Fabien Eboussi Boula, born in 1934 in Cameroon, was for about two decades a member of the Society of Jesus and a Catholic priest and lecturer of theology. Like his co-patriot Jean-Marc Ela, he was after some time no longer happy in the academic milieu. He returned about 1980 to his native village in order to re-think Christianity. He wrote a large number of articles and several books. His first book La crise du muntu was a sharp attack on the tradition of imitation within 'African' theology, still dominated by the North-Atlantic academic world. Soon after this publication he left the priesthood. His second book, Christianity without fetishes. An African critique and recapture of Christianity, presents a fundamental theology. It is a plea for the conversion of the Christian faith by Africans. It is a highly abstract book, but also the result of the personal pilgrimage of its author, full with concrete references to daily life. We were not able to collect many biographical references of Eboussi, but the development of his thinking, as reported in his writings, provides enough material for a theological portrait. Until the publication of the collected articles in À Contretemps in 1991, we find theological reflection, related to society, in his writings. After that year he concentrates on the political and social reality of his country. This article concentrates on the socio-theological writings, the period 1977-1991.

The first publication by Eboussi, known to me, is an article from 1968, “Le Bantou problématique”. It is a sharp attack on Placide Tempels. This accusation already sets the tone for his later work: the super-

4 Présence Africaine 66(1968), 4-40; cf. Placide Tempels, Philosophie Bantoue, Elisabethville, 1945.

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vision of African Christianity by European missionaries. He did not doubt the generosity of the European missionaries, but criticized their vision. The Bantu metaphysics according to Tempels was only a construction of a European missionary. According to Tempels the European researcher had the responsibility to give a systematic description of the Bantu pattern of thinking. But according to Eboussi there is no direct connection between the real Bantu consciousness and the reconstruction by the Belgian missionary. This was a prelude to a major concern in his theological denunciation. In many more publications Eboussi used a pointed style to emphasize a major theme of his theology: the critique of the supervision of African Christianity by well-meaned European missionising.

In 1972 the Jesuits of Yaoundé organised a seminar on “Faith and healing”. Eboussi gave a presentation with the title “Christianity as disease and as healing”. He started with a comment on the current methodology in scripture interpretation, the study of *Sitz im Leben*. In contrast to this exegesis, contemporary Christian communities stress the normative function of biblical texts, while their origins remain vague. This suggests that Christian communities have been separated from their surrounding society. Eboussi notes that the society where Jesus lived suffered from a fetishist worship for Jewish law. This turned universal Jahwism into an ethnic religion. Jahweh had become a tribal divinity. Moreover, God was considered as a backbone, while the God of Jesus pulls from the perspective of the future. Jesus annulled discrepancies like those between man and woman, free and slave, rich and the poor, intellectuals and illiterates. He substituted genealogical thinking (“we, children of Abraham, not those outside”) by the concept of God as father of all. This ‘all’ implied also diversity for Eboussi, even in the field of religion.

Jesus was on familiar terms with the sick. This is considered as a healing of society in the gospels. He could overcome the fear for a world without boundaries. Also the fear for disease and death. If Christianity in Africa would only be a derivative, a duplicate of an original one elsewhere, it would be a factor of alienation in Africa, like the Jewish religion of the time of Jesus. The fight against disease turned in that context into a condescending campaign against the consequences of ignorance, backwardness and lack of hygiene. The style of nursing became paternalistic. People can be excited about the idea to nurse disgusting sick people. There is an aspect of nihilism in this passion of nursing. The patient becomes object of charity, a good opportunity for the righteous to execute works of philanthropy and show superiority. In the context of the Western mission, health care is no longer the place where the Spirit can advance in triumph to inaugurate a new world. Eboussi comments anxiously: “I remain a Christian, but put myself the question how I, a black person, can

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