

The Place of the Spirit in Receptive Ecumenism and Receptive Ecumenism as a pneumatological reality – Mike Royal

Introduction

The personal is political. None of us approach our respective essays from a neutral position. I mediate my response to the theological question through the lens of my lived experience.

Thirty years of clerical experience in classical Pentecostalism and neo Pentecostalism

The Apostolic Church UK and the Apostolic Pastoral Congress as a participant observer but also having spend some years in what I describe as “ecclesiastical wilderness” in the Fresh Expressions Movement at Sanctuary fellowship.

My theological specialism is Black Liberation Theology with a particular interest in the work of Professor Robert Beckford and his theological and ethnographical commentary on Black British Pentecostalism.

My reflections will focus primarily on papers 4, 7, 19 and 27 of Murray, Ryan and Lakland’s book “Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesiastical Learning”.

The Place of the Spirit in Receptive Ecumenism

In chapter 4 Veli-Matti Karkkainen explores Receptive Ecumenism and the Dynamics of Development within Pentecostalism. The writer acknowledges his focus is classical Pentecostalism, which in a UK context would be churches who trace their origins back to the Azusa Street Revival and other Revivals across the globe at the turn of the 20th Century. Elim, Assemblies of God, Apostolic Church UK and Apostolic Faith Mission, (the latter currently going through the scrutiny process with a view to joining CTE), would all be classical Pentecostals.

Karkkainen writing states that “against the assumptions of uninformed outside observer, it is not the Holy Spirit or pneumatology that stands at the heart of Pentecostal spirituality but rather Christology. An emerging scholarly consensus that at the heart of Pentecostal spirituality lies the ‘full gospel’, the idea of Jesus Christ in his five fold role as Saviour, Sanctifier, Baptiser with the Spirit, Healer and Soon-Coming King.” (P40)

Two of the churches titles I mention use the word 'Apostolic' in their title. Indeed my own denomination is called the Apostolic Pastoral Congress.

Being a young church, some may surmise that the Pentecostal claim to Apostolicity is an oxymoron. But as Frank Macchia rightly said "Pentecostalism sort to discover direct access to the church of the apostles through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. Leslie Newbigin stated that Pentecostals seek a direct experience of the Holy Spirit as it was believed to have been shared originally among the apostles and early followers of Jesus' (p43).

The Apostolic Church UK additionally lay claim to Apostolicity through its early distinctive of belief in the ministry of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers for today, rejecting the secessionist view that Apostles were only manifest in the Apostolic Age as outlined in the New Testament.

Legitimacy

By focusing on Classical Pentecostals, Karkkainen misses the more recent development of Pentecostal Convergence Churches such as the Apostolic Pastoral Congress and the Order of St Leonard, both members of CTE.

It is this writers view, that being a young church, Pentecostals need to acknowledge the importance of Apostolic succession and draw on the wisdom and faith & order practice of the historic churches, in particular the Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox traditions. This is our need as Pentecostals generally as we present ourselves in the spirit of 'Receptive Ecumenism'.

However, I must contend that this work is already under way. Doye Agama states concerning the Apostolic Pastoral Congress (APC) that "The APC lays claim to a measure of Apostolic Succession through its founder Archbishop Agama." He goes on to outline the streams of Apostolic Succession now converging from Episcopal links to the Anglican Church in Nigeria; Greek Orthodox; Syro-Chaldean Archdiocese of North America and another convergence church movement, the United Pentecostal Churches of Christ. These lines of succession are carefully set out in the book "An Apostolic Handbook Volume One. Guidance on Faith and Order in the Apostolic Pastoral Congress" (p127-134)

Vibrancy

This writer contends that there are now so many Pentecostal Churches who are seeking a deeper understanding of Apostolic succession. As Pentecostals Churches bring a vibrant, Spirit filled Christian faith expression to the ecumenical table, we come as churches not complete but still as the Apostle Paul puts it “so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13)

So in short, the place of the Spirit is important but it is often over emphasised as the main preoccupation of Pentecostal Churches. As Larry Miller suggested “‘Receptive Ecumenism’s call for each church to first articulate its own weaknesses and consequently the need to learn from other churches in specific ways’ provides avenues for... participants to explore” (Sarah Rowland Jones; To Receive from Each Other, First Receive Each Other, Receptive Ecumenism and the Global Christian Forum (GCF) p85).

Receptive Ecumenism as a Pneumatological reality.

Receiving the Spirit from and with one another

Sarah Rowland Jones spoke about participants of the Global Christian Forum being “invited to share not only of their personal journey with Jesus but also that of their tradition”. However she states that “While speaking about and receiving, individuals’ experiences of faith has had a powerful impact, effective communication of the life of the Spirit at institutional level has proved far harder”. While the Pentecostal believer receives Jesus as ‘Personal **Saviour**’ and **Sanctifier**; **Spirit Baptiser** and **healer** is largely experience in a gathered, institutional setting. This writer contends that more focus in Receptive Ecumenical interactions on ‘receiving from and with one another’ would be a mutually enriching experience for both Pentecostals and the people from church traditions they interact with. Within the context of CTE, I hope as our relationships deepen with each other, leaders from other church traditions will be enriched as we offer the gift of Pentecostal experience.

Lament as a pneumatological reality

The Pentecostal Church has experienced the deep trauma of rejection from other churches over the years.

The history of the Windrush Generation from the Caribbean coming to Great Britain in the 1950's and 1960's and finding themselves not welcomed by the historic churches because of the colour of their skin, is well documented. These migrants from the Caribbean were often members of historic churches back in the Caribbean. My father was an Anglican and my mother a Presbyterian yet they met here in the UK, experienced personal salvation and renewal in the Spirit in the Apostolic Church UK, Pentecostal church's diverse congregation initially in Kennington, South London

The story of that rejection, in part fuelled the establishment of denominations like the New Testament Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy here in the UK. The sharing of those stories and the stories of the setting up of the Pentecostal Credit Union by Carmel Jones in the mid 1960's are stories of lament that when told in a receptive ecumenical setting not only brings healing and forgiveness between churches but has the effect of drawing churches into closer communion with each other as we understand the pain of the journey.

This writer would reflect the following:

"On 30th June 2022 I was privileged to be invited to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Central London by Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski. Father Jan Nowotnik was also present along with Father Mark Woodruff from the Society of St John Chrysostom. I was able to hear first hand experience of how this Congregation and indeed other churches within the denomination were supporting refugees from Ukraine. New computers for children to use at home, dentists, doctors, psychiatrists, social workers all offering their services to support displaced women and children fleeing war. The photos of Ukrainian soldiers who had died, on the wall, who were known to people in the church was particularly moving. As I listened to those present sharing, I not only gained a deeper understanding of the pain of the Ukraine War but also the complexity and nuisances of the relationship between different Catholic and Orthodox Church traditions. What I think I heard was a lament of the impact of the Russian Ukraine War. What I went away with was a sense of the Spirit making tender my heart towards my brothers who were their but also a closer and enduring relationship that will I believe lead to a greater understanding between Catholic, Orthodox and Pentecostal traditions. During the

conversation I was also able to share some of the wounds particularly experienced by West Indians including Black Pentecostals.”

The experience confirmed the words of Paul Murray that “Receptive Ecumenism represents an Ecumenism of the wounded hands of being prepared to show our wounds to each other, acknowledging that we cannot heal or save ourselves; knowing that we need to be ministered to in our need from another’s gift and grace”. (Bradford E. Hinze What is the Spirit Saying to the Churches” (p342).

Conclusion

Sandra L Barnes points to a similar deepening of understanding between churches in her chapter “Ecumenical Involvement between US Black and White Churches Revisited”. As we engage in Receptive Ecumenism she states “White Christians must stand side by side with their Black and brown sisters and brothers to more concertedly push back against such inequalities and promote structural change.

In an ecumenical setting, this writer thinks that this starts with allowing our laments to be a deeply pneumatological experience that leads to greater unity, solidarity and mutual aid.

References

Agama, Doye T. 2015, An Apostolic Handbook Volume One: Guidance on Faith and Order in the Apostolic Pastoral Congress, FastPrint Publishing

Murray, Ryan & Lakeland, 2022, Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Learning, Oxford University Press.

The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc®. All rights reserved.

Paper written by Mike Royal B.A(Hons); M.A; PGDip; FRSA.

