

“Decolonising the Doctrine of the Trinity” or “The Decolonising Doctrine of the Trinity”?

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ABSTRACT

The doctrine of the Trinity is often regarded as the inherent weakness of African Christian theology. This has to be understood in the light of African resistance against the colonising doctrine of the Trinity and thus the need to either affirm the continuity with African notions of the Supreme Being and the God of Israel or to reject Christianity altogether as the religion of colonisers. Nevertheless, this contribution will retrieve a decolonial impulse in the Trinitarian confession. Even if the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed may be regarded as an imperial compromise, the symbols of Spirit, cross and father are anti-imperial in origin. We argue that apophatic theology may offer a corrective, through resistance against any tendency to take God for granted.

Posing an Intriguing Question

This contribution emerges from a postgraduate course in theological hermeneutics that we offered at the University of the Western Cape in 2018. It was entitled “Theology and Decoloniality”. Together with six Honours students¹ we read some classic texts by Franz Fanon, Steven Bantu Biko, Kwame Bediako and Willie Jennings,² as well as various introductory texts on theological hermeneutics (e.g. on translation, inculturation, localisation and contextualisation), postcolonialism

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- 1 We wish to express our gratitude to Zolile Albany, Pervencia Farmer, Tsobotsi Koloti, Mkhangeliso Konza, Raymond Petersen and Zanele Sokatsha for digging deep into these texts with us.
 - 2 See Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1999); Steven Bantu Biko, *I Write what I Like: Selected Writings* (Johannesburg: Picardo Africa, 2017, 40th Anniversary edition), Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2017) (translated by Richard Philcox); and Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

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