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Summary of doctoral thesis

Title: “Les aspects culturels des apparitions mariales à Kibeho (1981-1989). A missiological approach”

Context and issues: The Marial apparitions of Kibeho (1981-1989) are a major religious event in the history of Rwanda and of the Catholic Church in Africa.

They took place against a backdrop of historical tensions and strong religiosity, before being officially recognized by the Church in 2001. Beyond their spiritual dimension, they had a significant cultural impact, arousing particular interest in a society where traditional beliefs and Christianity were in constant interaction. The central issue is therefore to understand how these apparitions were influenced by Rwandan culture and, in turn, how they contributed to the inculturation of Christianity and the evangelical mission.

Research objectives: This thesis pursues three major objectives: to study the Rwandan cultural aspects that influenced the reception and interpretation of the phenomenon; to assess the missiological impact of the apparitions on Christian culture and mission in Rwanda; to propose a theological-cultural reading of the Marial message of Kibeho in the face of the challenges of the time (1981-1989).

Methodology: The approach adopted is multidisciplinary, combining : A historical analysis, to understand the Rwandan context before and during the apparitions; An anthropological and sociological study, to examine Rwandan cultural practices and their influence on the reception of the phenomenon; A theological and missiological approach, to assess the impact of the apparitions on Christian mission and the inculturation of the Gospel message; Sources include ecclesiastical documents, testimonies of visionaries and faithful, as well as studies on Rwandan history and culture.

Thesis structure: The research is divided into two main parts:

Part One: Rwandan cultural aspects and their influence on the reception of the apparitions.

This part examines the cultural elements that played a role in the way the apparitions were

perceived: Communicative language and its importance in Marian messages, Greetings and farewells, reflections of Rwandan social and religious codes, Family structures, which influenced the understanding of Mary's role as spiritual mother, Rwandan artistic works, which integrated and disseminated the Kibeho messages.

Part Two: The Marian apparitions of Kibeho from a missiological perspective. This section analyzes the impact of the apparitions on Christian mission: the apparitions and their influence on Rwandan cultural aspects, particularly in terms of spirituality and religious practices; the inculturation and missionary role of the apparitions, showing how they strengthened the roots of Christianity in Africa; the theological-cultural message of the apparitions, seen as a response to the religious and social challenges of Rwanda between 1981 and 1989.

Main findings: This study highlights several key points: The Kibeho apparitions are deeply rooted in Rwandan culture, both in terms of the language used and the ritual practices associated with them. The historical context of Rwanda played a major role in the reception of the Marian messages, which found a particular resonance in the face of the social and political tensions of the time. The apparitions had an impact on Christian mission, reinforcing the importance of inculturation and helping to build an authentic African Christianity. The message of Kibeho, centered on conversion, prayer and reconciliation, anticipated the challenges that Rwanda was to face, notably the social crisis and genocide of 1994.

Contribution and prospects: This thesis makes a significant contribution to the understanding of Marian apparitions from a cultural and missiological perspective. It shows that the apparitions of Kibeho are not only a spiritual phenomenon, but also a lever for inculturation and a missionary tool in a Rwandan context. The prospects opened up by this research are manifold: a more in-depth study of the role of Kibeho after 1994, particularly in the process of national reconciliation. A closer look at the link between spirituality and culture, in order to assess how the Church can better integrate local realities into its evangelical mission. Ultimately, this thesis underlines the importance of taking local culture into account in evangelization, and highlights the role of the Kibeho apparitions as a phenomenon at the crossroads of the spiritual, the cultural and the missionary.