

## PATRISTISCHE NEUIGKEITEN DER THEOLOGISCHEN FAKULTÄT

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## 2. Mission und Entwicklung im Kontext der Globalisierung

Festakt zum 75. Jubiläum von Miva, Einsiedeln, am 1. September 2007.

## 3. Center for early african christianity ( in Englisch)

Contribution in Addis Ababa 2008:

## EARLY CHRISTIANITY HISTORY IN THE LIGHT OF THE AFRICAN THEOLOGY OF INCULTURATION

The encounter between christianity and the cultures dates back to the beginning of the church. The inculturation of the christian faith concerns the insertion and the appropriation of the evangelical message in the cultures of the peoples, in the image of Christ, the Word of God that came to live among us. It is to take care of the historical dimension of the faith. Late Pope John II said, in 1992, that “ a faith which doesn’t become culture is a faith which is not fully welcome, not fully thought and not faithfully lived”.

Our paper would bring up-to-date the church Fathers’ thought, to get right to their integration process of the ambient culture in order to better explain the Revelation message (see Paul VI, Africa Terrarurn, n° 3; Pope John II, Ecclesia in Africa, n° 31).

### I. EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PATRISTIC STUDIES IN AFRICA

#### 1. Inculturation and plurality of sources

The insistence on the interdisciplinary dimension in the study of the revelation sources is fundamental. In fact, it helps to understand inculturation as the search of cultural paradigms of the interpretation of the faith data. The interdisciplinary dimension is, however, indispensable in that it restore the elaboration and the arising context of the Fathers’ doctrines in connection with the christian institutions.

#### 2. Inculturation as a selective reading of theoretical models

The problem of sources is not taken for grant in advance. It requires an “interpretation” work, that is to say that it calls for a reading work between lines in order to find augmentative paradigms of the authors under study. “this study of sources should ensure a serious biblical and historical information in order for us to understand the doctrines and the institutions, as well as the uses that the missionaries have brought, and which the african churches still live”.

### 3. Inculturation as an integration of sources for a new synthesis

Our task is to determine the probable origins of the Fathers' thought in their predecessors' doctrines, either pagans or Christians as they have served as the point of support in the search of the solutions during the antipagan and the antiheretic controversies. African theology has some lesson to take from this Fathers' epistemological process. "It is a necessity that the African theologian pays attention to all the elements that come into play in the encounter between Christianity and Africa, in order to criticize them and to draw lessons for the theological work today. It is to justify not only the sources of principles and theories but also the reasons of their integration in the interpretation schemes of the Christian dogmas.

In the light of the threefold scheme of the hermeneutical method applied in theology (contextualization – decontextualization – recontextualization), a lot of studies are led within the Catholic Faculties of Kinshasa, the major contributions of which are manifest in the African theology. To sum up the matter, let's say that our paper clarifies the connection that exists between history (constructive step), grammar (deconstructive step) and doctrine (reconstructive step).

## II. EARLY CHRISTIANITY HISTORY CONTRIBUTION

### 1. Exegesis

Today, the discussion between letter-allegory can be passed beyond by enlightening the hermeneutical dimension of theology which does not oppose the particular to the universal, both are considered as two complementary ways for the understanding of the Holy texts. The historical lesson to draw is that neither the literalism nor the allegorism are the truth. They are but ways to accede to it.

### 2. Early Christianity text translations

Here the problematic is the translation of the faith terms in African languages, from the source languages (Latin, Greek). It is the assumption of new meanings to make more accessible the faith confession to all church members. It is what we call the updating of the faith symbol by the translator who is supposed to have a good knowledge of history, grammar and theology.

### 3. Ecclesiology: the Church as God's family.

In the light of the Fathers' thought, African theology has brought to the universal church the concept of "Church – Family" of God, in which we have all become brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### 4. African christology

These last years, African christology has expanded rapidly. The main issue is: "what is Christ for the Africans?" So we analyze in which extent the African christological thought can contribute to the full actualization of the Chalcedonian dogma. In the functional perspective, we bring up-to-date the christological titles of the early church such as : Christ foundation, Christ doctor...

#### 5. Pastoral theology of health: interpellation towards AIDS

There is a search of new pastoral ways for the elaboration of a theology of medicine in Africa that takes into account the sick in general, and the AIDS in particular. This is the situation of any person suffering or living with AIDS, to detect the Christian meaning in the light of the Holy Scriptures. In the context of AIDS, there is a need to have today an updated reading of the Bible in order to reach an incultured theology of medicine.

#### 6. Mariology

This mariology exploits the dogmatic expressions of the Credo in order to underline the link between ... and the bringing up-to-date of Marie's role in the history of Salvation for an authentic Marian spirituality, both biblical and African. Face in the situation of sects or new religious movements, our continent can again be inspired of the catechetical and theological methods of the Church Fathers for a fertile future of Mariological and Marian researches.

#### 7. Socio-political theology

It is to take into consideration the context of the emergence of the thought under study before defining its content, for every thought, every doctrine results from a context; and for the patristic theology is fundamentally pastoral as it answers questions related to God's city.

#### 8. Ecology

Theology as an interpretative science recalls to ecologists' by means of ethics, the threefold question of the cause, the use and the finality of the creation in the light of the revealed datum. From its epistemological status, the ecotheology updates the Fathers' doctrine on Creation towards the evolution of cosmic sciences.

## II. REALIZATION AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. African bibliography on Church Fathers

It is the result of a research undertaken within the faculty of theology of the Catholic Faculties of Kinshasa

2. Association of African Patrologists

It was founded in March 1992, by Professors and Assistants of the Catholic Faculties of Kinshasa, actually Catholic University of Congo.

3. The project of an african Patrology handbook

4. Project of organizing the first african colloquium on Patristic studies

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