

Theology essays - pneumatology



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

What is the relationship between the Pneumatology contained in the Pauline corpus* and the experience of the writer and his intended readers? What implications does your answer have for the development and application of Christian Pneumatology in the 21st century?

Introduction

Pneuma comes from the Greek and means wind or spirit and ology is a body of thought on a given subject thus theology, sociology etc.. Pneumatology is the theology of the Holy Spirit as understood in the Christian tradition.

References to the Spirit of God are to be found throughout the Old Testament, in the New Testament and in the Pauline body of writings.

Moltmann (1992) contends that for many years the Holy Spirit was the 'Cinderella' of modern theology but the rise of the ecumenical movement and in particular the second Vatican Council saw growing awareness of the role of the Spirit. The subsequent growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements has since generated a renewed interest in this neglected area of theology.

This assignment looks at the relationship between Paul's experiences, the Pneumatology contained within his work, and the intended recipients of his letters. On the basis of the answers to this question conclusions will be drawn as to their implications for the development and application of Christian Pneumatology in the 21st century.

Christians were preaching the words of Jesus before Paul came along, first as the Church's persecutor and then as its foremost advocate. For many Christian thinkers Paul is the foremost Christian theologian, others see his

work as detracting from the teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospels.

Bultmann (1972) maintains that in order to understand early Christianity one must first understand Paul. Whatever position scholar's take with regard to Paul's work he is most certainly not an Apostle who will be ignored. Paul is known for his tirades against enforced Jewish Orthodoxy and his mission to the Gentiles, in fact he is seen by many as the foremost *apostle to the Gentiles*.

Paul's Theology

The body of work that is attributed to Paul documents his experiences and demonstrates the development of his theology on the basis of such experiences (Becker, 1993). Becker maintains that:

...the theology of Paul is the theology of experience under the influence of the gospel and of the Spirit connected with it, . . . [so that] if Paul designs his theological statements on the basis of his experience of the gospel, then the content of the gospel must consequently be the measure and criterion of everything — in short, for the interpretation of all reality (Becker, 1993:: xi).

Paul came from Tarsus and was not a disciple of Jesus he had heard the preaching of the Hellenistic Church and had a dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus. Paul was a fervent and pious Jew and his conversion experience led him to question the Torah. This was because Paul was convinced that salvation came through the grace of Christ alone and not through personal righteousness and adherence to the Law (Bultmann, 1972). However, he believed that the Law did show the Jews (and the Gentiles) what righteousness was. Certain of the Jews tried to achieve

this through an enforced legalism and Paul said that this was not possible. The Law exposed sin and people's inability to truly adhere to the Law. This, as Stendahl (1963) points out was because of his concern about what would happen to it with the coming of the Messiah and what would happen to the Jews who were God's chosen elect.

An Eschatological and Anthropological View

Bultmann (1972) maintains that Paul's conversion was not the result of repentance but rather obedient submission to the call of the judgement of God through Christ and it is this that is the basis of his theology. Eschatology or the doctrine of the end times and God's judgement on the present world is central to Paul's thinking and the presence of the Holy Spirit demonstrates this feeling of 'now and not yet'. For Bultmann, Paul's own understanding of the human situation is the key to understanding Paul's theology. Thus Bultmann (1972) argues that Paul's theology is anthropological ie. a doctrine of human beings before the life of faith and under the life of faith. Bultmann (ibid) contends that the pneumatology that is found in the Pauline corpus can be confusing because Paul uses the term pneuma in a number of different ways. This it seems is due to his understanding of humanity as embodied subjects who have both a psyche and a spirit or pneuma.. Bultmann says:

When Pauls speaks of the Pneuma of man he does not mean some higher principle within him or some special intellectual or spiritual faculty of his, but simply his self, and the only question is whether the self is regarded in some particular respect when it is called pneuma (Bultmann, 1972: 206).

Pneumatology and Christology

In Paul's theology the Holy Spirit is almost indistinguishable from Christ and in fact in Paul's view the two are inseparable to such an extent that the notion of the Holy Spirit as Ruach or the breath of the Father seems to have disappeared from Paul's theological scene. Thus Gaffin (1998) demonstrates that in Paul,

The presence of the Spirit is the presence of Christ. There is no relationship with Christ that is not also fellowship with the Spirit. To belong to Christ is to be possessed by the Spirit. Elsewhere, within the comprehensive sweep of the prayer at the close of Ephesians 3, for "you to be strengthened by [the] Spirit inwardly" is nothing other than for "Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph. 3. 16-17) (Gaffin, 1998: 10).

It is arguably the case that Paul viewed the Spirit in this way because of his own experiences whereby acceptance of Christ means the indwelling of the Divine Spirit and this *bears witness to our spirit that we are God's children* (Romans, 8: 16). The Spirit therefore is evidence of Christ's presence in the believer. This is a view that has been adopted by many present day evangelical Christians but would perhaps not have been so popular in the early Church. In the Gospels (and even in some of Paul's work) the Holy Spirit is related to yet distinguishable from, the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is a person who is worthy of worship in his/her own right.

When Paul had his conversion experience he pledged obedience to Jesus Christ. It is in Paul's writings that Luther discovered the doctrine of justification by faith. In many instances in the Pauline corpus the Holy Spirit is

seen almost as a guarantee of salvation because he/she witnesses to the presence of Christ. Scholars maintain that the letter to the Romans was written to address the specific needs of the churches in Rome. This may also have related to Paul's own experiences and circumstances but the general consensus is that the main purpose of Romans (which has the most references to pneumatology) was to edify the Roman church. At that time there were threats to the unity of the Church due to problems between the Jewish Christians and the Gentiles. Hahn (2000) maintains that Paul's plea for the Church to live in the Spirit rather than according to the flesh was necessary in a Church that whose unit was under threat.

Paul speaks to the Church of being in the flesh or in sin, being a slave to sin. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is what sets a believer free from sin and gives a person life. Bultmann (1972) says:

Man, called to selfhood, tries to live out of his own strength and thus loses his self-his life-and rushes into death. This is the domination of sin. All man's doing is directed against his true intention-viz, to achieve life (Bultmann, 1972: 246).

It is the person who has faith who receives life, here again we see the connection between Paul's pneumatology and his own personal experience of being given new life at the moment of conversion. This is when a person turns from death to life through the ministry of the Spirit. Paul speaks to both Jew and Gentile when he says that human beings are confronted by righteousness through the Law but are unable to achieve it. Only God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit can make a person righteous so that

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they can stand before God as a righteous person (Bultmann, 1972). With the righteousness of faith comes the freedom of the Spirit as expressed in the first letter to the Corinthians.

For all things are yours...whether the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours

The Spirit takes on a number of different roles in Paul's writings and is closely connected to the concepts of eschatology and of soteriology or salvation history. Paul's pneumatology is a pneumatology of freedom. In Paul's thinking the Christian is set free from the cares of the world to enter the service of God as he himself had done. Through baptism and the gift of the Spirit a person is freed from sin and death and Galatians (5. 25) is encouraged to walk in the Spirit *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit* (Bultmann, 1972). It would seem that the whole of Paul's experience and thus the theology that is found in the Pauline corpus is permeated by his pneumatology. The whole of the Christian life is based on Paul's idea of freedom in the Spirit thus 2 Corinthians 3. 17 tells us that *where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom*. The believer is freed from the Law. The legalism of some of the Jews had made them slaves to the Law- when it was supposed to do the opposite.

It is through faith and the gift of the spirit that the believer is adopted as a child of God a process Pauls calls *the Spirit of adoption to Sonship* . As adopted children of God we choose to walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh. It is the gift of sonship that frees believers from slavish adherence to the Law. Bultmann (1972) writes:

Christian freedom is freedom from all

This freedom however is only granted in God. Paul's pneumatology points to a Christian way of life that is *marked by or filled with God's Spirit* (Reumann, 1991: 79). This stems from Paul's own experience since devoting his life to the work of God.

Other ways in which the Pauline corpus refers to pneumatology are (as his letters to the Church at Corinth demonstrate) in terms of spiritual gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues. Here Paul was dealing with the excesses of some Christians and was giving instructions on how the gifts of the Spirit should be used wisely. The Spirit is also seen as the sanctifier of the believer's life. Although the believer becomes righteous and free from the Law through faith, this is often a future righteousness that depends on the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

. Based on the above brief survey of the Pauline corpus it is arguably the case that Paul had a very distinct pneumatology. However, his tendency to speak of Jesus and the Spirit almost interchangeably could be problematic in a contemporary, religiously diverse society. The early Church in the main, had a theology of the Spirit which did not tie the Spirit to the Son. This was achieved in 381 with the addition of the filioque clause. Originally the Spirit proceeded from the Father (this remains the case in the Orthodox Church) the filioque changed this to the Spirit proceeding from the Father through the Son (Moltmann, 1992). In some respects therefore it is arguably the case that Paul's theology has a tendency to limit the role of the Holy Spirit, and

the fourth Century addition to the Nicene Creed eventually split the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054. Limiting the role of the Spirit in this way, I would argue, is detrimental to the pneumatological freedom that is also found in the Pauline corpus. A pneumatology that speaks of the freedom of the Spirit is arguably a vital part of any movement to renew the Christian faith in the twenty first century. Without this freedom contemporary Christianity could be said to be in danger of distancing itself from its roots and becoming something that should not be confused with the teachings of Christ. Thus Pneumatology in the twenty first century should be developed as one of the major themes relating to liberation in scripture. A pneumatology of freedom not just in the Christian life, but from all forms of injustice and oppression. As the Prophets would have it knowledge of God is demonstrated by the way in which we treat those who are oppressed.

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