



Pneumatology in African Perspectives

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Ngaruiya, David K., and Rodney L. Reed, eds. *The Holy Spirit in African Christianity*. ASET Series 7. Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022. Pp. xiii + 153. £14.99 (paperback).

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The editors, David K. Ngaruiya and Rodney L. Reed, are seasoned scholars and university lecturers. David K. Ngaruiya is an associate professor and former acting Deputy Chancellor for Academic Affairs at International Leadership University, Nairobi, Kenya. He holds a PhD in Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA. Rodney Reed is also an Associate Professor and Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs at Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya. He holds a PhD in Theological ethics from Drew University, USA. They both have been published widely. The book is authored by ten contributors, all qualified scholars, including an article by David K. Ngaruiya himself. The authors have an international pedigree: Kwaku Boamah from Ghana; Heleen Joziase from the Netherlands, who worked as a lecturer in Kenya; John Kiboi from Kenya; Jeffrey Krohn from the USA, lecturing in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Stephanie Lowery from the USA lecturing in Kanya; Kelosi Molato from Botswana; Esther Mombo from Kenya; Moses Ogidis from Nigeria; Jacob Oyata from Ghana; and Danson Wafula from Kenya.

A cursory glance at the titles of the chapters appears to be a motley of unrelated topics. Still, a closer reading reveals the connecting themes of the Holy Spirit or Pentecostalism. The relationship of the chapters' topics to African Christianity is somewhat tenuous and tangential in most of the chapters, but an in-depth reading manifests some connections. The book has eight chapters, with all the odd-numbered chapters written by one author. Chapter one is by Moses Ogidis, chapter three is by David Ngaruiya, chapter five is by Jeffrey Krohn, and chapter seven is by Kenosi Molato. The even-numbered chapters are co-authored except chapter four, which John Kiboi wrote. Chapter two is by Kwaku Boamah and Jacob Oyata, and chapter six is by Esther Mombo and Hellen Joziase. Chapter eight by Stephanie Lowery and Danson Wafula.

The first chapter deals with Acts 2:1–47, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

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to the Early Church. The author links the passage to partnership in ministry. He suggests that the influence of the Holy Spirit on the Early Church “is considered as a model for the contemporary evangelical churches in Nigeria” (1). He sees the work of the Holy Spirit as the panacea to equality, diversity, and inclusion, particularly for people with disability. He alludes to Luke’s bias in giving an account of marginalized, disadvantaged, and disabled people in his gospel and how he continued this in the book of Acts, where the preaching of the gospel embraces diversity and equality in its focus on the Gentiles. He points out how the Early Church dealt with discrimination in Acts 6, establishing the diaconate ministry to deal with inequity. He applies this to the Church in Nigeria and argues that gender and other prejudices in the Church would be addressed by a proper understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He points out that Acts 2:1–47 promotes inclusivity and partnership in Africa’s eclectic, culturally male-dominated leadership. “The church in Nigeria should learn from the model of the early church, which through the leadership of the Holy Spirit enabled them to do works for the kingdom of God irrespective of their diversities” (13). He further points out how the Holy Spirit enables *koinonia* (fellowship) in the Church’s engagement to build a new community. Although the author gives the impression of an exegetical study of Acts 2:1–47 in his topic, he barely accomplishes it. He instead gives sufficient proof texts to support his central thesis that the Holy Spirit promotes partnership in ministry. He nevertheless accomplishes his main objective of demonstrating that the Holy Spirit engenders partnership in ministry.

The authors of chapter two compared the Montanists and Pentecostals with reference to the churches in Ghana. They see common ground in the emphasis on the importance of the Holy Spirit, the marginalization and the resistance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and those who emphasize it. Also, it stresses “the participation of the Spirit in the church’s activities” (18). The authors see comparisons in the expression of the charismata, the use of scriptures, the doctrine of the end time and the role of women in the two movements. Both movements contended against the views that the charismata ceased after the death of apostles or with the canonization of scripture. The Montanists were denounced as the “Phrygian heresy” (2). Although people associate the beginning of Pentecostalism with the events of Asuza in the USA in the twentieth century and as a new phenomenon in Africa following Asuza’s experience, this chapter points out that one of the early African church fathers and apologist, Tertullian, joined Montanism for a period (22) implying that Pentecostalism had expression in the African Church before the arrival of the Western missionaries. The authors point out that one main contrast between Montanists and Pentecostals of the twentieth century is that while Montanism was reactionary to the heresy of Gnosticism, laxity and low morality in the early

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Church, apocalyptic eschatological concerns, and lack of emphasis on the charismata, Pentecostalism in the twentieth century was birthed by the Holiness Revival Movement that on the whole reacted to similar laxity issues as the Montanists. Concerning Pentecostalism in Ghana, the authors point out three major attraction factors: personal experience, manifestation in enhanced worship and miraculous deliverance. African Pentecostalism became counter-culture in recognizing women's ministry in leadership and in the expression of the charismata. The authors' overall evaluation of Pentecostalism in Africa is that it found fertile ground in the AICs (Africa Initiated/Instituted/Independent Churches) that form the major brand of Christianity in Africa. Pentecostalism and Montanism share a commonality in appealing to the laity as opposed to the established echelons of ecclesiastical power of the priesthood in the main denominations. The two movements were conducive to the "priesthood of all believers" and emphasized holiness, high morality, fasting and innovation in worship services. The authors' final assessment is that "The use of directive and predictive prophecy is more pronounced in Pentecostals, while Montanists emphasized more apocalyptic and eschatological prophecies" (30). The authors conclude on a crucial point, the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the Church and avoidance of splinter groups as follows: "If the church wishes to avoid the rise of such pneumatological movements, the church must always try and keep the activities and roles of the Spirit central" (30). One weakness of the chapter is that it does not address the situation in the rest of African Christianity besides Ghana, though this may be only a necessary limitation of scope.

Chapter three slightly echoes chapter two in pointing out that Augustine, arguably the architect of Western theology, was an early African church father who "utilized reason in his early thinking regarding the Holy Spirit" (33). The author aptly credits Augustine with articulating the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He demonstrates how Augustine articulated the divinity of the Holy Spirit and His part in Creation, distinguishing him from other spirits. The author points out that in AD 393, Augustine, in the plenary African Church Council, defended the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth against critics, philosophers, and heretics and, in so doing, laid the fundamental "understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit" (37) in his work *Faith and the Creed*. He stated that "Jesus did not have a divine mother; he was nonetheless born of a human mother" (38). The author also points out that Augustine defended the inspiration of scriptures by the Holy Spirit. Although the author explores the relevance of Augustinian pneumatology to the contemporary African Church, he fails to enunciate that Augustine was a founding father of African Christianity. He, however, recommends following his example. "Like Augustine, the African church must confront errant doctrine through spirit-led preaching" (46). He also, commends Augustine's "Quadriga" hermeneutical

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approach in interpreting scripture. One serious criticism of the author is that, given the book's title, the author failed to tease Augustine's influence in African Christianity in its adherence to scripture and its largely charismatic outlook.

In chapter four, the author proposes to expound pneumatology and the mission of the Church in postmodern Africa. He gives a preamble of Christological debates to the sixth century in the early Church that centred on the distinction of the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity and the various understandings and heresies surrounding the Holy Spirit. He links neo-Pentecostalism in Africa with early church heresies that perceived the Holy Spirit as a divine impersonal force consonant with the teaching of the Seventh-Day Adventists. He briefly defines philosophical terms and the development of post-modernism emanating from Western philosophies. He explains how it could affect the Church in Africa. It is not easy to follow the author's argument in relation to his proposed topic, but nevertheless, he gives useful insights on pneumatology in general without an African focus.

In chapter five, the author engages the Jehovah's Witness's understanding of the Holy Spirit and evaluates their contention that the Holy Spirit has no name; he is it, something and not a person. The author points out the importance of his exploration for Africa because, "a dominant theological theme in contemporary African Christianity is pneumatological" (72). The author's main thesis is "to explore plausible arguments for the lack of a name of the Holy Spirit in the biblical record while maintaining that he is the "third person" of the Triune God" (72). The author surveys the biblical evidence the Jehovah's Witnesses' belief, and expresses sympathy with their position, and offers two trajectories to address their concerns. Firstly, the author cites reputable biblical scholars who point to counter biblical evidence that the Holy Spirit has a name and even that the "Holy Spirit" is in itself a name. Secondly, the unity of the God-head, "There would not be a "need" for a specific name of the Holy Spirit, given that thorough biblical teaching the "name" of God, meaning God is the Triune God..." The author concludes, "The title "Holy Spirit" as his name and the biblical witness to the "name" that encompasses the three persons of the Father, Son and Spirit – are possible rejoinders to the arguments of Jehova's Witnesses" (77). The author qualifies his two trajectories by pointing out the unity of the Trinity in which the Holy Spirit exalts Christ and the biblical equivalency between Christ and the Spirit (79). He further qualifies this by citing another scholar who said, "No Christology without pneumatology and pneumatology without Christology (80). The author suggests the trajectory of equivalence is best illustrated in the book of Acts, where the Spirit is presented as the personal presence of Jesus (81). He points out that in scripture, The Spirit is used two hundred times and the Holy Spirit ninety times and argues that "The Spirit is the Holy Spirit" (82), whose main function is the sanctification of the

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believers. “While Jesus Christ is the “model” for Christian ethics, the Holy Spirit is the “power” for Christian ethics” (84). The author acknowledges opaqueness concerning the name of the Holy Spirit but criticizes the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ naivety of their simplistic conclusion regarding the Holy Spirit as an “It” rather than acknowledging the complexity surrounding the understanding of the Trinity. “A simplistic and superficial conclusion on the part of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, that “there is no name for the Holy Spirit, “results in a complete lack of understanding of the full witness of Scripture” (89). The one major criticism of the author is that while he does a superb job on pneumatology in general, he hardly links it to African Christianity except in a passing citation, “awareness of the spirit world is true of many societies in Africa” (85).

The authors of chapter six highlight how pneumatology empowers women’s ministry, equity, inclusivity and leadership, which resonates with the authors of chapter two. Although their contribution is focused on AICN (Africa Israel Nineveh Church) in Kenya, their applications cite other AICs making profound contributions to pneumatology in African Christianity. They point out how “The Spirit grants being and life, strength and power, harmonizing a person with the rest of humanity and the universe” (94). According to the authors, pneumatology affects African Christianity in that “the Spirit liberates women from dehumanization and gender injustice...and how the AICs’ pneumatology with liberating anthropology undergirds gender injustice in leadership and exercising gifts of the Holy Spirit” (95). The authors further point out how in one of the AICs (AICN), the dress code “symbolizes the discipleship of equals” (96). “The power of the Spirit is not preserved for the chosen few; it is not coupled to hierarchy, office or gender....every human being is enabled to invoke or mediate the Holy Spirit” (98). They, in particular demonstrate how pneumatology in AINC is akin to liberation theology. Being filled by the Holy Spirit, “liberates women from “old” cultural, religious and economic identities and from evil or Satan, but the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit also put them in a new relation to men: the Holy Spirit has set people free to regard men and women as equal” (101). The central thesis of this contribution is pneumatology of the AICs with particular reference to AINC, “viewed as a community of pneumatics, the various gifts of the Spirit are acknowledged and valued. The Holy Spirit is at the centre of the lived Christology of women – Jesus saves through the Spirit – and pneumatology is at the centre of ecclesiology and liturgy” (98). Although limited by space, the authors made a valuable contribution to pneumatology in African Christianity that is worthy of reading.

In chapter seven, the author continues exploring pneumatology in Botswana’s AICs and APC (African Pentecostal Churches). He points out that these groups of churches are imbued with an African worldview, meaning “these churches are African and have African perspectives of life and experience” (106).

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These churches “depict a strong yearning and a desire for the Holy Spirit to take control and lead the church” (107). Members seek deep spiritual experiences. The author points out that the Holy Spirit is perceived both as an impersonal force as well as personal and, in some cases, in a hierarchical manner where he is third in command in the Trinity. He also points out that AICs and APCs were formed by African leaders to deal with African issues that were ignored or minimized by the missionary-initiated churches, in particular, dealing with spiritual forces. Also, “longing to be engaged with the grassroots of public theology” (112). He refers to an African scholar who postulated, “Anybody who knows the African Christianity intimately will know that no amount of denial on the part of the church will expel belief in supernatural powers from the minds of the African people” (112). The author makes an important connection between glossolalia in AICs and APCs with spirit possession in African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and its impact on African Christianity. The AICs in Botswana perceive the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of God, he is Jesus, and he is understood as the angel of God . . . also as the all-embracing, pervading power of God” (114). Although the article oscillates rather than flows, it makes a distinct contribution to pneumatology in African Christianity in pointing out that it is not all about power and gifting of the Holy Spirit by arguing for the Holy Spirit’s transformation of Christians into the character of Christ and producing the fruits of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control).

In the final chapter eight, the authors look into the Holy Spirit’s deliverance ministry in Ghana in the context of Charismatic Ministries (CM), by which they refer to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. They acknowledge the spread of the charismatic movement that has swept across the African continent and its effect on Christianity by assessing Asamoah-Gyadu’s research and published writings on the phenomenon. Their assessment focuses on deliverance ministry, understood as “the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit and the use of this power to conquer evil” (127). In this sense, pneumatology is perceived as “the intervention of the Holy Spirit to provide relief from evil forces, leading to a renowned scholar characterizing their soteriology as a “pneumatological soteriology” (127). The authors observe that this type of pneumatology emanates from Africans’ deep-seated belief in evil spirits, of which salvation should go beyond deliverance from sin and eternal damnation to include oppression by evil spirits (28). This understanding of salvation from AICs and CM scratches where it itches compared to missionary-founded churches and finds resonance with African Traditional Religion (ATR). Conversion into Christianity, therefore, entails total break, as observed by one scholar regarding Ghanaian Pentecostalism in which “they have an uncompromising attitude towards traditional religion, which they depict as sheerly diabolical, and

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constantly preach a puritan ethic as the only way to escape satanic temptations” (129). The authors uncover what has become the scourge of African Christianity: cult submission to the spiritual leader, the Man of God (MOG), who is believed to be endowed with the power to protect and transmit to the followers, the intermediary between the spirit world and the Christian. The authors aptly assess that, theologically, this “takes ATR views of spiritual power and inserts them into pneumatology, specifically sanctification” (130). While the authors do well to make this observation, they fail to comment on the criticism often directed to Western missionaries for encouraging the abandoning of traditional religions in order to become Christians, which is the same thing the AICs and CM in Ghana are doing. To their credit, however, they emphasize that “inward regeneration should lead to outward transformation, contrary to non – charismatics who emphasize conversion more than transformation and empowerment by the Spirit” (131). The authors give an apt appraisal of the different implications of soteriology, which, in the understanding of Charismatic Ministries in Ghana that they are evaluating, is understood in terms of practical Christianity. According to CM’s view of deliverance, the “reliance upon the Spirit’s power for growth is linked to sanctification rather than regeneration” (136). The authors do well to point out what, in essence, is fundamental to Christianity, “the Holy Spirit’s power is greater than that of the demonic hordes and that He is indeed capable of delivering a person from demonic activity” (137). The authors address a crucial point at variance with biblical teaching, the CM’s held view of deliverance and never suffering, which they correctly point out is part of Christian discipleship and correctly criticize emphasis on over-realized eschatology leaving little room for the not yet of the Kingdom. They also challenge CM’s emphasis on prosperity and fullness of life here and now, which undermines eschatology. The authors have made a fair and balanced appraisal of soteriology and pneumatology in African Christianity. Their contribution is worthy reading for anybody who wishes to understand African Christianity and the contribution of Pentecostal and Charismatic input on the continent.

In conclusion, this book is a valuable tool for anyone seeking to understand the contours of pneumatology and its relevance in African Christianity. For anyone seeking to understand Augustine’s influence on African pneumatology, Ngaruiya’s article is a valuable resource. Krohn’s contribution is invaluable for anyone wanting a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. Chapter Six is a compelling reading on the impact of pneumatology on gender discrimination in leadership, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Overall, the book is written by able authors with experience grounded in the African theological scene and well qualified to tackle the book’s subject collectively. The reviewer highly recommends their collective contributions.