

# THE SPIRIT IN THE LETTER: PENTECOSTALISM AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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## **Preamble**

This article reflects on the relationship between the experience of the Holy Spirit which defines Pentecostalism and theological education which has normally been associated with the academic impartation of theology.<sup>1</sup> I will argue that the Pentecostal/charismatic movement has always been suspicious of academic theological education on the basis of the argument that it often neglects spiritual experience by imparting head knowledge to the neglect of matters of the Spirit. In the same vein members of the historic mission churches—both Catholic and Protestant, have often chided Pentecostals for neglecting theological education preferring to build churches and provide leadership on the basis of experience. It is the contention of this article that both positions—the mainline and Pentecostal—are flawed because in its proper biblical understanding theological education could be both academic and experiential if properly conceived, designed and imparted. Guided by the words of St. Paul that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (II Corinthians 3:6 NRSV), Pentecostals have always relied on the inspiration of the Spirit for “theological education.” One of the most important submissions made by Jesus concerning the Spirit is that when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he was going to teach the disciples all things. Does it mean that it is sufficient to rely only on the experience of the Spirit for theological education as some would have the world believe?

I define Christian theological education in this context as any conscious attempt to impart knowledge regarding the Gospel of Jesus Christ in order to ensure that Christians grow in the grace of God and the maturity of the Spirit. In its narrow sense Christian theological education is formalized through the work of seminaries and Bible schools and its main aim is to train Christian leaders and

pastors for the work of ministry. In its broader sense, such education occurs primarily through preaching, teaching and even other oral forms of communicating the message such as through testimonies and musical compositions. When they have thought it necessary, Pentecostals would usually rely on the Bible School approach to theological education in order to avoid the critical-historical methods that demystify the Bible and make it look like an ordinary text book. Besides a number of Pentecostal churches bemoan the fact that those of their number who study in seminaries, divinity schools and departments for the study of religion, often lose their spiritual verve by the time they were done. What is the way forward in dealing with the interface between theological education as an academic endeavor and the experience of the Holy Spirit?

### **Theological Education and Spirituality**

Theological education has mostly been associated with the older historic mission denominations. In much of Africa the relationship between theological education and historic mission Christianity has been sustained through the theological educational institutions established by the western missionaries. Its objective has always been to train ministers of the gospel to serve the churches and other Para-church establishments. I teach at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana established by the five main historic mission denominations—Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, AME Zion and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church—in 1942. Up until the early 1990s conservative evangelical and Pentecostal/charismatic Christians were suspicious of formal theological education. This was on account of the liberal attitude to Scripture and because formal theological education as received from the West also subjected personal religious experiences to critical scrutiny generating wide complaints that by the time people left seminary, they had received head knowledge but lost their passion for Christian ministry and evangelism of the experiential kinds.

With the massive growth of Pentecostalism as a world religion, the ice has thawed somewhat because of the increasing conservative evangelicals and Pentecostal/charismatic leaders who started to take higher degrees in biblical studies, theology and mission without losing

their evangelical orientation. During my second year as seminary teacher in 1994, a leading Ghanaian evangelical businessman who had opted for the ordained ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana was sent to the Trinity Theological Seminary to be trained as a mature candidate for ordination. A number of us evangelical/charismatic Christians had benefitted from his Christian leadership as a lay leader. One day after a New Testament class, he walked up to me visibly concerned and asked: "Sir, is it not possible to study Christian theology without mentioning the name Rudolf Bultmann?" The source of his concern was apparent. Bultmann was the New Testament theologian who demystified spiritual experience and the class may obviously have been studying about him. I am not a New Testament scholar but I presumed he came to me because of my own background in the evangelical movement.

I started theological training at the Trinity Theological Seminary, where I now serve, with similar concerns. What kept me going was the ministry of professors who bridged the gap between evangelicalism and charismatic Christianity on the one side and academic theology on the other. I determined then that if the Lord granted me the opportunity to teach theology someday, I was going to help seminarians understand that the gaps theologians created between academic theology and experiential faith were artificial and unnecessary. Later during doctoral studies at the University of Birmingham in the UK, I even encountered professors of mission who did not attend church. What sort of mission did they "profess" was a silent question in my heart that I never asked, at least, not publicly. In the ministries of those I call mentors, I saw what it meant for theology to be used in the interest of the church of Jesus Christ. It occurs when those at the center of it are people who take the experiential element of the faith seriously and almost without exception, they had a personal testimony of transformation; they tended to be biblical and expository in their preaching; and were people of the Spirit.

## Partnering God in Theological Education

Religious anthropologist I.M. Lewis identified doctrine, ritual and experience as the three main ingredients of religion noting that of the three, religious experience was the most critical. When I talk about religious experience in the Christian context I refer to the transforming and empowering encounter that Christians—whether as individuals or communities—have with the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. I have only recently personally met Craig S. Keener, the charismatic New Testament professor of Asbury Theological Seminary. One of the several books he gifted me was titled: *Gift Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* and in it he states that: “So pervasively has Enlightenment culture’s anti-supernaturalism affected the Western church, especially educated European and North American Christians, that most of us are suspicious of anything supernatural.” Keener then proceeds to ask: “Is it possible that God has something more to teach his church today about supernatural gifts?”

In thinking of theological education as service to the church of Christ, the question that confronts us in these reflections is this:

What is the biblical rooting that concerns our understanding of theological education as partnership in the gospel?

I will think of partnership in two senses. First is the partnership with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit because, as the Spirit of truth, he is our Advocate and Teacher. Second is the recognition of the shift in Christian presence from the former paradigmatic centers of theological education to new heartlands in the South and partnering with those people among whom the Spirit seems to be at work. It does not mean that Christianity in the global North ceases to matter but that in the South, the faith exuberantly engages with new religious worldviews sensitive to supernatural realities. The biblical text to guide my thoughts comes from the words of Jesus to the disciples as he prepared to withdraw his physical presence from the earth as God incarnate:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come

to you. ... But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:16-18; 26).

The critical lessons in this text concern the fact that: firstly, the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth"; [which is what theological education must be about]; secondly, He takes permanent residence within and among God's people: "for he lives with you and will be in you"; thirdly, the Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence with his people: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you"; [an orphan signifies those without support]; fourthly, the Holy Spirit will teach God's people: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things"; and last but not least, the Holy Spirit was going to teach or remind them about the very things that Jesus their Lord had taught them: "[he] will remind you of everything I have said to you." In the post-resurrection experience of the disciples (Luke 24) the resurrected Christ walks with them and illumined their minds that they may understand what he had taught them.

The recovery of our roots in theological education that will serve the church, I will argue, must pay attention not just to Scripture as the foundation of our faith but also to the ways in which it has been received in the new centers of Christian engagement and activity. Christianity as a world religion now lives through other cultural, historical, linguistic, social, economic and political categories than those that are dominant in the West.<sup>3</sup> In much of the Western academy, I have argued, the Bible was demystified through historical-critical methods of study. In the process, the Holy Spirit as our Advocate and Teacher, in many cases, was edged out of pastoral formation. Kwame Bediako suggested that if our knowledge of Christianity continues to be shaped predominantly by the Western intellectual and cultural experiences of it we may find ourselves ill equipped to recognize new opportunities and deal with the challenges that come with it. He spoke here about a certain type of non-Western Christianity that did not operate a theology boxed in by the sort of Enlightenment doubts represented by Bultmann, and which is suspicious of the transcendent world.<sup>4</sup>

### **Basis of Theological Education**

The basis of Christian theological education, however defined, must relate to a simple fact: a faithful and diligent search and understanding of how God—who revealed himself in Christ—sustains his presence in the world and in his church. If the words of Jesus here are anything to go by, then as the Advocate, God is at work in the presence of his Spirit. In such non-Western religious contexts as Africa, it is generally held that belief in the existence of God is innate. Thus the Akans of Ghana say: “a child knows God instinctually” so we do not expend ink and energy trying to prove God’s existence. What the Christian evangel has sought to accomplish is to show how this God—creator, provider, sustainer and indeed the beginning and end of all things—has revealed himself in Christ. To that end, Hebrews 11:6 reads:

And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Our roots in theological education that serves the church must relate to a “diligent” or “earnest” thirst for the presence of God. “God is Spirit,” Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well and “his worshippers must worship in *the Spirit* and in truth” (John 4:24). More often than not what Jesus rendered as “worship in the Spirit” is reconstructed to read: “worship in spirit.” The definite article in the translated text is important. That God must be worshipped “in the Spirit” refers to life that is ordered in relationship with the Holy Spirit who according to Jesus is not only the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17a) but will serve as an Advocate teaching us all things and reminding us of the things that he has said to us (John 14:26).

In other words, the Holy Spirit will among other things, educate God’s people. In Psalm 119:18, the Psalmist prays: “Open thou my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” The verse is preceded by the following claim and desires relating to the word of God:

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word (Psalm 119:11-17).

In other words, obedience to the word of God through reflective acceptance brings the Psalmist God's goodness. That which opens the eyes of the Psalmist to behold the truth of the law of God is his Spirit that illumines it by bringing to light that which ordinary human thought cannot fathom. Merrill C. Tenney, commenting on the words of Jesus to the disciples that the Spirit will bring to their memory what he has told or taught them, states this implies learning. Human beings, he points out, cannot remember what they never knew. Jesus, Tenney explains, did not intend that the Holy Spirit should be regarded as a substitute for learning. Rather his expectation was that the disciples would pay close attention to his teachings so that the Spirit might direct the use of what the knowledge already imparted to them.<sup>5</sup>

### **Moses: Spirit, Presence and Companionship**

In the period between the Ascension and Pentecost the disciples were expected to *wait* or *stay* for what Jesus describes as "the Promise of the Father" (Luke 24:49). Those who live in obedience to this instruction are those who expect to be "clothed" with the *Presence* of the Father—the Holy Spirit. An important Old Testament example of this earnest desire for the experience of God's teaching presence may be found in the example of Moses. Aaron his human companion had failed him badly through apostasy in the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. In Exodus 33, Moses returns to God in search of a new and more reliable companion. He therefore brings to God the following ardent request:

You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your peoples (Exodus 33:12-13)

It is instructive that in this request Moses refers both to the “leading” and “teaching” functions of the new companion he is searching for. In the very next verse in Exodus 33:14 the Lord replies Moses: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Pentecostal New Testament scholar Gordon D. Fee describes the Holy Spirit as *God’s Empowering Presence*. We will never achieve victory in our efforts to educate theologically or even in our own struggles if we do not learn to depend on what God in Christ accomplishes in us by his Spirit.<sup>6</sup> I suggest that the *Presence* of God promised to Moses here is the same Holy Spirit that Jesus said would come to abide with his disciples forever and to teach them as part of his advocacy role. Interestingly, with the desire for a more reliable companion who turns out to be the abiding *Presence* of God, Moses makes two other requests:

- i. Exodus 33:13, “...teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you.”
- ii. Related to this is where Moses says to God: “Now show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18).

The abiding *Presence* of God was going to be the chief instructor of Moses to the end that God’s glory may be revealed. It is this revelation of the glory of God that distinguishes his people, Israel, from all others on the face of the earth. In the teaching received through the abiding presence of God, his glory is revealed among those who belong to him and the encounter with theological education must necessarily lead to the sort of transforming presence that Moses’ engagement with God alludes to.

### **On the Road to Emmaus: “Stay with Us” Lord: Luke 24:13-35**

In the New Testament, Jesus does indeed present the Holy Spirit the Advocate or Comforter as his continuing *Presence* among the disciples. We noted in our introduction that there were two things that the Advocate was going to accomplish:

- i. He will “testify” about Jesus (John 15:26)
- ii. Based on the testimony of the Advocate the disciples were also going to testify about Jesus (John 15:27)



In other words, what the disciples were going to teach was expected to be that which had been revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. Two of the disciples had experienced the warmth of the presence of Christ during their despondent journey to Emmaus following the uncertainties regarding what had happened to the body of Jesus in the early hours of the resurrection. In the end, they made the following request: "stay with us" (Luke 24:29). The request was addressed to the risen Lord who had been ignorantly taken for a stranger as he walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

But they urged him strongly, "stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

There were two reasons for the request that one can read into the passage: first, the events of the Friday on which Jesus was crucified had created fear and panic in the community and everybody was confused. These were theological developments that were supposed to relate to the core message of the disciples and consequently the church. Second, this presumed stranger had shown some genuine interest in the case of the two gentlemen: "Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" (Luke 24:13-17).

The two were disappointed that their Lord had been publicly humiliated and crucified that Friday. This had not been helped by the news from the place of burial that the body of Jesus had disappeared from the tomb. His body had presumably been stolen and they were discussing these matters during their foot journey to Emmaus. The Scripture says: "They stood still, their faces downcast..." and even wondered who this stranger was, looking at his total ignorance of something that had become national news:

One of them named Cleopas, asked him; "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days? (Luke 24:18)

In verse 19 the stranger poses an important question by simply asking: "What things?" Suddenly a stranger seemed to show genuine interest in their case and they eagerly shared their dashed hopes and frustrations with him:

About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel (Luke 24:19b-21a).

In speaking this way, the two disciples were actually rehearsing something that Jesus had told them prior to his crucifixion, even noting that this was to form the *root* or *substance* of their message. The two disciples had continued to talk about how some of their women "amazed" them by claiming that the body of Jesus was not in the tomb:

They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive (vs. 23).

In other words, nothing was as yet certain. This had been confirmed that morning when some "companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see" (vs. 24). This was indeed a period of fear, uncertainty, panic, suspense and above all, despondency. "So we are going to Emmaus, running away from the city" one can literally hear the two disciples say.

### **Certain God in Uncertain Times**

It was in the midst of this confusion that the plan of God began to unfold. In Luke 24:25, the stranger "said to them":

How foolish you are, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?

The roots of theological education must necessarily lie in those prophetic utterances that had been fulfilled in the life and ministry of the resurrected Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who reminds us of the things of Jesus. These are things the two disciples were expected to know. Jesus had told them several times over that the Son of Man

was to suffer and die and be raised on the third day. In times of confusion and trauma, the memory of the disciples had refused to function and their faith seemed to fail them. That is when the one who reminds us of the things that Jesus had taught comes in. The stranger started with Moses and all the prophets, and explained to the two disciples "what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). In other words, he led them to appreciate the basics, the fundamentals, the roots of theological truth, which essentially is the truth of the Christ event.

From Luke 24:28-29, we read that as they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he was going further but the two disciples had heard enough and prevailed on him to continue the fellowship:

But they urged him strongly, "stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them (vs. 29).

The glorified Christ told John on the Island of Patmos to tell the Church in Laodicea: "...So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:19b-20). In verse 30, Jesus was at table with the two disciples "he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give to them" and that is when the process of discernment became complete:

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us, while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us

There are two important things relating to our roots in theological education here. First is the *encounter* with the risen Christ and the "strange warmth" that took place. Second, is that the process of *discernment* took place only because the two disciples *invited* Jesus to stay with them. The fellowship with the resurrected Christ is what brought them the "strange warmth" that they experienced, especially when they sat at table with him.

### **The Spirit and Our Roots in Theological Education**

We have learnt from Exodus 33 that this was not the first time that such a request for the abiding presence of God was being made. What I find instructive is the connection between the Lord's abiding *Presence* as the companion of Moses and the latter's own additional request "teach me your ways." In *God our teacher: Theological Basics in Christian Education*, Robert W. Pazmiño writes:

As a blessing of Jesus Christ's work of salvation, Christians experience the indwelling presence of the promised Holy Spirit in their lives. God *in* us through the person and work of the Holy Spirit transforms all dimensions of life, including the ministries of teaching. ...The indwelling Spirit fosters the processes of learning so that the spirits of the students are transformed along with their minds, souls, hearts and bodies.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus leaves us in no doubt about the fact that he stays with his people by his Spirit. The Spirit does not contradict what Jesus stood for as the exact representation of God's being (Hebrews 1:1-3). The risen Christ "opened" the "minds" of the disciples that they might understand the core message to be taught to the world:

"...Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see!; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."...Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:37-49).

Conservative Evangelicals and Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians for many years were wary of theological education because of its emphasis on academic theology to the neglect of religious experience. The Bible was in the Western religious and theological academy stripped of its mystical awe and when it lost its place as the word of

God in the Seminary it was only a matter of time and the church on which its content was founded began to crumble. Thus I argue that the status of the Bible as a sacred book must be recognized for its contents to be taken seriously as the inspired Word of God.<sup>8</sup> The strength of non-Western Christianity lies in its preservation of the Bible as *holy* and inherently powerful. Those who demystify the Bible will find it difficult to accept its contents as divine because then it ends up in our hands as another textbook and not as something that is “God breathed”. The essence of accepting all Scripture as God-breathed is that it is received as something delivered by God and inspired by his Spirit. Pazmiño explains:

The written Word is the essential source for authoritative teaching. God’s special revelation is through the person and work of Jesus Christ as the living Word and through the Scriptures as the written Word. The Holy Spirit inspired the initial writing and compilation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit also illuminates those who seek to teach the Scriptures or to be taught by them.<sup>9</sup>

The aggregate meaning of the encounter between the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the risen Christ is that theological education is a process of revelation from God in Christ, encounter with Christ through the Spirit and a recognition or discernment of the things taught by the Spirit. It is towards that end that Jesus told the disciples about the three core functions of the “Spirit of truth” in their education: first, that he will guide them into all truth; second, that he will not speak of his own but of only what he hears; and third, that, the Spirit will be prophetic, that is, “he will tell [the disciples] what is to come” (John 16:13). In his commentary on this text Tenney notes that through the Holy Spirit, “every Christian can be provided with individual authoritative instruction.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Theological Education and Non-Western Paradigms**

Religio-cultural experiences that underpin African Christianity help to explain the way Africans live out their Christian faith. The African independent churches, considered paradigmatic of indigenous choices in Christianity since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, developed a distinct

that stressed the church as a community of the Holy Spirit, organized around Christ as source of life and power.<sup>11</sup> In my own context in Ghana, a traditional priest is first and foremost one whose life has been interrupted by the spirit of a deity through possession. From that point the priest is quintessentially the wife of the deity but that is not automatic. The Akans of Ghana say "*se akom ka obi a, wodze no ko ntsetsee*", literally, when the spirit of a deity possesses a human being, he or she has to be taken for training. In other words, spirit-possession alone does not make for a good mouthpiece of the traditional deity. Training is needed to accomplish the calling and help the candidate to function effectively.

In the non-Western Christian context therefore, theological training if properly understood, must come after an encounter with the Spirit of God. If one comes to think of it, the African understanding of the relationship between spirit-possession and training or education may not be too different from what the Holy Spirit is expected to accomplish in the lives of believers. Craig Keener writes:

The Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is not just a doctrine, an idea, or an experience to be tagged on the other doctrines and experiences of our Christian life. He is the God who has invaded our lives with his transforming presence.<sup>12</sup>

This much is clear from the words of Pazmiño who notes that the experience of the Spirit "does not exclude the importance of nurture or development of the spiritual gifts of teaching". In his words: "The potential use of spiritual gifts for teaching depends upon a person's response to God's call and dedicated development of those gifts through training and mutual edification."<sup>13</sup>

### Conclusion

First, theological education must help to deal with uncertainties surrounding the presence of the risen Christ. We learn that the Lord, through the abiding presence of his Spirit, is willing to walk with us amidst the uncertainties of life. We find two confused disciples talking about their disappointments and even fears over what had happened. That was when the Christ appeared and walked with them. Part of the reading from the Epistle of Peter says:

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him, you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God (I Peter 1:20-21).

What the Spirit of God does is endow people with the gifts required for their calling. Theological education exists to help nurture these gifts of grace for the constructive building up of God's people into maturity so that as Paul says, they are not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. "The Holy Spirit works to sustain, nurture, probe, and challenge the Christian church in ways that accomplish Jesus Christ's agenda for the world."<sup>14</sup>

Second, in theological education, we learn that Jesus Christ is willing to stay if we are willing to invite him. If we desire to hear God, Keener says, the best place to start is by asking him to "open our ears."<sup>15</sup> God does not force his purposes and agenda on anybody. "Stay with us" is what the disciples prayed and their desire for continued fellowship was granted as Jesus not only stayed but also shared fellowship. In Psalm 42:1-2, we have an example of "thirst" for God:

As the deer pants for streams of water,  
So my soul pants for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God...

Through the Spirit, Jesus who is in the Father comes to dwell within each disciple (John 14:23) and by that presence transforms each individual into a temple fit for God's dwelling. This indwelling must be desired as part of theological education. In the Beatitudes Jesus said: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." Without this indwelling or infilling, people may know who God is on paper but they cannot experience his worshipful presence in their Christian lives as living reality.<sup>16</sup> The *Presence* of the living Christ fills those who hunger and thirst after fellowship with him.

Third, through theological education, we learn that we can have guaranteed fellowship with the Jesus who broke bread and warmed the hearts of the disciples. That was a sign of fellowship. The name given to Jesus the Christ at his birth was "Immanuel" which means God with us. In the words of Jesus: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears

my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Jesus Christ as the living word encounters people through the active presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Life with God guarantees that we have fellowship in his Spirit that keeps the heart strangely illumined and warmed.

The Holy Spirit continues the ministry of Jesus through his people in the world. The resistance to the presence of Christianity is what has accounted for its present decline in the global North. It does not mean that everything going on in the South is exactly right. I have become critical of the power games being played in our churches through the adoption of new ecclesiastical titles and accouterments. In the Pentecostal/charismatic sectors of African Christianity in particular, ministry has become a means of personal gain and the baptism of materialism as a prime indicator of God's favor. We are in danger of losing our way through the distortion of Scripture to suit fallen human tastes and inclinations. Elsewhere, Christianity has come under siege with the exclusion of religious faith from the public sphere and discourse.

In all those circumstances, God does not change. I started these reflections with reference to the skepticism imposed on theological education through biblical liberalization and the downplaying of the supernatural and experiential aspects of Christianity. Spiritual knowledge, Tenney explains, is not identical with dogma, though the body of historical Christian truth has at its core the final revelation of God. That is what Jesus tried to impress upon the disciples. The thrust of the message of Jesus to the disciples however was that "the creation, revelation, transmission, preservation, and application" of the truth of the Gospel is made possible by "the living personal Spirit who comes to each of the disciples."<sup>17</sup> To quote Tenney further:

The recurrence of the Spirit's impact upon individual lives keeps the truth from becoming dead tradition; the persistence and cumulative effect of His work historically recorded guards men from extravagances and mistakes.<sup>18</sup>



The Spirit remains the believer's *Paraclete*, Comforter, Counselor or Advocate (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) testifying along with us as a witness to the things of Jesus Christ. The Spirit does not advertise himself. What he does is present theological truth that is consistent with the revelation coming from the heart of God.<sup>19</sup>

The chief mission of the Spirit is presenting Christ and making him known to the world. He continues to confront the world with the person of Jesus through our proclamation of him as Lord so that what we teach will serve the interest of the people of God, the church. My conclusion is that it is possible to redeem Christian education from the clutches of those who have turned it into a mere academic exercise devoid of any spiritual experience and power.

## Endnotes

- 1 This article is a slightly revised version of one that will appear in a Festschrift for Apostle Prof. Opoku Onyinah, Chairman of the Church of Pentecost from 2008 to 2018.
- 2 Craig S. Keener, *Gift Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 91.
- 3 Kwame Bediako, "Whose Religion is Christianity? Reflections on Opportunities and Challenges for Christian Theological Scholarship as Public Discourse – The African Dimension." *Journal of African Christian Thought*. Vol. 9, 2 (December 2006), 43.
- 4 Kwame Bediako, "A New Era in Christian History – African Christianity as Representative Christianity: Some Implications for Theological Education and Scholarship", *Journal of African Christian Thought*. Vol. 9, 1 (June 2006), 3.
- 5 Merrill C. Tenney, *John: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 224.
- 6 Keener, *Gift Giver*, 70.
- 7 Robert W. Pazmiño, *God our Teacher: Theological Basics in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 87.
- 8 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Beyond Text and Interpretation: The Bible as a Book of Sacred Power in African Christianity", *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 10, 2 (December 2007), 19.
- 9 Pazmiño, *God our Teacher*, 94-95.
- 10 Tenney, *John*, 238.
- 11 Bediako, "Christian Theological Scholarship", 45.
- 12 Craig S. Keener, *Gift Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 18.
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