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## **Analysing African Traditional Gods Through a Trinitarian Apologetic**

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### **Abstract**

Christian apologetics within the African continent is undergoing some level of retrieval. While classical topics such as the existence of God and the problem of evil and suffering are critical questions to answer for emerging generations, there is a need to answer specific questions that emerge from the African religious heritage. Among them is the question of whether the Triune God of Christianity is the same as the gods of the African Traditional Religions (ATRs), and if not, what do we make of the doctrine of God in view of the two traditions? To explore this question, this article utilises a comparative approach in analysing the understanding of God in ATRs and in classic Christian trinitarianism. Beginning with an overview of the socio-cultural and worldview antecedents in African societies, this article then contrasts the doctrine of God within ATRs with the doctrine within a Christian worldview. The contribution of this article is in explicating the continuities and discontinuities between ATRs and Christian trinitarianism, and especially in formulating apologetics within the African context.

### **The African Religious Heritage**

Christian apologetics within the African continent does not come to a continent that is *tabula rasa*. By this I mean that defences of the Christian faith meet a continent that is not “empty” when it comes to preconceptions of the divine. Rational justification for the truthfulness and practicability of the Christian faith often encounters a more religious context within the continent

than a post-Christian context, as is the case with apologetics in the global North. Granted, statistics in the census of different African countries point to a rise of the “nones” among the emerging generations. Yet, missiologists continue to speak of the growth of Christianity within the continent for the foreseeable future (Jenkins 2011). The grip of Christianity in the global South has grown steadily since 1900 from one of the least evangelized continents to 70% evangelization of its population in 2021. The upward trend of African Christianity can be discerned through its contribution to global Christianity, growing from 18% of Christians being located in the global South (with 82% located in the global North) in 1900, to 66% of Christians living in the global South in 2020 (Zurlo, Johnson, Crossing 2021). Scholars at the Gordon Conwell Center for Global Christianity argue that by 2050, 77% of Christians will live in the global South (Zurlo, Johnson, Crossing 2020). Given these statistics, various critiques can be offered. The critiques of such statistics often focus on qualitative factors such as, what do we mean by Christian? Is one Christian merely by name or birth, as is common in African countries, or is it based on being a believer in Jesus Christ? However, the point is that Christian apologetics on the continent will likely engage more religious people than atheists or agnostics.

A seminal figure in African philosophy of religion, John Mbiti (1990), argued almost thirty years ago that Africans are incurably religious. The history of the Christian enterprise on the continent is both varied and complex. Scholars such as Thomas Oden (2007) have argued for the importance of African theologians such as Augustine and Tertullian in “shaping the Christian mind” in early church history. Athanasius’ (1903) exposition on the incarnation of Christ against Arius, Augustine’s (2009) political theology in the *City of God* as well as Tertullian’s *Apologetic* (Dunn 2004) within the Roman empire, all function as important apologetics within a continent that has always been multi-cultural and multi-religious. The growth of Islam in the 7th Century quelled Christian expansion. Much of the apologetic work in the 11th and 12th Century in the continent takes a polemic strain – even though Thomas Aquinas retrieves the cosmological argument from Islamic philosophers of his time (Craig 2000:4-7). It is critical to note that despite the lull in Christian mission, Christianity did not disappear entirely in the continent, particularly in Egypt and Ethiopia, where the oldest churches can be found (Mbiti 1975:182). Prior to the Protestant

Reformation, Portuguese and Spanish missionaries brought the Christian faith to the African coastlines in the 15th and 16th centuries (Mbiti 1975:183).

The Reformed heritage bequeathed to the global Church a return to the authority of Scriptures, which was the basis of the modern mission movement. In the last 300 years, the Christian missionary enterprise in the African continent has been interpreted in various ways (Nthamburi 2002). While some are overly-critical of the missionary enterprise as a purely political process, others are more sympathetic to the gospel cause, by separating the spiritual task of missions from the political task of colonialism. Whatever the case, Christianity was reintroduced to a continent that was not *tabula rasa* but that had a long Christian history and a multi-coloured religious history. In contemporary times, the Christian faith shares a table with Islam, African Traditional Religions (ATRs), and other world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. For example, bordering Nairobi's Central Business District, the Parklands area is literally owned by Hindus. Another neighbourhood called Eastleigh is an Islamic area. African urban spaces are increasingly pluralistic in religious, ethical, and philosophical senses.

Thus, apologetics on the continent meets a varied pluralistic context and must attend to several tasks. First, there is a need to engage with false gospels and theologies that have arisen, such as the prosperity theology (or theologies), which creates problems around the doctrine of God, biblical hermeneutics, and the goal of the Christian life and witness. Second, apologetics in Africa must engage subtle yet increasingly popular secular worldviews, such as secular humanism, agnosticism, atheism, and postmodern relativism. Ndereba (2021:187-198) has explored ways in which Christian apologetics can address these divergent worldviews within the emerging generations. Third, Christian apologetics must answer the question of the African traditionalists. A popular critique from African traditionalists goes something like this: "the *mzungu* (white man) came with the Bible on one hand and a gun on the other hand". This critique conflates the political and missionary thrusts of our colonial history and views the Christian faith as an intrusion into African soil. The historical evidence demonstrates that this could not be further from the truth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, robust historical analyses of Christianity in Africa in Isichei (1995) and Sundkler (2009).

Unfortunately, many have used this fallacy to conclude that Africans should (re)turn to their African Traditional Religions (ATRs) as authentic forms of religion and spirituality. How might the Christian, who is convinced of the uniqueness of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Scriptures, respond to this? Our response must distinguish between the concept of God in ATRs and the concept of the Triune God in the Christian Scriptures, particularly his self-revelation in the Scriptures and in his Son Jesus Christ. The rest of this article will explore this response in detail.

## **The Doctrine of God in African Traditional Religions**

With the exception of pockets of atheistic Africans in urban cities, need for the classic apologetic proofs for the existence of God are negligible. Africans already function within a religious worldview that already assumes the existence of God or the gods. The only question is which God or gods? An exploration of the doctrine of God in ATRs reveals varied interpretations of God, yet also traces out particular points of similarity. The earliest African philosophers of religion and theologians grappled with how the doctrine of God in ATRs relates with the concept of God in Christianity. Mbiti, already mentioned, viewed the ATRs as preparatory for the *evangel*, the gospel.

### ***The African Theological Enterprise***

Mbiti charted a new territory when he viewed ATRs as preparatory for the gospel. The World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 had observed that the “primal religions”, to use Bediako’s (1993:14-19) words, “contained no preparation of Christianity.” Bediako (1993:16) notes, however, how Mbiti laid the groundwork for African Theology by prioritising the African experience and identity as an important locus for theological reflection. Moving beyond liberation as a theological theme, African theological reflection has engaged the themes of inculturation and, eventually, of reconstruction. While the forefathers, closer to the colonial history, engaged in a postcolonial struggle of identity in “African theology”, contemporary theological reflections have utilised these resources to deeply interrogate the theological disciplines and to reflect on issues facing contemporary African societies. For example, the Africa Society of Evangelical Theology<sup>2</sup> organises annual conferences, has

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.asetconference.wordpress.com](http://www.asetconference.wordpress.com)

a partnership with Langham Publishers, and has published seven volumes, the last three being on God and Creation, Pneumatology in Africa, and Christology in Africa. Langham Publishers, under their Global Library Imprint, have been publishing a wide range of PhD dissertations and academic monographs, covering fields as wide as New Testament Studies, Theological Education, Public Theology, Practical Theology, and Systematic Theology - all written by majority world scholars and attending to issues within their societies including integration of faith and learning, African religions and worldviews, communality, HIV/AIDs, creation care, ethnicity, political violence, and *ubuntu* among a host of sub-themes relevant to the continent.<sup>3</sup> The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians has applied theological reflection, even Christology, to the reality of gender, women's studies and women's issues, usually from a liberation and feminist perspective (Oduyoye 2002:18; Mombo 2003; Gathogo 2008; Stinton 2010). Katongole (2017) observes the multifaceted nature of African theological reflection based on institutional challenges, rapidly changing socio-cultural contexts, and the need for theologians on the continent to somehow be up-to-date with these wide shifts. Regardless of the challenges and prospects, ATRs looms large as an implicit worldview that must always be considered, and which Mbiti, among others, brought to the foreground.

In Mbiti's (1980) conception, ATRs are like the Jewish religion – they have more continuities than discontinuities with the gospel of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ himself being their fulfilment. On the opposite pole, Byang Kato (1975), an evangelical theologian who was once a General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, claimed that ATRs have more discontinuities with the gospel message than continuities. Elsewhere, Kato contended that Mbiti's view led to a universalism in his soteriology and that Idowu's view led to a syncretistic mixture between the Triune God and the pagan gods. Kato, committed to a high view of Scripture and seeking to engage the African context, has been variously interpreted (Bowers 2009; Shirik 2019). His later softening of his critiques towards these "liberal" African theologians is a mark of his imperfections as well as of his maturation. Kwame Bediako, another important theologian, has straddled these two poles of continuity and discontinuity, with a long-standing debate around the areas of gospel and

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://langhamliterature.org/books?filter=allbooks>

culture and gospel contextualization (Kato 1975). In his magnum opus, Bediako (2011:xi) observes:

My interest in the theme of Gospel and Culture, which forms the background to the treatment I have given, is rooted in the development of my own Christian self-understanding. From early in my Christian conversion experience, I have felt the need to seek clarification for myself of how the abiding Gospel of Jesus Christ relates to the inescapable issues and questions which arise from the Christian's *cultural* existence in the world, and how this relationship is achieved without injury to the integrity of the Gospel.

While one could view Mbiti and Kato as being at opposite poles, Bediako has always been in conversation with them, delicately balancing African identity and Gospel fidelity (Hartman 2022:3). His magnum opus, *Theology and Identity*, sets African identity at the centre of meaningful theological reflection among Christians on the continent. Bediako (2011:xv) has returned to this abiding theme time and again.

Bediako (2013:36) claims that in order for one to wisely interpret the significance of the New Testament, one must consider the background of Greco-Roman culture and religion. Like ATRs, he views Greek religion and Roman religion as “primal religions”. What this means for the apologetic task in light of the ATRs, is that it must utilise “theological idioms without surrendering Christian content” (Bediako 2013:44). The consequence of this statement is the significance of exploring African concepts such as ancestors, sacrifices, and community from within a biblical worldview. Such explorations will have some continuity, and possibly some discontinuity, with how these concepts are used in African thought forms. Yet, such an approach will also give them much more significance in light of biblical revelation. To successfully reflect on the theological significance of Christ in the continent, Bediako infers that one must consider ATRs. In his later years, he formed the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture, an academic institution that has spearheaded a profound engagement with Africa's languages and concepts such as mother tongue translation and other significant African hermeneutical approaches. Bediako, Kato, and Mbiti remain luminary figures in any discourse

of the theological or apologetic task in the continent. This article seeks to further build up on the ongoing conversation for the task of Christian apologetics today.

### ***Concepts of God in ATRs***

Mbiti's *Concepts of God* analyses the doctrine of God in 300 African ethnicities. The doctrine of God in these various African Traditional Religions (ATRs) have similarities to each other, yet also show some divergence. African Traditional Religions have various names for God or the gods based on the activity or attributes of the said divinity. For example, based on the study of the Ashanti religion by J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, Parrinder (1970) notes that the traditional names of God communicated the basic idea of deity, personality, and infinity in his being. Within most ATRs, God can be approached through a combination of rituals, sacrifices, prayers, and worship - all conducted through a mediator (Mbiti 1975:19). Bolaji Idowu explains the Yoruba (Nigeria) conceptualisation of God as a pantheon of gods, *orisha*. He argues that this is different from polytheism and that the two or three hundred gods make up a single "soul," which brings coherence to their understanding of the Supreme Being (Parrinder 1970:82).

For the Sukuma in Tanzania, relationship with the divine is through "a direct ritual relationship with the spirits of their ancestors" (Tanner 1967:5). The Supreme Being has various names, contingent on one's geographic location – primarily, the Supreme Being is a solitary spirit with different aspects based on his character. As with the Yoruba above, the Supreme Being is preeminent within a world of lesser spirit beings (Tanner 1967:5). In more contemporary contexts, the Sukuma Christians have returned to the traditional names of God such as *Seba* and *Liwelelo*, which were avoided by the missionaries so as to distinguish the Christian God (*Mulungu* or *Mungu*) from the traditional god of the Sukuma. Other African Traditional Religions (ATRs) speak of God based on his attributes. For example, the Akan (Ghana) refer to God as "he who knows or sees all", while the Zulu (South Africa) and Banyarwanda (Rwanda) call him "the wise one" (Mbiti 1970:3). These names are not far removed from the Old Testament names of God such as *Elohim*, *Jehovah Rapha*, *Jehovah Nissi*, among others. The point is that the concepts of God on the continent are broad and reveal some level of continuity with Scripture in terms of attributes and names for God.

In terms of the sources of the conception of God in African Traditional Religions (ATRs), one must look to the oral traditions that are prominent in African societies. Hymns, songs, poems, speeches, proverbs, festivities, morals, and communal ceremonies all contain important material for theological reflection in the African context (Mbiti 1975). In summary, ATRs have a conception of a Supreme Being, a spirit world, mediators such as elders and ancestors, initiatory rites, and the practice of magic (Idowu 1975:137). Contestations remain as to the relationship between these ATRs and Christian conceptualisation of God. Within the religious landscape of Africa, religious thought traverses “pantheistic, monotheistic, polytheistic and animistic strands” (Parrinder 1970:86). The following section compares trinitarian theism with ATR conceptions of God. It argues that inherent differences must offer caution in theological reflection and apologetic engagement.

## **A Critique of Concepts of God in ATR**

With most African scholars, I agree that we need to take ATRs seriously if the Christian mission is to spread further on the continent. One sees recurring themes in Christian theology within the African context when one considers that the question of this article is similar to the questions that earlier theologians were asking in 1998 (Ngewa, Shaw, Tienou 1998). These theologians explored the salience of the Christian worldview for Biblical inerrancy, the doctrine of God, the spirit world, and demonology. This article is not a rehashing of the importance of these aspects but a fresh exploration for the contemporary African context. While earlier African theologians, closer to the colonial history were seeking the good in ATRs based on the generalisation arising from the missionary enterprise, today’s sceptics are pushing for a total abandonment of the Christian faith in favour of our ATRs. In essence, their claim is not similar to the forebearers of Christian theologising in the continent, but different in its repulsion against Christ. While the earlier scholars retrieved ATRs in order to understand the African worldview and its role in theology, I seek to focus more on the contrast in this section so as to show the difference between the African and trinitarian theism, and its role for the apologetic task in the continent.

## ***ATRs and the Question of Salvation***

The Christian worldview is unique in its exclusivity concerning how humanity attains salvation. While many religions teach different truths or parallel concepts such as *Nirvana* in Buddhism and *Yoga* in Hinduism concerning salvation, Jesus Christ walks a unique path. Adeyemo (1997:75) observes this contrast between Jesus Christ and the traditional systems of religion:

But Jesus did not come to offer a religion, an idea, a law, or a formula about reality. Rather, by his coming, he put an end to rituals and religions. He fulfilled the law in himself. He unveiled the personal Creator-God. He offered life. By a life of sinless obedience, he manifested the highest degree of morality and ethics. By his acts of mercy and compassion, he demonstrated the love of God. His teaching about what is right, good, and just has never been paralleled. He met the quest of philosophers concerning reality and truth. He lifted the poor; released the oppressed; healed the broken-hearted; set the captives free; fed the hungry; raised the dead; opened blind eyes; and proclaimed the good news of God's Kingdom. Above all, he suffered and died on the cross in the place of all sinners - not for any crime he had committed but to pacify the wrath of God. He died so as to reconcile man to God. He rose again so that justified man may be able to live by the power that raised Christ from the dead.

Adeyemo here spells out an orthodox Christian understanding concerning Christology. He speaks of Christ's vicarious atonement, which is central to the concept of salvation in Christian doctrine (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 3:18, Mark 10:45, 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, 2 Corinthians 5:21).<sup>4</sup> In his statement, one hears the apostolic confession of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ as the heartbeat of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:1-7). Adeyemo also expands how this objective work of Christ on the cross is applied by the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of believers through forgiveness, adoption, sanctification, and future glorification. As such, one understands the past,

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<sup>4</sup> In the recent past, William Lane Craig (2018) has offered an exegetical, philosophical, and theological treatment of the doctrine of atonement in view of the intersection of legal theories and the different atonement theories within historic Christian doctrine.

present, and future aspects of Christ’s salvific work, that it is objective in its reality and subjective in its application in the lives of different Christian believers across time and space. Adeyemo finally speaks about the kingdom of God, inaugurated through Christ’s first coming and coming in its fulness in his second return. These aspects are the pinnacle of God’s special revelation to his elect.

While general revelation is evidence in the natural world of God’s existence as Psalm 19 and Romans 1 teach, without spiritual illumination from the Holy Spirit, no human being can ascend to the truth of God and form a personal relationship with him (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Calvin’s concept of *sensus divinitatis* speaks to the classical proofs of God’s existence. However, the reality of sin renders the human faculties of cognition, affection, and will powerless – no wonder the apostle Paul notes that before Christ, we are “dead” (Ephesians 2:1-10). What is needed therefore is spiritual surgery that can reveal Christ to the hearts of humanity. While we would agree with the traditionalists that all people everywhere have a conception of God, we would critique this knowledge on the grounds that the Christian faith invites us into a personal, saving relationship with the One True and Living God (Acts 17:22-31). Paul’s apologetic engagement is different from the concept of God in ATRs:

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Christianity</b>	<b>ATRs</b>
<b>Creator</b>	Creator of the whole universe - “Lord of Heaven and Earth” (17:24)	Creator of the world (with a focus on a particular ethnicity)
<b>Presence</b>	Spirit and Omnipresent (17:24)	Spirit and should be worshipped in particular places (mountains, trees, etc)

<b>Sovereignty</b>	Accomplishes his own purposes – not in need of anything (17:24-25)	Can be appeased into a relationship of either blessing or cursing
<b>Culture</b>	Made one man from every nation (17:26)	Made a man or a couple from a particular ethnicity
<b>Personal</b>	A personal relationship with only One Mediator (17:27, cf. 2 Tim 2:5)	Ritualistic practices through many mediators (e.g., elders, ancestors, spirit world)

*Table 1: Distinction between Concepts of God in Acts 17 between Christianity and ATRs*

### ***ATRs and the Question of the Trinity***

While ATRs may contain some understanding of the divine, the biblical God has revealed himself as Trinity - thereby parting company with traditional African notions of God, which, as discussed above, are a constellation of monotheism, polytheism, and animism. While the word Trinity is not used in the Bible, the concept of the Triunity of God is evident in the Scriptures. The doctrine of the Trinity rests on three biblical truths:

1. That God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4, Mark 12:29, Zechariah 14:9, See also 1 Timothy 2:5, James 2:19);
2. That God has revealed himself through three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:1-2, 1:26, 16:7, 18:3, Psalm 110:1, Isaiah 61:1);
3. And that the three distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are “coequal” and “coeternal”.

Theologians help us to understand the triunity of God through consideration of the titles of God, the attributes of God, and the works of God. Concerning the titles of God, the Father is called God (Deuteronomy 6:3-5, John 6:27), the Son is called God (John 1:1, Hebrews 1:8), and the Holy Spirit is called God (Acts

5:3-9, 2 Corinthians 3:17). Concerning the attributes of God, the Father is called Holy, the Son is called Holy, and the Spirit is called Holy (Revelation 15:4, Acts 3:14, Isaiah 6:3). Therefore, the Father, Son and Spirit must have one essence even though they are of distinct personhood, which has been the orthodox understanding as per the Nicene formulation.<sup>5</sup> Concerning the works of God, the Scriptures reveal that the Father was involved in creation, the Son was involved in creation, and the Spirit was involved in creation (Genesis 1:1-2, John 1:1-2). A similar parallel could be made regarding God's redemptive purposes – the Father plans salvation, the Son accomplishes salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation to God's elect (Romans 8:29, John 17:2, John 16:13-14). Although Swinburne (2018) argues that one requires an "a priori argument" for the Trinity as one cannot derive the doctrine of the Trinity from the New Testament, I would argue, as expounded above, that it is plausible to conclude the Trinity based on the overall biblical data: that God is One yet has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Further, the councils of the Church throughout her long history have understood the Trinity to be a core doctrine for Christian believers. If the early church heresies could be seen as a confusion between the unity and diversity in the Godhead, then the concept of Trinity developed by the Church councils settled the matter. The Westminster Confession, as an example, summarises:

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<sup>5</sup> Following Boethius, Swinburn (2018) defines "persons" as "an individual substance of a rational nature". The systematic theologian, John Webster (2010), explores the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of creation. Readers may benefit from how he unpacks the doctrine of the Trinity through a systematic exploration of essence, persons, and external processions. He notes, for example, that "God's unity is characterised by modes of being in each of which the entire divine essence subsists in a particular way; this simultaneous, eternal existence in these three modes is the one divine essence. Accordingly, the persons of the godhead are not distinguished from the divine essence *realter*; there are not three eternal, or three incomprehensibles, or three uncreated, or three almighties, or three gods. This is not to reduce the persons back into some anterior unity (that is, this does not 'confound the persons'), but simply to state that the persons are inseparable from the essence, and the essence inseparable from its threefold personal modification".

Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory (1 John 5:7; Matthew 28:19).

The biblical arguments aside, the formulation of the doctrine has taken various approaches. Kombo (2016:7) lists these as: (1) “God as essence”, which is based on Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian thought; (2) “God as Absolute Subject”, borrowing from German idealism; (3) “God as Community in Unity”, based on apophaticism-doxology; and (4) “God as Great Muntu”, borrowing from Ubuntu philosophy. Unpacking these approaches, Kombo notes that contextual location influences and feeds into theological reflection, even on this mysterious doctrine. However, it may be, these approaches all seek to synthesise the unity and diversity in the Godhead. The ATRs, however, confuse the doctrine of God, for there seems to be no unanimity concerning whether ATRs are monotheistic or polytheistic. Further, in the ATRs God is accessed through intermediaries and moralistic rituals. In the Christian conception, God is a Trinity, a concept that distinguishes Christianity from both monotheistic religions (such as Judaism and Islam) and polytheistic religions (such as Hinduism). The biblical and theological conception of the Trinity distinguishes itself from the African conceptions of God, and functions as a central theological hermeneutic of the Christian faith (Kombo 2016:8).

## **Conclusion**

The concepts of God in ATRs have been considered because the metaphysical make-up of the African world is pregnant with spirits of various kinds. Africans have an incessant push to be right with God through these various intermediaries. The resurgence of African traditional practices such as the offering of sacrificial goats through elder initiatory rites affects the understanding of the new covenant that we have in Christ Jesus (Ndereba 2021). Within African Christian practice, some Christians lack Christian assurance and confidence, when they interpret life’s challenges through the eyes of ATRs. Seen that way, some African Christians either resort to prosperity preachers or return to traditional priests or mediums. The salience of this apologetic approach therefore is not merely an intellectual quest, but is also central to a pastoral response within the continent.

This article presented African theological interpretations on the concept of God. By exploring the work of African theologians such as Kwame Bediako, John Mbiti, and Byang Kato, this article presented the continuous challenge of responding to the gospel message in light of African traditional worldviews. The article revealed that the conceptions of God on the continent are as many as there are people groups. These include pantheistic, monotheistic, and polytheistic conceptions, among others. While understanding ATRs is critical to the missionary task of the gospel on the continent, there is a need to explore the discontinuities between concepts of God in ATRs and Trinitarianism. This article outlined two differences between ATRs and the trinitarian formulation of God. First, this article observed that ATRs are primarily concerned with communal harmony and not salvation. While this expands concepts of reconciliation to a holistic scope, it bypasses the underlying salvation theory of atonement. Secondly, this article observed that the concept of Trinity, which interfaces with the person and work of Jesus Christ, is central to an elementary doctrine of God, and parts company with the monotheism, pantheism, and polytheism of African Traditional Religions. Thus, this article concludes that while there is benefit in ATRs - in terms of holistic worldviews, the importance of communality, and concepts of *ubuntu* – by and large, the difference lies in the significance of the doctrine of God to the story of redemption, and its theological, missiological, and pastoral implications.

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