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THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE NEGLECTED PERSON OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Bona Ikenna Ugwu, CSSp

1. Introduction

The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church “professes that the Holy Spirit is one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, consubstantial with the Father and the Son”¹, that “the Holy Spirit is the last of the persons of the Holy trinity to be revealed”² and that he is worshipped and glorified with the other two divine persons³. This Holy Spirit is sometimes described as the neglected, the forgotten, and the unknown person of the Trinity. However, in recent times, there is a remarkable re-awakening of interest, sensibility and consciousness in the Spirit both in the Church and the world as a whole. This paper intends to examine the merits of the claim that the Spirit is neglected with a view to affirming or debunking it particularly in the light of the emergent spirit-consciousness. This will be done with particular attention to the African Church and theology.

2. The Christian Understanding of God

The notion of three distinct persons living in perfect unity as one God is the Christian unique experience, understanding and way of naming the Divine Mystery. The Christian God is Father, Son

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 685.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 690.

³ See the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

and Holy Spirit; eternal persons who co-exist, one within the other, in dynamism of life and love which binds them in complete union⁴. This distinctive way of naming God, which is both monotheistic and trinitarian was made known through God's revelation of himself in history. Through the sequence of events in the history of Israel, the people came to experience Divinity as one with personal aspects and these personal dimensions in God constitute the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity. Scripture shows that the God of all the earth manifested personal interest in the affairs of humanity right from the point of creation. His involvement in matters pertaining to the integral well being of the people is dramatically portrayed in the story of the exodus.

Contrary to the philosophical picture of a changeless, static, and emotionless Deity, the God of Moses and Jesus Christ is one who loves, cares, provides for and participates in the affairs of the world which he created. He reveals his transcendence and grandeur by his ability to be fully involved in history. He is a covenant God, who "does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and exert obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in him joy and sorrow, pleasure or wrath".⁵ This personal character of God's presence and relationship with the world contributed immensely to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁴ Leonard Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Kent, UK: Burns and Oates/Search Press, 1988, p.23.

⁵ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, New York: Harper and Row, 1962, p. 224.

The trinitarian dimension of God was not obvious to the people of the old, but they were not without indications of it because the Old Testament contains "preparatory revelations of the Trinitarian reality"⁶ The Jews recognised different forms of God's active presence in history using such metaphors as the word, breath, wisdom, fire, and compassion. These metaphors were understood as special attributes of Divinity and at times came very close to being identified as distinct supernatural realities. They were frequently applied by the people to denote particular operation and presence of the transcendent God particularly in matters affecting his people.

The event of Jesus Christ, through his life, words, deeds and above all his suffering, death and resurrection, brought about a radical change in the conception of God. Jesus revealed the Trinity. In the first place, Jesus spoke of himself as "Son" and of God as his "father" in a way that was unprecedented in the history of the people of Israel. Not only that he spoke but he acted as the Son by "knowing and revealing the truth about God, in changing the divine law, in forgiving sins, in being the one through whom others could become children of God, and in acting with total obedience as the agent for God's final kingdom"⁷. His claim to a unique filial relationship with God whom he called his father was one of the strongest charges of blasphemy brought against Jesus by his prosecutors. On the strength of all that Jesus said and did as the Son and the outcome of his life especially the Resurrection, his followers recognised in

⁶ L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, p. 26.

⁷ Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 126.

him the Lord and started to address him as such (2 Corinthians 13: 13). By the application of this title “Lord” to Jesus, which was an old practice in the Church, the crucified and risen Jesus was set on a par with Yahweh without identifying both as one person⁸. Thus, the event of Christ made the early Christians to expand their Jewish monotheism as epitomised in the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6; 4-5) to include the Lord Jesus. This expansion amounts to a revolution of the first order and it was never without serious challenges⁹.

In his capacity as the Son of God, the Lord Jesus revealed to us the Holy Spirit. Towards the end of his earthly life, he made his disciples aware of “Another Advocate” whom the Father will send at his request to stay with them in the world until the end of time. He gave so much significance to the coming and ministry of the promised Advocate that he even said that his departure would be of great advantage to the disciples since it was a necessary condition for the coming of the Paraclete. He left them with a stern instruction not to embark on any mission in his name until they were clothed with power from above. They waited and on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples and their experiences from that day became another reason to expand their understanding of God. They did not see the Spirit in physical form as they saw Jesus but the truth of his presence and actions was beyond doubt. They saw in this promise of the Father sent by Jesus another fundamental revelation of God which called for a further expansion of their

⁸ G. O’Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus*, p. 137.

⁹ The challenges culminated in the teachings of Arius that eventually led to the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.

monotheistic belief. There was need for expansion to accommodate the new reality.

The record of the life and works of the early Church gives clear witness of the presence and operation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Generally, "the liturgy became the first setting in which faith in the trinity was expressed. Doxologies (prayers of praise and glory—the meaning of the Greek *doxa*), which we still use in our celebration, are the earliest testimonies of the recognition of the Trinity in the faith of the believing communities"¹⁰. The baptismal formula of the early Church is captured in Matthew's Gospel and it states that converts to faith in Christ were to be baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28: 19). Ultimately, the affirmation of the Trinity as doctrine came with time after the reality have been accepted and practiced by the believing communities over a long time. The Church in the 4th and 5th centuries AD was able to put into doctrinal formulation her experience of God as three persons that subsist in one nature, the Trinity. This has remained the basic expression of Christian understanding of God through the ages.

The Holy Spirit in the Trinity

The Old Testament is replete with elements of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit but it never arrived at the point of recognizing him as a distinct divine personality. Israel's understanding of the Spirit of God developed gradually and it was mostly expressed through symbolic representations such as breath (*ruach*), cloud, fire, and water. Testimonies of the activities of the Spirit are found in

¹⁰ L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, p. 27.

almost every passage of the Old Testament. The story of the beginning of the universe and human beings in the two creation narratives in Genesis is intimately linked with the wind or the breath of God. The power and authority exercised by Moses and the elders who assisted him in ruling Israel are directly connected with the Spirit of God which was given to them (Numbers 11: 7: 25-29). The judges who governed the people after Joshua like Gideon, Jephthah and Samson were all charismatic leaders thanks to the Spirit that came upon them to accomplish designated tasks for the well-being of all. Saul and David, the founding figures of the monarchy in Israel, received the Spirit following the anointing they got from Samuel. Simply put, "at the founding of Israel, the Spirit is active in a variety of roles, imparting craftsmanship skills, empowering leaders as individuals or as a group..."¹¹. All the prophets of the Old Testament demonstrated real consciousness of the power of the Spirit in their lives and vocation. This informs the much later Christian confession in the Creed that the Spirit was the one who spoke through the prophets. By this, "Christians wanted to stress that the Spirit by whom Jesus had been conceived and who animated the gospel was the same as the Spirit who acted in the old dispensation"¹².

The four centuries that preceded the birth of Jesus gave rise to the wisdom tradition in Israel which in turn brought into being a particular genre of Jewish writing, the wisdom literature. In this tradition or writing, wisdom was the focus of discourse and it

¹¹ Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St Luke*, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984, p. 15.

¹² Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I, p. 6-7.

was very closely identified with the Spirit of God in such a way that the two were almost taken to mean the same thing¹³. Among other things, this tradition exalted both wisdom and the spirit to the point of personification. Furthermore, it helped to reveal that contrary to the understanding that wisdom and the spirit were peculiar gifts of the prophets, they apply to the realm of the experiential daily living of people in society. By so doing, "the wisdom tradition laid the foundation for the New Testament understanding of God, as revealed in the person of his Son, the Word or Wisdom of God, and made real and experiential by their mutual personal gift, the Holy Spirit"¹⁴.

The New Testament contains so many Pneumatological elements ranging from "discreet Pneumatology of Matthew" to "the rich Pneumatology of John"¹⁵. It supplied what the Old Testament was unable to do, namely, affirming the Spirit of God as a subject of distinct existence and actions. It is striking to note that in the earliest documents of the New Testament, for instance, the First Letter to the Thessalonians, "the Spirit of the Lord is not only called 'the Holy Spirit' but is mentioned in such a fashion as to evoke a well known element of the Christian experience"¹⁶. This is to say that by the time this letter was written, about AD 51, the person and action of the Holy Spirit had become well

¹³ Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I. p. 9.

¹⁴ George T. Montague, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1976, p. 110.

¹⁵ This is how G. T. Montague describes the Pneumatology of these two evangelists; cf. His *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, p. 302, 333.

¹⁶ G. T. Montague, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, p. 127.

known to the believers in many places where the good news of Christ had been preached.

From the relationship which the Spirit has with the Father, the Son, the disciples and the world, his identity as a subject as well as his proper mission in the history of salvation become highlighted. Of great interest is that "The Spirit does not invent or introduce a new and different economy. He gives life to the flesh and words of Jesus..."¹⁷; he upholds and actualizes the same mission of God which the Son established in history through his life, death and resurrection. There is only one way to the Father (which is Jesus) and only one Spirit that guides people through it to the Father. As a subject, the Spirit dwells with the disciples, he listens, teaches, communicates, guides, speaks, glorifies, bears witness and convinces the world of sin. Speaking thus about the Holy Spirit as subject does not mean that all disciples and Churches of the New Testament consciously experienced the Holy Spirit as a person beyond what they inherited from Judaism. Nevertheless, the experience of the Holy Spirit by the early Church was laudable and overwhelming. As Congar rightly puts it, "In the beginning, the Church saw itself as subject to the activity of the Spirit and filled with his gifts"¹⁸. The community of believers in Corinth offers us a good example of how the outpouring of the Spirit in charisms constituted the Church's essential understanding of itself and of how the risen Christ was actively present with them through his Spirit.

The formulation of the Church's belief in the Holy Spirit came later with the Councils, beginning with Nicaea (AD 325) and

¹⁷ Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 57.

¹⁸ Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 65.

culminating in Constantinople (AD 381). Like the Christological dogmas, the definitive teaching of the Church on the Holy Spirit was hammered out of the context of controversies and debates. The first Council of Constantinople proclaimed in clear terms the divinity of the Holy Spirit using Scripture and Christian worship as foundations of the content and language of its propositions¹⁹. In its proclamation, emphasis was laid on the equality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son which makes him to be adored and glorified together with them. With the affirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Trinity became secured and subsequent generation of Christians kept building on the revealed mystery thus formulated.

The affirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit and the doctrinal and theological explication that followed over the years did not translate to emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The truth is that down the ages, there has never been a time when the Holy Spirit disappeared from the lived faith of the Church. However, for some obvious reasons, the kind of awareness of the Holy Spirit in the Church which started on Pentecost gradually declined to the point of neglect or forgetfulness.

The Neglect of the Holy Spirit

The neglect of the Holy Spirit has a very long history and perhaps it has continued till date. Speaking about St Augustine in reference to the neglect of the Holy Spirit, Michael O'Carroll remarks that "He noted that much had been written on the Father

¹⁹ Michael O'Carroll, *Veni Creator Spiritus: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Spirit*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995, p. 58-59.

and the Son, on the different problems that arise in the theology of the first two Persons of the Trinity. He finds a dearth of such literature on the Holy Spirit"²⁰. A number of Christians bear witness to this neglect in contemporary time. Hans Urs von Balthazar describes the Holy Spirit as "the Unknown Lying beyond the Word"²¹. John V. Taylor observes that the Holy Spirit "so patent to Christians in the first century is largely forgotten in our own"²² and thus, he advocates "for a recovery of a significant doctrine of the Holy Spirit"²³. Similarly, John Burke says that "For many, if not for most Catholics, the Holy Spirit is really the forgotten Person of the Most Holy Trinity"²⁴. The *Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Spirit* by Michael O'Carroll devotes a relatively big space to the "Neglect of the Spirit"²⁵. Yves Congar, in his famous three-volume work on the Holy Spirit does not only speak of forgetting the Holy Spirit but talks also about the practice of "Substitutes for the Holy Spirit" in the Church. According to him, Catholics tend to take the Eucharist or the Blessed Sacrament, the Pope and the Blessed Virgin Mary as substitutes for the Holy Spirit²⁶. They attribute to these substitutes the characteristics and operations that are essentially of the Third Divine Person. This is the case when, for instance,

²⁰ M. O'Carroll, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, p. 21.

²¹ Hans Urs von Balthazar (1967), *Explorations in Theology, Vol. III: Creator Spirit*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993: 105-116.

²² John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: the Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, London: SCM Press, 1972, p. 1.

²³ J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, p. 5.

²⁴ John Burke, *The Holy Spirit*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Society of African Missions, 1997, p. 2.

²⁵ M. O'Carroll, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, p. 156-157.

²⁶ Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 1, p. 160-165.

the pope and not the Holy Spirit is identified as the principle of unity in the Church or when "Catholics attribute to Mary what really belong to the Holy Spirit or in extreme cases, give her a place that should be occupied by the Paraclete"²⁷. In fact, Majawa affirms that for centuries the focus of Christians was on God the Father and Christ and not much of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church and on the accomplishment of the mission of the Church was substantially known²⁸. Put together, these voices are united in saying that the Holy Spirit does not receive sufficient attention, emphasis, study, worship and devotion as is due to him as one of the persons of the triune God.

In what follows, we shall highlight some concrete evidences to substantiate the claim that the Holy Spirit is neglected, forgotten and unknown, particularly Catholics and then go further to point out some of the possible reasons for this. For these evidences, we shall direct our attention mostly on the areas of Christian theology, worship, prayer in general, faith-formation and mission.

In theology, human beings use reason and words informed by faith to understand, interpret and communicate their experience of God particularly from the context of a given community of faith. There is first and foremost people's relationship with God which gives rise to religious experiences that in turn constitute basis for interpretative reflection and expression of belief. St Anselm's famous definition of theology as faith seeking

²⁷ Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I, p. 163.

²⁸ Clement Chinkambako Abenguni Majawa, *The Holy Spirit and Charismatic Renewal in Africa and Beyond*, Nairobi: Creations Enterprise, 2007, p. 83.

understanding captures the essentials of the activity which theologians carry out. Theologizing is an activity of faith and the intellect within the context of a communal religious experience of Divine Mystery²⁹. The importance of context in this activity is underscored by Lonergan's idea that "a theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix"³⁰. In his theological study of the Trinity, St Augustine of Hippo discovered that even though the divinity, unity and equality of the three divine persons form part of the indubitable articles of the Creed, Christians of the time did not take much care in studying and writing about the Holy Spirit as they did of the Father and the Son³¹. This situation remained a feature of Christian theology in varying degrees and passed on to emerging theologies of the contemporary time.

African theology is marked by a serious Pneumatological deficiency and this is a serious lacuna. The history of modern African theology is traced to the ideas and works of personalities like Vincent Mulago, a Catholic priest from what used to be called Belgian Congo, Alexis Kagame, a Rwandan priest and a group of African priests in Paris which culminated in their publication of *Des Pretres Noirs s'interrogent* in 1956³². Since then, a lot of progress has been made towards having a theology

²⁹ Geoffery Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life, A Systematic Theology*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 1.

³⁰ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971, p.xi.

³¹ M. O'Carroll, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, p. 21.

³² Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, p. 58/59.

that is genuinely born from the context of African but with a universal credibility. Generally, "African theology is in search of new epistemological landmarks for the interpretation of religious experiences in a world that is becoming more and more global"³³. This goal is to have a theology that is truly African and truly Christian which will help to get Christ and his message incarnated in African soil. So far, the contributions of most African theologians range from apologetics, reaction to Western theologies to addressing general questions of faith and culture. Attempts are also being made to treat specific issues in the areas of Christology, ecclesiology, morality, sacramentology and liturgy. Recently, the attention of African theologians is being called to add the Trinity to their focus list particularly as it will provide the solution to the problem of "the partition of God" which characterizes popular Christian life and prayer in contemporary times³⁴. What some of the proponents of this call do not seem to fully recognize is that the Pentecostal and Charismatic influences which are sweeping through the continent of Africa like wild fire have not contributed so much to refocusing the attention of African theological thinking on the Holy Spirit. The over concentration on the Spirit or *pneumacentrism*³⁵ which is feared to be creeping to the African Church is theologically shallow.

³³ Bede Ukwuije, "Is African Theology still Alive?", *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, Vol. 15, 2003, 125.

³⁴ Bede Uche Ukwuije, *The Trinitarian God: Contemporary Challenges and Relevance*, Bandra, Mumbai: St Paul Press Training School, 2013, p. 21.

³⁵ B. U. Ukwuije, *The Trinitarian God*, p. 20.

It is surprising that Pneumatology is suffering neglect in African theology because the continent of Africa is populated by a people whom Shorter describes as “A world of the Spirit”³⁶, Ugwu presents as “Spirit-filled”³⁷ and Uzukwu qualifies as “a constituency that lays high premium on spirit”³⁸. Every dimension of life in Africa is connected with spirits in one particular way or another. Morality, farming, buying and selling, medicine, rain-making, security, illness and death are all associated with different forms of spiritual realities. In Africans, “spirits are ubiquitous; there is no area of the earth, no object or creature which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be inhabited by spirit”³⁹. The notion of spirit provides the key with which one can have a holistic understanding of the African person and his world. It also offers African believers the way to enter into the mysteries of the Christian religion such as the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Paschal mystery. As far as making meaningful contributions to the universe of theological discourse is concerned, Pneumatology is truly an area of comparative advantage for Africans.

Christian faith formation is another point of consideration as regards the neglect of the Holy Spirit. Let us take the Catholic formation of its clergy as our case of study. Since after the

³⁶ Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology—Adaptation or Incarnation?*, London: Geoffery Chapman, 1975, p. 9.

³⁷ Bona. Ikenna Ugwu, *Holy Spirit, Fire from Above*, Enugu, Nigeria: San Press, 2008, p. 32.

³⁸ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu (2012), *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*, Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 214.

³⁹ E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, London: SCM Press, 1973, p. 174.

Council of Trent, the formation of priests in the Church takes place principally in and through the seminaries. The Second Vatican Council gave its support to this tradition when it affirmed that "Major seminaries are necessary for priestly training"⁴⁰. Experience shows that the study of the Holy Spirit, Pneumatology, does not constitute one of course in the curriculum of many seminaries in the world. This is not surprising because it is not reflected in the courses laid down by the Council for theological formation of future priests. According to the Council, this order should be observed in the treatment of dogmatic theology: biblical themes, the Fathers of the Church (East and West), history of dogma, liturgy, moral theology, canon law, Church history, ecumenism, and knowledge of other religions. All these should be done within the context of the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation⁴¹. So, by way of study, many seminaries are Pneumatologically weak and they logically produce priests who have very weak formation in matters pertaining to the Holy Spirit. The themes of the long essays, projects of thesis produced by seminarians at the end of their formation reflect this weakness. In a book on *The Holy Spirit and our Faith Formation*, the author, Jennifer Chinyere Ezema, examines the agents, programmes and processes of Catholic faith formation and arrives at the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is neglected in almost all the areas of the Church's training of its children⁴².

⁴⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Training of Priests*, *Optatum Totius*, 1965, no. 4.

⁴¹ *Optatum Totius*, no. 16.

⁴² Jennifer Chinyere Ezema, *The Holy Spirit and our Faith Formation*, Enugu: San Press, 2013, p. 120-126, 140.

The public worship of the Church, liturgy, is another segment of Christian life where the Holy Spirit seems to be neglected in many ways. In the first place, we can affirm that the worship of the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Father and the Son was typical of the life of the early Christian communities. Believers were doing this ever before the official declarations made by the Councils came to force. The baptismal formula clearly expressed in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 28) or the doxological formulas often used by St Paul for greeting his audience reflect the liturgy of the community. The Fathers of the Council of Constantinople used this existing tradition of the Church to counter the views of those who doubted or denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Their argument was simple: If the Holy Spirit were not divine, equal and one with the Father and the Son, he would not have been worshipped and glorified in the same way as them. From the point of this declaration onwards, belief in the divinity of the Holy Spirit who is accorded the same level of worship with the other two divine persons became a fundamental element of the Christian faith.

However, the problem is that in practice, the worship of the Holy Spirit for many Christians does not go beyond the verbal profession they make usually while praying or reciting the Creed and a few associated symbolic gestures like making the sign of the cross. Besides Pentecost, there is hardly any other official celebration of the Holy Spirit in the Church's liturgical year. Votive Masses of the Holy Spirit are recommended but it is left for individual priests or communities to decide on when to do so. Experience does not show that the votive Masses are celebrated very often. Liturgical hymns and prayers that are addressed to the Holy Spirit are also few; even in this age of Pentecostalism when

choruses are speedily replacing hymns and songs, there is still a dearth of Holy Spirit related choruses.

Over the years, a number of calls have been made especially by popes for increased devotion to the Holy Spirit but they do not seem to have received sufficient responses. Leo XIII in his Encyclical, *Divinum Illud Munus, On the Spirit in the world* (1897) succinctly recommended that as Christians particularly Catholics, "we should direct towards the Holy Spirit the highest homage of love and devotion"⁴³. He took the lead by dedicating his pontificate to the Holy Spirit. At the end of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI requested that a new study and new devotion to the Holy Spirit be initiated as a necessary complement of the Christology and ecclesiology of the Council⁴⁴. If we use popular devotions in the form of movements and pious societies in the Church as measure, we cannot but affirm that there is yet real poverty of devotion to the Holy Spirit. There are little or no forms of popular devotions in parishes and dioceses that are focused on the Third Divine Person. Societies of Jesus and Mary and of the saints like Anthony, Jude, Michael Tansi, and Padre Pio are found in different places. The Charismatic Renewal Movement has helped in many ways to create awareness about the Holy Spirit but like most Pentecostal movements it is "centred on faith in Christ as Saviour rather than directly on the Holy Spirit"⁴⁵. In Nigeria, so far, there is only one or two groups, for example the Confraternity of the Holy Spirit, whose primary reason for existence is devotion to the person of

⁴³ Leo XIII (1897), *Divinum Illud Munus*, no. 17.

⁴⁴ Paul VI, General Audience, 6 June 1973.

⁴⁵ Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004, p. 88.

the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, this devotion is not yet wide spread in the country.

The neglect of the Holy Spirit is also being experienced in Christian mission. The missionary mandate of Christ shed light on the very intricate connection between mission and the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel according to John, the risen Christ in the evening of his resurrection appeared to the disciples while they were gathered in a room under locked doors. After imparting peace on them, he sent them on mission in these words: "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" This sending is the mission mandate. The story continues. "He breathed on them and said, to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (John 20: 21-22). Again in another instance the risen Jesus just before the Ascension told his disciples that they will only become his witnesses through the power they will receive when the Spirit comes upon them (Acts 1: 8). The human beings chosen by Jesus and sent on mission by him are empowered by the abiding presence and power of the Holy Spirit to carry out the work of God for the salvation of the world. Hence, the mission of the Father which is at the same time the mission of the Son, is continued by the Holy Spirit in and through the Church. Taylor avows that "The chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian Church is the Holy Spirit. He is the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things that he is doing in the world. In a special way it consists of the light that he is focusing upon Jesus Christ"⁴⁶. Therefore, Paul VI states that

⁴⁶ J.V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, p. 1.

"The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission"⁴⁷.

It is difficult to comprehend how in matters concerning mission today, the emphasis placed on the contributions of human knowledge, responsibility, skills, capabilities and resources tends to leave little or no room for the primacy of the role of the Holy Spirit. In trying to determine the prospect of missionary enterprises, missionaries usually put into serious consideration a lot of humanly constituted plans, programmes and processes but not the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Mission projects are forfeited for lack of trained and skilled personnel, fund, or other signs of viability but not for lack of the requisite gifts of the Holy Spirit. And, "Provided the human resources are adequate, we take the spiritual for granted"⁴⁸. Thus, mission is carried out as if it is totally human enterprise and no longer a divine project. The human attitude of it all depends on us seems to be overtaking the Church's approach to mission.

We can go on shedding light on more evidences of the neglect but what we have highlighted speak loudly enough in support of the claim of the neglect of the Holy Spirit. In all, we can be certain that this neglect in question are provoked or promoted by some factors that are discernable.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter, Mission of the Redeemer, Redemptoris Mission*, 1990, no. 21.

⁴⁸ J.V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, p. 5.

Reasons for the Neglect

What we consider today as neglect of the Holy Spirit has a long history and many factors contributed in different ways in bringing about it. Let us begin by pointing fingers at the philosophical movement which impacted so much on European history for many centuries particularly in the 18th century, namely, the Enlightenment⁴⁹. Among other things, this movement laid so much emphasis on reason as the measure of all things. Along with reason, science and the scientific method of empiricism were highlighted as the key to the future of human happiness and progress in the world. The Enlightenment taught humanity that with reason alone, they are able to understand the workings of the world and to create new conditions for the betterment of society. This movement questioned existing order in society including revealed truths which the Church had taught and handed on from generation to another. Generally, "The Enlightenment emphasis upon the competence of reason raised questions concerning the necessity of divine revelation"⁵⁰. Since matters of the Spirit do not readily lend themselves to the type of verification sponsored by reason and science, they were considered superstitious or mere creations of the human mind. Prompted by the spirit of this age of reason, people like Frederick Feuerbach and Karl Marx did not only question religion and its claims but passed a vote of no confidence on it. Truly and

⁴⁹ This movement began in 17th century, dominated the world of ideas in Europe in 18th century and had lasting influence up to the 19th and 20th centuries. Cf. "Age of Enlightenment" in *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, accessed, 28 May, 2016.

⁵⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology, An Introduction*, Carlton, Victoria Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2001, p. 381.

thoroughly considered, this movement contributed in no small way towards the de-emphasis on the Holy Spirit which characterized the Western world and Church over time⁵¹.

It is important to note that long before the Enlightenment, there were certain currents already set in motion which did not favour the development of Pneumatology in the Church, particularly in the West. Worthy of mention here is the emergence of groups in the Church which often claimed certain close association with the Holy Spirit but eventually ended up in conflict with the wider community of believers and the teaching authority of the Church. In fact, it seemed as if most of the Spirit-connected movements at one point or another saw itself locked up in a form of battle with the Church. By the Second Century, there was the Montanist, an ascetic group which traced its origin to Montanus and claimed special relationship with the Holy Spirit. Among other things, the members of this movement claimed that God spoke to them in a way that does not apply to any Christian outside its fold. Whatever they hear from God, they in turn gave out as prophetic utterances to other Christians. At first, they were received favourably but before long, the situation changed drastically. Among other things, "The Catholics criticized both the ways in which the Montanist prophets expressed themselves—by convulsions, cries, and the suspension of judgement, for example—and the manner of life and biased attitudes of these few prophets"⁵². Consequently, Montanism was rejected by the

⁵¹ Hilary Achunike is of the view that the white missionaries that came to Africa came with minds already affected by the Enlightenment ideologies. Cf. *The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians*, p. 24.

⁵² Y. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I, p. 66.

Church. Even though this did not mean a rejection of their emphasis on charisms and the Holy Spirit but it affected the attitude of the Church towards them. The association of the Spirit with prophetism, apocalyptic excitement and exaggerated emphasis on charisms easily lead to abuses in the name of God. In the bid of caution against abuses, the Church saw itself at the threshold of de-emphasis on the Spirit. The fear of abuses has contributed a lot towards the decreased attention on the Spirit in the Church.

Sometimes, the neglect of the Holy Spirit in Christian life is as a result of pure ignorance. As less attention is being paid to the Spirit, it becomes even harder for people to get acquainted with authentic teachings and insights about his actions and presence. If the Holy Spirit does not form an essential part of the scheme for preparing people for the Sacraments in the Church especially Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, if the Holy Spirit seldom comes up as themes for homilies and seminaries and if Pneumatology is not sufficiently taught in seminaries, the ultimate result is ignorance of the nature, ways and work of the Third Person of the triune God. Besides the mention made of the Holy Spirit in a few prayers which we say, many Christians are not too different from the disciples which St Paul met in Ephesus who confessed to him that they had no idea of anything called the Holy Spirit (Acts 19; 1-6). This is the feeling that one has with regard to Christians and the Holy Spirit in practical life situations today.

The mysterious nature of the Holy Spirit which is reflected in the titles, symbols and images by which the Spirit is often depicted contribute to his neglect among Christians. Walter Kasper

indicates that "the Holy Spirit is the most mysterious of the three divine persons, for while the Son has shown himself to us in human form or we can form at least an image of the Father, we have no concrete grasp of the Spirit"⁵³. Besides his proper name, the Holy Spirit, the Third Divine Person is also known as the Paraclete (which is translated as Advocate, Helper or Consoler), the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of the Promise, the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord and the Spirit of God⁵⁴. More so, the Holy Spirit is traditionally identified by or closely associated with the following symbols and images: breath (air or wind), cloud, water, fire, light, dove, seal, anointing, the finger (of God), and the hand (of God)⁵⁵. Sometimes, the metaphors of energy, power and space are applied to the Spirit too.⁵⁶ One can rightly observe that most of these imageries are abstract as well as inanimate realities and they are objects with which human beings do not usually relate with in personal ways.

A reflection on the possible reasons for the neglect of the Holy Spirit should consider the kenotic nature and mode of operation of the person in question. Usually, it is Christ Jesus and not the Holy Spirit whose history is associated with kenosis, but deeper reflection and studies show that "the Spirit participates in his own way in the self-limitation of the Father and the self-

⁵³ Walter Kasper (1983), *The God of Jesus Christ*, London: SCM Press, 223.

⁵⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no 692 and 693.

⁵⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 6691-701.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, London: SCM Press, 274.

emptying of the Son”⁵⁷. The history of the Holy Spirit and his manner of presence and action in the life of Jesus, the Church, and the world are characterized by self-giving, sacrifice and self-effacement. The terms “descending”, being “poured out” and “dwelling in” are often used in Scripture to describe the way the Spirit is given, exists or functions. Each of these terms has a kenotic implication; descent implies lowering oneself below one’s recognised status, what is poured out looses itself completely in another reality and dwelling in another reality subjects one to the prevailing conditions of the host environment. Accepting to dwell in creation exposes the Spirit to the groaning, pain and sighing which are characteristic of creatures (Romans 8: 21-23). Therefore, the kenosis of the Spirit consists in the fact that he, in his absoluteness, fullness and depth as God diminished himself to be in creation and to guide it without applying force; to be and work with Jesus without laying claim to his equality with him; to be in the Church as a helper co-working with her to accomplish the mission of the Father and the Son and to manifest himself as gifts through individual believers and persons⁵⁸. In fact, given the fact that the Spirit was in creation before Jesus and remain therein even after Jesus is ascended to heaven, it is logical to affirm that his kenosis endures more than that of Christ. In all, a person whose way of living and working is in the nature of the Holy Spirit can easily be neglected, ignored or forgotten.

⁵⁷ J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: the Doctrine of God*, London: SCM Press, 1981, p. 211.

⁵⁸ Sergius Bulgakov in his book, *The Comforter*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004, p. 219-227 throws light on the kenosis of the Holy Spirit in creation.

Consequences of the Neglect for the Church (Significance of Emphasis)

The neglect of the Holy Spirit has serious consequences for God, the Church, Christians and society. As far as the history of the triune God is concerned, the neglect of the Holy Spirit robs it of its completeness, at least from the point of view of human understanding. As long as the neglect continues, the notion of the Trinity is fundamentally threatened; God is Trinitarian because he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, deemphasizing any one of them changes the divine equation and leaves us with either a monarch or a binitarian God, which is not the right Christian understanding of Divine Mystery.

On the part of the Church, she owes her creation, oneness, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity, the power of witnessing and hope of eternal glory all to the Holy Spirit. The Second Vatican Council makes it abundantly clear that it is through the Spirit that the body of Christ, the Church, is unceasingly renewed, given life, unified and moves. Christ is the head of the body and the Spirit serves as its soul. By the continual outpouring of love into the lives of the faithful, the Spirit is able to create one family of God from the diverse peoples of the earth and to cater for their well being by his different gifts⁵⁹. Therefore, the neglect of the Holy Spirit leaves us with a Church stunted of growth because of lack of the essentials that she is supposed to have by the virtue of the person and power of the Paraclete. This is exactly what Christ

⁵⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, 1964, no. 7.

did not want to happen to the community of disciples when he said “I will not leave you orphans...” (John 14: 18).

Furthermore, a deficiency of emphasis on the Holy Spirit impacts on the missionary and prophetic roles of the Church. The evangelists, in their account of the last days of Jesus on earth and the period that immediately followed his death offer us a vivid picture of the pre-Pentecost Christian community. It was a community of the sons of Zebedee soaked in earth-bound ambitions of positions to occupy, of Judas who was ready to betray his Master for pecuniary gain, of Peter who could not admit his association with Jesus for fear of possible consequences, of disciples who did not dare to stand by their Master at the most crucial moment of his life and of a community living under closed doors as a result of fear of what the Jews will do. This picture can be contrasted with the experience of the same people after Pentecost which at a point made the people astonished at their boldness (Acts 4: 13). The secret of prophetic courage and missionary zeal lies on the power which comes to the body and its members from above through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, poverty of emphasis on the Spirit brings about weakness in the ability of the Church to play its role effectively in the world.

The neglect of the Holy Spirit has a lot of implications for society. In the first place, Scripture rightly proclaims that creation came into being through the Holy Spirit and cannot remain in existence without him (Genesis 1: 1-2; Psalm 104: 29-30). Moreover, the Spirit is not only the principle of unity of the Church but of the entire cosmos. The French Jesuit, theologian and Palaeontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin held the view

that the energy and force that are responsible for the genesis and progress of the evolutionary universe and which directs it to a point of unity in Christ is divine and in the nature of love and spirit. Through divine love energy, God creates by unifying, sustains the universe and guides it to perfection. The more love energy spreads through the world, the more unified, personalized, and spiritualized everything becomes⁶⁰. The unity, love and solidarity which the Spirit brings are essential for genuine development in the world. Hence, speaking about social order and its development, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council rightly said that "The Spirit of God, who, with wondrous providence, directs the course of time and renews the face of the earth assists at this development"⁶¹.

Today, the natural environment is suffering and humanity is being called to conversion, a new attitude and relationship with nature. Pope Francis in the *Encyclical Laudato Si*, calls the attention of men and women of this age to the present situation of "our sister" and "our mother" earth which according to him "cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has

⁶⁰ Cf. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "A Mental Threshold Across our Path: from Cesmos to Cosmogenesis" (1951), in *Activation of Energy*, 266 and also Bona Ikenna Ugwu, *The Holy Spirit as Present and Active in Cosmic Turmoil and Human Suffering: A Dialogue between Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Jürgen Moltmann*, Rome, Holy Ghost Fathers, 2004, p. 120-130 where the author exposes the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin.

⁶¹ Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 26.

endowed her”⁶². A revision of the relationship between creation, human beings and God is proposed as the most fundamental step towards this problem. Mark Wallace recommends that “hope for a renewed earth is best founded on belief in the Spirit as the divine force within the cosmos who continually works to sustain all forms of life”⁶³. Thus, a Spirit based orientation offers great hope for achieving the goal of ecological responsibility in our world.

Given the consequences and practical implications of the neglect of the Holy Spirit on God, the Church and society at large, we are left with little or no option than taking the path of more emphasis on the Holy Spirit through studies, worship, devotion, prayer and service. Hence, it is necessary that the new consciousness of the Spirit be promoted, guided and sustained.

Sustaining the New Shift of Emphasis

Today, the Church and the world are witnessing a shift towards the Spirit. The spiritual sphere which seemed to have been swallowed up in the pursuit of modern enlightenment, scientific and technological progress and other forms of development is coming back with resounding emphasis. From lack of emphasis, we are on the direction of what might qualify for exaggerated emphasis on the Spirit. Joachim of Fiore, a Medieval Cistercian Monk and mystic predicted an age of the Spirit which according

⁶² Francis, Pope, *Encyclical Letter, On the Care for our Common Home*, Laudato Si, 2015, no. 2.

⁶³ Mark Wallace, “The Wounded Spirit as the Basis for Hope in an Age of Radical Ecology”, in *Christianity and Ecology*, Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 52.

to him will be the time of deep spiritual understanding, the rule of the inner life and true freedom⁶⁴. Mark Wallace seems to suggest that the prophecy of Joachim is being fulfilled in our time. He observed that "At the dawn of a new millennium I believe we are witnessing a profound sea change in the spiritual sensibilities of our culture. Many people now sense that we live in the 'age of the Spirit', a time in which late-twentieth-century culture is undergoing a fundamental shift in its religious sensibilities"⁶⁵.

This yearning for the Spirit finds is expressed in different ways; some traditional and others not very conventional. The increased interest which people have today in astrology, horoscope, divination, magic, witchcraft, alchemy and all forms of mysticism, esoteric science and occultism can be explained as part of the new spiritual sensibility. Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements are also concrete expressions of new age of the Spirit. Since the birth of Neo-Pentecostalism at the beginning of the 20th century (precisely in 1901) in USA, it has grown to become a real challenge to the mainline Churches particularly in Africa. Among other things, the "Pentecostals emphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit to the individual and in the Church"⁶⁶ and this partly accounts for their rapid growth and success in evangelism. Uzukwu shares this view when he

⁶⁴ Cf. Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I, pp. 126-137 where the author presents the ideas of Joachim on the three phases of history.

⁶⁵ M. Wallace, *The Wounded Spirit...*, p. 51.

⁶⁶ Hilary C. Achunike, *The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians in Nigeria*, Onitsha: Africana First Publishers, 2004, p. 14.

notes that the independent churches and sects in Africa have recorded tremendous success and he attributes this to the fact that “many of these churches tune into the dimension of spirit, which is vital to the African notion of person”⁶⁷. In many ways, the new emphasis on the Spirit in the Catholic Church and beyond owes a lot to the Second Vatican Council.

The Second Vatican Council played and continues to play a very important role towards the rise and consolidation of the Spirit consciousness in the world today. As it were, “Pope John XXIII thought that Vatican II would be a new Pentecost; he liked to recall the expectations of those who would receive the Spirit spoke of in Acts 1: 14...”⁶⁸. Even though the desire of the supreme Pontiff was not largely fulfilled, his prayers were answered in many ways. The Council has remained a water-shed as far as the promotion of interest on the Holy Spirit is concerned. Without having any particular document, chapter or section of the Council decisions devoted to the Holy Spirit, a total number of two hundred and fifty eight references to the Spirit is found in the conciliar documents. Pentecostalism officially came to birth in the Catholic Church in 1967 in Duquesne University of the Holy Ghost, Pittsburgh as one of the concrete outcomes of the Council. The continent of Africa has had a fair share of the presence and activities of the Charismatic Movements with all the challenges they pose to the traditional Christians.

⁶⁷ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 109.

⁶⁸ M. O’Carroll, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, p. 223.

In the light of the new wave of Spirit consciousness in the Church and world, the question that we want to ask ourselves is: Is it still correct to describe the Holy Spirit as the neglected, forgotten or ignored person of the Triune God? With the changes that have taken place in terms of moving from less to more emphasis on the Spirit, has it not reached the stage where we can remove the Holy Spirit from the list of the neglected matters in Christian faith and theological discourse? So far, Catholic theology, missionary enterprise, liturgy, devotion and prayers are yet to reflect sufficiently well the new awareness of the Spirit which characterize the present world. As far as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is concerned, the Church is still lagging behind. The future calls for more work on this direction.

Recommendations

Some concrete steps need to be taken in order to create and recreate the future for better understanding and relationship with the Holy Spirit in the Church, particularly in Africa. In the first place, care must be taken to avoid falling into the problem of "Pneumacentrism" which implies an overemphasis on the Spirit to the point where Christ and the Father become neglected. The Spirit is always inseparably united with the Son, the Word made flesh and we must not under any pretext divide what God has joined together. We need a Pneumatology that is in every sense Trinitarian to remedy the lacuna created by the neglect of the Holy Spirit over years. It is also important that we promote an understanding of the Holy Spirit which is intimately connected with the Church and at the same time guarantees the freedom of the individuals in the community.

Bujo proposes that African ecclesiology constructed from the point of view of African Christology (Christ as Proto-Ancestor), must be evidently Pneumatological. For it is only the Holy Spirit, the “life-giving dynamic force” that binds the Father and the Son in a vital unity that can create living communities of believers⁶⁹. Communities so constituted by the Spirit are constantly renewed in vigour by his gifts bestowed on individuals who by baptism became the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. As it were, “the presence of the Spirit which fills the community and which dwells in each baptised Christian becomes manifest through the diverse gifts bestowed by the Spirit for the building of the community”⁷⁰. And “This personal and individual link with the Spirit in the Church-community is the basis of the freedom or liberation of each Christian. It is the freedom to create a better community, a renewed African community, a better world”⁷¹.

Beyond the organizational boundaries of the ecclesia, the cosmic dimension of the Spirit needs to be developed to take care of the activities of the Spirit in the realm of other religions and cultures of the world. Fuellenbach is of the view that “In our age, which has been called an age of broken religious symbols, there is an urgent need for a new religious symbol which can cut through all cultural barriers”⁷². This symbol is mostly needed in Africa which consists of developing nations made up of people of different religions and ethnic origins and cultural orientations.

⁶⁹ Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, p. 94-95.

⁷⁰ E. E. Uzukwu, *The Listening Church*, p. 108.

⁷¹ E. E. Uzukwu, *The Listening Church*, p. 108.

⁷² John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997, p. 5.

Most of the nations of Africa are faced with serious challenges of disintegration on account of not only the diversities in question but also because of the effects of colonialism, slave trade, neo-colonialism, debts and the local political exploiters that took over from the colonial masters. Given that belief in spirit(s) is common to Africans, the Holy Spirit would more readily provide the highly needed symbol of unity and integration for the developing nations of Africa. It offers a basis of encounter and interaction for Christians of different confessions and effective dialogue among people of different religions.

Conclusion

We can say without hesitation that the Holy Spirit is neglected particularly in the Catholic Church of the Latin rite. There are signs of change in this trend thanks to a number of factors acting from within and outside the body of Christ that promote fresh interests and awareness of the Spirit in matters of life and faith. This new shift from de-emphasis to emphasis on the Spirit needs to adopt an integral approach which takes on board the trinitarian nature of the Godhead, the different areas of Christian faith , pastorals, prayer, ethics, ministry, formation), the individual, the community and the cosmos. The Church in Africa should take advantage of the emerging emphasis on the Spirit and consolidate it through study and devotion and allow its formation of the clergy, religious and lay faithful to be more deeply informed by the Spirit. For, Christianity will remain a stranger in Africa as long as it continues to suffer from Pneumatological deficiency. Therefore, a Church marked by a sturdy accent on the Spirit in theology, liturgy, mission, formation, devotion, and ethics is the type we hope, pray and work for in Africa today and in the future.