Ambrose J. Bwangatto


On 11 June 2014 Ambrose Bwangatto (born in Kalisizo in 1969) successfully defended this PhD-thesis at the Radboud University of Nijmegen. He is an Ugandan Roman Catholic priest, lecturing missiology at the major seminary of Ggaba in Kampala. After his major seminary training in Uganda he studied philosophy at the Urbaniana University in Rome, but he did his Master in Theology in Nijmegen.

Bwangatto's starting point is that both the Roman Catholic Church and missiology need a new model for mission in a world of multiculturalism and globalization. The Münster school formulated the goal of the church's mission as conversion of individual souls. The Louvain school promoted the idea of implantation of the church, thereby opting for an extension of the institutional church. After the Second Vatican Council the ideas of inculturation and dialogue were more in vogue. The theology of liberation asked also for a new mission model. Now Bwangatto proposes the idea of conversation as a new alternative method of mission.

This idea of conversation is based on the concepts of the American philosopher Richard Rorty (1931-2007). Rorty linked the concept of conversation with the idea of truth. Truth is for him the main content of mission. But there are many ideas about truth. For Rorty truth is the result of an open, non-imposing, never ending way of communication, focusing on consensus. This truth is revealed and proclaimed to those seeking Truth. Subsequently, I think, human beings can and have to make the Truth.

In his introduction Bwangatto explains his study method, his research strategy and his technical design and makes clear that he will follow the method of the critical discourse analysis developed by N. Fairclough between 1992 and 1995.

In the first chapter of this dissertation Bwangatto exhaustively expounds the philosophical ideas of Rorty concerning conversation. He explains that according to Rorty philosophy is the mirror of nature (1979). Rorty did not appreciate René Descartes’ idea about a division between mind and body, neither did he agree with the bunch of concepts of the old, traditional philosophy, because for him their usefulness was very disputable. He is of the opinion that the source of thinking and philosophy has to be located in the daily life of all human beings.
The dissertation reveals that Bwangatto is an adept of Rorty, since Rorty focuses on communication of men and thus presents Bhangatto a link with conversation for truth and consensus.

The second chapter is a closer explanation of Rorty’s concepts, combining conversation, pragmatism and discourse. Here the author gives a more explicit explanation of the critical discourse analysis as way to understand men’s deeds and thoughts. Bwangatto illustrates his exposition with material from Uganda concerning ideas about mission as conversation.

In the third chapter the author explores some historical documents of the Ugandan Catholic Church, beginning with the Vicariate of the Upper Nile, in which the Mill Hill fathers, the White Fathers (of Lavigerie) and the Comboni fathers of Italy dominated the scene. He selects four texts: *A Short History of the Vicariate of the Upper Nile* by the Mill Hill Father J. Biermans; *Planting the Faith in Darkest Africa: The Live of Simeon Lourdel* by Sister Frances Alice Forbes; *Leaves from a White Father ‘Diary’* by Father A. Howell (W.F.) and *Les Chroniques Trimenstrelles* of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Nyanza. Employing discourse analysis Bwangatto analyses these texts linguistically, discursively and socially. For Bwangatto the documents show a preference for conversion.

Chapter 4 continues on what is presented in Chapter 3, but with a special focus on the mission concepts for today. This time the author analyses two study papers of the Archdiocese of Kampala, 2006 and 2010-2014. The title of the pastoral document of 2006 is: ‘You are the salt of the earth, the light of the world.’ The theme of the document of 2010-2014 is: ‘Partnership for the Gospel.’ Again Bwangatto employs the method of discourse analysis (linguistically, discursively and socially) on these documents. His conclusion is that they are increasingly oriented on conversation.

In his final fifth chapter Bwangatto presents a final survey beginning with the ideas of Rorty concerning religion, mission and conversation. It is clear to the author that his use of the material of Rorty probably leads to a new mission theory that goes further than dialogue and acculturation. Therefore mission as conversation in the sense of Rorty can be a new missiological model.

Bwangatto closes with a good bibliography (pp. 232-245) and summary (pp. 246-248).

In my view Bwangatto is correct in proposing a new fundamental and interesting complex of concepts concerning mission. At the same time his proposal asks for comments and discussion. Some of the panelists of the ceremony in the Aula of the University already started the debate with some