



Heresy or Prophecy: Tertullian's Theology of the Holy Spirit in Early Christianity

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Abstract

Spirituality and critical scholarship can be seen as the twin forces that have continued to influence the church in many ways at all times. Pursuing one or emphasizing one at the expense of the other makes the church imbalance. This truth is what this paper seeks to illustrate through the life, faith, and apologies of Tertullian against Praxeas and the church in the second century in favour of the Montanists. Tertullian condemned the official church for throwing out the Holy Spirit, and encouraged the Montanists who he described as spirituals, prophets, and true men and women of God.

In Tertullian's defense of ('the true prophets'), the Montanists, he articulated his theological thoughts on the Holy Spirit and his relationship with the church and the believer, order of life, marriage, the water of baptism, and the gifts of the Spirit as his theological basis.

Keywords: heresy, prophecy, gifts of the Spirit, trinity, filioque, carnals, spirituals.

I Introduction

Tertullian was born around AD 160 and lived most of his life in Carthage, a capital of the Roman province of Africa. He received his education in the second century and his surviving works date between 196 and 212AD. Tertullian was the first major Christian author to write in Latin and to use many of the technical words common in the later Christian theological debates.¹

He was very well educated in Latin rhetoric, well read, and deeply imbued with Stoic philosophy and Christian Scripture;² he also possessed strong argumentative skills. Ever since Jerome in the fourth century, it has been noted that Tertullian was a great professional because he was converted to Christianity when he was a competent professional.³ Because he was converted to Christianity when he was quiet mature, he became concerned about the behavior of Christians and constantly wrote on practical subjects such as repentance, prayer, baptism, fasting, behavior in persecution and even advice his wife on what to do after his death.⁴

He strongly urged absolute obedience to the revealed will of God and remained a penitent striving after holiness. Like many of his peers after him, he referred to the gospel, the Christian scriptures, and Christian beliefs as “the law” or “our law”. For him, it was conduct of life that marked out those who belonged to Christ from those of the evil world.⁵ Therefore in line with his character he became a Montanist (a Charismatic and a ‘schismatic’ group whose doctrines and practices were constantly attacked by the catholic Church) and broke away from the main church in Carthage.⁶

His passion for the “new prophecy” or the Montanists’ movement was shown in his later writings against the main church. A work like, the “spirituals” against the “natural men”, clearly showed his manifest support for Montanism and a move tantamount to causing a split or schism in the main church -- to the effect that Tertullian was alleged to have said: “I for my part was subsequently separated from the natural men by my acknowledgement and defense of the Paraclete”.⁷

¹ Tim Dowly, John H. Briggs et. al., *The History of Christianity* (England: Lion Publishing PK, 1985). p.111; Denis J.Mock, *Church History Survey* (Atlanta, Georgia:BTCP,1989),p.61; see also Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity vol. I Beginnings to1500* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975), pp.128-129.

² Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (London: S PCK, 1991), p.67.

³ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.67.

⁴ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.67.

⁵ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.67.

⁶ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.67.

⁷ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.68.

He understood the prophetic claims of the Montanists quite well and wished that difficult disciplinary questions were resolved by a body of prophets and prophetesses and even metaphysical questions about the soul.⁸ Tertullian saw the difference as one of strict obedience to God in a holy church which the naturals compromised both by breaking with tradition and by failing to innovate with the new prophesy.⁹

In a pamphlet on “Modesty” he attacked as outrageous a certain bishop’s announcement that he would grant remission of sin to those guilty of adultery and fornication. Tertullian may not probably be against the idea of forgiveness but probably, he was against the idea that a Roman bishop or sovereign pontiff is capable of forgiving sins.¹⁰

Besides practical works, Tertullian wrote excellent apologies in which persecution was criticized with such powerful sarcasms as immoral, unlawful and futile. He even stated that the number of Christians in Africa then was probably more in comparative terms, and included in some of his apologies accounts of how Christians attend prayer meetings by carrying all their finances with them.¹¹

Tertullian in some of his works also showed some concern about Christianity’s attitude to the Roman state and society. He wrote in defense of orthodox belief against heresy and the moral behavior of Christians. He also wrote in a witty and rigorous style marked by startling turns of phrase. It was he who claimed that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.¹² But his well-known question, “what has Athens to do with Jerusalem”, succinctly expressed a rejection of a philosophy that was not true of his own, since he demonstrated how pagan intellectual achievements could be made to serve Christianity.¹³

II Tertullian’s Theology of the Holy Spirit

Tertullian’s profound and lasting theology of the Trinity especially the Holy Spirit probably made him the church’s first ‘Pentecostal-Charismatic theologian’. Stanley Burgess captured this assertion in the following terms:

Tertullian contributes significantly to the Christian doctrines of the trinity and of the Holy Spirit. He gives to the church its language of “Trinity” and of “persons” in the Trinity. From his Montanist experience of the Holy Spirit, Tertullian, more

⁸ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.68.

⁹ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.68.

¹⁰ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.68.

¹¹ Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p.68.

¹² Dowley, Briggs, et al., *The History of Christianity*, p. 111.

¹³ Dowley, Briggs, et al., *The History of Christianity*, p. 111.

than any theologian before him is able to distinguish the Personhood and work of the Spirit from that of the Father and the Son.¹⁴

Besides this, Tertullian himself gave a classical expatiation on the relation of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity in these words:

What follows Philip's question, and the Lord's whole treatment of it to the end of John's Gospel, continues to furnish us with statements of the same kind, distinguishing the Father and the Son, with properties of each. Then there is the Paraclete or comforter, also which he promises to pray to the Father, and to send from heaven after He had ascended to the Father. He is called "another comforter" indeed; but in what way He is another we have already shown. "He will receive of mine", says Christ, just as Christ Himself received of the father's. Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent persons, who are yet distinct one from another. These three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, "I and my Father are One," in respect of unity of substance, not singularity of number.¹⁵

Tertullian again argued:

Now the spirit indeed is the third from God and the Son; just as the fruit of the three is third from the root, or as the stream out of the river is third from the fountain, or as the apex of the ray is third from the sun. Nothing, however, is alien from that original source hence it derives its own properties The Father, and the Son and the Spirit are inseparable from each other... they are distinct from each other ...The Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole ... even as we say that the Son is also distinct from the Father, so that he showed a third degree in the Paraclete, as we believe the second degree in the Son ... Besides, does not the very fact that they have the distinct names of Father and Son amount to a declaration that they are distinct in personality?¹⁶

These theological elucidations from one of the earliest intellectual giant of Christianity in the late second century in North Africa forms the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of the Holy spirit in the church which has even persisted till now. The first emerging idea of the Holy Spirit in Tertullian's thought is the relation of the Spirit to the Father and the Son. In this relation of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, the Spirit comes as "the third person", in the Trinity.¹⁷ The Spirit is therefore the "another", apart from the first of all the Father, and followed by the Son.

¹⁴ Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 1997), p.63.

¹⁵Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.63.

¹⁶ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*. p.63.

¹⁷ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*. p.63.

Tertullian affirmed that the trinity is distinguishable into three persons and that the Holy Spirit comes third, but having the same substance or essence with Christ and the Father.¹⁸

In his thought, regarding the relation and position of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit should not be thought of as a creature or not having equality with the Father, rather both the Son and the Spirit should be honored equally with the Father.¹⁹ To him, the divinity and glory of the Trinity are so united and inseparable to the extent that one cannot think of anything at all in One Person that can be separated from the fullness of the Godhead.²⁰ What he meant was that, even the name “Lord” is attributed to the Father, and the Son, and to the Spirit. And moreover, the *Logos* attributes in a common and unified way all that pertains to the Father and Himself to the Spirit.²¹ Tertullian maintained that the ‘thirdness’ and the distinction of the Spirit from the Father and Son are affirmed by the fact that the Holy Spirit did not share in Jesus’ suffering on the cross.

In essence, the distinction of the Spirit from the Father and the Son as the third person in the trinity is an affirmation beyond the power of the human intellect to grapple with, beyond what is founded and beyond every immaterial and deified intellectual. In essence the Holy Spirit is differentiated from the Father and the Son in such a way that there is no interchange or commonness into their names, relation, position or themselves.²²

The ‘source’ of the Holy Spirit is another critical point in Tertullian’s discourse on the Holy Spirit. According to him the Spirit as promised by Jesus will come from the Father and will also receive from him (Christ) to the apostles and the church (John 15:26, 16:7, 14:16). In line with Western theological tradition to which he originally belonged, Tertullian thought the Spirit proceeded from the Father through the Son.²³

The doctrine of the procession of the Spirit was also debated later by Arius as proceeding from the Father. Meanwhile the Greek church Fathers taught that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. The issues surrounding the procession therefore were not always clearly defined by geography or language.²⁴ Stating what was to become the recognized Eastern position, Athanasius and the Cappadocians for instance taught that the Spirit is not created by the Son but eternally proceeds directly from the Father mediated by the Son.

Not all Eastern theologians subscribed to this view. Epiphanius and Cyril of Alexandria believed that the Spirit derived from the Father and the Son. However, Theodor of Mopsuestia maintained

¹⁸ Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Massachusetts: Henderickson, 1989), p.25.

¹⁹ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions*, p.26

²⁰ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions*, p.26.

²¹ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, pp.35-37.

²² Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.37.

²³ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.96.

²⁴ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.96.

that there is no dependence of the Spirit on the Son.²⁵ Thus, the procession issue was not clarified in the West until Augustine's position which was largely a confirmation of Tertullian's thought gained general acceptance at Toledo in AD 589.²⁶ At that council, the "*filioque*" clause was inserted in the Niceno-constantinopolitan creed together with an anathema against its opponents -- that is, the Arians and not the Greeks. It is interesting to note that the relational peace between the Western and the Eastern Church partially came to an end because of the idea of the "*filioque*".²⁷

For a long time after the insertion of the "*filioque*" without consulting the East, nothing happened until Patriarch Photius condemned the "*filioque*" as a heretical addition to the creed. From this time onward, it served as one of the worst causes of the friction between the East and the West which eventually led to the schism in AD1054.²⁸ Thus to a large extent, Tertullian's view on the Spirit has remained with the Western church and its descendants to date.

One thing that Tertullian emphasized so clearly was the fact that the Holy Spirit is a comforter or "another comforter". In his articulation, the Holy Spirit possesses in itself or himself the quality and the ability to comfort because no one comforts like him and no one will ever comfort like him. What this meant for Tertullian was that until a person has received the gift of comfort from the comforter he has need of the divine Scripture to turn his thought to God. It means that a person who walks and experiences the comfort of the Spirit might suffer physical misery but will not be vexed.²⁹ Thus with the comfort of the Spirit, a person can constantly subdue evil and live in miserable circumstances without human comforts.

III Tertullian – A Pentecostal-Charismatic Theologian of the Second Century

The prominent view in Tertullian's theology of the Holy Spirit is the fact that a new age of the Spirit had begun in his own days. He taught that in this age, the Spirit is working by giving prophecies and revelations to the Montanist prophets: Montanus and his two female disciples Maximilla and Priscilla.³⁰

Tertullian vigorously defended what he regarded as true spirituality against the larger church which he felt has fallen away to a state he described as "psychic". He therefore replied critics within the main church thus:

It is these (the psychics) which raise controversy with the paraclete: it is on this account that the new prophecies are rejected: not that

²⁵ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Tradition*, p.96.

²⁶ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.96.

²⁷ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.96.

²⁸ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.96.

²⁹ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.106.

³⁰ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p .64.

Montanus and Priscilla and Maximilla preach another God, nor that they disjoin Jesus Christ (from God), nor that they overturn any particular rule of faith and hope, but that they plainly teach more frequently fasting than marrying. They (the psychic) are constantly reproaching us with novelty.³¹

Tertullian continued his passionate defense of the Charismatics in the following words:

Nor is there any other cause whence they find themselves compelled to deny the Paraclete more than the fact that they esteem Him to be the institution of a novel discipline which they find most harsh....But the Paraclete ...will begin by bearing emphatic witness to Christ.... And when he has thus been recognized...he will reveal those “many things” which appertain to discipline.³²

He pressed further with his Pentecostal-Charismatic apology thus:

Whereas reason why the Lord sent the Paraclete was, since human mediocrity was unable to take in all things at once, discipline should, by little, be directed, and ordained, and carried on the perfection by the vicar of the Lord, the Holy Spirit ... what, then, is the Paracletes administrative office but this: The direction of discipline, the revelation of scriptures, the reformation of the intellect, the advancement toward the “better things”? Nothing is without stages of growth.³³

Clearly, this whole theology of the Spirit regarding prophesy, revelation and other supernatural manifestations in the view of Tertullian could be based on Jesus’ promise that the Spirit of truth will come and guide the disciples of Christ into all truth. Not only that, but He will also tell them what is to come, and remain with them, and give to them what he receives from Christ.³⁴

According to Tertullian, the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity is in his time. In other words, he is in his dispensation and so he is actively working his works through revelations, visions, and prophecies. And these are being manifested through His prophets Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla.³⁵

For Tertullian, the mainline church which he described as the “psychics” are rather in contention with the Paraclete or the Holy Spirit because the Montanists are free from of any doctrinal heresy, and their insistence on strict biblical lifestyle and their frequent fastings cannot amount to

³¹ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.96.

³² Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.96.

³³ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.65.

³⁴ John 14:15-17; 16:12-13.

³⁵ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity* (Michigan; W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p.196.

anything heretical. According to Tertullian, it is rather the Orthodox church that is either dead or asleep in carnality and sin, and has been by-passed by the Holy Spirit.³⁶

It is against this background that Tertullian's response to Praxeas for his accusations and conspiracies against the Montanists deeply captures Tertullian's view on the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's presence among the Montanists and his apology to the mainline church's stand against Montanus and his two associates. His response to Praxeas reads:

In various ways has the devil rivaled and resisted the truth. Sometimes his aim has been to destroy the truth by defending it. He maintains that there is one only Lord, the Almighty creator of the world, in order that out of this doctrine of the unity he may heresy.... For after the Bishop of Rome had acknowledged the prophetic gifts of montanus. Priscilla and maximilla, and, in consequence of the acknowledgement had bestowed his peace on the churches of Asia and Phrygia, he, by importunately urging false accusations against the prophets themselves and their churches and insisting on the authority of the Bishop's predecessors... compelled him to recall the pacific letter which he had issued,³⁷

Tertullian continued his response against Praxeas by being very categorical:

By this Praxeas did two fold services for the devil at Rome: he drove away prophesy and he brought in heresy; he put to flight the paraclete, and he crucified the Father. Praxeas' tares had been moreover sown and had produced their fruit here also, while many were asleep in their simplicity of doctrine: but these tares actually seemed to have been plucked up, having been discovered and exposed by him whose agency God was pleased to employed But again shall it be rooted up, if the Lord will, even now: but if not now, in the day when all bundles of tares shall be gathered together, and along with every stumbling block shall be burnt up with unquenchable fire.³⁸

Clearly, Tertullian did not hide his negative feelings and rage against those he perceived as enemies of the cause of true spirituality and Christianity being re—inaugurated in his days by the Holy Spirit through Montanus and his two female associates. Tertullian found in Praxeas, Satan working and fighting against the work of the Spirit, and the Pope a victim of lie and deception.

In Tertullian's thought, failure on the part of the church to acknowledge prophecy and the supernatural gifts of the Spirit in the church is ushering in heresy instead. Therefore the church has no choice but to allow the Spirit that inspires prophesy to remain in the church in word and

³⁶ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.65.

³⁷ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1993), pp.597,598.

³⁸ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, pp.597, 598.

deed to the glory of God. This line of thought about the person and work of the Spirit may be confirmed by the council of Nicaea's declaration in 325 AD:

We believe in the Holy Spirit ... who with the Father and the Son is both the subject and the object of faith, he through whom and in whom we believe in Jesus Christ and are saved. In him God himself is the content of what he does for us and communicates to us.³⁹

Thus, in Tertullian's theology, the Holy Spirit is not just something divine from God or some sort of action at a distance or some kind of gift detachable from himself. For in the Holy Spirit, God acts directly upon us and in giving us the Son He gives nothing than himself.⁴⁰

IV The Holy Spirit and the Baptismal Water

Besides the belief in the Spirit as the sole inaugurator of prophecy and ecstatic revelations, Tertullian also held that the Holy Spirit is also the sanctifier who hovers over the water of the baptized and sanctifies it. He taught that the Spirit is corporeally washed in the waters and the flesh is in the same way spiritually cleansed -- thereby confirming eternal life.⁴¹ Tertullian clarifies this by emphasizing that it does not mean that one obtains the Holy Spirit in the water: but in the water, and under it one becomes cleansed and prepared for the Holy Spirit -- in that after one has come out of it he or she is thoroughly anointed with the blessed unction.⁴² He supported this by alluding to how in the Old Testament priests, kings and prophets were anointed and then the "unction" comes upon them to make them spiritual, well furnished and fit for their call because they have been anointed with the Spirit by God the Father.⁴³

He further buttressed his thought by stating:

For just as after the waters of the deluge, by which the old iniquity was purged, after baptism, so to say, of the world – a dove was the herald which announced to the earth the assignment of celestial wrath So by the self same law of heavenly effect to the earth that is to our flesh, as it emerges from the font, after its own sins, flies the dove of the Holy Spirit, bringing us the peace of God sent out from the heavens, where it is the church, the typified ark.⁴⁴

³⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1993), p.191.

⁴⁰ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p.191.

⁴¹ J.F. Bethene-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1903, p.381

⁴² Bethene-Baker. *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*, p.390.

⁴³ Bethene-Baker. *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*, p.390.

⁴⁴ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.64.

This shows how Tertullian deeply attached spiritual significance to water baptism by making the Holy Spirit central to all the elements and motions involved. Thus in water baptism the Spirit sanctifies everything involved and prepares the candidate for the Spirit's unction for divine service.

V Order of Life, Marriage, Gifts of the Spirit and the Church

The Spirit in the same manner is the “determiner” of discipline itself. For Tertullian, the pre-Christian order of faith was imperfect and that real Christian discipline began with the death of Christ and the manifestation of the Spirit from heaven who was sent to guide believers into all truth.⁴⁵ When Tertullian, pursuing the most holy discipline in Christ through the agency of the Spirit was charged with his declaration of no marriage as being unbiblical, he responded thus:

For in saying, “I still have many things to say to you, but you are not yet able to hear them: when the Holy Spirit shall come He will lead you into all truth” He sufficiently, of course, sets before us that he will bring such as may be esteemed alike novel, as having never before been published, and finally burdensome, as if that was the reason why they were not published.⁴⁶

It is difficult to say where in Scripture Tertullian quoted the above statement. But clearly, he again leaned partly on Scripture by saying that when the Spirit comes, part of the leading into all truth might be, forbidding his people not to marry. Just like his critics and attackers of his article on “No marriage”, they were only speaking like Jesus who said in the gospel of John that some of the many things he said to his disciples were unbearable.

In his view marriage is an infirmity waging a constant war against better things. Believers in the past could not stay single because, then, the Holy Spirit was not given, but now with the *Paraclete* it is possible. By remaining unmarried the Spirit vanquishes the flesh so that the flesh may yield to the spirit,⁴⁷ and fulfill the Spirit's biddings, desires, and pleasures in this preparatory realm awaiting the soon coming of the Lord. Marriage can therefore become a temptation or if not even prevent the Christian from fully yielding to the work of the Lord or seeing him.

Tertullian believed that avoiding marriage is necessary for uprooting the most tenacious passions and negative thoughts from within. He perceived it as necessary part of the process of purification that enables believers to participate in the kingdom of God.⁴⁸ This moral and spiritual discipline in Tertullian's conviction was probably a recapitulation of the experience of

⁴⁵ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.65.

⁴⁶ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.65.

⁴⁷ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, p.65.

⁴⁸ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.198.

Jesus in his days when he engaged himself in fasting and enduring temptation of the highest order just to make the kingdom of God become a reality on earth.⁴⁹

In all of Tertullian's writings, he also gave an important place to the Spirit who fills the life of the church by manifesting his gifts as promised by God through his apostles and the prophets.⁵⁰ He noted in relation to this:

... and I think we may derive from this a very just conclusion that the bestowal of a gift is not the work of a god other than Him who is proved to have given the promise ... In this Christ the whole substantial of the spirit would have rest, not meaning that it would have to rest upon Him the entire operation of the Spirit of grace, which so far as the Jews were concerned would cease and come to an end. This result itself shows: for after this time the spirit of the creator never breathed among them.⁵¹

What Tertullian sought to emphasize is that Christ rules in the church because he has made the Spirit central to the life of the church as a result of which the Spirit's presence is visible and evidently demonstrated through spiritual gifts. These gifts are exercised in the name of Christ by the power of the Spirit.⁵² The spirit fills the church, thereby exclusively empowering believers to exercise his gifts in a moral and spiritual way.

In that case, the church that is filled with the Spirit becomes the centre where God rules over man's inward and outward state, thereby delivering him from spiritual bondage by imparting to him spiritual graces. This eventually leads the Believer to a life of obedience to the divine precepts.⁵³ The Spirit in the centre of church and governing, it empowers the church not with physical force but spiritual power.

The power of the church which the Spirit offers it through His gifts is not in any way independent or sovereign. Or, the Spirit being at the centre of the church does not make it independent or sovereign because it still depends on Him (the Spirit).⁵⁴ The power of the church therefore or the Spirit's centrality is derived from Christ and subordinate to His sovereign authority over the church. The gifts must be exercised in harmony with the word of God and under the direction of the Holy Spirit through both of which the Spirit and Christ govern the church in the name of Christ himself as the king of the church. As the Spirit fills the church through Christ in the view of Tertullian, the Spirit becomes the source of real and comprehensive power, consisting in the administration of the word and the determination of what is and what is

⁴⁹ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, p.198.

⁵⁰ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Tradition*, p.66.

⁵¹ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Tradition*, p.66.

⁵² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Banner of Truth Trust,1998). p.594. See also the following spiritual verses; John 20:22, 23; 1 Cor. 5:4; 15:12, II Cor.10:4; Lk12:13ff; Matt. 20:25-28; John 18:36,37.

⁵³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p.594.

⁵⁴ Cf. Matt20:25,26;23:8,10 II Cor. 10:45; Acts 4:29,30, Matt 28:18, Rom 10:14,15; Eph. 5:23; 1Cor. 5:4.

not permitted in the kingdom of God -- the forgiving and retaining of sin and the exercise of discipline in the church.⁵⁵

In experiencing a continuation of many of the spiritual gifts described by St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, Tertullian seemed to be implying that the spirit fills the life of the church first and foremost by preserving the word of God. And by giving his word to the church, God constituted the church as the keeper of precious deposit of the truth. While hostile forces are pitted against it and the power of error is everywhere apparent, the church must see to it that the truth does not perish from the earth. The Spirit empowers the church to maintain and defend the truth against all forces of unbelief and error.⁵⁶

VI The Holy Spirit and the Church

The second is the administration of the word of sacraments. The role of the Spirit in the church is not only to preserve the truth in Tertullian's view but also to preach it in the world and in the assemblage of the people of God, for the conversion of sinners and for the edification of the saints since the coming of Christ is so close in montanists evangelistic preaching.⁵⁷ Because, that is one of the means the Holy Spirit will use in the name of Christ to ceaselessly gather out of the whole human race a church chosen for everlasting life. Alongside Holy Spirit filled preaching as being the instrument of bringing the elect out of all the nations of the world comes the administration of the sacraments.

The third is the enforcement of the Laws of Christ. In this category, Tertullian believes that the Holy Spirit through the leadership of the church and the clear teachings of scripture should teach the moral and spiritual requirements of the Christian faith and ensure that every member of the community adheres to them. Montanus and his associates therefore are spiritually qualified to demand certain ways of life and enforce them as instruments of godly morality and examples. Though all members of the church may possess this power to ensure godly living, it is only in small measure but the actual power is vested in Montanus and his assistants.⁵⁸ Tertullian plainly also taught that, the gifts of the spirit are clear evidence of true spirituality. He therefore challenged the heretic Marcion to show similar evidence:

Let Marcion then exhibit, as gifts of his god some prophets, such as have not spoken by human sense but with the spirit of God, such as have both predicted things to come and have made manifest the secret of the heart: let him produce a psalm, a vision, a prayer -- only let it be by the spirit, in an ecstasy, that is, in a rapture. Whenever an interpretation of tongues has occurred to him; Let him show

⁵⁵ See Matt. 28:19; 16:19; John 20:23; Matt.16:18; 18:17; Heb.12:15-17.

⁵⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p.595.

⁵⁷ Berkhof. *Systematic Theology*, p.595.

⁵⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p.598.

to me also, that any woman of boastful tongue in his community has ever prophesied from among those specially holy sisters of his. Now all these signs ... are forthcoming from my side without any difficulty, and they agree, too, with the rules, and the dispensations, and the instructions of the creator.⁵⁹

By this, Tertullian argued that, the giving of gifts to the sons of men means gratuities which are known as *charismata*. In his view when the Scripture say “sons of men”, it does not mean men who are promiscuous, but those who were truly so called: chosen men, and apostles.⁶⁰ He quoted from 1 Cor. 4:15, Gal. 4:19 and Joel 2:28, 29, to prove somehow that the giving of the Spirit and functioning of the gifts in the midst of the church are the proofs of spirituality.⁶¹ In his view what occurred at the day of Pentecost fulfills the prophecy of Joel for the last days.

Tertullian argued that God promised the gifts of the Spirit for the last days and Christ in the last days is the dispenser of the gifts of the Spirit, thereby making it evident that the gifts of the Spirit belong to Him, the Christ, the predictor.⁶² Therefore with copious evidence of Scripture on the promises and necessities of the gifts of the spirit and their functionings, Tertullian emphatically declared that the Montanists make those evidences a mark of true spirituality.⁶³

VII Conclusion

The reading of the records so far on Tertullian’s views on the *pneuma* and His manifestations amongst the Montanists in particular and the Spirit’s role in the believers faith, order, and the Church has confirmed the timeless nature of the church and the work of the Spirit amongst Believers. The life and career of Tertullian were testimonies to the fact that critical, intellectual, and biblical thinking are more than compatible. In the same vein, he has also shown the danger of employing philosophy, theology, and church doctrine to negatively encourage and promote deception and lies instead of the truth and true spirituality.

It is in view of this that he openly attacked Praxeas and labeled him as carnal and as an instrument in the hands of ecclesiastical leaders who are carnal themselves and enemies of the cause of Christ. Tertullian challenged all theological highbrows to be impartial and unbiased in their treatment of the Montanists. He cautioned the church against the tendency of becoming over-philosophical and over-critical to the nature and work of the Holy Spirit since that negatively impacts the church’s spiritual life, worship, and witness.

⁵⁹ Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Tradition*, p.67.

⁶⁰ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburg T&T Clark, 1993), p.446.

⁶¹ Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, p.446.

⁶² Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, p.446.

⁶³ Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, pp.446-47.

Some of the relevant issues Tertullian might be raising in view of the shift in Christian expansion today are already in the domain of the cultural process in Christian history and expansion. The background of Montanus and its adherents, and the prevailing questions, needs, and problems of the people were laid at the feet of the Holy Spirit, His presence and power mediated through Montanism. The impact of the movement on its followers cannot be measured by canons of speculation and abstraction. The followers of Montanus and his admirers and theological professionals who sought to defend and intelligently articulate the belief and the practice of the Holy Spirit of which Tertullian was the principal figure underscored the cultural, religious apprehensions of the followers of Montanus.

Tertullian might not have openly acknowledged the errors and the overzealousness of the 'spirituals'. But as an intellectual and a theologian, he knew there were problems with the group's beliefs and practices. Perhaps he also might have been too emotional to listen to his critics or felt he was not in the position to judge the works of the Spirit, or maybe, he believed that the Lord himself would take care of the lapses and errors amongst his people.

The history of the church in all ages has shown that questions about the person and works of the Spirit have always transcended groups, denominations, councils and doctrinal formulations. Therefore church and her scholars must be encouraged to learn to be bold, spiritual and honest in handling matters of the Holy Spirit as constantly witnessed in the continuous transformation of the church. That is very necessary for instruction and guidance -- so that the church can bear an effective, timeless, and productive witness to Jesus Christ.

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Degbe, S. K. (2014). Heresy or Prophecy: Tertullian's Theology of the Holy Spirit in Early Christianity. Open Science Repository Religion and Theology, Online(open-access), e45011812. doi:10.7392/openaccess.45011812