articles. For sources on the Marian apparitions in Kibeho, he first turned to direct sources on the Marian apparitions in Kibeho. As for the sources of the missiological perspective, this essay draws on works that focus on the inculturation of the Christian faith in Rwanda, exploring the integration of local beliefs and the theology of mission.

In addition to the introduction, the general conclusion, and a list of abbreviations, this thesis consists of two parts: The first part of this work, composed of four chapters, analyzes Rwandan cultural aspects and their influence on the reception and interpretation of the Marian apparitions of Kibeho". The first chapter is dedicated to the communicative language. It is divided into three points, namely: verbal, para-verbal, and non-verbal language. The author analyzes the influence of these communicative cultural aspects, looking at how they facilitated the reception and interpretation of Marian's communicative language in her appearances in Kibeho. The second chapter focuses on the cultural values of greetings and farewells. In many societies, these aspects play a role in interpersonal relationships. Given that an apparition is interpreted



as a dialogue between Mary and her children, how did this cultural aspect influence the interpretation and reception of the Marian apparitions in Kibeho? The third chapter focuses on a family element. It is divided into five points, namely: the concept of the word "family" and its types according to Rwandan culture, the functions of the family, the hierarchical relationships and duties of the members of the traditional Rwandan family, the classification of family members in Rwanda: (family genealogies) and finally, the analysis of the influence of a family element and its characteristics on the reception and interpretation of the Marian apparitions of Kibeho. This brings us to the fourth chapter, in which is the analysis of Rwandan works of art. It will be divided into three points, namely artistic, symbolic, and material elements in the Marian apparitions of Kibeho and the influence of artistic and literary works on the reception and interpretation of the Marian apparitions of Kibeho. The second part, consisting of three chapters, examines the Marian apparitions of Kibeho from a missiological perspective. The fifth chapter focuses on the impact of the Marian apparitions of Kibeho on various cultural aspects of Rwandan life. The sixth chapter examines the inculturation and missiological role of the Marian apparitions of Kibeho, while the seventh chapter draws out the theological-cultural message of the Marian apparitions of Kibeho as a response to the needs of Rwandans in the particular period of history between 1981 and 1989. The author concludes his work with a discussion of the implications of this study and recommendations for future research and bibliography.

## II. Formal and Substantive Qualities of the Dissertation

Walter UKURIKIYIMFURA undoubtedly makes a valuable contribution to the study of the cultural aspects of the Marian apparitions in Kibeho (1981-1989) from a missiological perspective. The author has coherently pointed out the cultural dimensions of the apparitions to understand how the events fit into the cultural context of Rwanda, and he does so in a missiological approach. He has demonstrated the influence of cultural aspects on the reception and interpretation of the revelations, as well as the reverse effect, i.e., the influence of the revelations on cultural dynamics. He has skillfully conducted a multifaceted analysis of the revelations from a missiological perspective, highlighting their contribution to a better understanding of the interaction between faith and culture. The author has also demonstrated through his research that the Marian apparitions at Kibeho are deeply rooted in Rwandan

traditions and practices, which gives them a unique dimension. The author clearly distinguishes and identifies those cultural elements that foster a contextual understanding of current events, making the Marian message more accessible and meaningful to Rwandans. Not without importance in the study, the author points out the verbal, para-verbal, and non-verbal language of the message of the apparitions in the cultural context of Rwanda (customs, family traditions, the idea of forgiveness and reconciliation).

The doctoral student draws many conclusions based on legitimate research: The Marian apparitions at Kibeho (1981-1989) had a profound impact on many aspects of Rwandan culture, especially in the areas of language, spirituality, society, national identity, and the collective perception of historical events. The fact that the messages of the Marian apparitions at Kibeho were transmitted in Kinyarwanda reinforced the strength of this language, which characterizes the unity of Rwanda. The author notes that in terms of spiritual and religious significance, the revelations strengthened Catholicism as a pillar of spirituality in Rwanda. Moreover, Kibeho's messages of repentance, prayer, and unity were addressed to a society divided by growing tensions, contributing to a collective spiritual awakening and reconciliation. The doctoral student also shows that the revelations had a clear impact on cultural practices, inaugurating new forms of piety, on the perception of historical events, and especially on the prophetic interpretation of the genocide. Significantly, the apparitions strengthened the Christian faith while integrating it into local traditions, fostered social reconciliation, enriched cultural practices, and contributed to the country's collective memory. Today, they represent a unique spiritual and cultural heritage that continues to inspire Rwandan society.

The doctoral student also demonstrated through his research from the perspective of inculturation and missiology that the Marian apparitions at Kibeho are a remarkable example of the integration of Rwandan cultural values and practices while promoting fruitful dialogue between Christianity and local religious traditions. Moreover, they convey a profound theological and cultural message based on repentance, faith, redemptive suffering, and a call to peace.

The doctoral student does this mainly in the key of the research methods declared in the Introduction: critical analysis, cultural and historical inspiration, participatory observation, seeing, judging, acting, and comparing finally synthesizes the results of the research.

The author has aptly chosen the research problem of the dissertation for its originality and specificity. The topic has not yet been so widely developed. And especially almost unknown



to a wide audience. Also, he applies original research solutions thanks to the appropriate procedure, that is, he implements the various stages of research in an orderly manner, applies an appropriate system of methods, and uses appropriate techniques and tools. In particular, the research problem is to be presented in the broad context of the long process of formation of the modern paradigm of faith consciousness, one's own culture, language, and the meaning and significance of the message contained in the Marian apparitions in Kibeho from the perspective of cultural-theological-missionary reflection.

The author, in the course of proper research, has sufficiently achieved the goal of the dissertation. The dissertation is characterized by the passion of scientific research, especially manifested in the analysis of the linguistic and cultural layer of the Marian message and the strong impact in awakening the consciousness of a specific identity of Catholics in Rwanda. The author also notes the grassroots movement, the reflection on one's own experience of faith becomes a challenge in the process of reconciliation and forgiveness through concrete theological and pastoral solutions.

The author of the dissertation put a lot of effort into its preparation. He properly selected those sources that adequately addressed the research subject of the dissertation. Also, he drew on rich supporting, and comparative literature. Against the background of existing knowledge, the doctoral candidate has clearly articulated the innovative aspect of the cultural-creative model in a wide range of its various areas, which are centered around the specific challenges of the Church in Rwanda. He comprehensively presents the research object starting from historical, anthropological, and cultural conditions in a missiological perspective.

### III. Applications

The doctoral student extensively and multifacetedly analyzes each aspect of the Marian apparitions and message. He reaches very deeply into the contextual layer, referring to many complex issues related to local tradition, culture, language, customs, etc. Hence, one can get the impression of embedding the research problem contained in the doctoral thesis in too much detail in these contexts. The dissertation would have benefited from clarity if it had been simplified somewhat in this regard. On the other hand, the dissertation is a source of valuable knowledge as to the above issues. The reader can learn, from the very detailed analyses carried out, about many valuable issues concerning the traditional values of the Rwandan people.

However, I believe that to exhaust the topic of the thesis, it was not necessary to rely on so many threads and to define the core of the research problem. Given the above, I direct the doctoral student to some questions for discussion:

Local reception: How did Rwandan communities perceive these apparitions, and what role did traditional customs and beliefs play in their interpretation?

The effect on culture: What cultural transformations have been observed as a result of these apparitions? Did they influence religious or social practices?

The missiological approach: How have these events enriched the dialogue between Christian faith and African culture in the context of evangelization?

#### IV. Conclusion

The study of the problem undertaken is methodologically and factually correct. The objections, questions, or doubts raised in the review can be discussed. The doctoral student has undoubtedly achieved the stated goal. The reviewed dissertation is a scientific work and meets the requirements of the *Ustawa z dnia 14 marca 2003 roku art. 31 o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki (Dz. U. z 2017 r. poz. 1789*. Therefore, I make a motion to the Council for the Discipline of Theological Sciences of Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw to continue the doctoral dissertation of Rev. BA MA Walter UKURIKIYIMFURA.

Rev. Prof. UAM Dr. Hab. Piotr Piasecki

