

# Book Review: *The Holy Spirit in African Christianity*

Ngaruiya, David K., and Rodney L. Reed, eds. 2022. *The Holy Spirit in African Christianity*. African Society of Evangelical Theology Series. UK: Langham. xxi, 151 pp. ISBN: 978139736469. Approx. 429.78 ZAR (22.99 USD). Paperback

## 1. Introduction

David K. Ngaruiya is an Associate Professor at International Leadership University in Kenya, and he holds a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the USA. He has published various journal articles and book chapters and was chair of the Africa Society of Evangelical Theology from 2015 to 2016. Rodney L. Reed is a missionary educator who has been working at Africa Nazarene University in Kenya since 2001. He has a Ph.D. in Theological Ethics from Drew University in the USA.

The authors argue that there is a unique shade to the understanding of and practices related to the Holy Spirit in Africa (p. xi). Nevertheless, the differences in understanding and experience have not affected the Africans' confession regarding the person and works of the Holy Spirit (p. xi). The features of the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit in Africa are treated along the broad categories of the charismatic works of the Holy Spirit, the emphasis on the person of the Holy Spirit, and the African Independent/Initiated Churches (AICs) and their application of the theology of the Holy Spirit in their church practices. The book is a comparative study of the understanding and practices related to

the doctrine of the Holy Spirit among African Christians from varied backgrounds and perspectives. The authors developed the content of the book by first discussing the continuity and discontinuity between Montanist, Pentecostal-Charismatic, and Augustinian views of the Holy Spirit. Second, the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church's mission in postmodern African Christianity is addressed. Third, deliverance in the work of the Holy Spirit in AICs and Pentecostal-Charismatic churches is contemplated (p. xxi).

The authors' contribution to the African Society of Evangelical Theology (ASET) project has been significant. This project endeavors to conduct Evangelical scholarship faithful to the biblical text while drawing implications for the Christian faith in Africa and beyond. The authors' work has helped to further this mission by engaging with the biblical text and exploring its relevance to the African context. Their work is a testament to the importance of rigorous scholarship in promoting a thoughtful and nuanced understanding of the Holy Spirit.

## 2. Overview

The authors aim to comprehend the implications of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 within Christianity in Africa. They demonstrate that unity and equality are present within the church. This is helpful because it invites Christians to a mutual relationship in the church. It is crucial because men, women, children, and people with disabilities all bear the divine image of God (Gen 1:26–27). The authors express their disappointment with the limited attention given to the study of pneumatology in missionary associated churches (p. 94).

Second, the authors have identified several contextual concerns related to pneumatology. They believe that addressing the implications of pneumatology could help alleviate these concerns. For instance, they

suggest examining how pneumatology intersects with social, political, and gender identity issues. By doing so, they hope to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of pneumatology in these contexts (p. 94). Added to this is a significant concern regarding the lack of understanding of the person of the Holy Spirit among some Christians in Africa. Some believe that the Holy Spirit is either an angel or a spirit of good deeds, but these beliefs are clearly incorrect and have no biblical foundation. Moreover, it diminishes the importance of the Holy Spirit as a member of the Trinity (p. 110).

Third, the authors highlight the significance of pneumatology in shaping the practical aspects of the Christian faith. Their interactions with Asamoah-Gyadu serve as a powerful illustration of this impact. By examining the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian life, they provide a compelling argument for the relevance of theological inquiry. They demonstrate that a deep understanding of pneumatology can enrich one's spiritual experience and provide a solid foundation for Christian living. Ultimately, their work underscores the importance of theology in shaping both the faith of individuals and the beliefs of the broader Christian community (pp. 131–138).

Fourth, Augustinian pneumatology implies that the Holy Spirit, an essential member of the Trinity, has been actively involved in the world's creation and sustenance. The Holy Spirit's actions are not limited to the physical realm but extend beyond it. The Holy Spirit is the one that brings about divine change and transformation in the life of Christians. Augustinian pneumatology thus emphasizes the essential role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian faith. Overall, this doctrine underscores the idea that the Holy Spirit is not limited by time or space and continues to work in mysterious ways to bring about God's purposes in the world (pp. 45–47).

Fifth, by exploring the biblical and theological dimensions of the Holy Spirit's ontology, we can better understand how the Spirit works in the world and our lives. Ultimately, this can help us better appreciate the Holy Spirit's significance for our faith and practice. John Michael Kiboi contends that “an explication of pneumatology from a Trinitarian point will illuminate the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and this will clear the misconceptions and resolve the postmodern epistemological doubt on the work of the Holy Spirit” (p. 50).

Lastly, in the context of African and new-age religions, it is essential to clearly understand the Holy Spirit's name. This understanding can help to avoid confusion and promote accurate communication among believers. Therefore, studying and comprehending the Holy Spirit's name is crucial to engage meaningfully in these religious contexts (p. 86).

### **3. Assessment**

The book provides a relevant overview of theological, contextual, biblical, historical, and methodological concerns regarding pneumatology in contemporary Christianity in Africa. However, the reader may be left wondering if the Holy Spirit is the book's actual subject due to the emphasis on women's liberation and their roles in ministry that pervades it. For instance, the first essay argues for gender equality by taking an all-inclusive approach to reading Acts 2. The interpretation of Acts 2 as a basis for discussing authority, hierarchy, and ordination is confusing. The structure of the text does not provide sufficient evidence to support such claims. The lack of clear definitions of partnership, hierarchy, and an agenda-driven hermeneutical approach makes it difficult to conclude whether chapters 1, 2, and 6 deal with the Holy Spirit or women's roles in ministry.

The chapters “The Holy Spirit in Trinitarian Theology as a Panacea” (pp. 49–67) and “Augustine's Articulation of the Holy Spirit” (pp.

33–47) provide a helpful biblical-theological framework for engaging pneumatology. However, the reader may become confused by the editors' location of these chapters in the book. These chapters are great resources for providing a strong biblical-theological foundation for the remaining chapters. If these chapters were placed at the beginning of the book, it would help the reader to see how the other chapters address the implications of the Holy Spirit in the context of Christianity in Africa. Readers need to have a clear understanding of the theological foundation to fully appreciate the implications discussed in the remaining chapters. This suggested arrangement would also help to provide structure and context to the book, making it easier for readers to follow.

While the book provides valuable insight into the African understanding and practices related to the Holy Spirit, the book could benefit from a deeper theological and biblical analysis. The authors' consideration of the continuity and discontinuity between Montanist, Pentecostal-Charismatic, and Augustinian views of the Holy Spirit is a good starting point. However, a more in-depth examination of certain theological issues could have greatly enhanced the book's overall impact on the understanding of the Holy Spirit and its implication for Christian practice in contemporary Africa. Some issues that deserve attention include the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, the Holy Spirit and the Scripture, the Holy Spirit and angelic beings, and the Holy Spirit and theology of religions. A more thorough engagement with these areas would provide readers with a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit's nature and work, and its relevance to the African context. Additionally, a more comprehensive analysis of these issues would equip African Christians with a solid foundation for their faith and enable them to engage more effectively with the broader Christian community.

## 4. Conclusion

Contemporary pneumatology in African Christianity is a complex and fascinating topic. Understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of African Christians requires a deep understanding of their culture, traditions, and beliefs. This involves a careful examination of how African Christians understand and experience the Holy Spirit, and how these experiences are shaped by their unique cultural contexts. By exploring these issues, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity and richness of Christian spirituality in Africa, and how it continues to evolve and develop in the contemporary world. This book is a great resource for the understanding of the Holy Spirit and its implication for Christian practice in contemporary Africa. I recommend it for pastors, teachers, leaders, and students who desire to understand the conversation about the Holy Spirit in contemporary Africa.

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