

BOOK DIGEST

Trinity and Inculturation:

Presentation of: *Trinité et Inculturation*, Collection, Théologie à l'Université, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2008, 503p.

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This book is a largely reworked version of a PhD dissertation in Theology presented in December 2005 at the Catholic University of Paris (Institut Catholique de Paris) and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. The title of the dissertation was *L'Humanité de Dieu : Pertinence de la doctrine trinitaire d'Eberhard Jüngel pour la nomination de Dieu dans le contexte de la théologie africaine de l'inculturation* (*The Humanity of God. The Pertinence of Eberhard Jüngel's Doctrine of the Trinity for the Naming of God in the Context of African Inculturation Theology.*)

The book proposes a renewal of the naming of God in the context of on-going debates in fundamental theology about the responsibility of theology towards its object, the Trinitarian God, in a world of epistemological and religious pluralism. Special attention is paid to the dilemma of African inculturation theology, which serves as the author's point of departure.

The dilemma: Defence of African cultures and dogmatic responsibility of theology

In the effort to demonstrate the pertinence of Christian faith in the African context, theological reflection in Africa since 1960 has been massively centred on inculturation. The objective of this theological reflection was to help Africans accept the Christian God while safeguarding their identity and their cultural and religious traditions. This explains why theological reflections have attempted to demonstrate continuity between the God of African traditional religions and the Christian God using the idea of

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primitive monotheism. This also explains Christological reflections, which present Christ as an *Ancestor* who accomplishes the aspirations of African ancestry.

The advantage of this inculturation theology is that it affirms the necessity to move away from the disdain of African religious traditions. Moreover, this theology emphasizes that a major characteristic of the Christian faith is revealing to human beings that they are already in contact with God through personal existential experience. If it is true that no culture is totally closed to God, then the presentation of the Christian God can assume certain features of African cultures.

Nevertheless, the apologetic approach of African inculturation theology produces two adverse effects. On the one hand, because it pursues self-defence and self-justification of cultures, this theology tends to distance itself from the dogmatic responsibility of every theology. This is evident in the disjunction between theology and Christology, the difficulty of thinking God along with God's incarnation and God's self-identification with Jesus Christ. A consequent difficulty is conceptualising the human being before God. On the other, this apologetics does not fully respect African religious traditions because it depends on an evolutionist history of religions that views them as *evangelical preparation*, that is, incomplete religions waiting to be completed by Christianity.

The project: renewing the naming of God in African inculturation theology through a rediscovery of the doctrine of the Trinity.

This book therefore proposes a renewal of the naming of God in the context of African inculturation theology. It hopes to contribute to the on-going debates in fundamental theology about the responsibility of theology towards its object, the Trinitarian God, in the context of epistemological pluralism.

Starting from the hypothesis of the pertinence of contemporary Trinitarian theology for the renewal of the naming of God in the context of African inculturation theology, it proposes to borrow from the doctrine of the humanity of God in the work of German

theologian Eberhard Jüngel. The central question addressed by the dissertation is: *To what extent can Jüngel's doctrine of the humanity of God help to solve the problem of disjunction between theology and Christology inherent in the apologetics of the African inculturation theology?*

A Book in Three Parts

Part I: State of the Questions—Naming of God in African theology
This part demonstrates that the problem of this reconfiguration of God can be traced back to its apologetic goal of speaking about God and the Christian mission in such a way that safeguard African cultural values.

Chapter One traces the origin of African inculturation apologetics to the first definitions of God and African religions in the internal debates among Western epistemologies in the 18th through to the 20th centuries. Three moments are distinguished: the debate on the theistic idea of God in the 18th century (Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume and Hegel); the socio-cultural evolutionism of the 19th century (Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor on the one hand, and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Leo Frobenius on the other); and the apologetics of primitive monotheism by ecclesiastics (Wilhelm Schmidt, Alexandre le Roy and Placide Tempels) at the beginning of the 20th century.

In these debates, African religions appear under contrasted characteristics. Some classify them under the category of magic; some regard them as polytheistic religions, while others go the extent of considering them as primitive monotheisms recognizing the existence of the unique God, the Supreme Being. But these classifications serve specific purposes. On the one hand, theists and anthropologists use them to account for the unitary evolution of humankind and simultaneously to disqualify the Christian religion's claim of uniqueness. On the other, the hypothesis of primitive monotheism accorded to Africans by certain anthropologists serves as a major weapon for Christian apologists to defend the humanity of Africans against Hegel and to prove the

possibility of a primitive revelation and the historicity and universality of Christian revelation.

Chapter Two shows how the debates on African identity and religions continue in African literature. Two tendencies are analysed. The first is the Black movement, the *Négritude* (W. E. Du Bois and Léopold Senghor) that defends the black race. The second, more critical and subversive, is *the African personality* (Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka). The former thinkers tend to reduce the multiplicity of African traditions to a world vision having as centre the monotheistic idea of Supreme Being, while the latter authors propose to integrate the question of African identity into the more global question of the truth of tragic human existence. They thereby discard the affirmation of the Supreme Being as the centre of African world vision.

After these inquiries about the origins of the defence of African identity, Chapter Three explains how these debates determine the reconfiguration of God in African inculturation theology. Three major stages are identified: *the apologetics of African monotheism* (Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti), the *Christ-Ancestor Christology* (Charles Nyamiti and Bénézet Bujo) and *two attempts of epistemological rupture: the existential analyses* of Oscar Bimwenyi-Kweshi and *the negative theology* of Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga. The analysis brings to light the difficulty of holding together theology and Christology and of theologically conceiving the identity of the human being before God. It also shows the connection between these theological developments and those of other contemporary theologians, especially Germans who have attempted to give an account of the Christian God in the modern context

Part II: Eberhard Jüngel's Doctrine of the Trinity, the Humanity of God

This part searches for dogmatic and methodological bases for a Trinitarian theology that would help solve the problem of

disjunction between theology and Christology in African inculturation theology.

Chapter Four situates Jüngel's doctrine of the humanity of God in the footsteps of philosophical and theological debates on God's being, precisely God's incarnation in Jesus Christ in the context of modernity under the influence of the *Aufklärung* or Enlightenment. Special mention is made here of Hegel's *theologia crucis* and the debate between Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann on the objectivity of God's being.

Chapter Five deals with Eberhard Jüngel's doctrine of the Trinity, precisely his understanding of God's being as love from God's self-identification with the crucified and the understanding of the being of this man from his determination by God.

Chapter Six streamlines the implications of Jüngel's doctrine of the humanity of God for Christian theological anthropology and for method in theology. Special attention is paid to the question of the starting point of theology and the relationship between theology and other epistemologies. Jüngel proposes an *unapologetic theology* which does not seek to ground itself on other epistemologies, although it does borrow concepts from them. Moreover, the theological anthropology derived from the humanity of God conceives human being *extra se*, as from the event of justification.

Part III: *Pertinence of Jüngel's unapologetic Theology for Renewing the Naming of God in African Inculturation Theology.*

Chapter Seven takes up the question of the starting point of theology and its relationship to other epistemologies. It shows how assuming dogmatic responsibility for the Trinitarian God helps to go beyond the theory of continuity between the God of African traditional religion and the Christian God. By doing so, theology respects the specificity of Christianity as well as that of African traditional religion.

Chapter Eight takes up the project of thinking African identity before God. It verifies the pertinence of Jüngel's understanding of

justification derived from the humanity of God as the definition of the human being and hence as the hermeneutical principle for the critique of the world and its self-understanding.

In conclusion, Chapter Nine demonstrates how an unapologetic theology can help reflect on Christian mission and inter-religious dialogue in a way that respects the specificity of Christian faith. It proposes to conceptualize the humanity of God as a regulator of how Christians should live and share with others in society.

Thesis statement

It is import to note that the analyses and critique proposed herein are not meant to disqualify the immense work done by our predecessors in African inculturation theology. They rather represent our reception of this theology. The best way to assure posterity of a thought is to evaluate its objectives and epistemological tools and, following the results, to propose either changing or refining them. The problem of African inculturation theology is not its missiological objective as such, but rather its apologetic approach that tends to absolve theology of its dogmatic responsibility.

The thesis of this book can be formulated as follows: the unapologetic-theology proposed by Eberhard Jüngel in his doctrine of the Trinity, the humanity of God resolves the problem of disjunction between theology and Christology and thereby helps theology to assume the specificity of the Christian God who made himself known in Jesus Christ. In that sense, Jüngel's doctrine of the humanity of God stands a chance to help African inculturation theology to accomplish its objectives. This consists in thinking the Christian God and the identity of the human being in such a way that opens an avenue for Christian mission while promoting inter-religious dialogue. If it was necessary in the past to affirm an African God to oppose the disdain of African cultures and traditions, it has become urgent today to assume the specificity of

the Christian God in order to foster Christian mission and dialogue in the context of religious pluralism.

This thesis has few consequences. Amidst the context of domestication of God and the growing culture of violence in Africa, Christians moulded by the doctrine of the Trinity are called to demonstrate the possibility of an alternative society. They should avoid cheap equations, for example, pretending to federate the African Tradition Religion, Islam and Christianity under the same idea of monotheism. It is not even certain that different Christian denominations from the Pentecostal movements to the most orthodox churches can agree on their understanding of God. How much more the different religions that affirm their claims to truth in diversified ways. Christians have the responsibility to confess the Trinitarian God.

Christian theology has to re-examine the question of God from a new perspective. It is not enough to ask: how can one present God to Africans in order that this God may correspond to the God of the African Traditional Religion? The question should now be: how can Christianity convert Africans to the God who revealed God's self in Jesus Christ and the activities of the Holy Spirit? By so doing, theology presents itself as a critical theology; it assumes the dogmatic responsibility of helping Christian communities to confess their faith in a way that corresponds to the way of being of the Trinitarian God.

This style of theology does not hinder interreligious dialogue; rather it brings to light a specific Christian way of thinking and practising interreligious dialogue. The dialogue will primarily concern the encounter between different truth claims about the meaning of human existence and the destiny of human society. The Christian style of dialogue will be at the same time a *Yes* to humanity and a *No* to inhumanity. While accepting joyfully the work of God's grace in other religions, Christians will be ready to denounce that which does not encourage life.