

## **Discourse On Ecumenical Implications of Pneumatological Vital Force Towards University Students' Welfare**

**Prof. P. N. Wachege, Cheronoh Fancy**

*Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya  
P.O. BOX 30197-00100 Nairobi, Kenya*

*PhD Candidate, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya  
P.O. BOX 30197-00100 Nairobi, Kenya*

---

**Abstract:** In a world divided by religious differences, science and technology, reason, economic, political and cultural aspects among other differentiating factors, ecumenism is no doubt necessary. It is even more urgent at the universities where the aforementioned differences are evident in comparison to lower levels of learning. Religion is an important pillar of society which can play significant unifying role even at the universities if properly harnessed. Interreligious dialogue that respects the real differences between religions is necessary to clear up misunderstanding that university students from Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu and other religions may have of one another. Ecumenical theology, in its search for unity and religious pluralism has not paid much attention to pneumatological vital force. The present treatise takes into account the vital force that has been closely associated with Christianity. The study however, opens up pneumatological discourse to other religious traditions in view of building new while strengthening existing ecumenical efforts. The study was conducted among sampled university students at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and Focus Group Discussions among students from different religious backgrounds. Through descriptive survey and content analysis aided with redaction criticism theory, the study concludes that pneumatology initiated ecumenical movement and provides rich grounds for wider interreligious dialogue even at the universities.

**Key words:** Implications, Pneumatology, Discourse, Ecumenism, Vital Force

Date of Submission: 12-07-2018

Date of acceptance: 29-07-2018

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The concept of ecumenism has been described differently by scholars. In Harmon's view (2010:23), it is a term derived from the Greek word *oikoumene* which means "ecumenical or ecumenism." Machai (1980:127) notes that ecumenism if truly understood in its original meaning implies "the whole inhabited world." The study adopts the latter definition which denotes more than just the coming together of religions but a movement of all people. Furthermore, the study agrees with those scholars as Harmon who view interreligious dialogue as wider ecumenism. Consequently, the study uses the two terms interchangeably.

Pneumatology on the other hand is derived from the Greek word *pneuma* which is often used to designate on and about the Holy Spirit (Nyamiti, 2005: 28). In the Old Testament, the term spirit is commonly used without the qualifier holy. In its primary sense, the term "Spirit" translates to the Hebrew word *ruah* or *ruach* which means breath, air, wind (CCC, 1994: no 691). The present discourse purposively uses the term 'Holy Spirit' to distinguish it from malevolent forces. He is the Third Person of the Trinity described using different symbols among believers. Such symbols include the hand and finger, fire, cloud, wind, water, dove and invigorating oil among others (Montague, 2001). Unfortunately, this Third Person of the Trinity has been neglected even by Trinitarian theologians. Even where He has been studied, much focus has been on the personality, procession and divinity of the Holy Spirit (Dunn, 1998). His function as a Person in economic Trinity seems ignored but thanks to charismatic, evangelical and popular movements who have drawn attention to the discourse; a view corroborated by McGrath (1994:240) who noted, "The rise of the charismatic movement within virtually every mainstream church has ensured that the Holy Spirit figures prominently on the theological agenda. A new experience of the reality and power of the Spirit has had a major impact upon the theological discussion of the person and work of the Holy Spirit."

Consequently, the theologizing of the Holy Spirit arose among Christian theologians such as those of Moltmann (1992) and Welker (1994) among others. The emergence and development of Pneumatological perspectives in World Council of Churches (WCC) theologies cannot be underscored (Kärkkäinen, 1999).

Despite this positive development, the theologizing on and about the Holy Spirit was restricted to subordination of the Father and Son largely due to the protestant influence and evangelical piety (Raiser, 1989). The need to understand the role of the Holy Spirit as a Person in economic Trinity is crucial to unearth His ecumenical role or what Kärkkäinen (1999) calls 'ecumenical potential' because "A truly Trinitarian approach to ecumenism emphasizes the role of the Spirit since — as Eastern theologians have taught us — we can never know the "essence" of God, only his "energies," or the "economy" of the Spirit." (Kärkkäinen, 1999: 144)

## **II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite the above positive development in ecumenical studies, few have focused on ecumenism imbued with pneumatological vital force within in a university context. It should be appreciated that contemporary university students encounter difficulties including religious segregation where students live in fear of one another on religious grounds. There is a growing trend among students of describing their colleagues from different religions as 'the other.' It impacts negatively on students' interpersonal relationships. Consequently, students seem to use religion as an appendage to widen the socio-economic, political, cultural and ethnic classification inherent among contemporary university students. There is need to counteract such malevolent forces with a benevolent one as the Holy Spirit hence the present study. The study is thus based on a research conducted among students in a public university in Kenya (University of Nairobi) with students from diverse religious backgrounds in view of establishing possible grounds for ecumenism from pneumatological perspective.

The interplay of diverse religions at universities is a social support system put in place by particular universities to assist students among other roles identify, appreciate and nurture unity in diversity. It is mainly coordinated by the Dean of Students through the chaplaincy services. To this effect, the University has employed three chaplains namely; the Protestant, the Muslim and the Catholic Chaplain (University of Nairobi, 2014/2015). These chaplains however, do not only serve students from their respective faith affiliations but are also open to all students irrespective of their religions. Furthermore, they organize activities such as interreligious prayers at the university to bring together students from different religious backgrounds. Nevertheless, few students participate in such functions even at the university level. It is on such grounds that the present study sought to investigate factors that hinder interreligious dialogue among university students and then identify possible ways of enhancing wider ecumenism among the students drawing particularly from universal aspects of pneumatological vital force.

## **III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To investigate some of the factors that hinder interreligious dialogue among university students.
- ii. To identify universal aspects of pneumatological vital force in view of building new and strengthening existing ecumenical efforts among university students.
- iii. To draw out ecumenical implications of pneumatological vital force towards university students' welfare.

## **IV. JUSTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

There are over thirty public chartered universities in Kenya and over seventeen private chartered universities (CUE, March 2017). The study chose one public university, University of Nairobi, which is the pioneer institution of university education in Kenya and as well the oldest university. Furthermore, being a public university with the highest number of students (79,000, University of Nairobi factfile) from diverse religions, the study chose it for an in-depth research. The views of the sampled students from this University however, represent those of others from different public and even private universities though with varying magnitude.

The findings of the study will go a long way in informing policy makers and service providers at the universities particularly the Students' Welfare Units on the need to build and strengthen rich grounds for interreligious dialogue among the students. Consequently, they will adopt new ways of handling students' issues as well as adjusting existing policies taking into account the religious situations of contemporary university students. On the other hand, the study serves as an eye opener to university students on the need to embrace healthy interpersonal relationships even at the religious level. Theologically, the study contributes to the existing interreligious efforts aimed at enhancing co-existence, mutual interactions and respect for the different religions. It champions a world theology that is neither Christian, nor Buddhist, nor Islamic but one that is respectable of all humankind (Hick, 1980) without undermining one's religious traditions.

## V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive case study research design where 264 students were sampled randomly and purposively from different religious backgrounds. It was conducted through the religious organizations within the University such as Christian Union (CU), the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), the Catholic Christian Community (CCC) and the Muslim Students Association (MSA) among others. The study targeted students and some university students' welfare staff such as the chaplains. Questionnaires that were respondent-completed, semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used in collecting data. Thematic approach was adopted in analyzing the data collected through content analysis taking into account existing literature on the subject of study.

## VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study surveyed relevant literature which provides further background to the study as well as aiding the achievement of the study's objectives. It is presented through the following sub-headings:

### 6.1 Brief Background to Ecumenism

The modern ecumenical movement can be said to have begun early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, there have been continuous efforts, organized or non-organized in attempts to unite religions from divisive factors. The first efforts at ecumenism were responses to threats to the integrity of the church posed by early heresies (Harmon, 2010). Interestingly, most of the heresies seem centered on the Trinity hence the study's concern. From 325 to 787 CE, bishops from all over the Christian world met in seven ecumenical councils. The First Council of Nicaea (325) and the First Council of Constantinople (381) clarified the relationship of Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit to the divinity of God the Father and the significance of that relationship for the salvation of humanity (Harmon: 2010). The Council of Ephesus (431), the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Second Council of Constantinople (553) and the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681) each addressed different dimensions of two interrelated questions: How are the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ related to one another in the one person of God the Son? And what does the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ mean for the experience of salvation and the living of the Christian life? The Second Council of Nicaea (787) sought to resolve controversies over the veneration of icons (Harmon, 2010:22).

It is worth noting however, that these early ecumenical councils did not aim at dividing the Church into heretics and non-heretics but rather to unite the Church by clarifying the Church's faith and practice. They passionately confronted the issues at stake so that all parties in the debates might come to a more complete understanding of the truth. Furthermore, they sought greater unity on issues that were vital to the integrity of the faith and its relevance to the world (Harmon, 2010:23). Consequently, contemporary ecumenical movements at various levels including universities should not aim or be taken to be pursuing such interests as classifying religions into the true or false religions; a view common among students who view their own religion as the true one while others are false religions. Ecumenism however, "seeks unity in the truth, and not a unity that comes at the expense of the truth." (Harmon, 2010:23) The study's chosen aspect of pneumatology pursues the latter in view of strengthening existing ecumenical efforts as well calling other religions to identify related benevolent forces. In so doing, the study assumes that a pneumatological approach to other faiths allows Christians to meet others from different religions on their own terms without abandoning their Christian perspectives and vice versa.

### 6.2 Biblical Foundation on Ecumenism

The Gospel according to John, particularly Jn 17:11; 21-23, has been considered by theologians such as John of Damascus (1994) among others as the basis for ecumenism derived from the Trinitarian unity alluded to by Jesus in the prayer (Harmon, 2010). Four times in the course of this prayer, Jesus prays that His disciples and all who later believe through their testimony might have unity: "...that they may be one as we are one (Jn. 17:11)."; "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (Jn. 17:21)."; "...that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me... (Jn. 17:22-23)." In the first prayer above, Jesus asks the Father to protect His followers from the evil one (Jn. 17:15) who in Greek is known as *diabolos* which literally means "one who divides (Harmon, 2010)." It can be inferred from Jesus' prayer therefore that the evil one seeks to divide those who ought to be united by God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is also worth noting that the unity that Jesus prays for His followers is not a superficial one as the holding of hands, taking pictures together or converging for meetings and seminars (Interview, 2017). It is a unity rooted in the Trinitarian community and built in the life of the one God, who as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is three distinct persons sharing one divine work, the redemption of the world (Harmon, 2010:7). In attempts to understand the relationship between the persons of the Trinity as Jesus acknowledged in the prayer, the ancient Greek theologians employed a Greek technical term *perichoresis* which meant "mutual indwelling"

or “mutual permeation,” or “interpenetration” (Lampe, 1961). The invaluable relationship denotes a deeper unity that was yearned for and pursued by the early ecumenical movements. To explore this relationship, the study borrows insights from Harmon who views it as the indispensable ingredient in ecumenical discussions. In the Trinitarian relationship, “the being of each person mutually indwells/ permeates the being of the other two persons, so that the Father is in the Son and is in the Holy Spirit; the Son is in the Spirit and in the Father; and the Holy Spirit is in the Father and in the Son.” Furthermore, each person participates in the work of the other two persons so that:

When the Father creates the heavens and the earth and makes human beings in the image of God and gives the life, the Son and the Spirit jointly share in the divine work of creation. When the Son come down from heaven and becomes incarnate for us and for our salvation ...the Father and the Spirit jointly share in the divine work of redemption. When the Spirit indwells the lives of believers, makes them holy, and empowers the Christian life, the Father and the Son jointly share in the divine work of sustaining what God has created and redeemed. (Harmon, 2010:8-9)

The above concept of Trinitarian *perichoretic* unity can be symbolized by three interlocking circles in which each circle is intertwined with and inseparable from the other two. If any of the circle is removed from the others, it is incomplete hence the vital significance of each of the persons of the Trinity. The interlocking circles has ecumenical implications. It means that the relationship between Christians in different denominations and between believers of different religious traditions ought to be inseparable and integrated as the interlocking circles. University students should embrace unity that is integrated and interwoven together like the Three Persons of the Trinity. They should overcome all forms of religious, cultural, social, economic and political differences. It is on such grounds that the study sought to investigate barriers to effective ecumenism among university students as discussed in the succeeding section.

## **VII. STUDY FINDINGS**

The study aimed at investigating barriers to interreligious dialogue among university students, identify universal aspects of Holy Spirit’s vital force and draw out ecumenical implications of pneumatological discourse to university students. The findings are thus discussed under the following adopted headings:

### **7.1 Barriers to Effective Ecumenism among University Students**

When asked to explain the possibilities of interreligious dialogue with their colleagues from Christian background on the basis of pneumatology, Islamic and Hindu students disputed it and were hesitant towards it (Interview, 2017). The contrary was also evident among some Christian students who view their fellow students from other religions especially the Muslims as “evil” associating them with terrorist activities as those of Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda among others. The latter case seemed heightened by such dehumanizing acts as the Garissa University terrorist attack of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015 where about 148 people majority of them students were killed through mass shooting and hostages by Al Shabaab militants (CNN or [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)). The study however, did not establish any relationship between terrorist groups and Islamic faith. Due to such biases and bigotries against other religions, interreligious dialogue is hindered among the students.

Fear of conversion was further noted as among the barriers to interreligious dialogue among university students. A mention of Christian-Islamic interreligious seminar elicits fear among most students who view it as a way of propagating one’s religion depending on the conveners of the seminar. Consequently, a considerable number of students tend to keep off from such fora but attend only that which is of their faith. For others, they attend the seminars but with reservations hence hindering truth-seeking dialogue (Interview, 2017). It results in confessional dialogue where “everyone is convinced that only her own faith has truth or absolute truth while all others have no or only relative truth. One enters interfaith dialogue only in order to induce a change of beliefs in others.” (Huang, 1995:29) Interreligious dialogue that seeks truth however, takes into account that each party “is conscious that the Transcendent Being is infinitely greater than his own limited vision of it ... and they accordingly seek to share their visions in the hope that each may be helped towards a fuller awareness of the Divine Reality before which they both stand. (Hick, 1980: 81) Students are encouraged to pursue the latter dialogue to allow mutual criticism, enrichment, and transformation of the different religions they adhere to. Accordingly, “a growing world ecumenism, in which the common commitment of faith in a higher spiritual Reality which demands brotherhood on earth will seem more and more significant, while the differences between the religious traditions will seem proportionately less significant.” (Hick, 1980:57)

The study further found out that university students from different religious traditions have limited knowledge of the conditions and characteristics of interreligious dialogue. It is evident through their naïve responses where a considerable number of them thought that interreligious dialogue is a platform to showcase one’s religious beliefs/convictions in view of counteracting the “evil” aspects in other religions and hence market one’s religion in order to win converts (Interview, 2016). Ecumenical efforts through seminars or conferences at university, national and international levels are thus considered “competitive” fora among

students especially at lower levels of learning. A mention of the Holy Spirit to non-Christian students for instance, sounded a conversion interview to a considerable number of them at the onset of interviews (Interview, 2016). For that reason, it is imperative to understand some of the basic conditions for interreligious dialogue as suggested by scholars such as Senécal (2014:84). For instance, it requires that each must have a thorough knowledge of its own tradition; each must possess a strong doctrinal and scriptural understanding of their counterpart's religious traditions; each side must have an in-depth practice of at least one of the mediation or prayer techniques the respective tradition teaches and most importantly, the encounter (which is a dynamic process) should be grounded in humility and patience, and accompanied by a clear declaration to never attempt converting one's religious counterparts, otherwise it will be neither genuine nor fruitful. University students thus need to understand that calls for interreligious dialogue via different approaches such as seminars, conferences and research activities among others offer them opportunities to dig deep into their own tradition hence have a broader approach to basic tenets of their faith and consequently that of others as well.

Related to the above are misimpressions and misinformation that students have about other religions; what some termed as "religious brainwashing." Pursuance of the issue revealed that some students in their religious upbringing have been warned against participating in other religious' practices apart from those of the same faith lest they compromise their faith by relating with "unbelievers." In their relationship with students from diverse religious traditions therefore, such students tend to avoid their religious counterparts in order to guard their faith (Interview, 2017). This finding is corroborated by Harmon (2010:22) who noted that ecumenism among religious traditions is hindered by the view that it "means a lowest-common- denominator approach that compromises core convictions in the interest of securing a superficial unity."

The above situation has not been helped with the proliferation of New Religious Movements or call them Gospel Kiosks. University students and the youth generally seem an easy target by such movements where they are exploited in various ways. Some have been actively involved in these movements to the extent that some have dropped from their university education. Others have switched from their mother churches to these movements due to the charism, "enriching sermons," lively way of worship among other deceiving factors. Consequently, some students have been financially and sexually exploited only to regret later. Some students attributed the latter to the impatient approach to challenging life issues among contemporary university students who seek instant solutions to their problems (Interview, 2016). Experiences from such religious exploitations and the fear of being a targeted prey has made some students shy away from any interreligious meeting. Some even became irreligious and identify themselves as atheist due to bitter past experiences in some of the Gospel Kiosks. Such students consider interreligious dialogue impossible and view it as a creation of some people to earn a living for themselves (Interview, 2016). It is from such barriers to wider ecumenism among university students that the study identifies the following universal aspects in the Holy Spirit in view of building bridges among the diverse religions.

## **7.2 Universal Aspects of the Holy Spirit's Vital Force**

The study considers imperative to explicate the universal aspects of the Holy Spirit in view of strengthening interreligious dialogue among university students. The creation story in Gen 2:7 indicates that the "breath of God" is given universally. Ezekiel calls the Spirit from the four winds (Eze 37:9). In the book of Job Elihu says, "It is the Spirit (*ruah*) in man, the breath (*nishmath*) of the Almighty that gives him understanding (Job 32:8). In the New Testament, Evangelist John in his Gospel records, "The Spirit blows where he wills" said Jesus in his famous conversation with Nicodemus (Jn 3:8). Such among other biblical passages are used to illustrate the universal nature of the Holy Spirit. If the New Testament, as Montague (2001) argues, insists that Jesus is the giver of the Spirit, does this mean God limited his gift of the Spirit to those who embrace Jesus? In any case Paul says in one of his Letters that the Holy Spirit bears united witness with our spirit, he seems to imply that every human being has the faculty of receptivity ("our spirit") to God's Spirit (Rom 8:15), although Paul in this context is clearly thinking of the specifically Christian experience (Montague, 2001). The Holy Spirit is thus poured for all students not only to Christians as one may think. Elsewhere Paul's views in Eph 2:18 further imply that the Christians and Jews alike can access the Holy Spirit and by extension anyone who opens oneself to the inspiration of the Spirit of the Lord. God allows His Spirit to act in sovereign freedom. The same way the Spirit hovers in nature (hovering *ruach* of God) so does He in the person who opens himself/herself to His guidance. It thus calls for considerations on the role of world religions in the plan of God and the issue of the uniqueness of Christianity.

The universality of the Holy Spirit is further manifested at the Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4; 4:31). The Pentecost event fulfilled Joel's prophesy who had announced the coming of the Spirit on all sons and daughters (Acts 2:16-32). The promise is extended to all nations through the intermediary of languages and even after the event, Pentecost is renewed for Samaritans and the pagans (Montague, 2001). It follows therefore that the Holy Spirit is given to all as long as one opens himself/herself to His illumination. It can be argued therefore that if the Spirit was extended to the Samaritans as aforementioned, then He has been poured to the whole world on the

basis of the Great Commission (Mt 28: 18-20) where the gospel is to reach all nations of the earth. Drawing from the same event, it may be rightfully argued as well that wherever the gospel is, so is the Holy Spirit who is consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

Furthermore, one may ask how the Spirit of Christ functions universally in an individual's life such as in the financial or social lives of the students yet He is commonly known working in the religious life of an individual. It is for this reason that Pittenger (1974:60) notes the Spirit of Christ as that which "speaks, works and moves in all sorts of unexpected and secular places." It is because the Holy Spirit is everywhere and is active everywhere. Drawing from the above therefore, it follows that contemporary university students need not be afraid of existential difficulties and exasperations including new scientific, economic, political and religious discoveries and ideas however odd and adverse they may sound. Moreover, it implies that the Holy Spirit is not confined to the Church nor to religious matters only as some may want to think. Such "inveterate tendency of so many Christians to parochialize and ecclesiasticize the Spirit of God, making him seen so often only a function of human experience, (Pittenger, 1974:64)" needs to be counteracted with a universal understanding of His working. In Pittenger's (1974:64) own words, "The very real and important working of the Spirit of the Lord in people's individual existence can be properly understood only when it is seen in the context of the more universal working."

He is therefore, present and at work everywhere and in every human undertaking "leading men (read human beings) to respond to truth wherever it is found and to receive from God that which he wills to disclose in any place (Pittenger, 1974:64)." He is not therefore to be confined to Christian students only but rather should be understood as a personified force working even in the secular places such as in student leaderships. He is at work in every other sphere of human life so that as human beings, including university students "seek to live as people, conforming their lives to whatever glimpse they may have...striving to do what good is possible for them to do..." (Pittenger, 1974:107) as well as embracing others from different religions, the Holy Spirit is "moving through their lives to bring about their proper fulfillment as children of God."

Drawing from the above, a further question asked in the course of the study needs to be answered. The issue here is that if the Spirit of the Lord is at work everywhere and in every sphere of human existence, does it mean that even in students' religious segregation, fear of others due to their religious orientations, religious exploitation among other destructive forces that the Holy Spirit is still at work? If so, how can He be at work in such dehumanizing acts yet He is a benevolent force? The study's answer to such a question is that the Holy Spirit is still at work in human imperfections, failures and distortions. He works however, "taking whatever good has been seen and done, correcting subtly whatever error or evil has been present and making everything serve in the long run toward accomplishment of the divine purpose in the creative advance which we call the world (Pittenger, 1974:107)." The Holy Spirit is thus present in students' daily activities such as preparing and participating in lectures, examinations, and committee meetings including the interreligious ones, attending parties and functions, recreation with friends, exercising spiritual activities among other daily chores. To see the Holy Spirit this way is to "discover a freshness and joy which redeems daily existence from the triviality and superficiality which all too often seems inescapable and frustrating (Pittenger, 1974:65)."

The universal nature of the Holy Spirit can further be understood from the view that He works *incognito*. He does not proclaim Himself but rather operates through the whole creation drawing it towards the perfect will of the Creator. In Pittenger's (1974:106) own words, "to recognize him as the Holy Spirit is not so important as to serve instrumentally for the accomplishment of the goals which he sets." But what are these goals which university students need to accomplish in a world characterized by diverse existential issues including religious factors? How are they to accomplish these goals as purposed by the Creator? Pittenger's answer is that these goals are usually proposed to people in secular terms such as social, economic, political and even religious justice. Achieving the set goals in the different courses taught in respective degree programs are thus part of the goals which the Holy Spirit working in and through students seeks to achieve. Equitable allocation of educational resources and opportunities and respect for others is also a goal to be accomplished in the power of the Spirit of Christ among others. These goals may be considered irreligious by many since they are very secular, but as Pittenger (1974) notes they do indeed possess the activity of the Holy Spirit which may not be obviously seen or identified.

In one of his encyclicals, John Paul II (2003: 32) emphasizes the universality of the Holy Spirit. According to him, the Spirit of Christ is not bound to specific Christian believers only but to others as well who dispose themselves to the Spirit's efficacy. He observes that the Spirit is present and active in every time and place. Precisely, he (2003:32-33) notes that "the Spirit manifests Himself in a special way in the Church and her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal; limited neither by space nor time...the Spirit...is at the very source of human person's existential and religious questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situation but by the very structure of his being. The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions." Consequently, the Holy Spirit can

be argued to be present in other world religions through general revelation as further discussed in the next section.

### **7.3 Ecumenical Implications of Pneumatological Vital Force Upon University Students**

Min (2001:440) posits important remarks worthy of reflection even in the beginning of this section. He notes that “religions do not encounter one another. Only concrete human beings with their religions do.” It follows therefore that students of different religions by the very fact of being at the university have to develop healthy interpersonal relationships including the religious ones. Even in so doing, the interreligious situation at least as posted by interreligious theorists, does not require that religions give up their particular beliefs or identities, but it does require that each religion penetrate its own tradition deeper and retrieve its own grounds for relating to and appreciating other religions. The present study should thus be an awakening ground for other religious traditions to identify, reflect and analyze related vivifying, illuminating, inspiring and empowering forces inherent in their belief systems. Such efforts should be aimed at encouraging interreligious dialogue rather than being used as basis for eliminating others. Furthermore, a dynamic theology of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of solidarity of others in God makes it possible for Christians to believe, as Vatican Council II (no.22) recognizes, that the Holy Spirit is also active in the world, in other religions and cultures, “offering to every human being the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery (of the death and resurrection of Christ)” but that we do not know yet how she is present there; this “how” remains “known only to God.” The Holy Spirit can thus be argued, at least for the case of the study, as present in other world religions that are geared towards drawing the creations towards their Creator.

On the same note, Min (2001:440) further posits important argument which calls for reflection among theologians, ecumenists including contemporary university students. According to him, “the actual perceived difference between Christianity and other religions is not itself an argument for the absence of the Spirit in the latter.” It means that there is a possibility of the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions though alluded and described differently according to a particular religion’s belief system. Furthermore, the “Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and there cannot be any contradiction between them in principle (Min, 2001: 440-441).” Min further argues that “even though the historical Jesus as the Word incarnate does remain decisive, normative savior of all humanity, this decisive universal significance is derived from his hypostatic union with the Word.” In other words, God sent the Word and that Word was revealed by Jesus by being incarnate; taking human nature as Jesus of Nazareth. However, “Insofar as there is not only identity of person between the human Jesus and the divine Word but also difference of nature, it is legitimate to say that the Word cannot be exhaustively identified with all that has been revealed through Jesus (Min, 2001: 440-441).” As a result, it is possible to think and argue that the “Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ may be actualizing different aspects of the Word in other religions.” The difference between Christianity and other religions therefore, “is not a contradiction between the Word and the Spirit as such but a difference between the Word incarnated in the particularity of the human Jesus and other manifestation of the Word brought about by the Spirit in non-Christian religions (Min, 2001: 440-441).” In summary, the differences in the incarnation or inculturation of the Word in various religious traditions should not be aspects of division among university students as such but solidarity and mutual co-existence since the same Word seems normative in all.

It can be argued further that the Holy Spirit is present in other religious traditions. On this assertion, Comblin (1989:75) reminds that “human efforts to improve the world are not made without the impulse of the Spirit. The Spirit unites without imposing uniformity.” In this case, the working of the Holy Spirit is present in every religious tradition where humans are involved and since every religion has human being at the centre and seeks to serve him/her, then it can be argued that He is at work even in the non-Christian religions. Comblin (1989:75) further reminds that, “The Holy Spirit works in history, guiding it and changing it, though its actions may be hidden.” Associating the Holy Spirit with Christianity therefore could be attributed to the emphasis put on His work among Christians compared to other world religious traditions where the Spirit’s works may not be amplified as such. It can be legitimate to argue therefore that the Spirit of Christ is present and at work in other world religions working in somehow hidden manner. Furthermore, even though the study cannot claim evidently how different religions may be mutually compatible, at least from the fellowship of the Word and the Spirit in the immanent Trinity, it can be hoped and argued that different religions can be compatible and complementary and that in and through those religions the uniting and reconciling Spirit is nonetheless working to bring different religions “together in solidarity of Others in her own mysterious way (Comblin 1989:75).”

In addition, from the point of view of God’s general revelation, it can be argued that the same God who reveals Himself to Christians is the same God who makes Himself known albeit through various forms to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains among others. Christian students therefore and adherents of other world religions should not forget that God who is working among them is the same God at work throughout his universe in other religions. As such, Christian students specifically should not monopolize the Holy Spirit but make it as a responsibility to identify related Person in other religions who may not be apprehended by the same

names and symbols as they use. Hodgson (1943:40-41) on the same reminds them that, “so far from leading us (read them) to deny the value of non-Christian thought, our (their) faith should enable us (them) to recognize the activity of God in confronting, correcting and straightening the vision of men, even when they themselves are unaware of the source of their enlightenment.”

It is also worth noting that the growth in globalization, socio-economic processes including education continues to bring together people including university students of diverse religions, cultures, races, nations, languages and origins thus necessitating the need for mutual interaction. It calls for global religious, cultural, economic and political understanding among the diverse peoples of the world. The success of such mutual interactions on religious grounds depends on the openness of people from various religions and the need for concrete coexistence among them. There is need therefore to encounter another person from different religious background without prejudice, but willingness to learn from the other person as posted by interreligious theorists. The study’s chosen doctrine is one of such efforts that calls for interreligious dialogue and should thus bring together students from Islamic, Buddhist, Confucianism, Hindu, Protestant and Roman Catholic among other religions and denominations to discuss this among other topics in view of mutual coexistence rather than division.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is shown as the bond of love among believers. Paul in a number of his Letters speaks of *koinonia* created by the Holy Spirit such as in Phil 2:1 and 2 Cor 13:13. He emphasizes this theme in his Letter to the Ephesians where he speaks of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). From such and other biblical references, one may ponder whether the biblical understanding of Spirit also provides a place of encounter with non-Christian religions. Scholars such as Gertel (1995: 48-49), a Jewish scholar and rabbi, maintain that such understanding provides the best grounds for interfaith dialogue. Precisely, he notes “Its universality, according to the biblical perspectives makes it the most fertile and reasonable ground for interfaith dialogue.” Though he has serious reservations on how the dialogue should be done, he strongly maintains that the universal ‘Spirit of wisdom’ is the most promising starting point of such dialogue. Other scholars among them Hanh (1995), a Buddhist scholar, supports Gertel’s view that biblical understanding of the Spirit provide rich grounds for interreligious dialogue.

To support the above view on the significant role of the Holy Spirit on ecumenism, Panikkar (1981:57) in his effort to develop Hindu-Christian relations argues that “if Christ in Jesus as the culminating point of God’s self-closure seems too specifically Christian a view to be accepted by a Hindu, then the Spirit of God-which Christians will consider the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Christ, and which Hindu will interpret as the Divine *sakti* penetrating everything and manifesting God, disclosing him in his immanence and being present in all his manifestations-this Spirit of God provides the real ground for an authentic religious communication and dialogue at a deep level.” The Holy Spirit therefore can be said to be present in Hinduism and other world religions calling each of them to deeper interreligious dialogue without any aim of conversion.

Panikkar (1981:57-58) further develops the view by arguing that “while Christ as the Incarnate Son of God is a specifically Christian figure, the presence and reality of the Spirit is an element common and important to both Hinduism and Christianity.” The above view, by extension, includes other world religions whose center may not necessarily be Christ of the Christians. What happens is that “only because the Spirit dwells in our hearts and in the world was it possible for the Logos to become flesh and establish his dwelling among us, that is, we meet in the Spirit, the Spirit of God, which for the Christian is the Spirit of Christ (Panikkar, 1981:58).” The appropriation of Logos among the Christians therefore is not an exclusion of other religions since all of them have the Spirit of God as their meeting point. It calls other world religions therefore to initiate and develop grounds for interfaith dialogue as Panikkar and others have done.

Furthermore, as mentioned elsewhere in the study, the Holy Spirit works *incognito*. He does not draw things to Himself nor does He proclaim Himself but rather “operates through the whole creation to bring it to its intended perfection by conforming it to the perfect plan of God manifest in Jesus Christ (Pittenger, 1974: 66).” All world religions claiming revelation from God therefore work in and through the Holy Spirit who may not be obviously identified. Furthermore, “to recognize him as the Holy Spirit is not so important as to serve instrumentally for the accomplishment of the goals which he sets.” He “speaks, works and moves in all sorts of unexpected and secular places” such as in social and economic justice luring human beings “to respond to truth wherever it is found and to receive from God that which he wills to disclose in any place (Pittenger, 1974: 65).”

The Holy Spirit is thus not confined to Christians only nor to the religious life of an individual; rather He works everywhere and is active in all spheres of human existence. Unless He is understood in this universal nature, recognizing Him as working even in secular places, one becomes “guilty of parochialism, provincialism and an inverted religiosity in thought (Pittenger, 1974:107).” For some people however, as Pittenger (1974:106) acknowledges, “religious orientation is essential, since it is their way of establishing a relationship with God in an attentive and conscious manner.” To identify the Holy Spirit with Christianity therefore is not wrong, but to confine Him to Christians only is to parochialize and ecclesiasticize the Spirit of God yet “God himself, who

obviously does not have a religion, is much more concerned with the securing of the good ends which will both fulfill his creation's potentialities and also achieve his purpose in the creation."

The doctrine of the Trinity itself has ecumenical implications. The view of God as one being manifested in three natures (Immanent Trinity) should serve as a model for human society and community including the university. God's oneness calls all people from various religious backgrounds to unity while His Threeness affirms their diversity and uniqueness. God's creation also reflects the unity in diversity which should be pursued at all levels including the university. The incredibly rich diversity of uniquely individual creatures, of plants, of animals, rocks and trees are all created, united and held together in Christ (Col 1:15-17); a further justification for the diverse religions. Even humanity was created with the diversity of male and female (Gen.1, 2). It can be argued therefore that the diversity among the various religions is a created gift from God that reflects part of God's own nature. The different world religious traditions, can thus be argued, at least for the case of the study, as instituted by the same Creator to fulfill some purpose. The unity that Christ brings through His redemptive work which is effected by the Holy Spirit, is thus not a new unity but restoring and renewing a unity that was already there at the beginning of creation, a unity that was disrupted by sin. The study thus makes the following recommendations in view of encouraging wider ecumenism among university students.

### **VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i. The study recommends adoption of diverse interreligious activities by the Dean of Students office through the chaplaincy and even the students. Such activities as community services like tree planting organized together by the different religions can assist in encouraging interreligious interaction among university students.
- ii. Particular universities should be aware and recognize the arising religious orientations among contemporary university students which are becoming rampant and may impact negatively on students' interreligious co-existence. Examples of such are the atheist students and the *Young Blut Saints* among others that are growing at alarming rate. In recognizing and identifying such movements/cults, they will help affected students overcome the pressure and even malevolent forces that perhaps lure them to such extent. Consequently, they will be better equipped to handle arising religious and social challenges faced by contemporary students and hence meet the diverse religious needs of students.
- iii. University students should overcome the inverted approach to religious matters and hence curb the spirit of parochialism that hinder effective ecumenism. They should utilize available resources and opportunities at the universities that are aimed at enhancing their holistic growth appreciating unity in diversity in the diverse spheres of life.
- iv. A further study on related benevolent forces from other religious traditions would complement the study's findings in building new while strengthening existing interreligious efforts.

### **IX. CONCLUSION**

Study findings reveal that there are rich grounds for interreligious co-existence and growth among contemporary university students. Nevertheless, inherent factors such as misappropriations and misimpressions about other religions, fear of the 'other' and generally lack of in-depth knowledge of one's religion and others hinder healthy interreligious dialogue. In effect, the Holy Spirit reveals benevolent universal aspects that can be harnessed in view of enhancing ecumenism among contemporary university students. In fact, He initiates and inspires wider ecumenism as a person in economic Trinity shown through the *perichoretic* unity elaborated in the study. The study thus concludes that pneumatology has ecumenical implications to the contemporary university students who are divided by religious factors.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1]. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: Double Day, 1994 (691).
- [2]. Comblin, J. *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1989.
- [3]. Commission for University Education in Kenya, *Status of Universities Authorized to operate in Kenya March 2017*. Retrieved from [http://www.cue.or.ke/images/phocadownload/Accredited\\_Universities\\_March\\_2017.pdf](http://www.cue.or.ke/images/phocadownload/Accredited_Universities_March_2017.pdf)
- [4]. Dunn, J. D. G. *The Christ and the Spirit: Pneumatology Vol. 2*. Edinburgh: T& T Clark Ltd, 1998.
- [5]. Gertel, E. B. *The Holy Spirit and Judaism*, New York: Berkley, 1995.
- [6]. Hanh, T. N. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, New York: Berkley, 1995.
- [7]. Harmon, S. R. *Ecumenism Means You, Too: Ordinary Christians and the Quest for Christian Unity*, Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010.
- [8]. Hick, J. *God Has Many Names*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1980.
- [9]. Hodgson, L. *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1943.

- [10]. Huang, Y. Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue: Beyond Universalism and Particularism, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Jun 1995; 37(3): 127-144, Accessed: 30-04-2018 09:46 UTC
- [11]. John Paul II, *The Mission of the Church (Redemptoris Missio)*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2003, art 28; 32.
- [12]. Kärkkäinen, V. M. The Ecumenical Potential of Pneumatology, *Gregorianum*, 1999; 80 (1): 121-145; Accessed: 30-04-2018 08:56 UTC
- [13]. Lampe, G. W. H. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1961.
- [14]. McGrath, A. *Christian Theology. An Introduction*. Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1994.
- [15]. Min, A. K. "Solidarity of Others in the Power of the Holy Spirit: Pneumatology in a Divided World," in B. E. Hinze and D. L. Dabney (Eds.), *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, USA: Marquette University Press, 2001; 440.
- [16]. Moltmann, J. *The Universal Affirmation*. London: SCM Press, 1992.
- [17]. Montague, G. T. "The Fire in the World: The Holy Spirit in Scripture," in B. E. Hinze and D. L. Dabney (Eds.), *Advents of the Holy Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology (USA: Marquette University Press, 2001.*
- [18]. Nyamiti, C. *Studies in African Christian Theology Vol.1 – Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind: Methodological and Trinitarian Foundation*, Nairobi: CUEA, 2005.
- [19]. Panikkar, R. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981.
- [20]. Pittenger, N. *The Holy Spirit*, Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974.
- [21]. Raiser, K. "The Holy Spirit in Modern Ecumenical Thought," in *The Ecumenical Review* 1989; 41 :( 3): 375.
- [22]. Senécal, B. Jesus Christ Encountering Gautama Buddha: Buddhist-Christian Relations in South Korea, *Journal of Korean Religions*, Vol. 5, No. 1, *Envisioning a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Korea* April 2014; 81-107, Accessed: 30-04-2018 09:28 UTC
- [23]. *The University of Nairobi, Student Information Handbook (2014/2015)*, Nairobi: The Dean of Students Office, 2014.
- [24]. University of Nairobi factfile (<http://www.uonbi.ac.ke>).
- [25]. Vatican Council II, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, (22).
- [26]. Welker, M. *God the Spirit*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Prof. P. N. Wachege." Discourse On Ecumenical Implications of Pneumatological Vital Force Towards University Students' Welfare." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 23 no. 07, 2018, pp. 57-66.