

A CRITIQUE OF BARTHIAN PNEUMATOLOGY IN AFRICAN CONTEXT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON CHRIST APOSTOLIC CHURCH

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Abstract

Karl Barth's discourse on pneumatology is arguably one of the most extensive descriptions of the Holy Spirit. His position reflects the general tendencies of Western intellectual tradition, which may not strictly be in alignment with the self-disclosed revelation and the existential experience of the Two-third world, especially Africa. African critics have argued that Barth's concept of Pneumatology is faulty in its appropriate bearing towards African self-disclosure of God's revelation which is very peculiar to the Africans in term of spiritism and the grossly metaphysical understanding of man's experience. Therefore, this paper compares African Christian beliefs on the Holy Spirit with Barthian's beliefs with the intention of ascertaining the theological and existential implications of the contrasting views for humans, particularly in Africa. Descriptive and comparative methods of research were adopted in this paper. It was discovered that, while Barth perceives the Holy Spirit as a person; Christ Apostolic Church dwell much on the works of the Holy Spirit to meet the physical and spiritual needs, and the Africans see the Holy spirit as a force and power for achieving their ends. The paper concludes by recommending that the concept of the Holy Spirit should be holistic and all- encompassing- since the Holy Spirit is essentially a person, who can help God's people with their needs.

Introduction

Those who are familiar with Barth would acknowledge that his concept of pneumatology is one of the most extensive descriptions of the Spirit in the general tendencies of Western intellectual tradition, which may not strictly be in alignment with the self-disclosed revelation and the experience of the Two Third existential concern. Alternatively, his work on the Holy Spirit takes a larger leverage with Evangelicalism who had been equally apprehending contextualization from non-reactionary front and had conceived exclusivism as a better way of doing contextual Theology.

However, with this confinement African critics have argued that Barth's concept of Pneumatology is faulty in its appropriate bearing towards African Self disclosure of Gods revelation which is very peculiar to the Africans in term of spiritism and the grossly metaphysical understanding of man's experience. This polemic

stance is against Barthian approach towards the actual reflection on the person and work of the Spirit in Africa. Hence this is the centre piece of this paper as the nature of spirit in Africa becomes a consequent hermeneutical tool in criticizing the transcendence function of Barthian expression of Pneumatology.

The work adopted Kendra Cherry's theory of holism which sees organism (Holy Spirit) as means to provide support that looks at the whole person (life or situation), not just only on intangible matters. The theory affirms that the support should also consider their physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing. This holism theory is in sequence with Barthian understanding of the Holy Spirit and relatable in African sense. It is envisaged that the outcome of this research will positively contribute to the ongoing debate and articulate a relevant pneumatology in the CAC context.

Karl Barth and his Theology of Holy Spirit

Barth was born in Basel, the son of Fritz Barth, a professor of New Testament and early Church history at Bern, and Anna Sartorius. He studied at the universities of Bern, Berlin, Tübingen, and Marburg. At Berlin he attended the liberal theologian Adolf von Harnack's seminar, and at Marburg he came under the influence of Wilhelm Herrmann and became deeply interested in the thought of the early 19th-century German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher and in the nature of scientific method. After serving a curacy in Geneva from 1909 to 1911, he was appointed to the working-class parish of Safenwil, in Aargau canton.

In 1913, he married Nelly Hoffman, a talented violinist; they had one daughter and four sons. His vigorous opposition to German National Socialism led to his suspension as professor of theology at the University of Bonn. Subsequently, at Basel, he continued work on his monumental *Church Dogmatics* (completing four volumes) and delivered more than 500 sermons.

The theology of Karl Barth may best be understood as an extended response to the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Protestant liberalism. Borrowing the language of Søren Kierkegaard, Barth spoke of the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and the human being.¹ God is the one who is "wholly other," and if one is to know anything of God, it will not be found by gazing into the world of human experience. Barth summarized his own position by declaring, "The possibility of knowledge of God's Word lies in God's Word and nowhere else."²

The only way we are to know this God is in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and nowhere else. When asked how one knows that this is true, Barth responded, "Proof of faith consists in the proclamation of faith. The proof of knowledge of the Word consists in confessing it."³ In a sense, all Barth's work is occasional. In June 1933, he said that the urgent task was to get on with theology "as if nothing has happened," Barth was not suggesting that the Church withdraw to the hill in denial of the Nazification of Germany, rather he was declaring that National Socialism

must not be allowed to set the agenda for the Church. For Barth, theology must be related to the contemporary without being dominated by the contemporary.⁴

Pneumatology is not an isolated science or field of study. Pneumatology completely affects and is affected by one's conception of the Trinity. Therefore, asking how Barth conceptualizes the Trinity is the first task. Barth declares himself to be neo-Orthodox; clinging to the doctrines of the Reformation that made it a true reformation. This means that God is one and only one for Barth. It also means that God is three. It seems that the nature of God is the perfect canvas for Barth's dialectical theo-graphicart; asking how can one God be three? Is the perfect dialectic dilemma.

Barth maintains a strict monotheism while affirming the importance of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Barth explains this seeming inconsistency by claiming that God is revealed to humanity through repetition of God's nature. Such repetition "is grounded in His Godhead; hence in such a way that it signifies no alteration in His Godhead; but also in such a way that only in this repetition is He the one God."⁵

This repetition is not a post-Pentecostal event. Barth, in a somewhat un-orthodox fashion, defends the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed by claiming, as Colin Brown says, that "the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is not limited to the giving of the Spirit in time at Pentecost, but expresses an eternal relationship within the being of God."⁶ So it may be concluded that the work of Jesus on earth was equally and simultaneously the work of God as well as the Holy Spirit, as the work of the Spirit in our lives today is equally the work of Jesus and God. Being utterly monotheistic, what then is the role, or function, or personality of the Holy Spirit that requires a three-fold repetition of God's nature? Though Barth continually affirms the universality of the promise of Christ to all of humanity, he distinguishes Christians by those who "are breathed upon,"⁷ by Christ's breath, which is the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the Spirit is the very Word of God breathed upon the life of humanity, the very Revealedness of God. Barth describes the functions of Father, Son and Spirit as Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness in order to show that revelation itself is what creates such tension and difficulty of being three-in-one. In Jesus, the Word was revealed in flesh. The flesh of Jesus was the Spirit as well as divine. Jesus did not cease to be God or Spirit when he became flesh. Each act of Jesus was three acts: that of the Word, the Word revealed in flesh, and the revealedness of the Word by the Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit cannot be reduced to an emotional experience, a spiritual entity, or any other exclusive mode of being.

The Holy Spirit is the active participation in the life of Jesus, as that life is also the life of God, as is the life of the Holy Spirit. This keeps Barth from being modalist. In Barth's theology, the Spirit's main work is to make it possible for humanity to recognize and to receive Christ's universal reconciliation. Barth continually affirms the universality of the promise of Christ to all humanity, he distinguishes

Christian by those who are breathed upon” by Christ’s breath, which is the Holy Spirit.⁸

Pneumatology and Soteriology

Beginning with the second century theologian, Irenaeus, he talks about the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father, working out the love and the will of the Father throughout the world. British theologian, Colin Gunton, picks up on Irenaeus’ language and argues that when we think of God’s redemptive work in the world, we must think in a trinitarian shape. He argues that the Son and the Spirit both have a particular agency in the world, each moving and working in a specific way. As the French charismatic theologian Jean-Jaques Suurmond puts it, that Word and the Spirit are the two creative hands of God who “together develop and work out life like a cosmic Bach fugue.”⁹ The point is this, when one thinks about atonement, redemption, or any other work of God in the world, one must think in terms of the fullness of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. Only in this context can we begin to envision the dynamic nature of the work of God in the world. And this brings this work to our second key concept, the Holy Spirit is the ‘deposit’ of our inheritance (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14) which means that the Holy Spirit is given to us as a guarantee or an assurance of our inclusion and identity as the heirs of God (i.e., we are co-heirs with Christ).

The Augustinian tradition's "*vinculum*" interpretation of the Holy Spirit, which views the Spirit as the "bond of love" that unites the Father and the Son, is the source of concern. The *vinculum* has been criticized by some (Robert Jenson, Colin Gunton, for example) for catastrophically depersonalizing the Spirit in Augustinian thought, while others (Barth, in some places, Rowan Williams, Milbank, etc.) see it as vital to comprehending the Trinity as a living, loving unity.¹⁰ Hegel's conception of the Holy Spirit is in the context of the Trinity. First of all, according to Hegel, the Spirit mediates the redemption of the Father and Son and represents the third point of reconciliation in the emergence of God as absolute spirit. The power of Jesus Christ is the Spirit, through whom the act of the Son in Christ is known and historic in and of itself, the depth of the historical experience with the rising Christ.¹¹

Therefore, to discuss participation in Christ is to discuss how the human subject's life is oriented to correspond with God's life. This has been argued in the dissertation of Ables, Travis Evan that Augustine and Barth together provide a fundamentally performative and aporetic "pneumatology of Christian knowledge," or that is, the aporetic of performance.¹²

Holy Spirit is only intelligible in the context of an Augustinian doctrine of grace. Jenson and supporters like Hunsinger (A) agree on the common confession of the Holy Spirit in a renewed doctrine of the triune God, but (B) disagree on (i) the identity of the person of the Spirit (i.e., how is the Spirit other than Father and Son without being something other than Father and Son?) as well as (ii) the identity of the work of the Spirit (i.e., can the work of the Spirit be an intimate *spiritus* creator

of the world in the Church while also being other than them?). The issue has to do with how theology can render the particular otherness of the Spirit as the reason for God's intimate relationship to the Church—and do this while maintaining Barth's axiom that "God's Word (and, we might now say, Spirit) is God Himself in His revelation".¹³

But this is not just a promise; this is a continuous and active agency for us on God's part. In Christ's farewell speeches in John, he talks about the Spirit as the one who will continue his work and teachings in the world when he is gone. Throughout the writings of Paul, we see the Spirit as the Triune person who inspires, empowers, and moves us to continue the work of Christ in the world. Somehow in this interchange, we are involved not because we just need something to do in the world but because we are the children of God. We do not just become members of the Kingdom of God; we are the rightful heirs with Christ of the riches, responsibilities, and benefits.

The Holy Spirit, who is sent to us, is both the guarantee and the deposit of this inheritance, which is a mysterious and wondrous gift. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul tells us that the Spirit reveals to us the deep mysteries of God. British theologian, Tom Smail, concludes from the 1 Cor. 2:11 passage that the Spirit is identified as God. Only God can know God, and only God can reveal God to us. Smail argues that: What the Spirit does is not a human work, or the work of some spiritual energy that is imminent to our humanity or to the created order, but a work of God.¹⁴ I think it is important to note here that Smail is working for a charismatic renewal of the Spirit in the life of the Church and wants to move toward a theology that holds a high place for the personalizing of the Spirit. The first thing that he does is set apart the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is not an anonymous spiritual force or energy in the world.

The Spirit is God at work in the world, not simply the collective energy of humanity or the created order. God is not present in an ambiguous manner; God is present for us through the particular agency of the Spirit. Moreover, the Spirit brings us Christ and we are brought into full relationship with the Triune God through the Spirit. The Spirit is a builder of relationships. Here Smail continues: If it is through the Spirit that we come to believe the gospel and to appropriate corporately and personally all that the Father has done for us through the Son, none of this is a possibility for or an achievement of our own inherent spirituality; rather, it is a gracious work of God within us.¹⁵

African Pneumatology

All Pentecostals focus on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. However, African Pentecostals have certain perspectives of the Holy Spirit that is comprehensible only in relation to their traditional worldview. Chigor Chike, for instance notes, "the understanding of the Africans concerning the work and person of the Holy

Spirit”.¹⁶ His findings are very important for any discussion on African pneumatology because of its scope. It covers not only Pentecostals but also African Catholics, Methodists, Anglicans Baptists etc. He found similarities in their views on the Holy Spirit. Since they are from different Christian backgrounds, this similarity can only be accounted for by the African traditional religious heritage that they have in common. Chike shows that although their denominational backgrounds affect their pneumatology to some extent, it was obvious that all the participants are heavily influenced by the African worldview.

Clifton Clark also studied the understanding of the Holy Spirit among Indigenous Churches in Ghana. He concluded that for African Christians, unless the Christian faith is able to help them to emerge victorious in the battle against the African world, it fails to bring the salvation they require and will appreciate.¹⁷

Since the African worldview sees life as a spiritual battle, Africans see the Holy Spirit as helping believers to overcome the work of the evil spirits, especially to ensure that they have material prosperity.¹⁸ They focus on the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit and how it might be used to deal with the evil spirits of the African cosmos. In this way it can be said that they have a local theology.¹⁹

Most African Initiated Churches (AIC) understanding is that the Holy Spirit meets existential needs in the African spirit world. It is also believed that by the power of the Holy Spirit those who have faith in Jesus Christ can do almost everything if they had enough faith.²⁰

The Holy Spirit also, “illuminates, empowers, protects, works wonders and gives guidance” to the believer. Although they believe that the Holy Spirit gives the believer “power to live a holy life and to conquer sin”, their focus is on the power to overcome the impediments of life on earth.²¹ Harold Turner’s study of African Indigenous Churches also reveals that they see the Holy Spirit mainly as a source of power to save people from the evil spirits of the African cosmos.²²

The Holy Spirit is regarded as a means of healing and protection. Anderson asserts rightly that Africans flock only to the Pentecostal churches where the prophet-leaders constantly demonstrate spiritual power to meet their existential needs such as healing and liberation from other spiritual disturbances. Essentially, the Holy Spirit is understood as the source of God’s power which is given so that personal needs and all other forms of powerlessness can be addressed.²³ It can be seen that the thought of conquering the devil and his emissaries, the demons, is prominent in the pneumatology of African Christians.

What Jesus does about the existential issues that Africans struggle with, is more important for many African Christians than what he does about their innate moral weakness that frustrates their efforts to live in accordance with the moral image of God. Among African Christians generally the emphasis on the persons and works of the Holy Spirit is directed against the powers of darkness, as if the assumed victory over evil spirits is the most important goal of salvation.

Although the central focus of these churches is on the Spirit, generally speaking a central place is also given to Jesus Christ. In some of these churches, however, there may indeed be a largely unconscious weakening of Christology as a result of an overemphasis on the Spirit. The Spirit is not generally seen as an ambiguous, numinous power; but he manifests his presence and power personally, making a dynamic relationship between God and his people possible.

African pneumatology meets human needs far more substantially than does either Western Christianity or African Traditional Religions. At the same time, African 'enthusiastic' Christianity such as is found in the Spirit-type churches, like the world-wide AIC movement (which is becoming increasingly a 'Third World' phenomenon), witnesses to the fact that 'Christian life is life in the Spirit, and bought by its very nature to display manifest signs of its transforming and invigorating energy'

Brief History and Holy Spirit in Christ Apostolic Church

The Christ Apostolic Church is distinctly an Indigenous African Church by its structure, beliefs and practices; it is an independent Aladura Pentecostal Church.²⁴ Christ Apostolic Church is the first of its kind in Nigeria and in Africa. The history of the Church is traceable directly to her fore-fathers, namely Oba/Pastor Isaac Babalola Akinyele, Pastor Divid Ogunleye Odubanjo, Joseph Sadere, Miss Sophia Odunlami and Evangelist (late Apostle) Joseph Ayodele Babalola who was called to the ministry by the Lord on 11th Oct., 1928. Apostle Babalola's invitation to the ministry subsequently led to the great revival of 1930.²⁵

Christ Apostolic Church believes in the impartation of the Holy Spirit, that He is the source of power that will transport them to heaven at the close of the age.²⁶ The impartation of the Holy Spirit should translate into speaking in tongues other than one's own. The Holy Spirit fills the believers with joy, peace and boldness to evangelize and imparts joy of salvation to people or sinners and it is also help in building the Church. The Holy Spirit has helped in the expansion of the Church in the country and abroad. The Holy Spirit searches all hearts. The Holy Spirit takes an important role revealing Jesus' reality and the truth about Him in Christ Apostolic Church. Christian Apostolic Church acknowledges the nine gifts of the Spirit as reflected under the one of the doctrine and beliefs of the Church.

Similarities in Barthian Theology of the Holy Spirit and Christ Apostolic Church

There is a similarities in what Barth feel about the Holy Spirit being a mediate and movement of mediation African believes in the Spirit as the mediator between human and God of course, the Spirit bring human to God in other words they make human to understand whom Jesus is.

Critique of Barthian Pneumatology

Barth is monism in his idea about the holy spirit in the life of a Christian, how the Holy Spirit illuminates but fails to recognize that the holy spirit is the concrete source of power for the African man to be delivered and that is the way he sees him "Holy Spirit", yes there are several powers militating against man but Barth was much more concerned about the abstract and in Africa "seen is believing" Based on this, Holy Spirit in Barth's idea within African framework is not 100% right.

If Barth understanding about the Holy Spirit is only centered on inner man without meeting the existential need of human, then where is the place "when the spirit of comforter which I shall send in my name shall come upon you definitely Barth defiled the work of the spirit "comfort" because this is one of the major beliefs in African that the spirit comfort, gives joy, peace and life. One of the major effectiveness of the spirit is that the spirit liberate from all manner of forces and Africans strongly believe that the spirit is worth one should relied on.

Barth is not consistent in his idea when trying to defend himself about the trinity by using "Mode" for Holy Spirit which to him, he meant Holy Spirit is middle man between the Father and the Son of course Barth defeated the issue of trinity and still relating to Holy Spirit as a singular entity so, Barth is neither concrete nor factual, at this juncture Barth's view should be called binary. A long standing criticism of Barth has been that his Christocentrism so overpowers his theology of pneumatology often seems to take a theological backseat. This was noted by Robert Jenson's famous article cleverly entitled, "you wondered where the spirit went."²⁷

Jenson's and others while highly sympathetic to Barth's theology, nevertheless they are concerned that Barth's Christological centre is so unmoving that sometimes all we have is "Jesus Christ" when we would expect to be hearing Holy Spirit, this criticism focused especially upon Barth's pneumatology as evident in the Church Dogmatics (CD)²⁸

The African Christian will not subscribe to Barth's view because the issue of the Spirit is much more given an attention.

To what extent is materialism to the Africans? This is due to what they had experienced or they are experiencing, Africans believe that let my needs be meant, definitely that is God whom I shall follow and serve.

The Role of The Holy Spirit in Our Lives Today

All gifts are given to mankind by God; there is none greater than the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has many functions, roles, and activities. First, He does a work in the hearts of all people everywhere. Jesus told the disciples that He would send the Spirit into the world to "convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:7-11). Everyone has a "God consciousness,"²⁹ whether or not they admit it. The Spirit applies the truths of God to minds of men to convince them by fair and sufficient arguments that they are sinners. Responding to that conviction brings men to salvation.

Once an individual is saved and belongs to God, the Spirit takes up residence in his/her hearts forever, sealing the person with the confirming, certifying, and assuring pledge of our eternal state as His children. Jesus said He would send the Spirit to us to be our Helper, Comforter, and Guide. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever" (John 14:16). Christian in the modern age are facing a lot of challenges, because of their understanding or otherwise of the Holy Spirit. Andrew J Losier puts in this ways ".....they say that the average Christian is somewhere between Calvary for pardon but have not been to Pentecost for power."³⁰

Bruner, quoting Riggs tells that 'being baptized in the Spirit' is for Pentecostals, something of catch phrase. Thus when the Bible uses phrase such as 'filled with' (Acts 2:4) and 'to receive the Holy Spirit' (Acts 4:8), it is synonymous for Spirit baptism.³¹ However, Pentecostals will say there is a difference between receiving the Spirit and fully fill with the spirit.³² The Bible constantly speaks of the spirit in language, which characterizes him as a distinct intelligent person. In passages too numerous to write here, he is described as exactly the functions, thoughts, volitions and emotions which belong to a distinct personality.³³

The Greek word translated here "Counselor" means "one who is called alongside"³⁴ and has the idea of someone who encourages and exhorts. The Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence in the hearts of believers (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 12:13). Jesus gave the Spirit as a "compensation" for His absence, to perform the functions toward us which He would have done if He had remained personally with us. Among those functions is that of revealer of truth. The Spirit's presence within us enables us to understand and interpret God's Word.³⁵

Jesus told His disciples that "when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). He reveals to our minds the whole counsel of God as it relates to worship, doctrine, and Christian living. He is the ultimate guide, going before, leading the way, removing obstructions, opening the understanding, and making all things plain and clear. He leads in the way we should go in all spiritual things. Without such a guide, we would be apt to fall into error. A crucial part of the truth He reveals is that Jesus is who He said He is (John 15:26; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

The Spirit convinces us of Christ's deity and incarnation, His being the Messiah, His suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension, His exaltation at the right hand of God, and His role as the judge of all. He gives glory to Christ in all things (John 16:14). Another one of the Holy Spirit's roles is that of gift-giver. First Corinthians 12 describes the spiritual gifts given to believers in order that we may function as the body of Christ on earth. All these gifts, both great and small, are given by the Spirit so that we may be His ambassadors to the world, showing forth His grace and glorifying Him. The Spirit also functions as fruit-producer in our lives. When He indwells us, He begins the work of harvesting His fruit in our lives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

(Galatians 5:22-23). These are not works of our flesh, which is incapable of producing such fruit, but they are products of the Spirit's presence in our lives.³⁶ The knowledge of the Holy Spirit of God has taken up residence in our lives, that He performs all these miraculous functions, that He dwells with us forever, and that He will never leave or forsake us is cause for great joy and comfort. Thank God for this precious gift the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives!³⁷

Recommendation

Christ Apostolic Church should employ the totality of Barth's theology of the Holy Spirit to measure and review the article of faith of the Church in accordance to the belief in Holy Spirit with a sense of detaching western elements in Barth's submission.

Conclusion

Barth is an elusive figure, winding his way through doctrine and dogma like a stream through a wood. Where he pushes too far for one, he pulls to weakly for another. The difficulty for African today is not so much in seeing the similarities and dissimilarities between Africans Theology and Barth but in helping the Church understand Africa (or Barth) rightly. Another intriguing correlation between Barth and African Theology (which could not be covered here) is their emphasis on preaching.

The challenge of every theologian is to be practical in the life of the laity, to be preachable. The dialectic methodology is complex and often times purposefully put answers out of the reach of human understanding. Yet the work of the Holy Spirit in Barth and Africans is of central concern to the Holiness Tradition. Barth has aptly given the tools necessary to preach of the awakening and quickening power of the Spirit in the life of the Christian. African preachers may well interpret such power as the Spirit's impetus towards holiness as well as the moving of the Church for a revival (perhaps, even in the camp meeting sense) that moves the Church into the world, spiritually as well as socially.

Lastly, much of African thought is understood as specifically against Barth thought, and rightly so. The priority of human free will, real holiness in this lifetime, and works proceeding from faith which transform the believer are paramount for Africans. Barth's winding stream of thought in the woods of theology seems to be carving a new, less traveled path over old, well traveled territory. Barth has shown that revelation is far more complex than traditional labels suggest. Whether Barth or Africans, the Spirit reveals, awakens, and quickens us all to the ambiguous synthesis of the kingdom of God on earth and heaven.

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