

African Journal of Contextual Theology
 SIST, Attakwu – Enugu
 P.O. Box 9696, Enugu, Nigeria
ajct@sistenugu.com

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The *African Journal of Contextual Theology – AJCT* – (ISSN 2141-3037) is published annually. The subscription price is the following:

Nigeria: N500 per issue

Foreign: US\$20.00 per issue (including postage)

Payment may be made in cash or by cheque, payable to:

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Enugu, Nigeria

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The editor-in-chief

African Journal of Contextual Theology

Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu

P.O. Box 9696, Enugu, Nigeria

e-mail: nwachukwums@gmail.com ; editorajct@yahoo.com

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HOLY SPIRIT, FATHER OF THE POOR

Ikenna Bona UGWU, C.S.Sp

1. Introduction

The Sequence of Pentecost, "called the Golden Sequence"¹, stands out as one of the most beautiful and enriching elements of the Christian liturgy of the Pentecost celebration. It is one of the best known hymns to the Holy Spirit which tradition is not very exact about its origin; opinions are divided between those who attribute it to Pope Innocent III and Cardinal Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who died 1228. Speaking about this sequence, Michael O'Carroll says: "this composition marks a high point in Latin hymnody, the most perfect realization of the Sequence form. The verse form and phrasing are flawless and the sentiment so strong and pure matches doctrinal insights that are sure and uplifting"². Among other things, this sequence contains an unusual affirmation about the Holy Spirit, namely, the designation of the Third Divine Person as "the Father of the Poor".

There are no grounds whatsoever which could make one think that the author of this piece is unaware of or does not believe strongly in the Christian understanding of God as Trinity distinctively named as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other

¹ Michael O'CARROLL, *Veni Creator Spiritus: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Spirit*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990, p227.

² O'CARROLL, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, p227.

words, this unusual application of the name 'father' to the Holy Spirit must have been intended to bring to light a special aspect of his being and mission in relation to the poor. This paper aims at discussing the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the poor by highlighting the qualities of the person and mission of the Holy Spirit that merit him the name, "Father of the poor". Let us begin by underscoring some fundamental characteristics of the father in the family particularly as they obtain in most traditional societies.

2. The Father in the Family

Typically, a family in its most elementary form is made up of the man who is husband and father, the woman who is wife and mother and their children. In this setting, the father stands out as the one around which the life and activities of other members of the family revolve. This fact is concretely highlighted by the fact that the Hebrew word for family is *bet'ab* which literally means 'father's house'.³ The role and significance of a father in the family vary across cultures and times in history but there are certain features that could be identified with fatherhood particularly in traditional societies. Though there are matrilineal societies found in different parts of Africa, the greater majority of traditional societies are patriarchal, like among the ancient Jews.

In the family, in patrilineal societies, the father plays various roles ranging from social, economic, religious to political ones. He enjoys a lot of rights and privileges over the children by virtue of being their father. The Decalogue commands children to respect and obey their father and mother promising

³ John L. McKENZIE, "Family" in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, St Mary's Town, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1976, p273.

to reward any child that keeps this statute with stable inheritance of the land of promise (Cf. Exod 20:12). The father is the principal provider of sustenance and protection to the family and it is from him that the family takes its identity. It is a thing of shame for a father to see his children die of starvation or any other preventable causes of death or sickness. Every father fights tooth and nail to see that he provides food enough to feed the members of his household and to see that they are guarded from all forms of external aggression. In traditional African societies, for example, the father has an important role to play in deciding who should marry his daughters or who his sons should marry. Sometimes, he practically arranges their marriages giving little room to the wishes of the parties concerned. He allots land to his sons for farming and for building their household when they attain the age of having separate homesteads. The action of Jacob in conferring the rights of primogeniture upon Ephraim instead of Manasseh who was biologically the first son (Genesis 48:13) or by David in preferring Solomon to his first son, Adonijah (1 King 1:30) shows how powerful the authority of the father is with regard to his children. Usually, the father plays religious roles in the family such as blessing his children or offering prayers and sacrifices on their behalf. The idea of God as father is not unconnected with this traditional understanding of fatherhood among the Jews.

2.1 *The Fatherhood of God*

The fatherhood of God or the imaging of God as father forms an essential part of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Israel's experience of miraculous deliverance from bondage in Egypt, which formed the basis of her belief that she was divinely chosen by God to be his own special possession,

paved way to her understanding of God as Father. In the Old Testament (OT), “a large number of Hebrew personal names apply the title of father to the deity such as Joab (Yahweh is father), Abiel or Eliab (El is father), Absalom (the father God is peace).”⁴ The paternity of God was metaphorically applied in recognition of his creation of Israel as a people, his affection towards Israel, and above all, his love for Israel as his son. It is of great interest, however, that there is no place in the OT where the term father was applied to God in terms of being the natural begetter of the Jews. Through the life and ministry of Jesus, this already existing notion of the fatherhood of God received a new emphasis which deepened and broadened its meaning. Thus, as far as the fatherhood of God is concerned, there are points of continuity and discontinuity between the OT and New Testament (NT). In all, what is clear is that “the concept of God as father includes the notion of paternal love and care.”⁵

Jesus called God father and related to him in a way that shows that for him, the notion was not simply metaphorical but natural. The Christological title of Jesus as Son of God is a relational term whose vertical dimension implies the fatherhood of God.⁶ This is to say that the ideas of the fatherhood of God and the sonship of Jesus may be seen as twins.⁷ It is obvious that Jesus’ sonship and by implication the Father’s fatherhood did not begin in time because it existed in

⁴ McKENZIE, *Dictionary of the Bible*, p275.

⁵ McKENZIE, *Dictionary of the Bible*, p275.

⁶ Gerald O’COLLINS, *Christology, A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p115.

⁷ George B. CAIRD and L. D. HURST, *New Testament Theology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p403.

all eternity. Inasmuch as the notion of divine fatherhood and sonship is found in Pre-Christian Judaism, the fact remains that "in the OT no individual ever addresses God as 'my Father'."⁸ On the contrary, Jesus applied divine sonship to himself individually and spoke of God as his Father (Cf. Matt 11:27; Luke 22:29). He addressed God as Abba which does not just imply Father but a unique filial relationship of endearment. The word Abba is "an address used at times by children to their father, indicating an intimacy and directness not contained in the more formal *abinu*."⁹ From his utterances and the impressions he gave of himself, it was obvious that he was not just a person chosen, adopted and anointed to represent the Divine in creation. In effect, "Jesus claimed an essential, ontological relationship of sonship towards God which provided the grounds for his functions as revealer, lawgiver, forgiver of sins, and agent of the final kingdom."¹⁰ If the son-father relationship between Jesus and God is ontological, it means that fatherhood is an essential definition of the first divine person. In teaching and inviting his followers to see and accept God as father, Jesus was drawing them into the infinite loving mercy of God which is the ground for salvation. So, "The fatherhood of God was not so much a concept which Jesus taught as something he lived and shared with his disciples, pre-eminently by introducing them into his own prayer."¹¹ From Jesus, Christians learnt to call God Father and to relate with him as such and gradually, addressing God and praying to him under the title of Father became the way of the faithful. The Christian Creed and the Lord's Prayer contain concrete expressions of this.

⁸ O'COLLINS, *Christology*, p125.

⁹ CAIRD and HURST, *New Testament Theology*, pp400-401.

¹⁰ O'COLLINS, *Christology*, p126.

¹¹ CAIRD and HURST, *New Testament Theology*, p403.

It is evident that the image of the father when it is applied to God is an ontological quality which pertains distinctively to the first person of the Trinity. It is not a name commonly shared by all the three divine persons. The term father is correlative with the Son, but the Son cannot be addressed as Father and vice versa. Thus, there is apparently a problem with the designation of the Holy Spirit as the “Father of the Poor” and this problem needs to be addressed as part of our reflection. We need to justify this designation about the Holy Spirit by clarifying the ground on the basis of which the application is plausible. In the first place, it is important to note that calling God father does not mean that the Christian God is a male deity. God has no gender. Moreover, Leonardo Boff is of the view that the term ‘father’ or ‘mother’ can equally and validly be used in addressing God because in each case what is intended is indicative of a single source of procreation. The one who begot the Son can be referred to as father or mother since “being begotten and born can just as well refer to motherhood” as it is to the fatherhood.¹² Put simply, “Jesus’ father is a Father only through being also a Mother, uniting the strength of paternal love with the tenderness of maternal love. Only by postulating the two figures of an eternal Father and an eternal Mother can we express what we believe in faith: there is an ultimate mystery, our final resting-place, the source and origin of everything that invites us to communion, from which everything comes and to which everything tends, and it is the heavenly Father and Mother.”¹³ So, does it mean that one can address the third divine person as father?

¹² Leonardo BOFF, *Trinity and Society* (tr. Paul Burns), Mary knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p170.

¹³ BOFF, *Trinity and Society*, p171.

The African classificatory way of naming relationships in the family affords a way of understanding how the Holy Spirit could be called father and yet it does not tinker with the naming of the first divine person. In most Africa societies, children have many men and women whom they call father or mother other than their real biological parents. Usually, those whom in the Western culture are named uncles, aunts and cousins are called and treated as fathers and mothers in Africa.¹⁴ These persons are so called because in relation to the children in question, they play roles and take up responsibilities of the same kind or even more than their real fathers and mothers. Thus, it is rightly observed that "The African system of naming relationships in a classificatory manner provides another favourable context for teaching and living the practice of establishing names and titles of relationship in the wider family of God."¹⁵ The dynamism of this system of naming relationship provides strong cohesion among people in the extended families and the logic does not give room for confusion as regards the place of natural parents in society. Above all, it teaches us that 'father' or 'mother' can be used in different senses. Nevertheless, it is still important to note that the term father cannot apply to the Holy Spirit in the same way as it does to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ Cf. John LEWIS, *Anthropology Made Simple*, London: W.H. Allen, 1969, pp100-101 where the classificatory relationship system is explained.

¹⁵ Bona Ikenna UGWU, "Understanding and Teaching Christian Faith through Three Key Elements of African Tradition", in *African Journal of Contextual Theology (AJCT)*, SIST, Enugu, Vol. 4, June 2013, p125.

The Spirit is not the Father of Jesus Christ. The fatherhood of the Holy Spirit should be understood in relation to creatures on the level of the economy of salvation and as such it is used in a metaphorical sense. Surely, believers trace their birth to the Holy Spirit, but this does not necessarily guarantee the application of the title 'father' to the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is the title of mother that should apply more appropriately to the Holy Spirit in view of her relationship with creation. Therefore, we can say that even though addressing the Holy Spirit as 'father' is uncommon; it is not totally out of order provided that it is done with qualification and caution. Like in the case of the first divine person, when the Holy Spirit is called father it is meant to underline his unique relationship of endearment as well as paternal love for the people. However, the term father cannot apply to the Holy Spirit ontologically; at best it is used in metaphorical sense. With these clarifications made, we would now proceed to look at some aspects of the nature and mission of the Holy Spirit which offer grounds for the close association between him and the poor that qualifies him as their father.

3. The Holy Spirit and the Poor

Here, we will consider as far as possible the elements of the person and actions of the Holy Spirit which make him closely related to the poor. First, let us try to clarify the concept of 'the Poor' particularly as it would be used in this discussion.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional concept which can be conceived in either restricted or wider sense. In its most constrained sense, people see poverty mostly from an economic perspective whereby the poor are those who lack material wealth or related basic necessities of life. However,

broadly speaking, the poor “include those who are economically poor, the groups that are politically marginalized or oppressed, people discriminated against on sexual grounds, peoples that have been culturally silenced or oppressed, and those who have been religiously disinherited or deprived.”¹⁶ To a large extent, this is the understanding of poverty and the poor which one finds in the OT. Therein, the poor primarily refer to “those groups of people who are economically deprived, who have no social status, who are treated unjustly by foreign rulers or by authorities in their own land.”¹⁷ Such oppressed, afflicted, weak, powerless, marginalized and voiceless people in society include widows, orphans, the sick, outcasts and the ignorant. The NT goes further to deepen the understanding of poverty especially when Jesus spoke about the poor in spirit (Cf. Matt 5:3). This is not intended to deemphasize material poverty but to point out the fact that in the final analysis, those whom people count as rich materially might be poor in the real sense of it.

One of the most striking insights that Scripture offers us about poverty is that the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ commits himself personally to the plight of the poor. God shows “some special care or preference for people or groups who are marginalized in human society.”¹⁸ By his life and teaching, Jesus showed solidarity with the poor and he denounced the rich who trust more in their wealth than in God. His attention was turned to a section of the population made up of the blind, the beggars, the lame, the crippled, the lepers, the hungry,

¹⁶ Donald DORR, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*, revised edition, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992, p4.

¹⁷ DORR, *Option for the Poor*, p6.

¹⁸ DORR, *Option for the Poor*, p7.

sinner, tax collectors, the downtrodden, and the oppressed. Now, “Jesus generally refers to them as the poor or the little ones.”¹⁹ In other words, Jesus made an “option for the poor” and poverty for him goes far beyond mere economic deprivation. This solidarity of God with the poor which is epitomized in the history of Jesus Christ is ultimately continued in the life and mission of the Holy Spirit.

Israel’s experience of the Spirit of God as recorded in the OT went through a gradual developmental process which ultimately paved way to a fuller understanding of the mystery of the Third divine Person in the NT. A close examination of the Yahwist and the Elohist traditions reveals that “the earliest understanding of the spirit was two-fold. On the one hand, it was understood in the anthropological sense as the life-breath received directly from God, the gift and the source of life...On the other hand, spirit was understood to be a divine impulse which came sometimes by way of a word of prophecy (Balaam) or knowledge or wisdom (Joseph) but equally by way of ecstatic exaltation which might have no particular message other than being a sign of the coming of the spirit upon those so touched.”²⁰ Starting from this early beginning, the attempt to grasp the mystery of the Spirit was chiefly actualized through symbols and imageries, some of which include breath, dove, fire, cloud, water, finger of God, advocate, helper, unction and seal. In the fullness of time, the Word of God made flesh, namely Jesus Christ, revealed to us that the Holy Spirit is not merely a divine influence, force or instrument but a divine person.

¹⁹ Albert NOLAN, *Jesus Before Christianity*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001, pp27-28.

²⁰ George T. MONTAGUE, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1976, p16.

Operating in the form of breath, dove, cloud and fire, the Spirit notably stands out clearly as the active presence of God with his people in their most needful moments in life. The second account of creation in the Book of Genesis (2:4-24) presents the making of the human being as a process which moved from a state of helplessness to full life. Initially, the human person was a mass of helpless dust until the Creator communicated his breath to it; then, the helpless and wretched mass became a living being charged with cultivating the earth and taking care of it. Ever since then, life has continued to be sustained by the same breath. Every breath which a living person takes in or out represents God's approval of his or her continued existence. Rightly so, the Psalmist remarks that when God withdraws his breath, the human being returns to dust (Ps 104:29-30). Lifting up the down trodden from dust to a privilege position is the work of the Spirit. It is also remarkable that from the time the people of Israel left Egypt and set forth resolutely towards the Promised Land, God manifested his protective and guiding presence among them through the symbols of the cloud and fire—two key symbols of the Holy Spirit. It happened that as soon as the people departed, Pharaoh changed his earlier decision to let them go; he summoned his men of war and pursued them. In the meantime, Israel was caught up in between the Red Sea and the Egyptians. Now, as Pharaoh and his chariots drew near, "the angel of God, who preceded the army of Israel, changed station and followed behind. The pillar of cloud moved from their front and took position behind them. It came between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel. The cloud was dark and the night passed without the one drawing any closer to the other the whole night long" (Exod 14:19-20). Thus, the people of God were protected from the harm intended by Pharaoh and his soldiers. The cloud was so dynamic that its

position and thickness changed positions in response to God's plan for the guidance and protection of his people. At other times, the cloud appeared as God's glory to assure Israel of divine support or as a sign of God's approval of the deeds of his servant whom he placed to lead the people such as Moses (Cf. Exod 24:16-18; 40:34) and Solomon (1 Kings 8:10-11). Through such mediated presence realized through the cloud and fire, the lives of the 'poor' and helpless Israelites were saved. In all these, one sees that the presence and activities of the Holy Spirit was felt mostly at the most difficult times in the history of the humanity in general and Israel in particular.

Solidarity with the poor essentially entails speaking on their behalf and against their oppressors or the upholders and builders of the structures that cause poverty. The prophets in Israel were at the forefront of the battle against the oppression of the poor by the rich and the powerful. The prophet Amos is a good example of the prophets whose attentions were heavily directed to matters of social justice. He spoke strongly against the merchants, the landowners and the powerful in Israel who oppressed the less privileged and impoverished them (Cf. Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:7,11,24; 8:4-6)²¹. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, among other things, identifies the Holy Spirit as the one who spoke through the prophets. In other words, the sum of all the utterances and actions of the prophets in solidarity with the poor are the work of the Holy Spirit. The prophets gave expression to the mission of the Holy Spirit in creation. In Jesus we find an expression of the fullness of the prophetic vocation.

²¹ Cf. Michael L. BARRÉ, "Amos" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E Brown, Joseph E. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1994, pp209-210.

4. The Holy Spirit and the Poor in Jesus Message and Ministry

In his oracles about the Spirit and the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah offers us good insight into the strong connection which exists between the Holy Spirit and the poor (Cf. Is 61:1-2; 58:6). Generally, the God of Israel is one who lives and acts in strong solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and marginalized. In his appearance to Moses in the burning bush, he revealed himself as one who hears the cries of the poor and comes to set them free from the hands of their oppressors. (Cf. Exod 3:7-9). He judges the cause of the poor and is moved to compassion towards them. Thus, the expected Messiah will be associated with "the practice of compassion, concern for justice and for the rights of the poor, the lowly, the weak, and the marginalized."²² These ideas foretold by the prophets were fulfilled in the life, words and actions of Jesus Christ when eventually he came.

At the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus underwent the rite of baptism in the hands of John the Baptist at the River Jordan. All the four evangelists recorded the baptism of Jesus and all together they testify to it "as a special bestowal of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of Jesus' ministry."²³ In fact, the evangelist John, in his own narrative, adds that during this baptism, the Holy Spirit did not only descend on Jesus but "remained" on him from then onwards. It is interesting to note that later, Jesus gave expression to how he understood this descent of the Holy Spirit on him in a way that concerns the poor. It happened right at Nazareth, where Jesus had been

²² John FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God, The Message of Jesus Today*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1995, p239.

²³ FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God*, p242.

raised. He came to the Synagogue on the Sabbath day and the scroll was given to him to read and he found the passage of the prophet Isaiah where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus rolled up the scroll, sat down and declared that this promise is fulfilled even as the people listened to it. Thus, Jesus underlined the fact that the Spirit he received at baptism meant to put him at the service of the poor.

In his public ministry, the activities of Jesus were largely devoted to the poor and he saw this as a clear sign of the active presence of the eschatological Spirit in the world. The sick were healed, people possessed by demons were delivered, and the dead were raised to life. At a point, he was accused of doing these great things through Beelzebul, the Prince of demons, but in his response, he declared that the wonders he worked were accomplished through the Holy Spirit of God (Cf. Matthew 12: 28). Moreover, these accomplishments done through the Holy Spirit serve as proof that the final coming of the kingdom of God has dawned in history. Thus, as J. Fuellenbach rightly observed, "Jesus' self-understanding and his kingdom message are deeply linked with his being conscious of having the eschatological Spirit."²⁴ Therefore, the history of the life and ministry of Jesus cannot be written without the Holy Spirit and his connection with the Holy Spirit does not exist without the poor. There are three important elements in this drama: Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the poor.

²⁴ FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God*, p243.

4.1 *Why is the Holy Spirit for the Poor?*

The history of Jesus makes it abundantly clear that a special link exists between the Holy Spirit and the poor. The task before us now is to try to examine and highlight the particular characteristics of the person and mission of the Holy Spirit which provide ground for his solidarity with the poor to the extent that qualifies him as their 'father'. In the first place, it is important to note that the active presence of God the Father and the Son in the universe is concretely realized through the Holy Spirit. In creating the world, the Creator intended it to be like a home for him and not simply as work that is finished and abandoned to exist on its own account. God made the world to live in it; the goal and the inner secret of creation is that it becomes the dwelling of the Creator. His relationship with creation goes beyond what exists between the worker and his work because in actual fact, "the Creator, through his Spirit, dwells in his creation as a whole, and in every individual created being, by virtue of his Spirit holding them together and keeping them in life."²⁵ This is why J. Moltmann states that whenever we talk of God in creation, we mean God the Holy Spirit²⁶ and that this indwelling of the Holy Spirit has as its objective, the fulfillment of all the promises made by God to the poor and thus provides hope for those who experience alienation in this world.²⁷ Thus, the Spirit gives expression to the sympathy of God for all creation and by so doing, he experiences all the tragedies of the universe and turns them into prayers in favour of the oppressed. To whom else then would the poor turn to in their distress except this

²⁵ Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, tr. M. Kohl, London: SCM Press, 1985, pxii.

²⁶ Cf. MOLTSMANN, *God in Creation*, pxii.

²⁷ Cf. MOLTSMANN, *God in Creation*, p5.

God who is present to them reconciling, renewing, perfecting, preserving, and redeeming all things?

Empathy and compassion are particular characteristics of the person of the Holy Spirit and his active presence in creation. In his involvement in the life of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is revealed as the compassion of God capable of unconditional solidarity with the suffering of humanity and creation as a whole. It is true that “there was no time and no period of his life when Jesus was not filled with the Holy Spirit,”²⁸ but it was at his baptism that Scripture notes that the Spirit descended on Jesus and rested on him. This coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus which constituted him as the anointed one of God, the Messiah, meant for the Spirit complete participation in the life of the Son of God up to the point of his death. For the Spirit, this implies self-surrender because “to dwell in and operate through Jesus, the Spirit had to renounce its equality with the Son and take the form of a humble servant.”²⁹ By making the life of Jesus part of his own, the Spirit subjected himself to the same situation of the lowly state which Jesus assumed by his incarnation. For a while, the Spirit of creation restricted himself within the limits of the vulnerable humanity, Jesus of Nazareth, which the Son of God had taken. During his temptation when the tempter enticed Jesus to seize the messianic power by force or to gain universal power by renouncing God and worshipping Satan, the Spirit was with Jesus. Hence, “by the power of the Spirit, Jesus rejected these offers choosing the way of the cross as his

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (tr. M. Kohl), London: SCM Press, 1990, p18.

²⁹ Bona Ikenna UGWU, *The Holy Spirit as Present and Active in Cosmic Turmoil and Human Suffering: A Dialogue between Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Jürgen Moltmann*, Rome, 2004, p183.

means to victory.”³⁰ Moltmann is of the view that the temptation of Jesus prefigures his passion³¹ and thus the solidarity of the Spirit with Jesus runs like a thread through both. The Spirit participated totally in Jesus’ suffering to the point of his death on the cross. By binding himself totally and intimately to Jesus’ destiny, “it follows logically that nowhere is the Spirit more humiliated than in the personal life of Jesus.”³² This compassionate sharing in the life of the other thus exemplified in the story of Jesus defines the person and mission of the Holy Spirit in the world.

The Holy Spirit has been in creation from its inception but through the Incarnation that culminated in the Paschal Mystery, he definitively opened himself to the world in a way that is new. Speaking on this, Sergius Bulgakov states: “The utterly new thing that occurred in the Pentecost was not the descent into the world of the ‘spirit of God’ in the capacity of his gifts, but the descent of the hypostatic Holy Spirit himself. And the descent now was not within definite limits, not on Christ and the Mother of God alone, but also on the apostles, as well as on all who were with them.”³³ In other words, there is a fundamental difference between the OT’s description of outpourings of the Holy Spirit in his separate gifts and the Pentecost when not only the gifts were bestowed but the divine hypostatic descends.³⁴ This invisible and mysterious presence of the Holy Spirit in the world takes after his involvement in the life of Christ; it is compassionate and

³⁰ MOLTSMANN, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p93.

³¹ MOLTSMANN, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p93.

³² UGWU, *The Holy Spirit*, p184.

³³ Sergius BULGAKOV, *The Comforter*, tr. Boris Jakim, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004, p267.

³⁴ Cf. BULGAKOV, *The Comforter*, p269.

empathic. Since after the Fall, creation is subject to the frailty of temporality and the degradation of ultimate death. While faith professes that heaven and earth are full of the glory of God, the face of the earth in the meantime is disfigured by diseases of all kinds, sickness and tragic natural disasters. Humanity contributes a lot to this picture through violence, corruption, injustice, and ecological exploitation with its obvious consequences of desertification and global warming. Lives are lost in great numbers as a result of all these and untold suffering is the lot of many people in the world. Thus, groaning and sighing form part and parcel of the history of creation in every age.

The groaning of creation is not actually a cry of despair but for liberation. Seeing itself as victim of all sorts of oppression and bondage, the children of God join the rest of the members of the community of creation in uttering loud cries to their Saviour for freedom. The story of Israel and of the faithful in the New Covenant testifies to the fact that "At the beginning of every experience of liberation which comes from God, there is always a cry from the depths of misery."³⁵ When the people of Israel in Egypt could no longer bear the oppressive conditions of their life under Pharaoh, they cried out and seeing their misery, the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, came down and confounded their oppressor with the power of his arm and thus brought them out of slavery to freedom. Through Christ, it was revealed that "in the Spirit people experience what it is to be free"³⁶ because St Paul rightly states that "the Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). The presence and the

³⁵ UGWU, *The Holy Spirit*, p194.

³⁶ Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (tr. M. Kohl), London: SCM Press, 1992.

efficacy of the risen Christ are definitively experienced in the presence of the Holy Spirit in the universe. In the Spirit, people can still encounter Jesus and are able to experience true liberation from every form of inward and outward bondage such as sickness, demonic possession, social stigma and other humiliating conditions of life. Hence, "the groans that go forth from the ruined nature and the cries of the oppressed people are directed to the Spirit."³⁷ In other words, the nature of the Spirit as Lord which is essentially connected to freedom qualifies him as one to whom the poor would necessarily turn to in their plight. Poverty is essentially a form of bondage and those who are in its grip desire freedom above all things.

In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is most prominent as the "Paraclete" or most precisely, "Another Paraclete". In the passage where Christ made a direct promise of the Holy Spirit to his followers, he spoke of him as "another Paraclete" and in addition, he spoke about him using a personal pronoun which indicates the personal character of the third person of the Trinity; he is not merely an object, influence or instrument but a subject. In profane Greek, the Paraclete "means the person called to the side of one in need for assistance, particularly in legal processes; but it does not signify a professional advocate..."³⁸ He is a helper, an intercessor or someone who speaks on behalf of another person that cannot help himself or herself. Usually, it is the needy, people who are going through difficult times or facing miserable conditions beyond their control that require the assistance of a helper. If this is the name by which Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, it is apparently because he knows, from his own personal experience in life,

³⁷ UGWU, *The Holy Spirit*, p195.

³⁸ McKENZIE, "Paraclete" in *Dictionary of the Bible*, p636.

that the Holy Spirit is by nature a helper and that his mission is directed in a specific manner to the helpless poor. The life and ministry of Jesus had the poor as focus of attention and the Holy Spirit is one meant to universalize in time and place the mission started by the Son of God on earth. Thus, “Jesus himself is primarily the Paraclete and the Spirit who is sent is ‘another Paraclete’.”³⁹ The Holy Spirit continues in and through the Community of Jesus’ disciples, the Church, the project whose foundation is laid by Christ, namely, total solidarity with the poor. It is obvious that for the Jews and many other cultures, “The name is considered to be more than an artificial tag which distinguishes one person from another. The name has a mysterious identity with its bearer; it can be considered as a substitute for the person, as acting and receiving in his place.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the name by which the Holy Spirit is known, namely, the ‘Paraclete’ defines both his nature and mission particularly in relation to creation and human beings. He is rightly one who stands on the side of the poor or the needy in their conditions of misery with a view to changing their situation.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is called love which again indicates his essential nature and mission in the Church and in the universe. The biblical affirmation is that God is love. Down the ages, various Christian thinkers have identified this love which is God and is from God as the Holy Spirit. St Anselm, Richard of Saint-Victor, St Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas, all of the Western Church, are associated with the theme of the Holy Spirit as the mutual love of the

³⁹ McKENZIE, *Dictionary of the Bible*, p637.

⁴⁰ McKENZIE, “Name” in *Dictionary of the Bible*, p603.

Father and the Son.⁴¹ Now, there is a "terrible aspect of love"⁴² and that is the fact that it entails suffering. Genuine love goes with the capacity to suffer with the one whom we love. This essential connection between love and suffering applies even in the case of God. Pope Saint John Paul II observes that "in the depths of God, there is a Father's love that faced with man's sin...reacts so deeply as to say: I am sorry that I have made him."⁴³ This feeling of God is a form of pain that is profound and inexpressible. Now, "to say that love is essential to the being of God is to say in one way or another that suffering is essential to his nature."⁴⁴ Applying suffering to the Holy Spirit does not in any way reduce him to the same ontological order with the rest of things that suffer in the world. The empathic suffering of the Holy Spirit is redemptive; it is intended to liberate the victims of suffering in the world. For just as the Son of God has to assume the human condition in order to redeem it, the Holy Spirit immerses himself in the same ocean of misery where the poor find themselves with the aim of getting them liberated. Love necessarily establishes a bond between the Holy Spirit and the poor.

The qualities of compassion, empathy, liberation and assistance which define the nature and mission of the Holy

⁴¹ Cf. Yves CONGAR, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit, The Complete Three Volume Work in One Volume* (tr. D. Smith), New York: The Crossroad, 1997, pp85-92.

⁴² G. MACGREGOR, *Introduction to Religious Philosophy*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959, p274.

⁴³ JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Letter, The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, Dominum et Vivificantem*, no. 39.

⁴⁴ G. MACGREGOR, *He Who Lets us Be: A Theology of Love*, New York: Seabury Press, 1995, p4.

Spirit explain why some Christian scholars or thinkers refer to him as mother. This way of thinking which is not without support from Scripture and tradition is fundamentally aimed at highlighting the role of the third divine person towards the begetting and nurturing of the children of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the mother of God's children who not only gives them life but follows them all through life to ensure that they are not crushed by the challenges they encounter on the path of life unto eternity. This is sufficiently credible because mercy or compassion which is "one of the foremost characteristics of the God of revelation...is presented in the figure of the bowels of a mother (*rahamim*)."⁴⁵ It is about the same objective that the author of the Pentecost Sequence intends to achieve by identifying the Holy Spirit as "father of the poor". In all, it is expected that children born of the Holy Spirit would as a result of their inheritance and training take after their parent in solidarity with the poor.

5. The Church and the Poor

Right from its beginning, the Christian Church, which is a creation of the Holy Spirit, has had a very strong connection with and commitment to the poor. It was largely a religion of the poor for the poor. The founder of the religion, Jesus Christ, chose the life of poverty and preferred the uneducated and ordinary people such as fishermen to form the cradle of the community which eventually became the Church. St Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth of this aspect of their history thus, "Consider your own calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, and not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish

⁴⁵ BOFF, *Trinity and Society*, p171.

of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing..." (1Cor 1:26-28). As Pope Francis rightly puts it, "Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members."⁴⁶ Docile attention to the cries of the poor forms an integral part of the Christian faith and evangelization.

The Church has always seen herself as living and working with and under the Holy Spirit. Christians are Disciples of Christ born of the Holy Spirit into a living community of faith and charged with the responsibility of joining the same Spirit in his one and important mission of empathic and compassionate solidarity with creation in its quest for freedom and fullness of life. The activities of the Spirit as the "father of the poor" necessarily include human involvement through listening and acting with and for the oppressed, the weak and the marginalized (the poor) to change their conditions of existence. Sometimes, this human responsibility implies first of all the realization of oneself as a vital agent of transformation of one's own life. In concrete terms, this act of co-working with the Holy Spirit means, creating communities of love and peace, working with others with similar goals and aspirations and making extreme sacrifices for the sake of one's neighbours. In no way, therefore, should anybody play down on the role of human reflection, energy and industry for the continuing overthrow of the forces that create the conditions that render so many people poor in society. People should be made to understand that "by carrying out their

⁴⁶ POPE FRANCIS, *Apostolic Exhortation, The Joy of the Gospel, Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, no. 186.

work, human beings coincide with the unifying action of the Spirit of God in the universe and collaborate with the hands of God in their strive to attire (*sic*) and prepare the world for the final union.”⁴⁷ The Holy Spirit endows different individuals with gifts and empowers them to live and act responsibly at the service of the poor.

The social teachings of the Church represent a concrete form of commitment to the situation of the poor and less privileged in society. The study of these teachings reveals the extent to which the Church “is an effective defense of the poor and powerless in society and an encouragement to them in the struggle for justice.”⁴⁸ Besides, there are several levels of practical commitments to the cause of poor undertaken by Christians. Speaking of the social dimension of evangelization, Pope Francis calls on the Church to remain committed to the poor. According to him, the Church should “constantly go out from herself keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor.”⁴⁹ The missionary effort of the Church should go to “everyone without exception” but our attention should first be addressed to the poor.⁵⁰ Every Christian community or person should see itself as a special instrument chosen by God for “the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society.”⁵¹ By being committed to the poor, the Church is saved from being worldly or being trapped in superficial spirituality. It is interesting that the Holy Father notes that it is only “by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit” that

⁴⁷ UGWU, *The Holy Spirit*, p102.

⁴⁸ DORR, *Option for the Poor*, p11.

⁴⁹ POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 97.

⁵⁰ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 48.

⁵¹ POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 187.

Church would be healed of the disease of the “stifling worldliness” and the “self-centeredness” that is capable of making her lose its focus, namely, commitment to the poor.⁵² A commitment to struggle against structures that render the masses in society poor and powerless and solidarity with such victims amounts to “an option for the poor.”⁵³ This is the stand of the Church and where the Church is there is the Holy Spirit.

6. Conclusion

Prompted by an uncommon text contained in the Sequence of Pentecost which addresses the Holy Spirit as “father of the poor”, this work undertook the task of examining the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the poor. To establish the plausibility of this appellation, it is noted that usually in the Trinitarian family, the name ‘Father’ applies essentially to the first divine person because in all eternity he has been the Father of the Son. This is not the case with the Holy Spirit. The application of the title ‘father’ to the third divine person, the Holy Spirit, credible insofar as it is understood metaphorically, particularly with the intention of highlighting his solidarity with the poor.

The Holy Spirit is committed to the poor. His mission as love, helper, life giver and liberator who dwells in creation and is capable of empathy and compassion qualifies him to be addressed as the father of the poor. These qualities make him the closest companion of the poor to whom they cry and through whom their cries are drawn to the heart of the Trinity.

⁵² POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 97.

⁵³ Cf. DORR, *Option for the Poor*, p11.

Every form of human solidarity with the poor or action taken on their behalf is an expression of collaboration with the Holy Spirit in his continuous empathic relationship with them (the poor). All those who are born of the Holy Spirit into a living community of faith actualize their call only to the extent that they are at the service the poor. Therefore, every man or woman who professes the Christian faith is expected to collaborate with the Spirit in his project of commitment to the poor. By his relationship with the poor, the Holy Spirit draws the Christian community and individual Christians into awareness of the poor and empowers them to be and act on their side in order to transform their conditions. The Spirit also provides human beings with a sort of guide as to what authentic solidarity with the poor means. It is an all-inclusive solidarity which includes, being there with and for them, giving and sustaining their life, speaking for them and suffering with them.

This study highlights the Pneumatological dimension to the question of the option for the poor—an issue which has usually been treated under the social teachings of the Church. This approach will obviously be more beneficial to Africans particularly in West Africa, a people, whom E. E. Uzukwu describes as “a constituency that lays high premium on spirit.”⁵⁴ By implication, it could be said that the promotion of knowledge and true devotion to the Holy Spirit will logically impart positively on our commitment to the poor among us. On the contrary, neglect or forgetfulness of the Holy Spirit would have negative impacts on Christian commitment to the poor in society or in the Church. Therefore, the much needed

⁵⁴ Elochukwu E. UZUKWU, *God, Spirit and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*, Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012, p214.

promotion of study and devotion to the Holy Spirit holds key to the realization of a Church and the world which exists for the poor and in solidarity with them. The Holy Spirit is indeed the father of the poor.