

In search of the Complementarity between Christology and Pneumatology in Ecumenism

Abstract

This article is to discuss how the Charismatic Renewal in the 1970's contributed to the complementarity of christology and pneumatology in ecumenism. Based on Irenaeus of Lyons' metaphor, "the two hands of the father", which refers to the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the traditional teaching on *perichoresis*, this article argues that the Son and the Holy Spirit had always been considered as equally important in theology. Hence, ecumenism, as one of the branches in theology, cannot avoid considering both christology and pneumatology as methodologies. The Charismatic Renewal, which emphasized on the Holy Spirit and charisms, reminds the Church and ecumenists of these two forgotten elements in the search of unity. This article will explain how the Charismatic Renewal, with the vivid manifestation of the charisms, brought about both the christological and pneumatological elements in the church and the church united.

Christology has dominated both the WCC and Vatican II's ecumenism. The role of the Holy Spirit is mentioned, but He does not share the same significance as Christ. Christ seems to be the principle of church unity while the Holy Spirit is the one to realise it. There is lengthy discussion of the former while only a few remarks about the latter, given in a few sentences as supplementary details for the discussion on Christ. It is probably not a misjudgment for Amos Yong to say that the Holy Spirit has been put in "practical (if not actually theological) subordination ...either to the Word or both Word and Father" in the making of theology throughout history.¹ McDonnell suggests that the subordination of pneumatology to christology in Western theology implies a perception that sacraments and christological elements come first and then the Holy Spirit. He ironically uses the analogy that this subordination is like putting tinsel to decorate an already full grown tree.² This secondary consideration of the Spirit also appears in ecumenism. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notices that the Holy Spirit has been neglected in ecumenical theology.³ After observing the ecclesiology of Vatican II, John Zizioulas comments on its christocentric emphasis and warns that if pneumatology remains as an auxiliary to christology and ecclesiology in Catholic theology, the huge gap between the goal and reality of church unity will remain. The internal problems of the Roman Catholic Church, such as the over-domination of institution and clergy, will also persist.⁴ The charismatic renewal seems to remind the church of the hitherto inadequate attention given to the Holy Spirit. But I aver that it is not appropriate to concentrate solely on pneumatology and neglect Christology, as that will repeat the historical

¹ Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), p. 74.

² Kilian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), pp. 88-89.

³ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "The Ecumenical Potential of Pneumatology" in Amos Yong (ed.) in *Toward A Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission* (New York: University of America, 2002), p. 65.

⁴ John D. Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today: Suggestions for an Ecumenical Study", in Alasdair I. C. Heron (ed) *The Forgotten Trinity: 3 A Selection of Papers Presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: BCC/CCBI, 1991), p. 22; *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 123.

problem that has arisen from the overemphasis on christology. Rather, the complementarity between christology and pneumatology, which ecumenism definitely cannot avoid, should be pursued. In the following, I will use Irenaeus of Lyons' theology of "the two hands of the Father" and a theological concept, *perichoresis*, to elaborate the theological complementarity between christology and pneumatology and how it can be applied to our understanding of the church and unity.

1. The Two Hands of the Father and *Perichoresis*

This metaphor appears in the preface to Book IV of *Against Heresies* which was written to counter the Gnosticism which Irenaeus regarded as a threat against Christian beliefs between the apostolic period and the third century.⁵ Irenaeus suggests that the Son and the Holy Spirit are the right and the left hands respectively through whom the Father fulfills His work in humankind's history. He equally names the Son as Word and the Spirit as Wisdom and argues that, through them, the Father "makes everything, disposes everything, governs everything, gives existence to everything" whether it is "visible or invisible, sense-perceptible and intelligible, temporal for God's plan or eternal".⁶ In *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, he explains why the Son is Word and the Spirit is Wisdom in the context of creation.

And as God is verbal (λογικός), therefore He made created things by the Word; and God is Spirit, so that He adorned all things by the Spirit, as the prophet also says, "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all their power by Holy Spirit". Thus, since the Word 'establishes', that is, works bodily and confers existence (ὑπαρξίς), while the Spirit arranges and forms the various 'powers', so rightly is the Son called Word and the Spirit the Wisdom of God.⁷

He therefore concludes by stating the interdependency of the Son and the Spirit regarding the prophecy about the Son and the redemption achieved by Him.

Thus, the Spirit demonstrates the Word, and, because of this, the prophets announced the Son of God, while the Word articulates the Spirit, and therefore it is He Himself who interprets the prophets and brings man to the Father.⁸

Yong suggests that the reciprocity and unity given in Irenaeus' "two hands" metaphor builds a foundation for the theology of "coinherence of the divine person" which is called *perichoresis* in

⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, "Against Heresies: On the Detection and Refutation of the Knowledge Falsely So Called, Book 1", in Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 1; Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, p. 50.

⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, "Against Heresies: On the Detection and Refutation of the Knowledge Falsely So Called, Book 1", p. 87.

⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons, "The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching", in John Behr (trans.) *St Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), p. 43.

⁸ Ibid.

Greek, *circumincession* and *circuminsession* in Latin.⁹ The former Latin word was the first translation and it means “a dynamic interpenetration”, and the second one refers to “a lasting and resting mutual indwelling”. The verbs of *perichoresis*, *perichoreo* and *perichoreuo* meaning “mutual resting” and “dancing around with one another” also connote motion and inactivity.¹⁰ The active and inactive connotations of *perichoresis* can be explained in terms of the immanent Trinity which concerns God as God Himself; the mutual indwelling and communication of the three persons *ad intra*; and the economic Trinity which concerns God for us, His mission within history and time, and His communication *ad extra*.

In the immanent Trinity, *perichoresis* suggests the mutuality and “*reciprocal interiority*” which creates a sense of “catholicity”.¹¹ This catholicity enhances the distinctness and subjectivity of each person as they need to rely on the other two to build up their identity. Moltmann suggests that each person has two names depending on their relationship with each of the others. The First person is the Father when is relating to the Son, and He is also the producer of the Holy Spirit. The Second person is the Son when is relating to the Father; and He is the Word when is relating to the Holy Spirit. The Third person is the Holy Spirit when is relating to the Father; and He is the Light when is relating to the Son.¹² The distinctness of each of them does not just manifest that particular person but also the other two. As Jesus says “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 14:11), one can see the Son through the Father and vice versa. The Father and Son also share the glory (Jn 17:5), truth (Jn 17:8) and possess the saved (Jn 17:9) and everything (Jn 17:10). The Holy Spirit accompanies, originates and “proceeds from the Father” and baptised Jesus in the river Jordan as He was being baptised by water. Hence, the mutual indwelling and resting of the Trinity does not just take place in heaven but also happened on earth when Jesus was fulfilling the Father’s salvific plan.

Perichoresis can also be understood in terms of the economic Trinity, as the best translation has the active meaning of “dancing around”. To fulfill the tasks for the world, the three persons become selfless. They empty themselves and cooperate with one another to a stage where they give themselves up for the world. The creation of humankind was accomplished by the God of three persons saying, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). The redemption was fulfilled by the Son’s willingness to obey the Father and sacrifice Himself for humankind. The incarnation of the Word came about by the divine conception in Mary through the Holy Spirit. His “descending and remaining upon” Jesus during the baptism in the river Jordan (Jn 1:33) and His constant empowerment enabled Jesus to demonstrate the Kingdom of God. Hence people recognised that “God was with Him” and that He was “doing good and healing all who oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38). At the last moment of Jesus’ life, the Spirit strengthened Him in Gethsemane, on the way to Golgotha and finally on the cross. Facing the suffering of the Son who was made sin, the Father also suffered as He forsook Him. It gave Him profound pain as He watched the death of His beloved Son. Since the subjectivity of the persons in the Trinity relies on the others to form, the fatal separation causes a drastic alteration of their

⁹ Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, p. 53.

¹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, “The Trinitarian Personhood of the Holy Spirit”, in Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (eds) *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology* (Milwaukee Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2001), pp. 311-312.

¹¹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 208-209.

¹² Jürgen Moltmann, “The Trinitarian Personhood of the Holy Spirit”, pp. 312-313.

identities; the Father becomes “Sonless” and the Son become “Fatherless”.¹³ Regarding the suffering of the triune God, Moltmann says, “If one suffers, the others suffer too” and he perceives the death of the Son as “an inner-trinitarian event” that relates to the three persons. However, the momentum of the *perichoresis* was not terminated by this separation but it has continued because the Spirit raised up the Son and accompanies the church which is the body of Christ until the end of time. Hence, the Father’s love for humankind is concretised by His Son’s incarnation and sacrifice and the Son’s ministry is made perceivable by the Spirit’s empowerment.

Irenaeus’ “two hands” motif and the concept, *perichoresis*, justify the pursuit for a complementarity between christology and pneumatology for two reasons. Firstly, in terms of personhood, the Son and Holy Spirit are two subjects but they rely on each other to be distinct through mutual indwelling. Secondly, since the genesis, the Father has accomplished His works with both the Son and the Spirit. As Yong says, “To put it crassly, without his hand, the Father is impotent and therefore neither creator nor divine”.¹⁴ In other words, neither of them is subordinated to each other in immanent and economic Trinity. As McDonnell rightly remarks, “If the person of the Spirit is not equal to that of the Son, if the mission of the Spirit is not as important as that of the Son, then the Trinity collapses. The Trinity cannot support imbalanced, unequal persons or missions.”¹⁵ Hence, christology and pneumatology, as methodologies, should be used simultaneously to investigate any aspects of God’s works, including the church and its unity. The charismatic renewal vividly shows the potent work of the Spirit for the church and unity. The following section will illustrate this point from the christological and pneumatological perspectives.

2. The Church

The charismatic events such as baptism in the Spirit and charisms reflect the fact that the church is full of *Spiriti praesens* and *Christus praesens*. The former is characterised by its tangibility, visibility and sensibility while the latter is characterised by its connection of historicity and contemporaneity. Baptism in the Spirit brought about the genesis of the church at Pentecost and it was Jesus Christ who was the baptiser of the Spirit (Jn 1:33). He had both received the Spirit and given the Spirit “without measure” (Jn 3:34). He had been anointed by the Spirit and anointed His disciples with the Spirit. Mühlen defines the church as “the continuation of Christ’s anointing by the Spirit”.¹⁶ Christ enables the church to be full of *Spiriti praesens* and formed by the Spirit who is “the subject of the church’s coming-to-be”.¹⁷ Although Christ is not physically present in the church, the continuous baptism in the Spirit of believers marks the continuous work of the baptiser and His continuous presence. He breathes into the church with the Spirit, and the Spirit forms the church with charisms so that it becomes “a charismatically marked community”.¹⁸ These charisms manifest the *Spiriti praesens* and *Christus praesens* simultaneously and enable the church to see and hear Jesus’ words and ministries in the present.

¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, p. 305.

¹⁴ Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, p. 52.

¹⁵ Kilian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God*, p. 86.

¹⁶ Quoted in Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee, “The Spirit and the Church”, in Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (eds) *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), p. 390.

¹⁷ Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee, “The Spirit and the Church”, p. 393.

¹⁸ Ralph Del Colle, “Spirit-Christology: Dogmatic Foundations for Pentecostal-Charismatic Spirituality”, *Journal of*

Concerning Jesus' words, the Spirit works in the church as a Paraclete by distributing gifts such as prophecy, words of knowledge and wisdom and tongues with interpretation; and by reminding them of Jesus' words and teaching as well as revealing the hidden facts according to the truth which is Jesus himself. Since Jesus is the Word, once His words are proclaimed and heard His presence is known in the church. Peter Hodgson who deals with the meaning of *Christus praesens* suggests that words or language causes a person's presence. He says, "...personal presence occurs when recognition is evoked by means of word, including also verbal action or enacted word."¹⁹ *Christus praesens* can be perceived to be more striking when the words which are spoken apply to the present situation of, or to challenges facing, the church.

Moreover, His words are also seen to be effective because what He promised in the past comes into reality. The charismatic renewal shows that Jesus' promises are not just spoken for the disciples alone but also for His church in the ancient past, the present and the future. For example, before His ascension He promised, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). This happened at Pentecost (Acts 2) and is still happening nowadays. Through this experience, *Christus praesens* takes place personally in individuals' lives and is witnessed by the church collectively. Hence the baptism in the Spirit and the charisms which immediately bring about the *Spiriti praesens* simultaneously usher *Christus praesens* through the proclamation and fulfillment of His words.

Concerning Jesus' ministry, the charism also plays a vital role in manifesting the *Spiriti praesens* and *Christus praesens*. Miracles such as physical and psychological healings and exorcism are surprising but also familiar. They are surprising as they happen in the present day when "supernatural" things seem rare and science is believed to be sufficient to solve daily problems and to improve standard of living. But they also seem familiar because similar things can be found in the Bible which records what Jesus and the apostles did in the past. So charisms function as an anamnesis of Jesus who was determined to "work the works of Him (the Father)" (Jn 9:4) on the one hand, and enables us to continue His ministry "on his behalf and accompanied by him" on the other hand.²⁰ Hence the Holy Spirit, through charisms, "reflects in us what has already been initiated, originated and brought to fullness and perfection in Christ".²¹ The charisms given by the Holy Spirit not only bring about the presence of the giver tangibly, visibly and sensibly but also the presence of the Spirit anointer who worked on earth in human history and is still working nowadays. The historical and contemporary Jesus is connected by charisms and they are both manifested in the church at the same time.

The charismatic renewal displayed by its vivid performances of charisms leads to the vivid presence of the "two hands". Through charisms, the Paraclete brings Jesus' words and ministries into the present, bringing them to mind and making them a reality and so revealing the *Christus praesens*. The church is reassured that the God Emmanuel is still accompanying it. He, as Smail

Pentecostal Theology, Vol. 3 (1993), p. 108.

¹⁹ Peter Hodgson, *Jesus-Word and Presence: An Essay in Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 267, quoted in Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit*, p. 171.

²⁰ Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee, "The Spirit and the Church", p. 391.

²¹ Tom Smail, "In Tune with the Trinity 2: The Son, the Givenness of God", *Theological Renewal*, No. 5 (1977), p. 3.

describes, “is not two thousand years away in the past, remote and retired in heaven, or reserved for an apocalyptic future, but lives to keep his promises to all who turn in expectant faith towards him”.²² The *Christus praesens* mediated by charisms reveals God as a real being and hence the church no longer focuses on the gifts and the giver of gifts, but perceives God Himself as God. The experience of God is not just about gaining and exercising the gifts, but about experiencing God Himself as the one to whom we should relate. He is not only the one from whom we can ask for gifts, but the one to whom we should dedicate our lives.²³ Charisms will then no longer be exercised out of selfishness and self-centredness, but out of a desire for God’s ministry and His kingdom. Since the Head of the church is present, the church’s identity is confirmed and its ministry on earth with the help and presence of the Paraclete is continued. As Ralph Del Colle says, “If the *Christus praesens* is in fact God’s identity in the church, so too the Holy Spirit does not just ‘make relevant’ the historical-resurrected Christ but ‘is the *Christus praesens*.’”²⁴ This perichoretic relation or “reciprocal interiority” between Christ and the Holy Spirit is made crystal clear in the charismatic renewal through the use of charisms. It therefore supports the complementarity of christology and pneumatology applied to the understanding of the church and its unity in the charismatic context.

3. Church Unity

Since the charismatic renewal reveals the inter-relatedness of Christ and Spirit in the church through charisms and baptism in the Spirit, it is reasonable to think that unity can also demonstrate this intimate relation of these two hands. I am going to use Aloysius Pieris’ model to develop this point. Although his model is invented for interreligious “core-to-core dialogue through a *communication in sacris* (communion in ritual)”,²⁵ it can also be adopted when discussing the grassroots unity nurtured by the charismatic renewal from the christological and pneumatological perspectives. He suggests three levels of dialogue: primordial experience which is pneumatological, collective memory which is christological and interpretation which is ecclesial. Although there was no formal ecumenical dialogue in the charismatic renewal, Christians of different traditions, particularly Protestants and Roman Catholics, experienced these three levels and thus a sense of unity ignited and grew. I will interpret these three levels with three respective commonalities which brought about unity among the charismatics.

3.1. Primordial Experience: Common Experience in the Spirit

Baptism in the Holy Spirit was widely acknowledged as the fundamental and primary experience among charismatics and it led to mutual recognition of one another as members of the body of Christ, and so a sense of unity was nourished at the grassroots level. The astonishing point for charismatics was that the Spirit was not only poured out on the “born-again” or “true” Christians, but also those who had been regarded as “heretics”. Baptism in the Spirit as a common experience was a point of departure for a common confession of Christians from different traditions and common life in worship and ministry in the body of Christ.

3.2. Collective Memory: Common Confession of Christ as God and Saviour

²² Tom Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), p. 13.

²³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 302.

²⁴ Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit*, p. 170.

²⁵ Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit*, p. 211.

The baptism in the Spirit enabled charismatics to recognise one another as Christians because they discovered that they had a shared memory of salvation. They were prompted by the same Spirit to confess their sins and receive Christ as Saviour and had actually believed in the same God. More importantly, through the use of charisms, they confessed Christ as God collectively, since charisms manifested *Christus praesens*. Volf suggests that “Just as every charisma is a concrete manifestation of Christ’s grace, so also is every charismatic activity a concrete form of confession to him.”²⁶ Hence, the memory of their personal confession was not only retrieved and made the standpoint for their mutual recognition, but it caused a joint, living and renewed confession to the Saviour as they practised the use of charisms.

3.3. Interpretation: “Common Responsibility”²⁷ in the Ecclesia

The church is a living interpretation of the love of God, *Christus praesens* and *Spiriti praesens*; and charisms enable members of the Body to make this interpretation tangibly and visibly. Each member is endowed with various charisms by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of edifying one another instead of being simply for their personal benefit and glory, hence they bear responsibility for each others’ spiritual lives rather than depending entirely on the leaders. Volf suggests that this common responsibility entails “*mutual subordination*” and “*interdependence*”. Since there is no one who has the whole set of charisms from the Spirit, they need to be humble enough to be served by others for their physical and spiritual needs, and consequently the “fullness of gifts” can “be found in the entire (local) church.”²⁸ This mutuality expressed by the use of charisms displays the church as a community of love, with the presence of God, in front of the world. It also cultivates the unity implanted by the Spirit at the grassroots level from the time when the church was established.

4. Conclusion

The christologically-oriented ecumenisms of the WCC and the Vatican II have laid the foundation of the unity that the church pursues, but the charismatic renewal has restored the experiential elements in the Spirit at the grassroots level which are indispensable for unity. Ecclesialogically, charisms which manifested in the charismatic renewal vividly reflected *Spiriti praesens* and *Christus praesens* simultaneously in the church, and ecumenically, baptism in the Spirit and the use of charisms for ministry brought about three commonalities which led to the flourishing of the grassroots unity among Christians from different traditions. The charismatic renewal demonstrates the complementarity between christology and pneumatology, that the church and church unity are both established “in Spirit and in truth” or in Irenaeus’ terms, in wisdom and in Word. Hence, when pursuing unity, the Father’s two hands should be allowed to work so that order and spontaneity, doctrines and experience, truth and life may be found in the united church, and can be visibly demonstrated in this world.

Connie Ho Yan Au

PhD candidate of the University of Birmingham

²⁶ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p. 229.

²⁷ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p. 230.

²⁸ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness*, pp. 230-231.