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Review of the PhD thesis by Walter entitled:

**LES ASPECTS CULTURELS DES APPARITIONS MARIALES À KIBEHO
(1981 – 1989)**

UNE APPROCHE MISSIOLOGIQUE

written under the supervision of Rev. prof. PhD hab. Jarosław Różański OMI,
Warsaw 2025, pp. 387.

1. Aim of the thesis

In the introduction to his thesis, the author clearly defines the purpose of his study: “ The overall aim of this study is to analyze the cultural aspects of the Kibeho Marian apparitions (1981-1989), in order to understand how these events fit into the Rwandan cultural context and influence the missiological approach” (p. 19).

This overall aim is divided into 6 particular objectives:

- to analyze the Rwandan cultural and sociological aspects that have influenced the Marian apparitions at Kibeho, notably through traditional beliefs, local rituals and perceptions of spirituality;
- to assess the impact of the Kibeho apparitions on Rwandan culture;
- to explore inculturation in the Marian apparitions of Kibeho;
- to explore the missiological dimensions of the Kibeho apparitions;
- to analyze the theological-cultural message of the Kibeho apparitions as a response to the cultural and spiritual needs of the Rwandan population in the years 1981-1989;
- to contribute to Marian theology and Christian mission.

These 6 objectives are accompanied by 4 research questions:

1. What are the salient Rwandan cultural aspects manifested in the Marian apparitions at Kibeho, and how do they influence the way these apparitions are perceived and interpreted?
2. What impact have the Marian apparitions of Kibeho had on various aspects of Rwandan culture?
3. From an inculturation and missiology perspective, how do the Marian apparitions of Kibeho integrate Rwandan cultural values and practices, and how do they foster dialogue between Christianity and traditional religion?
4. What is the theological-cultural message conveyed by the Marian apparitions of Kibeho, and how did this message meet the cultural and spiritual needs of the Rwandan population between 1981 and 1989?

2. Structure of the thesis

Walter Ukurikiyimfura's dissertation consists of a list of abbreviations used, an introduction, two parts with four and three chapters respectively, a general conclusion, perspectives for future research and a bibliography.

In the 15-page-long introduction, the author included theological frame, historical background, presentation of the main research question translated into detailed research objectives, motivation for the choice of the topic, methodology and its limitations, sources, as well as originality and significance of his research. All these elements have been presented in a very clear way.

In addition to the introduction and general conclusion, the thesis consists of two parts: First part of this work which is composed by four chapters analyzes Rwandan cultural aspects and their influence on the reception and interpretation of the Marian apparitions of Kibeho.

The first chapter is devoted to the language issues. It is divided into three points, namely: verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal language. The candidate analyzes the influence of these communicative cultural aspects, looking at how they facilitated the reception and interpretation of Marian communicative language in the apparitions at 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, this cultural aspect influences the interpretation and reception of the Marian apparitions at 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 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.

In the fourth chapter, the candidate analyzes Rwandan works of art. It is 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, comprising three chapters, looks at 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 this particular period of history between 1981-1989.

3. Content

In talking about the strengths of the doctoral thesis of Walter Ukurikiyimfura, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the theme analyzed by the candidate, which concerns the only recognized Marian apparitions in Africa and their cultural and missiological context. By describing Mary in the light of the role of women in traditional Rwandan society and using the Kinyarwanda language, the candidate presents the Mother of the Word as a model of inculturation.

The candidate's linguistic skills are impressive. The reader from outside the African context is exposed to the full richness of Kinyarwanda and learns a significant number of traditional expressions that carry the culture and values of the Rwandan community. In addition, the reader learns much about the specific roles played by each family member in Rwandan society, as well as the ways in which the Kibeho apparitions shaped Rwandan artistic expression.

There is no doubt that the candidate has done an impressive amount of work. One could only wish that more of the analysis would be directly related to the content and form of the apparitions themselves, since some of the material presented is not directly related to them. Shortening these parts, especially the linguistic analyses, would make the thesis more readable.

A final comment is that it would help the reader to have an introduction to the current landscape of academic and non-academic publications related to the Kibeho apparitions. Doing so and placing the perspective of the dissertation against such a background would help the reader immensely in understanding the process proposed by the candidate.

4. Formal assessment

The dissertation is characterized by a clear and consistent structure and language. However, there are occasional editorial mistakes and inconsistencies, both in the main body of the text and in the footnotes. Additionally, given the substantial length of the dissertation, it is not surprising that the candidate could not avoid some repetitions that are not necessary.

The most salient comment pertains to the manner in which the candidate supported his findings and postulates. At times, the author appears to rely on personal experience rather than on publications that could substantiate his claims. While the conclusions are well-supported, it is essential in academic writing to clearly indicate the source of the argument.

A parallel observation pertains to the utilization of sources. A notable proportion of these sources are of a popular nature rather than academic, with a considerable number being directly sourced from internet sources. While this practice is not inherently unacceptable, it is essential that such citations are appropriately balanced with academic publications.

5. Questions for debate

I would like to propose two questions for discussion.

- The first question is related to the first chapter. The candidate rightly states that the traditional forms of greetings and farewells should be an essential part of the inculturation process of the Church in Rwanda but does not offer any concrete examples of that. Would it be possible to obtain some of them?
- The second question is related to the last chapter. The candidate presents the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda. In the candidate's judgment, did the apparitions at Kibeho potentially mitigate the cruelty of the events in 1994 and the reconciliation process thereafter?

6. Final conclusion

It is evident that the dissertation by Walter Ukurikiyimfura meets the criteria defined for a doctoral thesis and can serve as the basis of further registration and conferment procedure for a doctoral degree. I put forward a proposal to admit Walter Ukurikiyimfura to further stages of the registration and conferment procedure for a doctoral degree.

Ottawa, 12. 04. 2025

Rev. Fr. Andrzej Jastrzębski O.M.I., Ph.D., Th.D.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrzej Jastrzebski', is written below the printed name.