

# **The Role of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as part of Lay Missionary Groups in Nigeria**

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## **Dedication**

This academic work is dedicated to my very beloved mother of blessed memory, who smiles at me from heaven, Ezinne Lolo Theresa Ezimma Virginia Onyejuluwa who taught me the joy of faith in God, and humanity, and hard work as the virtue of the living in imitation of God the Worker!

It is also dedicated to members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal worldwide and to all who believe and seek the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son and adore God in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

## Biography

The author hails from Utuh town in Nnewi South of Anambra State in the Southeast of Nigeria. He was born on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1962, in the nearby town of Ihiala (at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Hospital Ihiala and was baptised five days after in the Catholic parish of St Martin's, just opposite the hospital) in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State. The writer did his Nursery School in Utuh Central School (1967 – 1969) and started his Primary School in the same school (1970 – 1973) and finished in Azigbo Primary School (1973 – 1976) in Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The researcher started his secondary school education in St. Paul's Junior Seminary Umunuko, Ukpok (1976 – 1977) and continued in All Hallows Junior Seminary Onitsha (1977 – 1979) and graduated from secondary school education in Abbot Boys Secondary School Ihiala (1979 – 1982).

The writer began his seminary training (1983 – 1984), in Spirituality, in the National Missionary Seminary of St. Paul of Nigeria in Iperu-Remo of Ogun State in Nigeria. The Missionary Society of St. Paul of Nigeria was founded by the Nigerian Bishop's Conference in 1977, the first Indigenous Missionary Institute in Africa. He did his philosophy studies in the same Missionary Institute in the Gwagwalada Campus in Abuja in Nigeria (1984 – 1987). The author studied theology in the same campus (1987 – 1991); and was ordained a deacon in 1990 and a Catholic priest on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1991 for the Missionary Society of St Paul of Nigeria.

His first Missionary assignment was in Ekiti diocese (St. John's Orin- Ekiti, 1991 – 1992) in Ekiti State in Nigeria. From there, he was posted to Lagos Archdiocese to St. Mary's Catholic Church, Ajegunle in Lagos State in Nigeria (1993). In 1993, two of his classmates and the author were posted to work as assistant parish priests in the diocese of Mzuzu in Malawi in

Central Africa (1993 – 1995). He was recalled back to Nigeria to work in Lagos Archdiocese in St. Theresa's parish Ajilete in Ogun State as an assistant parish priest (1996); now, this particular parish is in Abeokuta diocese in Nigeria. The writer was appointed the parish priest of St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, Ladi-lac Bariga in Lagos Archdiocese (1996 – 2004). Then his missionary journey to the United Kingdom began on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005 to the Archdiocese of Southwark in Our Lady of the Annunciation, Addiscombe in Croydon as an assistant parish priest (2005 – 2006). From there, he was transferred to work as an assistant parish priest in the parish of The Assumption, Deptford in London (2006 – 2008).

In September 2008, he was posted to the diocese of Portsmouth in the United Kingdom to St Joseph and St Edmund parish in Southampton as an assistant parish priest. In the following year in September 2009, he was made the parish priest of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Southbourne in Bournemouth Dorset (2009 – 2016). From September 2006, the author was made a hospital chaplain in Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital as well as an assistant parish priest of the Churches of Holy Ghost and St Bede, Basingstoke in Hampshire in the UK (2016 – 2018). At present, the writer is the parish priest of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus parish, Totton, and Our Lady of the Assumption and St Edward the Confessor Church, Lyndhurst in Southampton as well as a part-time Catholic Chaplain to Southampton Hospital.

The author of this thesis was told about the Graduate Theological Foundation in 2014 by Rev. Dr. Anthony Mbanefo, MSP, an alumnus of GTF, and a friend and classmate of the writer in the senior seminary. I applied and was given admission on August 26, 2015 to the Doctor of Philosophy in Theological Studies.

## Abstract

The author of this thesis has gone through a thorough and fascinating research to study to discover the Holy Spirit; who he is, his personality and attributes, and his importance in the life of the Church, the individual members of the Church, and the salvation of the whole of humanity. The writer leads his readers to an amazing discovery of the origin of the Holy Spirit who is actually the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son, who are mutually in love for each other and this Their intimate love is the Holy Spirit himself, their mutual Gift to humanity. Readers are led through the Scriptures in accessing the activities of the Holy Spirit in the Church, in creation and the individual persons, and so He is identified as a divine Person with divine attributes such as Being all powerful, just, merciful and unchanging, a Creator, loving, forgiving, and so constituting him as God since he is the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son. We can then deduce that the Holy Spirit is Equal to God the Father and God the Son, and so, the Holy Spirit is to be adored and glorified.

The goal of this thesis is to examine how the Catholic Charismatic Renewal forms part of the Lay Missionary Groups in Nigeria which led to an in-depth study of the divine Personhood of the Holy Spirit, who is the Originator and Guide of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Readers are led to appreciate the difference between religious movements founded by individual believers or groups of Christians and this particular spiritual movement (the Renewal) founded and guided by the Holy Spirit Himself. The Renewal is identified as part of the gifts of the Second Vatican Council and the teachings of the Church Magisterium and it enables believers to discern the continual Pentecostal events in the daily life of the Church, the individual believers and the creation as a whole. The argument is made that the Renewal is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church to rejuvenate the Church and its members.



Importantly, we are led to understand that the laity are not secondary members of the Church but share in the equality of all the baptized as well as in all the mission of the Church, particularly through evangelizing by the witness of their lives.

Readers are made aware that they can understand and encounter the Holy Spirit by being loyal to the Magisterium of the Church, and studying the Scriptures, the teachings of the Church Fathers and the Theologians. The Spirit must be discerned by being obedient to the Magisterium of the Church to avoid conflicting spirits and the vice of pride and the sin of presumption. This is because some uninformed members of the Renewal can foment serious problems for the Renewal and the Church as a community of believers. Again, it is explicitly and categorically pointed out that the Renewal is not a rival or a parallel church but a spiritual movement under the jurisdiction and guidance of the Church Magisterium: the members of the Renewal are members of the parish Church who are supervised and spiritually nurtured by their parish priest who is a co-worker of the local Ordinary. It is pointed out the vice of pride and the claims of extraordinary knowledge and superior possession of the Holy Spirit is apparent in some members of the Renewal, and as a result, their refusal to obey the guidance of the parish priest has caused and continues to cause schism in the Catholic Church. Hence, it is evident that the Church authority has not put in place adequate measures to educate the members of the Renewal and the Catholic faithful in general with regards to the doctrine, morals and the teachings of the Church. The Catholic faithful in general, including clergy, should engage in ongoing formation in Catholic spirituality, doctrine and the teachings of the Church. This is because on one hand, even some members of the clergy can constitute some problems due to ignorance, lack of administrative acumen and patience with regard to the members of the Renewal who only need Christian understanding, education and continuous catechesis.

The writer of the thesis has dug deep into the activities of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of both Saint Gabriel and Saint Gerald parishes in the Archdiocese of Lagos in Nigeria to showcase what can go wrong with this fast growing spiritual movement in the Catholic Church if the Church authority fails to get its act together.

However, on the final note, it is important to note that the advantages of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are numerous, which goes to buttress the point made by Saint John Paul II that the Renewal is one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council, hence since its inception; the four successive Popes have supported the Spiritual Movement including Pope Francis the reigning Pontiff. It is rightly argued that the Renewal is Catholic, and so the Catholic faithful are encouraged to join in, support and facilitate the Movement for the renewal of the Church and its individual members.

## Introduction

The writer of this thesis sets out to establish who the Holy Spirit is because it is arguable that along the way of its evolution so far, the Church has in some sense lost track of the Holy Spirit, and it has become imperative for the Church to rediscover and educate her children on the personality, identity and importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, the individual members and the salvation of mankind to which Christ has entrusted the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. At present, this mission of the Church is urgent in the light of the new evangelization and the advent of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which could be described as the “baby” of the Holy Spirit, part of the Lay Missionary Groups in the church in which the faithful participate in voluntarily to proclaim the Kingdom of God by word and deed. The new movement of the Holy Spirit (the Charismatic Renewal) has become a powerful force in the Church. Some misguided members, however, threaten to “confuse or overwhelm” many of the Catholic faithful, more negatively than positively. So, if the Charismatic Renewal is part of the numerous pious associations in the Catholic Church which are authorized to work for the spiritual wellbeing of the members, the church and the whole of mankind, then, all the faithful ought to know and appreciate the person and identity of the Holy Spirit, and the Renewal which Saint John Paul II described as one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council. The person and the role of the Holy Spirit have become so important that the faithful have to have a sound knowledge of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. This is more so because many Christians lay claim of the Holy Spirit when some of them talk out of both sides of the mouth and so spread confusion and doubt. But the Spirit of God is truth without confusion and no shadow of doubt.

In the past, the role of the laity was insignificant and secondary to that of the clergy and the institutional Church. The laity was considered as neither members of the clergy nor religious

as there was no clarity about their role: hence the derogatory notion that the role of the laity was only to pay, pray, obey and listen to the Church clerical leaders.<sup>1</sup> But the role of the laity has undergone a dramatic transformation, thanks to God for the gift of the Second Vatican Council. There is no doubt that the papacy of Pius XI and Pius XII encouraged the advent of the lay movement, the official acceptance and promotion of Catholic Action, that is, giving a definite mandate enabling the laity to cooperate or even participate with the Church hierarchy in the mission of the Church. This underscored the fundamental unity and equality of all the baptized, lay or ordained. Venerable Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical Letter, **Mystici Corporis**, frankly acknowledged that no less than the hierarchy, the laity has an obligation to the Church's total mission.<sup>2</sup> The laity by their actions consecrates the world itself to God<sup>3</sup> as well as evangelizing by the witness of their lives<sup>4</sup> and their words of preaching in their places of work, recreation and business. The lay faithful are seen all the time under the umbrella of the pious societies they belong to in the church and the authority of their own faith as baptized members of the church preach along the streets, in the neighbourhood and on buses and trains and other public arenas. They preach fearlessly and with joy of the Holy Spirit. In this study, the writer wants to showcase the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as an important lay missionary group in the Church's New Evangelization endeavour in the church. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is believed to be the movement of the Holy Spirit offered to the entire Church to rejuvenate every member and the whole Church. This study will help us to discover how the Holy Spirit works in each of us as our inspiration for noble work for the church and for humanity and as our joy of life and strength of purpose. The Holy Spirit gives meaning to

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<sup>1</sup>Aurelie A. Hagstrom, *The Emerging Laity, Vocation, Mission and Spirituality*, New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2010, p. 15. Hereafter as Hagstrom, *The Emerging Laity*.

<sup>2</sup>Venerable Pius XII, Encyclical Letter on the Mystical Body of Christ **Mystici Corporis Christi** to our Venerable Brethren, Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops, and other local Ordinaries enjoying peace and communion with the Apostolic See, 1943, par. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, in A. Flannery (Ed), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. 1., New York 1984, par. 34. Hereafter as LG.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, 12.

and direction life. This study will help us to understand that the Holy Spirit has been all along the hidden motivating factor and force directing, guiding and influencing our life for better.

In the first chapter, the writer of this thesis tries to define who the Holy Spirit is. This is essential because the average Catholic faithful is able to describe with some degree of confidence that God is the Creator of all things and people (Hebrews 11: 3; Revelation 4: 11; Genesis 2: 7 – 24), and that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is the Son of God (John 3:18), the Saviour of mankind (Matthew 1: 20 – 21; Philippians 3:20), but God the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity appears unfamiliar and distant to their understanding. The average Christians are not able to demonstrate with convincing familiarity in relation to the Holy Spirit who gives life and perfection to the church.

However, according to the author of this thesis, the Holy Spirit is the Gift of the Father and the Son to humanity (John 14: 15 – 16). In other words, he is not inherently part of the living beings but a gratuitous gift from Yahweh (Judge 6: 34; 2 Chronicle 6: 34; Ezekiel 39: 29). He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son (John 14: 17; CCC 687), and so, he is God (John 14: 26; Genesis 1: 2), the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. As a divine Person, human beings need him (John 16: 13 – 14; Acts 16: 25 – 26; Mark 16: 17 – 18; 1 Corinthians 12: 8 – 11) since he is the Creator of all things and people (Isaiah 45: 12; Psalm 104: 30; 139: 1 – 6). Humans need him as their Advocate (John 14: 16, 26; 15: 26; 16: 7; 2 Corinthians 12: 9; John 3: 34; Acts 15: 9; 1 John 2: 27; Romans 8: 16); because they are baptized with the Holy Spirit (John 1: 32 – 33) who makes them a new creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 2 – 3; 1 Peter 2) and children of God and brothers and sisters of one another. From the above description, we can deduce that the Holy Spirit gives life as well as acts and effects physical and spiritual activities.

The actions of the Holy Spirit are evident in the Old and the New Testaments and understanding the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament influences our understanding in the New Testament. This divine knowledge defines our life and its purpose and destiny.

Chapter Two examines what the Fathers of the Church understood about the Holy Spirit and his impact on their lives. Their comprehension of the Holy Spirit helps us to appreciate the activities of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures which also has an impact on the way other Christian denominations understand the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. The Fathers of the Church believed and taught that the Holy Spirit is God as do the teachings of the Magisterium about the Holy Spirit and those of the different successive Popes in relation to the third Person of the Holy Trinity.

In Chapter Three, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of St. Gabriel's Catholic Parish Bariga in the Archdiocese of Lagos in Nigeria is introduced. It is explained that the Renewal is a spiritual movement started and guided by the Holy Spirit and its membership comprises of men and women, young and old, laity and clergy and consecrated men and women. The question is raised as to whether some of the activities of Renewal could discernibly be perceived as the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit?

Again, the behaviours and activities of some of the members of the Renewal which can be considered harmful to the Church and to their members as well are exposed. Hence, the Renewal is presented ambivalently since some of its members could constitute a possible source of problems to the Church.

In Chapter Four, the bitter reality of the deep level of ignorance of many members of the Renewal with regard to the basic teachings of the Catholic faith, morals, doctrine and the general running of the Catholic Church is considered along with a number of ways the members of the charismatic Renewal could cause some damaging problems to the church. Certain ways the Church may forestall those potential problems are proffered; for instance, by organizing ongoing formation for members of the Renewal as well as the whole Catholic faithful including the clergy. Importantly, it is underlined that the Renewal is **NOT** a rival or a parallel church but a spiritual movement in the Catholic Church under the jurisdiction of the Magisterium of the Church.

In Chapter Five, there is presented the advantages of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal to the Church as a whole and to the society in general as well as the importance of the Renewal as a necessary organ and mechanization for New Evangelization in the Church.

## **Methodology**

The author of this thesis has applied the genetic-evolutive method by examining his theme as it appears in Scripture and Tradition (genetic), and following it through its historical growth (evolutive).

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Holy Spirit remains the Truth, the Advocate who leads us to the complete truth. When he was about to ascend to his Father in heaven, Jesus told his disciples, ‘ ... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth ... he will be with you, and will be in you ... I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you. (John 14: 15 -19). Perhaps, the Church along its evolutionary history lost track of the Holy Spirit, and now wants to rediscover and re-establish the importance of the Holy Spirit in its pastoral ministry to the faithful and humanity. In this study, I want to trace the movements and power of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments, and how we encounter him in the Church and experience him in our individual and collective living out our faith even outside the church. It all means that we perceive the Holy Spirit not only in the Church but in the world of nature, in all creation.

#### **1.1. God and the Holy Spirit**

The ordinary Christian men and women may be familiar with God our Father and his Son Jesus Christ but the Holy Spirit may sound far-fetched to some Christians. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that it is only the Spirit of God who comprehends the thoughts of God as well as revealing His Word Christ to us (John 14: 17).<sup>5</sup> Today, we urgently need to grasp and appreciate the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity to be able to go through the vicissitudes of our contemporary society without losing our bearings. Rev. Dr. Benjamin Okon, MSP, in his foreword for the book titled *Charisms For Ministry, An Exploration Of How The Manifest Charisms In The Church Can Be Recovered And Restored For Ministry In The Catholic*

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<sup>5</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, (Burns & Oates: A Continuum Imprint) Trowbridge, Great Britain: The Cromwell Press, 1999, par. 687. Hereafter abbreviated as CCC.



Church Today, by Dr. Ayo Emmanuel Efodigbue, says that in today's contemporary world, secularism, emotivism, pragmatism, and nihilism have not only redefined human life and existence, but have systematically elevated man to the position of a deity. Dr. Okon explains that this often puts in doubt and questions the place of God and the Holy Spirit in our human day-to-day living.<sup>6</sup> As Christians, how much do we appreciate the place and importance of the Holy Spirit in our individual personal lives and in the life of the Church?<sup>7</sup> Is it not the Holy Spirit who bestows the supernatural gift for the building up and maintenance of the body of Christ, the Church, both as the people of God<sup>8</sup> and as the concrete place of worship? A close look at the members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal will show you that they are a group of Catholic members who live a daily practical experience of life of faith in God within and outside the Christian community, indicating the divine presence in them which enables them to come together in worship through the power of the Holy Spirit. I do not mean that it is only in the members of the charismatic group one perceives the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We have other members of the church other than the Charismatic members who do a lot of charity work in and outside the church and they cannot do such noble works without the prompting and empowering of the Holy Spirit. For example CAFOD – known as Catholic Agency for Overseas Development; an international development charity and the official aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales which has the blessing and backing of The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. CAFOD reaches out to people living in poverty with practical help, whatever their religion or none and culture. This is one of the largest global church networks in the world and they have the potential to reach everyone and equally important is that they mount serious campaign for global justice, so that every woman, man and child can live a full and dignified life. The Catholic Church is not a

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<sup>6</sup> Efodigbue A. Emmanuel, *Charisms For Ministry: An Exploration of how the Manifest Charisms in the Early Church can be Recovered and Restored For Ministry in the Catholic Church Today*, Maitland, U.S.A: Xulon Press, 2017, P. 17. Hereafter abbreviated as Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 17.

<sup>8</sup> LG pars. 359 – 360.

charity organization but the amount of charitable work being done in the church or outside the church in the name of God is overwhelming which speaks loudly of the presence of God and the power of the Holy Spirit in the world. I can rightly claim without fear of contradiction that there is no organization whether civil or religious that can outdo the Catholic family in works of charity in the whole world. The Holy Spirit remains the Truth and the Advocate who leads us to the complete truth (John 15: 26) and prompts us to do work for God and for the wellbeing of humanity. What about the Legion of Mary whose members engage in ministering to the poor, the elderly and the sick in within the church members and outside the church? The members of the Block Rosary Crusade have a special apostolate for the sick and the elderly both within and outside the Church. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society is known for their ministry to the poor. These spiritual and social works for the wellbeing of parishioners, Christians and members of society are prompted and carried out with joy by the power of the Holy Spirit. The influence of the Holy Spirit is never lacking in the life of those who live a discerning life who work for God in the service of humanity.

## **1.2. Who is the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Spirit of the Son of God, whom the Father sends into our hearts to reveal to us the Father and the Son.<sup>9</sup> So then, he is the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son. Through the sacrament of baptism, the Holy Spirit communicates to us the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son,<sup>10</sup> and so we share in God's life and become his children (Galatians 4: 5 – 7). To share in God's life is to bear God's Spirit, who leads us to the Word, that is, to the Son, and the Son presents us to the Father, and the Father confers on us immortality. Just as it may not be possible to see Jesus, the Son of God, without the Holy Spirit, and no one can approach the Father without

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<sup>9</sup> CCC 683.

<sup>10</sup> CCC 683.

the Son, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God can only be obtained through the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> He is the One whom the Father has sent into our hearts, the Spirit of his Son who is truly God (CCC 689). After eating with them, Jesus said to them, “Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the fulfilment of the Father’s promise about which I have spoken to you (Acts 1: 4). The Spirit which is the promise of the Father is inseparable from the Father and the Son and He is the gift of love for the world. The Father sending his Word does not fail to send his Breath as the Spirit who reveals the Son (CCC 689). He is the Spirit who ‘anointed’ Jesus as Christ, the Messiah (CCC 690) who accomplished the divine mission of God the Father. It was necessary that the Messiah be anointed by the Spirit of the Lord at once as King and Priest and Prophet to fulfil the messianic hope of Israel (CCC 436). And the glorification of Christ facilitated the coming of the Holy Spirit from the Father to those who believe in him, communicating his glory to them, that is, the Holy Spirit who glorifies him (CCC 690). So to believe in Christ whom the Father sends is to believe in the Holy Spirit and to encounter him. That is why the confession of the Son’s Lordship is made in the Holy Spirit by those who receive him (CCC 690). No one understands the mind of God except the Holy Spirit who reveals God to us as well as makes Christ known to us who is the Word of God. But, it is interesting, that the Spirit who ‘has spoken through the prophets’ makes us hear the Father’s Word, but we do not hear the Spirit himself. The Spirit does not speak of himself (CCC 687). **(MASSDIILE)**

### **1.3. How do we then know the Spirit?**

What do we believe and profess? In the Creed, millions of Christians each week profess as their common faith the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken

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<sup>11</sup> CCC 263.

through the prophets (The Nicene Creed, 381). The Creed is a reflection on the meaning of our Christian faith in the Holy Spirit. Christians can boast to know something about God the Father and God the Son but not much or even nothing about God the Holy Spirit. Although, Christians claim to be more familiar with Jesus Christ the Son of God but, they can't truly appreciate him, except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). Hence it is fundamentally important to understand the personality of the Holy Spirit. God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts who cries out: Abba! That is, Father (Galatians 4:6). God by sending the Spirit of his Son into our hearts makes us children of God. And again, to know that we have faith in God is only possible in the Holy Spirit who helps us to be in touch with Christ because we must have been touched by the Spirit first of all. It is the Spirit who comes to meet us and kindles faith in us. Baptism remains the first sacrament of the faith by which the Holy Spirit communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son (CCC 683). It is the sacrament of baptism that gives us the grace of new birth in God the Father, through Jesus his Son, in the Holy Spirit. Christians are led to the Word, that is, to Jesus the Son because God gives them his Spirit, and the Son presents them to the Father who confers incorruptibility on them. And it is impossible to see God's Son without the Spirit, and no one can approach the Father without the Son, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of God's Son is obtained through the Holy Spirit (CCC 683).<sup>12</sup> In other words, Christians who claim to know the Son of God Jesus Christ may not truly know him if they do not know the Holy Spirit who reveals the Father and the Son. Some Christians are like the Pharisees and some Jews who refused to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and rather, preferred to defend the written law than the satisfaction of the human needs when Jesus, on the Sabbath day, restored the sight of the man born blind (John 9: 13 – 33). The Jews claimed to believe in God as well as being disciples of Moses but

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<sup>12</sup> St Irenaeus, Dem. Ap. 7: SCh 62, 41 – 42.

rejected Jesus the Messiah because he restored a man to health on the Sabbath day. It is surprising that they would not believe in the divinity of Jesus despite the extraordinary deeds he did. It was obvious that the Jews who claimed to be sons and daughters of God did not recognize the way God worked and revealed himself to his people. They could not see that God was working through Jesus. And the man born blind who received his sight from Jesus rightly said to them “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (John 9: 33). In their rejection of Jesus, they even claimed that Jesus was a sinner (John 9: 24), and in his response to such blasphemy, he said “I don’t know whether he is a sinner or not; I only know that I was blind and now I see” (John 9: 25). He healed my blindness and now I can see. Here human logic is applied to demonstrate our faith in God. The man who has received his sight is saying something like: ‘If he has not come from God, he wouldn’t have healed my blindness.’ This is just a straight forward reasoning or logic. In other words, it is only someone who has come from God who would be able to do what he has done. This is a demonstration that reason and faith do not contradict each other. They are amicable partners. That is why Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter, Faith and Reason says Faith and Reason are like two wings on which human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth. According to Fr Mitch Pacwa, SJ, faith builds on reason and completes it. Reason and faith contain each other. But it was all too much for the Pharisees to accept such truth. They rather preferred to deny that the man was blind all these years before Jesus’ encounter with him. To attribute such huge divine miracle to Jesus was simply too much for them to endure. They preferred to suspect that Jesus and the man faked the miracle, at least to assuage their wounded ego. To further exploit people’s vulnerability, they were all well aware that the law recognized that a false prophet could produce false miracles for his own false selfish purposes (Deuteronomy 13:1 - 5). There is a true story in my town in Utah of a woman who was breaking happy news to her colleagues about another woman whose son has just graduated as a medical doctor. Another

embittered woman who was definitely unhappy about such wonderful remark being accorded to the woman remarked: ‘Is it that boy whose grandfather stole tubers of yam during the Nigerian-Briafran war and nearly died in prison.’ She made efforts to deflate the accolade being laid on her fellow woman. Another unfortunate aspect of the biblical story is that the common Jews were afraid of the Pharisees because they had enormous power. They had the power to excommunicate anyone from the synagogue and, for them; anyone excommunicated from the synagogue was assumed shut out from the congregation of God’s people, that is, from the Kingdom of God. Who would like to be shut off from the Kingdom of God? The only difference today is that majority of modern people prefer their freedom to the Kingdom of God. They even deny that God exists. They cannot be threatened by man-made god or by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For those of us who believe God is the Father of every human being but for them God doesn’t even exist. But, what about their salvation? I believe God knows how to save his people. For us Christians, we must learn how to discern the spirits especially man-made gods. We need to come back to the question of how to discern the Spirit of God. So the all important question is, how can some Christians claim to know the truth of God the Father and God the Son if they do not appreciate the person of the Holy Spirit? Hence it is necessary and important to investigate, learn and understand the Holy Spirit.

#### **1.4. Names associated with the Holy Spirit**

In Sacred Scripture, the Holy Spirit is given various names: Gift, Lord, Spirit of God, Spirit of Truth and Paraclete, Love, among others. Each of these terms highlights a particular characteristic of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity.<sup>13</sup> To identify each of the names given to the Holy Spirit will help us to recognize Him in our daily living and in the lives of other people with whom we interact. We will come to understand that he has been all along

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<sup>13</sup> Opus Dei, (2014) Christian Life, Summaries of Catholic Teaching, Topic 12: I Believe in the Holy Spirit. I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church. <https://opusdei.uk/en-uk/article/topic-12-i-believe-in-the-holy-i-believe-in-the-holy-catholic-church/>. Accessed on March 2, 2018.

with us leading, guiding and prompting us. He is “Gift” because the Father and the Son send him to us gratuitously: the Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts when we receive the sacrament of baptism which precedes the reception of other sacraments. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us comes with all graces and gifts, the greatest of which is eternal life together with the other divine Persons: in him we have access to the Father through the Son.<sup>14</sup> The Catholic Church recognizes and teaches that there are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which are listed in the Book of Prophet Isaiah as Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2 – 3). Our God is generous in giving his gifts. As much as he allows his sunlight for the benefit of both the good and the evil and his rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), God spreads his gifts to his sons and daughters as he wills without depriving them of his gifts necessary for their basic survival and salvation. To grow in our spiritual life is to imitate God our Father and be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Those who reciprocate God’s generous nature, the Scripture encourage them because God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Spiritual neophytes most of the times claim that God has not given them any gifts, or that; they do not know what gifts God has given them. It is true that we may not know our gifts and need help from others or spiritual councillors/directors to recognize our own individual gifts, we can recognize and appreciate some of the above enumerated gifts of the Holy Spirit visible in the brothers and sisters in the Christian community and praise God for them. If we are able to recognize the gifts of others and thank God for them as well as encourage them, we will begin to recognize and appreciate our own gifts because God has endowed each person with gifts according to his plans and purposes for that person as well as his/her neighbours. The fact of being able to recognize gifts in other people and thank God for them is itself a gift from God. There is no doubt that in the church community there are some men and women who put their gifts in use for the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

building up of the Body of Christ, the Church. The Catholic Church in particular remains the greatest religious organization in the world where the faithful give their time, talent, knowledge, money, wealth and a lot more without reservation or any charge for the service of God's Kingdom and for the welfare of humanity. For God's sake, the people of God in the Catholic community give selflessly and happily. The Catholic Church remains the most organized institution in the whole world, and it is mind-blowing that its numerous structures and institutions are run on the generosity of Catholic men and women of goodwill the world over. The selfless giving, service, sacrifice and commitment of individual Catholics, Catholic communities, societies and organizations are demonstration of God's existence, love and mercy. The generous giving and sacrifice of the Catholic faithful is unimaginable and unparalleled and goes to show the goodness of the Lord we serve. It is important to note that God gives each person gifts but we need to discover our individual gifts and varied ways God wants us to serve him in mankind. No one is created without gifts but our gifts are different to each other according to God's plans and purposes for us and for the society. Although different, we are gifted by the same Holy Spirit. We do not need to be envious of other people's gifts, talents and skills because we are created uniquely, and our uniqueness gives glory to God our Creator, and allows us to meet the needs of others. We may not realize our potential if we fail to try. The professional athletes are not born with special talents. If you observe them, they exercise constantly, maintain healthy lifestyle, and are constantly civilized in their character. We may have to try our hands at different things. Life challenges us to test the waters. It is mind-blowing to think of what Peter did. How could he walk on water if he had not made the attempt to step on it (Matthew 14:22 – 29)? Very importantly, let us not feel bad about our limitation but accept ourselves as we are. To accept our limitations helps free us from the burden of being jealous and trying to compete with others, and facilitates us to doing what God has designed for us. Part of discovering our gifts is to accept constructive



feedback both from friends and perceived enemies regarding our character, our effectiveness in certain areas, and areas we need improvements or areas where we are really not good at all. So openness of the spirit to constructive criticism will help us to recognize what gifts we have and what we are good at. We are beings who have need for social interaction and communication. We can realise self-affirmation through co-operation with others. Hence, according to prophet Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can understand it.” While creating us God has his tasks mapped out for us to discover and do them: “What we are; is God’s work. He has created us, in Christ Jesus, for the good works he has prepared, that we should devote ourselves to them” (Ephesians 2:10).

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are present in their fullness in Jesus Christ who has come to give us life in abundance. Saint Paul writes of the “manifestations of the Spirit” in the faithful in 1 Corinthians 12:7 – 11. As followers of Christ, we can perceive the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the brothers and sisters in the community of believers. Saint Paul emphasizes that all gifts come from God and that they are meant to be used in God’s service for the good of all. But unfortunately the Church has been far too narrow in its interpretation of these special gifts and this narrow-mindedness has done it grossly a great disservice. The Church has so often concentrated on the special charismatic gifts such as speaking and praying in tongues, teaching, writing – the more or less intellectual gifts, and neglecting other gifts like the gifts of the man and woman who can work with their hands, are just as special gifts from God. We think of the mason, the carpenter, the electrician, plumber, the painter, gardener, and the engineer and the farmer and the grocery man all have their special gifts which are from God and can be used for the service of God’s Kingdom.<sup>15</sup> These people with special gifts which may appear common to many of us are gifts from God and they use their

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<sup>15</sup> William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Letter to the Corinthians, Revised Edition*, Bangalore, India, Theological Publications in India, 1995, pp 108 – 109.

gifts to render to us basic services. Unfortunately, most of the time, we look down on people with such gifts as common and ordinary without remembering that the services they render to us form the fabric that sustain humanity. Their services are unparalleled and necessary for human wellbeing. It is unfortunate that in Nigeria those who take to farming, the masons and carpenters, electricians, motor mechanics, vulcanizers and other artisans are looked down upon as drop-outs from primary and secondary schools and are referred to as second-class citizens. The mentality of Nigerians is that that class of people are condemned to be poor because they are not educated and so they are not well regarded and rewarded. That is why graduates from secondary schools and universities shy away from trying their hands in such vocational work but continue to chase shadows looking for white collar-jobs, and unfortunately end up in becoming armed robbers, kidnappers, paid assassins and engaging in slave trade especially in Nigeria. But in reality, the handiwork of artisans is a necessity for our wellbeing and sustenance and their services are special gifts of God. They add meaning and beauty to our life. We may not forget that Jesus Christ worked as a carpenter most of his adult life and with that blessed the handiwork of man and woman. Jesus used his hands to handle nails and hammers to work on woods to make such things as chairs, stools, cupboards and so forth which are basic necessities to families and communities, and so with that in mind, the works of our hands are blessed. So we should always make use of our hands, and teach our children to appreciate work. That is why St. Paul cautioned that food should not be given to a lazy man (2 Thessalonians 3:10). So people should be proud to use their hands in work so that in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, they may renew the face of the earth. And work is, of course, a fundamental dimension of man's life on earth. This is a fact of life substantiated in the revealed word of God and so it is a matter of faith. The Book of Genesis reminds us that God the Creator and Redeemer of man and woman unites them with the mystery of work. Their Creator and Redeemer said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill

the earth and subdue it' (Genesis 1: 28). In other words, work is a lifelong activity which man and woman have to pursue in their earthly existence. From the revealed word of God, we can deduce that work has dignity, and when man does his work as God wants, he reveals in his work the action of God the Creator of the universe himself. It all then means that the earthly work of man has eternal dimension. This is because in the first place, work is a divine mandate given to man by God the Creator and Redeemer. God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work it and care for it (Genesis 2:15). We are created for work so, why should "graduates" be ashamed of using their hands as artisans?

Without diverting away from our focus, we may now go back to describing the names associated to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is called "Lord" and "Spirit of God" (names used by Sacred Scripture only for God) because he is God with the Father and the Son. He is the "Spirit of Truth" because he teaches us all that Christ has revealed in its fullness, and he guides and sustains the Church in the truth (cf. John 15: 26; 16: 13 – 14). So if we want to know the truth, live by the truth and remain in the truth then, we seek the Spirit. We should pray constantly to the Holy Spirit. He is the "other" Paraclete (Consoler, Advocate) promised by Christ, who is the first Paraclete (the Greek text speaks of the "other" Paraclete, and not a "distinct" Paraclete, to stress the communion and continuity between Christ and Spirit).<sup>16</sup> Our catechism reminds us that God made us for his own purpose and so he sends us the Advocate who will help us to live for him. The Advocate will help us to be speakers for God. In the Scripture we read of the Hebrew prophets where men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Prophets Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and a host of others all spoke for God and by God, and they were known because of it. Did God not promise us the Scripture the Spirit of

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<sup>16</sup> Opus Dei, (2014) Christian Life, Summaries of Catholic Teaching Top 12: I Believe in the Holy Spirit. I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church, <http://opusdei.uk/en-uk/article/topic-12-i-believe-in-the-holy-i-believe-in-the-holy-catholic-church/> Accessed on March 2, 2018.

the prophets would be poured out on all flesh, a promise we could rightly claim to be fulfilled and recorded in Acts 2? Jesus told his disciples not to be afraid that even when they are persecuted before kings and judges that words would be put in their mouths. The Spirit gives us power to preach in order to save souls. When we speak for God, salvation is given to hearers. As prophet Jeremiah said, “His word was a in my like a burning fire (Jer. 20:9). In Jeremiah’s description, what is really amazing is the irresistible power of God’s word. It is the preaching of the Word of God that brings new life to the hearers. The Spirit acts when the Word is spoken. It is more difficult to resist it than to face human opposition. Paul declares in a fairly similar way, that he cannot evade the responsibility of preaching the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:16). Some of us do not have this burning zeal for the Gospel because we do not allow the Spirit of God to possess us. Rather, we are overtaken by the spirit of the world. We are more possessed by the pursuit of pleasure, wealth, success, promotion, possession and pride, feelings of vengeance and bugged down by sin. Hence the zeal for God like the prophets of old is lacking in our life of faith. But when the Word of God is accepted and spoken, it is always active. People come alive through the Spirit-Word; they are born-again by his creative work. However, no matter how powerful we preach, it is only the Spirit to which the Word belongs and vice versa that can produce marvellous results. The power of the Spirit was evident after Jesus gave the keys of the Kingdom to Peter, and the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), Peter the head of the Apostles spoke in the power of the Holy, the crowds of people flooded in. It was the same experience before the time of Jesus. The eloquence of Prophet Isaiah and the tears of Prophet Jeremiah did not touch people so deeply. God spoke through the prophets as he said: “You are to make the heart of this people sluggish, to dull their ears and close their eyes; else their eyes will see their ears hear, their heart understand, and they will turn and be healed” (Isaiah 6:10). But the Pentecost Day preaching of Peter about the risen Jesus brought in three thousand converts signalling the age of salvation. This change

was a great act of God that we cannot dismiss. “Now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). But let us think about it; it is wonderful to be able to speak the Word. It is the same Word of God from the beginning which belongs to the Spirit, charged with all the energies seen from the day of creation. It is the Word-Spirit that gives life to everything from creation till date. In our celebration of Sunday Masses and Solemnities, we profess the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed when we express our faith in the Holy Spirit as “the giver of life”, we make reference to the gift of divine life to mankind. As Lord and giver of life, he is God, with the Father and the Son, and therefore receives the same adoration as they do. Dear friends, the Word has been given to us. We must therefore proclaim it. “How shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). It cannot be Good News at all unless people hear it. It is simply clear that we are in an age of evangelism, and to capture the current spiritual mood and participate in it fully, Pope John Paul II calls it a period of New Evangelization in his encyclical *Redemptoris* mission for the transmission of Christian Faith. The Pontiff wants us to be on “fire” for the divine mandate to “Go out and proclaim the Good News” (Mark 16:15). “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). God planned to share his life and joy; that is why he made his children channels and means of his saving plans. Hence, Paul was able to say to the Ephesians; “I did not shrink from making known to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). Christ said to his Apostles: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who believes in me will do the same works that I do; and he will do even greater than these, for I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). This is a puzzling remark from the Lord. Humanity ever since is still trying to digest this statement. We may not overstretch our imagination as we reflect on Christ, his life and words of life. Christ said, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). The words and works of Christ were driven by the power of the Holy Spirit – God’s driving force and passion. So to be able to continue the saving mission of Christ, we need the same Holy Spirit. If people are to hear the voice of

Jesus through us today, we must be filled with the Spirit. We don't need to be guessing in the sky unnecessarily. We may not forget that "We are his workmanship, created in Christ for good works he has prepared, that we should devote ourselves to them" (Eph. 2:10). Are we prepared to live out our divine calling? Jesus said, "Come, follow me; and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). That is why self-proclaimed pastors/prophets are not good for Jesus' work. That is why today, we have so much confusion in Christendom. These self-made pastors spread false doctrines, contradictions, falsehood, deceit that suits their evil intentions and purposes, false god who banishes all suffering, poverty and all sickness. This is the false gospel that attracts the most vulnerable and leads millions astray. They ordain 'false priests and bishops' and proliferate brands of churches and doctrines and display abundant wealth as proofs of God's blessings and approval. This deceit attracts millions of gullible followers. They also stage-manage fake "miracles" to authenticate their falsehood. The unfortunate thing is that religion is "commercialized" in the contemporary Nigerian society.

In the same Creed, we remember the last phrase that points to the mission the Spirit carries out amongst men: he has spoken through the prophets. The revelation by the Spirit in the Old Testament prophecies reaches its fullness in the mystery of Jesus Christ, God's definitive Word.<sup>17</sup> Christ would delay his disciples from going out to preach until they received the promise of the Father – the Holy Spirit – to make them his witnesses (Acts 1:4), and 1 John 2:20 speaks of an abiding anointing of the Holy Spirit. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost equipped the Apostles with permanent power of the Holy Spirit for their works of evangelization.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The Father from eternity expresses himself and this is the Word, the Son. They “look’ towards each other” and they express their love. This love is the Holy Spirit himself. Essentially, in the one divine nature, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit know and love each other. In their intimate internal life the Holy Spirit is LOVE proceeding from Both, and is Their love. He is equal to the Father and the Son from both of whom he proceeds. He is the source of all redemption and life, the source of sanctifying grace which makes us the new creation. Hence the redemption of humanity through Jesus’ obedience to the Father’s plan is completed by Christ sending the Holy Spirit from the Father (Acts 1: 8).

Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold new things have come (2 Corinthians 5: 17). A study of the Old and New Testaments confirms the necessity of personal faith and repentance toward the Lord as a condition of divine favour and ultimate salvation.<sup>18</sup> We may not forget that faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2: 8). Of course this new creation as a result of our association with Christ is being challenged by such global external extremes as collectivism/ethnocentrism and narcissism assaulting our sensibilities. The problem of gender and race continues to torment the religious leaders, the individual believer and community of believers in the face of their new status as new creation in Christ. The consolation is that there are rich biblical resources that inform their contemporary situation and liberate them from extremism. A read through the Gospel of St. Luke and Acts of the Apostles, one discovers that the Spirit helps any receptive person to be made new, and the Lord creates a new community and society that demonstrates the glory in becoming a new creation. Being in Christ is not about religious and wisdom of God.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Charlie Self, (2016), For the Life of the World, When the Spirit Comes, New Creation and New Community. <https://www.letterstotheexiles.com/spirit-comes-new-creation-new-community/>. Accessed on April 11, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

It all means to be in Christ and a demonstration of piety. It is about having a change of mind, attitude and direction. It is simply a conversion of heart; a disposition of life and commitment to Christ by a daily witness to him. Carol Glatz of Catholic Service, Vatican City, reporting on Pope Francis homily at Mass Tuesday May 6, 2014, in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, repeats the Pope words:

“... We are a people who follow Jesus Christ and give witness ... and this witness sometimes ends up in giving up one’s life ... Giving witness always bears fruit whether it is just one’s daily witness to Christ, witness during very difficult times, during persecution or witness that ends with death ... Being persecuted, becoming a martyr, giving one’s life for Jesus are all reasons to rejoice because the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians. ... The Church bears fruit and is a mother when it gives witness to Jesus Christ ... The devil cannot stand seeing the holiness of the church or the holiness of a person without trying to cause some kind of trouble ... The Church becomes sterile when it closes up inside itself ... when it believes itself to be a school of religion with lots of beautiful ideas, with many beautiful temples, with many fine museums, with many gorgeous things ... Christians who do not give to others the new life they have been given by Christ remain sterile ... Pray to the Holy Spirit who makes us strong in order to take the path of witness...”<sup>20</sup>

Prayer to the Holy Spirit endows us with divine strength, that is, grace. Grace, in this sense means God’s own loving kindness and favour, which is given to all. Those who are true recipients of grace live for Christ (2 Corinthians 5: 15), the incarnate Lord who offers himself for the reconciliation of all, bearing the pain and penalty of sin so that believers are accounted righteous before a holy and loving God their Father (2 Corinthians 5: 16, 18 – 21). Hence, the true believers in Christ are declared a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5: 17). One writer describes the Christian as a “microcosm of the new heavens and new earth.”<sup>21</sup> To be a new creation is to live in Christ and for Christ to live in us (Galatians 2: 20). To be a new creation

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Glatz, Catholic News Services (2014), Pope Francis: Christianity Means Giving Witness To Christ Every Day. <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-christianity-means-giving-witness-christ-every-day>. (Accessed on 11th April 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



in Christ is to have a new access to God's presence, a new favour, a new nature and secure destiny.<sup>22</sup>

The new creation in Christ who is responsive to the proclamation of the Gospel has the spirit of Christ in him who moves him from self-indulgence to a Christ-like service; making all his endeavours as signposts of the reign of God. Our new life in Christ as new creation does not happen in isolation since we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, with power over sin and eternal hope animating our service in his vineyard (Romans 6: 8). We are not all for ourselves since we are also baptized into the Body of Christ, the Church, and through faith and work we now become part of a new community, a new humanity, a new nation, and a new people of God (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 2 – 3; 1 Peter 2). Each member belongs to all the others. Our callings, mission and purpose can only unfold when we are connected to the plan of God for the whole church and humanity (Romans 12: 1 – 8; Ephesians 2: 10; 3: 10). The Gospel according to Saint Luke and the Acts of the Apostles give us enough insight to show that when the Spirit comes, there is a new community, a new society, and, in the words of Vincent J. Donovan, a new song arising from this holy and heterogeneous miracle.<sup>23</sup>

The world can only see and say the obvious: See how the Christians love one another and humanity (Acts 2: 42 – 47). This 'newness' is perceivable in the spirituality of some Christians who devote themselves in serving the poor, the sick, the elderly and the abandoned in their works of mercy and charity. They volunteer themselves in many generous deeds in the service of the church and humanity. It is the spirit of God empowering and moving them to do selfless things for the church and for humanity. Their generous service and selfless giving is so fascinating, commendable and encouraging. It can only be the power of God at

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

work in human beings in their imitation of the Son of God who in his service to humanity brought it oneness with God in his Cross and Resurrection.

You only need to reflect on the above examples to appreciate the impact the Holy Spirit has on the followers of Jesus as it is narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. When the Spirit comes, people who would ordinarily have no social interaction are now having Eucharistic fellowship and social interactions and friendship.<sup>24</sup> It is worth reading chapter four of Saint Luke's Gospel about how the Spirit guided and protected Jesus in the desert for forty days, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, he began his public proclamation of the Kingdom of God in which he ended religious exclusivism by explaining how God has bestowed his favour on non-Jews in the examples he cited in the Old Testament as he announced his mission.<sup>25</sup> It is important to study the influence of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments as Jesus cited the power of the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament (Isaiah 61: 1) in the beginning of his public ministry.

To be able to continue the mission work of Jesus, we need to be constantly submissive to the power of the Holy Spirit in us. We receive the Holy Spirit when we repent and are baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2: 38). To continue to be a new creation in Christ, we may need to be conscious always of what St. Paul tells us that all believers have died with Christ and so no longer live for themselves, but for him, who died, and rose for them (2 Corinthians 5: 15). This suggests a daily repentance, that is, yes to Christ every day, at every point in time and situation, whether it favours us or not. Christ died for all of us, therefore all have died (2 Corinthians 5: 14). In his death on the cross, he nailed our sin to the cross (Colossians 2: 14). It was buried with him, and just as the Father raised him up from the dead, so we are raised

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

up to “walk in the newness of life” (Romans 6: 4). The new person that was raised up with Christ is what St. Paul refers to in **2 Corinthians 5: 17** as the “new creation.” Of course our newness in Christ is brought about by God’s will (John 1: 13). So now, we die to sin and look toward Christ instead of toward self. As newborn in Christ, we delight in the things of God and abhor the things of the world and the flesh. We see the world differently with the eyes of Christ because we now “put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3: 9), and put on the “new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4: 24).<sup>26</sup> We now “put on Christ” because our minds and hearts are transformed by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul describes this dramatic change in our hearts and minds as Jesus living in us. We “put off the old man with his deeds” and “put on the new man.” We are “renewed” in knowledge and in the spirit of our minds. As the children of God we become “in Christ” a truly new creation. God transforms us into his own family – his sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6: 18).<sup>27</sup>

## **Chapter 2**

### **Introduction**

To locate the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures will help us to learn who the Holy Spirit is; how we can receive or encounter him and relate to him, and what he does to each of us, to the Church and humanity as a whole. What are the promises of the Spirit? These fundamental questions will help to get to know and then relate to him as a person who loves us and expects us to love him in return.

### **2.1.The Spirit in the Scriptures**

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<sup>26</sup> What Does It Mean That A Christian Is A New Creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17)? <https://www.gotquestions.org/new-creation.html>. Accessed on April 11, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> United Church of God, Preaching the Gospel, Preparing a People, Bible Study Course – Lesson 9: The Transforming Power of God’s Holy Spirit, A New Creation in Christ. <https://www.ucg.ca/bible-study-lessons/the-transforming-power-of-gods-holy-spirit/gods-promise-nwe-era>. Accessed on April 11, 2018.

We need to dig hard and deep in order to appreciate the traces of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Firstly, he is God both of the Old and New Testaments. God gave his chosen persons in the Old Testaments special gifts of the Holy Spirit to fulfil the assignments he gave to them. We may not be surprised that it took the Church many years to evolve and it continues to be subject to the transformational moulding of the Holy Spirit in each generation.<sup>28</sup> Are we not always clay in the hands of the Potter, who is God (Jeremiah 18: 6)? The story of the Holy Spirit started with creation,<sup>29</sup> gave birth to all things, brought about the incarnation and the birth of the Church.<sup>30</sup> It is obvious that, the Church flourished through the willingness and openness of the early Christians to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who guided and granted charisms to them for divine plans and purposes.<sup>31</sup> According to Ayo Emmanuel Efodigbue<sup>32</sup> in his book, *Charisms For Ministry*, despite the hustling and bustling for material acquisition and pleasure that characteristically defines the modern people, there is still a hunger for the exploration to experience God as many Christians delightfully experience a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches, and their prayerful study of the Scriptures. Christians of Pentecostal and Catholic Charismatic Renewal Churches characteristically dig hard and deep into the Scriptures in their day-to-day living and enthusiastically tell their experiences of their knowledge of the Holy Spirit in the Bible and the impact of his powerful influences in their life. If you are ready to listen to these ‘pupils’ of the Holy Spirit, they have a lot of testimonies to share. It is true that some of them give testimonies that appear like ‘cock and bull’ stories. It is equally true that many Christians read the Bible upside down and so say things that have no bearing either in heavenly or earthly context. It is obvious that some Christians are simply ‘sick’ and are hugely confused

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<sup>28</sup>Efodigbue, *Charism for Ministry*, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life, A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004, p. 64. Hereafter as Edwards, *Breath of Life*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Alan Schreck, *The Gift, Discovering the Holy Spirit in Catholic Tradition*, Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2013, p. 12. Hereafter as Schreck, *The Gift*.

<sup>32</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 21.

and deceived by the false suggestions of Satan and evil forces. There is no doubt that these spiritual confusions are not coming from the HOLY SPIRIT! In this age of the Holy Spirit, Christians cannot afford not to pursue on a daily basis the discerning spirit of the Church; otherwise, they are “tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching”, all in the name of the Holy Spirit. Equipped with the discerning spirit of the Church, the spirit of God in us will always lead us to all truth. We will be able to discard the “spiritual rubbish and disease” the spiritual sick and agents of Satan disseminate around which ‘stifle and kill’ vulnerable men and women being tossed around by whirled winds. If we stay spiritually healthy through the sacraments and teachings of the Church in communion with the Magisterium then the Holy Spirit will lead, guide, teach and heal us.

Ayo Emmanuel Efodigbue in his book, through a scriptural-theological-exegetical method, traced what is now known as the Holy Spirit in the New Testament to the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. Ayo Efodigbue, in his brilliant theological reflection on the Trails of the Spirit in the Old Testament explored how the understanding of **ruach** as the breath of life, the source of life in Hebrew Scriptures, trickled into New Testament theology as the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.<sup>33</sup>

## **2.2. The Spirit in the Old Testament**

The term “spirit” translates the Hebrew word **ruah**, which primarily means breath, air, wind, and **pneuma** in Greek. **Ruah** in the Old Testament carries the primary meaning of blowing air, which is the idea behind the implication of something immaterial but moves and impresses forcefully.<sup>34</sup> It designates the power that gives life, acts and effects physical and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> Colin Brown, Ed. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol., 3., (English language ed.), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan and Exeter, Devon, U.K, The Paternoster Press Ltd, 1986, p. 690.

spiritual activities.<sup>35</sup> The account rendered by the Priestly biblical tradition's pre-history revealed the breath of Yahweh as a mysterious power of God in creation.<sup>36</sup> It was the power of **Ruah Elohim** hovering over the formless void in Genesis 1: 2, from which came forth creation as we have it.<sup>37</sup> You only need to read the creation account in the Book of Genesis to appreciate that **Ruah** is the dynamic, creative and powerful authority behind all creation and the formation of the people of Israel. Again, the account of the biblical journeys of the Jewish people in the wilderness, and their charismatic leaders, kings and prophets abundantly reveals that the spirit of God has always been the creative, guiding, protecting and abiding presence that navigates the history of the world.<sup>38</sup>

We can see that **Ruah** and **Pneuma** are commonly used in passages of the scripture referring to the spirit. The spirit of God hovering over the waters (Genesis 1: 2), and in Genesis 2: 7 and Ezekiel 37, **ruah**, is translated "breath of life", and Genesis 8: 1, uses **ruah** to describe the "wind" God sent over the earth to recede the flood waters. It is important to note that the word **ruah** is found almost 400 times in the Old Testament. So **Ruah** is the "spirit of the Lord" or the "spirit of God."<sup>39</sup> But the use of **ruah** as "spirit" may not always be linked with God but in reference to the human spirit: in case of the immaterial part of human beings, that is, the soul or to one's mood, emotional state, or general disposition. **Ruah** can refer to literal breath or wind, or as a figurative speech as an idiomatic expression such as "a mere breath."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit, The Complete Three-Volume Work in One Volume*, Translated by David Smith, New York: A Herder & Herder Book, 2006, p. 3. Hereafter as Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*. New York, N.Y/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 1984, p. 20. Hereafter as Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*; p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit. Word **Ruach**? Question: "What is the meaning of the Hebrew word **Ruach**?"* <https://www.gotquestions.org/meaning-ruach.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

From the above description, one can deduce that the Hebrew word **ruah** mostly is rendered as both wind and spirit.<sup>41</sup> The ancient Nigerian traditionalist religionists have different meanings attached to gods/spirits: the god of the forest, the god of the mountain, the gods of the river, the warrior gods or the gods of the war, the fertility god (for humanity and agriculture), the avenging gods, amongst others. In Nigerian context, there are good and bad spirits. In the case of **ruah**, it has variety of meanings which some commentators believe can be resolved through critical examination of each text in question.<sup>42</sup> However, Pope John Paul II believed that most of the time it is not possible to resolve the exact meaning of the word **ruah** without some difficulty:

One might waver between wind and breath, between breath and spirit, or between created spirit and the divine Spirit. This multiplicity, however, has a certain wealth, for it establishes a fruitful communication between so many realities. In this regard it is better to give up in part the pretences of neat reasoning in order to embrace broader perspectives. When we think of the Holy Spirit, it is useful to remember that his biblical name means “breath,” and that it is related to the powerful blowing of the wind and to our own intimate breathing. Rather than clinging to an over-intellectual and arid concept, we will find it helpful to take in this wealth of images and facts. Unfortunately, translations are unable to convey them to us completely, for they are often obliged to choose other terms. To render the Hebrew word **ruah**, the Greek translation of the Septuagint uses twenty-four different terms, and so does not permit one to see all the connections between the texts of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>43</sup>

However, despite the multiple uses of the term and interpretations of ‘**ruah**’, Pope John Paul II maintains that the overriding principle of ‘**ruah**’ is that it is the source of life.<sup>44</sup> The **Ruah** of God is the One who gives life to all creation. God’s **Ruah** has created every other non-divine thing (**ruah**) that exists. All living creatures owe the breath of life to the Creative spirit

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<sup>41</sup> Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, O. CARM. Eds. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990, p. 1290. Hereafter as Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary.

<sup>42</sup> John L. Mckenzie, S.J., Ed. Dictionary of the Bible. (First Touchstone Edition) New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: A Touchstone Book, Published by Simon & Schuster 1995, p. 840. Hereafter McKenzie, Ed. Dictionary of the Bible.

<sup>43</sup> Pope John Paul II, The Meaning of Spirit in the Old Testament. Catechesis by Pope John Paul II on the Holy Spirit, General Audience, Wednesday, January 3, 1990.

[www.danwebs.com/ruah/2NaturaRuah&WritingsJPPII.html](http://www.danwebs.com/ruah/2NaturaRuah&WritingsJPPII.html). Accessed on April 17, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

(**Ruah**) of God.<sup>45</sup> The spirit gives life to humanity and the other creatures (Psalm 104: 29, 30). Moses states this truth categorically when he says: “God ... gives breath (**ruah**) to all living things” (Numbers 27: 16). Job understood this truth as well. He said, “The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty keeps me alive” (Job 33: 4). In his promise that the Messiah would be empowered by Holy Spirit God used the phrase **Ruah** Yahweh: “The spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11: 2). This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus when at his baptism in the River Jordan “the Spirit of God came down like a dove and rested on him” (Matthew 3: 16). At the same time, a voice from heaven was heard, “This is my Son, the Beloved; he is my Chosen One” (Matthew 3: 17).

There is no doubt that many commentators believe that the Old Testament writers used the word **ruah** as wind, breath, and spirit to describe the different ways they understood the presence of God in their midst.<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that the use of **ruah** to indicate the breath of God as the animating presence that gives and sustains life in every creature, has consequently impacted on the development and understanding of spirit in New Testament theology as mentioned before.<sup>47</sup> The wind is the breath of God and also reflects the definite manifestation of God’s divine presence and power.<sup>48</sup> Of course wind is unpredictable, and its power is mysterious and its impact on nature fittingly symbolized the divine in the Hebrew mentality and Scripture.<sup>49</sup> We note that in the Jewish understanding, the spirit is a force that abides in the divine but displayed in an amazing way in eternal activities that had their origin

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Ryrie, The Holy Spirit, Word **Ruah**? Question: “What is the meaning of the Hebrew word **Ruah**? <https://www.gotquestions.org/meaning-ruach.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Pope John Paul II, The Meaning of Spirit in the Old Testament. Catechesis by Pope John Paul II on the Holy Spirit, General Audience, Wednesday, January 3, 1990. [www.danwebs.com/ruah/2NaturaRuah&WritingsJPPII.html](http://www.danwebs.com/ruah/2NaturaRuah&WritingsJPPII.html). Accessed on April 17, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, p. 1290.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



in Yahweh. However, the spirit was not understood as a personal being in the Old Testament but a principle of action that belongs to Yahweh alone who gives life to all living beings.<sup>50</sup> Life is a gift from God (Jeremiah 1: 5) transferred to us through the breath of Yahweh. So, the spirit is Yahweh's instrument of authority for creativity (Psalm 33: 6), or a tool for the elimination of the wicked<sup>51</sup> as seen in Isaiah 11: 4, "He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked."<sup>52</sup> It is believed that all power comes from Yahweh and so the spirit is associated with anything that affects the people negatively, like sickness or anger.<sup>53</sup> Metaphorically, different kinds of spirits are believed to come from Yahweh that can possess and manipulate humans. Spirits are not visible but can be perceived to be present at particular times and in certain places, and they are beyond human control.<sup>54</sup> In other words, there are positive and negative spirits both of which surpass human abilities to manipulate. Of course, there are examples in the Scriptures where they are pictured as if they have their personal beings able to access human minds and hearts to influence them for good or evil. In the Book of Kings, a lying spirit seduced King Ahab (1 Kings 22: 21 – 23), the Book of Numbers 5: 14 talks about the spirit of jealousy and in Zechariah 12: 10, we read of the spirit of compassion and supplication.<sup>55</sup> Also in the Book of Samuel, we read of the spirit of the Lord departing from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord tormenting him (1 Samuel 16: 14). In Nigeria, as in other African countries, there are diviners/bear-foot native-doctors or witch-doctors who claim to have the power to foretell future events or interpret past events as well as forestall bad omens, evil spirit attacks, drive away evil spirits and uncover witches and evil mechanisms of witches. They also provide

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> McKenzie, Ed. Dictionary of the Bible, p. 840. The reference to the destruction of the wicked here points to the spirit of the messianic King (Isaiah 11: 4)

<sup>52</sup> Senior Donald and Collins J. John, Eds., The Catholic Study Bible, Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 2006, p. 942. Hereafter as Senior and Collins, The Catholic Study Bible.

<sup>53</sup> McKenzie, Ed. Dictionary of the Bible, p. 840.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Downey, Ed. The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, Collegeville Minnesota: The Liturgical Press 1993, p. 911. Hereafter as Downey, The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 911.

their clients with amulets. In other words, the diviners or witch-doctors both serve Satan as well as attack Satan and his agents. Hence, Christians have nothing to do with them because Light, which is Christ, has nothing to do with darkness which symbolizes Satan.

The spirit is not inherently part of living beings but a gratuitous gift from Yahweh. Yahweh gives the spirit freely as in the case of Gideon who was clothed with the strength of Yahweh (Judge 6: 34). Also the spirit of Yahweh fell upon Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chronicle 24: 20). Again, the spirit can be poured out (Ezekiel 39: 29; Isaiah 29: 10; 44: 3). At our baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit who takes up permanent residence in our lives (Titus 3: 5 – 6; CCC 1215). We also note that the Spirit can be taken away at any time (Psalm 51: 13) or depart from a person (1 Samuel 16: 14).<sup>56</sup> It is important to note that the spirit in the above texts is a demonstration of the enduring power of Yahweh who chose, anointed and empowered the Judges, Kings and Prophets to exercise special mission at a particular point in time according to his will. The Biblical authors have also made us to understand that Yahweh has absolute authority and can withdraw that spirit and power at will. In the case of Saul, the spirit of Yahweh departed from him because of his disobedience (1 Samuel 13 – 15). The story of Saul helps us to understand that all living beings receive life and sustenance from God who reserves the power when to take away their spirit (Psalm 104: 29), which returns to Yahweh their Maker when they die (Ecclesiastes 12: 7).<sup>57</sup> So Yahweh remains the executive authority over life and death without rivalry (1 Samuel 2: 6).

We are then sure that God is gracious with the gift of his Spirit which he gives us at baptism thereby makes us his adopted sons and daughters (CCC 1265). On the day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church (CCC 1076), St. Peter tells his fellow Jews and others to “repent and

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<sup>56</sup> Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 1290.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2: 38). Again, at Confirmation, he completes in us the grace we receive at baptism, since we receive a “special strength of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1285ff). Since we are ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (Galatians 4: 5- 7), members of Christ and co-heirs with him (1 Corinthians 6: 15; Romans 8: 17), and temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6: 19), how then do we maintain permanent communion with the Holy Spirit without losing him unlike Saul in 1 Samuel 13 – 15? Firstly, we must avoid mortal sin which separates us from God and salvation, and so keep connected to Christ who reveals to us God the Father, and always live life of the sacraments through which we retain divine life.

We continue our study of the Spirit. The authors of the Book of Genesis claim that God created every living being (Genesis 1 – 2). This worldview gave birth to the pre-twentieth century science and theology.<sup>58</sup> The progress is dynamic. With the introduction of biblical criticism, some biblical scholars in the early 1900s started to bring to our knowledge that the Genesis stories of creation as mythical are not to be understood literally.<sup>59</sup> This was a giant leap and a breath of fresh air in the scriptural theological studies for progressive scholars. However, the battle goes on because some still claim that they can prove the historicity of everything in Hebrew Scriptures. However, as we grow in knowledge of modern biblical scholarship and the study of the universe, it becomes clearer that the worldview in the Book of Genesis is constantly questioned.<sup>60</sup> I believe that scientists will acknowledge that the Old Testament claim that the spirit is the source of all life will be beneficial to them. Denis Edwards in quoting Stephen Hawking clearly brings out this point when he wrote: “What is it

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<sup>58</sup> Brennan R. Hill, *Exploring Catholic Theology, God, Jesus, Church, and Sacraments*, Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty – Third Publications 1995, p. 80. Hereafter as Hill, *Exploring Catholic Theology*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?”<sup>61</sup> Denis Edwards asserts that God’s spirit is the source of the fourteen billion years of the evolutionary process of the universe.<sup>62</sup> He calls this spirit, ‘Creator Spirit.’<sup>63</sup> It is what Genesis 2: 7, describes as the breath of God that breathes life to the dust of the earth which becomes a living being.<sup>64</sup> The Hebrew Scriptures explain the Spirit as the presence and action of one true God and maker of all things in the universe.<sup>65</sup>

The breath of God in the Old Testament is the basis of all life.<sup>66</sup> The author of the Book of Genesis in a figurative sense brings this understanding to light. God breathed in the nostrils of the fashioned image of the human person to bring about life. The Jewish experience of the divine presence that protected and vivified helped to lay the foundation for the theological evolution of the understanding of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.<sup>67</sup> This knowledge grew gradually and yet continues to grow because God is a mystery which the human mind cannot totally comprehend but will continue to pursue until we see God face to face. **Ruah** Yahweh, the spirit of Yahweh, inspires prophecy (2 Samuel 23: 2; Ezekiel 2: 2; 3: 12, 14, 24; 8: 3; 11: 1, 5, 24; 37: 1; 43: 55; Isaiah 61: 1).<sup>68</sup> In his prophecy, Joel (3: 1 – 2) prophesied that the messianic age would usher in a general outpouring of the spirit on all mortals: “It shall come to pass; I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions. Even upon your male and female servants, in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 3: 1 – 2).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Gelpi Donald SJ, *The Spirit in the World*, Zacchaeus Studies, Theology Wilmington, Delaware: Liturgical Press, 1988, p.43. Hereafter as Gelpi, *The Spirit in the World*.

<sup>67</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> McKenzie, Ed. *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 841.

<sup>69</sup> Collins and Senior, *The Catholic Study Bible*, p.1187.

The prophetic spirit that stirred up ecstatic worship in the sons of the prophets was inspired by **Ruah** Yahweh (1 Samuel 10: 6, 10; 19: 20, 23).<sup>70</sup> Also **Ruah** Yahweh is the charismatic spirit that imparts those chosen for ministerial offices in Israel the graces they need for their tasks.<sup>71</sup> The dynamism of the Spirit is even more evident today hence; we refer to this age as the Age of the Holy Spirit. The prayer meetings of the Catholic charismatic members and the gathering of the members of Christian denominations in prayer and worship are demonstrations of the presence of the Holy Spirit amongst Christians. Also, Christians of different denominations preach and pray boldly along street corners, in buses and on trains and in public arenas without fear or favour and enthusiastically. Some move around with their bible ready to share the word of God with whoever is ready to listen. There is a sense of urgency in the work of evangelization amongst Christians. All this shows that Christians are a people God chooses in whom the message of Christ finds root and a home and Jesus encourages them to share the good news of God with all humanity. This is the good news Christ has given them and wants them to share it with the rest of mankind. After his resurrection and the reluctance of his Apostles in believing the testimonies of those who saw him; he reproached them for their unbelief, and hardness of heart. Then he said to them shortly before he was taken up into heaven to take his place at the right hand of God: “Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation” (Mark 16: 14 – 19). So today the Christians feel the choice of God upon them as well as his challenge to draw out goodness and joy from the store his Holy Spirit has given them in this moment of divine favour to share the Good News with those who are disposed to hear it. It is an amazing thing and the grace of joy of the Holy Spirit for lay people to take it upon themselves to share with the rest of humanity their experiences of God’s love and mercy.

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<sup>70</sup> McKenzie, Ed. Dictionary of the Bible, p. 841.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 841.

### 2.3. Symbolic Depictions of the Spirit in the Old Testament

Wind, water and fire are frequently used to depict the Spirit in the Old Testament. The spirit in the Old Testament is represented by wind in a symbolic way. In fact, the original Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” can be translated “wind.” We may not forget that the wind that appeared on Pentecost Day (Acts 2: 2) was similar to the wind that blew over the waters at the beginning of creation (Genesis 1: 2). The wind calls attention of Christians to the Holy Spirit breathing life into the Church and children of God. We may not see the wind; neither can we see the Spirit physically but it remains God’s active power in the universe and amongst God’s people. However, to be able to present the reality of God’s dynamic life - giving power,<sup>72</sup> the biblical authors used the Hebrew word, **ruah**/wind, which always carries with it the concealed but visibly experienced presence of Yahweh.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the wind represents the great breath of God (2 Samuel 22: 16), and the breath of the flesh is its **ruah**-wind (Genesis 6: 17). However, like the wind, God cannot be seen; but God’s divine presence is strikingly visible in creation. Paul says, “Because his invisible attributes – his everlasting power and divinity – are made visible to reason, by means of his works, since the creation of the world” (Romans 1: 20).<sup>74</sup> As believers, how do we bear witness to God’s presence? Christians believe that God is omnipresent, and this means that he is present at all times and in all places. Our salvation history testifies that, in the beginning, Adam and Eve enjoyed a close presence of God in the Garden of Eden. However, after they sinned, they became separated from God’s presence (Genesis 3: 8 – 24). A conscientious reading of the Scriptures helps us to appreciate that God reveals his presence to different people in various ways. A few examples will help us. God spoke with Noah in Genesis 8, and with Moses and

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<sup>72</sup>Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life, A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004, p. 35. Hereafter as Edwards, *Breath of Life*.

<sup>73</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Collins and Senior, *The Catholic Study Bible*, p. 1496.

the people of Israel during their forty years in the wilderness (Numbers 10 – 36). There was this wonderful interaction between God and Moses which is worthy of note (Exodus 33: 11 – 23). And in the New Testament, God made himself known through Jesus Christ in human form (John 1; 1). John 1: 14 says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Again, Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he promised that the Holy Spirit would come to dwell and empower believers with God’s presence and this took place on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

We come back to our description of **ruah**. We come across a variety of the meaning of the word **ruah**. However, to grasp the real meaning of the word **ruah**, the particular context in which it refers to a given subject or intention has to be considered. For example, “**ruah-pneuma**,” simply means the wind (as in John 3: 8; Acts 2: 1- 4, 6). But, it can mean the breath of God that communicates life (Psalm 33: 6) and consequently man’s breath, the principle and sign of life (Psalm 104: 29 – 30). Also the Book of Job portrays the breath of God communicating life (Job 33: 4).<sup>75</sup> He holds the life of every creature and the breath of humans (Job 12: 10). In his prayer, Ezra the priest said: “You, Yahweh, you alone made the heavens ... and all their army, the earth and all on it, the seas and all in them. You give life to all, and all the angels of heaven adore you” (Nehemiah 9: 6; Psalm 146: 6). If all the angels adore God, human beings created by God in his own image ought to adore him as well. God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1: 26 – 27). Hence, it is no surprise that it is only mankind that worships God in one form or another while no animal does the same. It is obvious that human beings have innate desire to worship God when animals do not. It is because God created man and woman in his image and likeness and with a spirit, a soul and a body. So it is God who gives them the desire to know him and respond to him. Catechism of the Catholic Church

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<sup>75</sup> George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit, The Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006, p. 4. Hereafter as Montague, *The Holy Spirit*.

number 27 says that: “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.” That is why Saint Augustine states “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” The spirit of man and woman is filled with God’s life when he breathed into their nostrils the breath of life making them to become living souls (Genesis 2: 7). It is with this spirit that human beings can receive God, contain him and adore him. It is this spirit that separates man from all other created beings.

We come back in our attempt to understand spirit in the Old Testament. Water symbolizes purification and life-giving grace of the Spirit of God: “Then I shall pour pure water over you and you shall be made clean – cleansed from the defilement of all your idols” (Ezekiel 36: 25). “For I will pour water upon the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my spirit upon your race and my blessing upon your offspring” (Isaiah 44: 3). The symbolism of water as God’s presence that purifies and gives life is enormously portrayed in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus: “Truly, I say to you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again from above” (John 3: 1 – 21). Again, the blessing of water in the rite of Baptism in the Catholic Church abundantly sums up the splendour of the Spirit of God in the waters of life:

“O God, who by invisible power accomplish a wondrous effect through a sacramental signs and who in many ways have prepared water, your creation, to show forth the grace of Baptism; O God, whose Spirit in the first moments of the world’s creation hovered over the waters, so that the very substance of water would even then take to itself the power of sanctity; O God, who by the outpouring of the flood foreshadowed regeneration, so that from the mystery of one and the same element of water would come an end to vice and a beginning of virtue; O God, who caused the children of Abraham to pass dry-shod through the Red Sea, so that the chosen people, set free from slavery to Pharaoh, would prefigure the people of the baptized; O God, whose Son, baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan, was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and, as he hung upon the Cross, gave forth water from his side along with blood, and after his Resurrection, commanded his disciples: “Go forth, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” look now, we



pray, upon the face of your Church and graciously unseal for her the fountain of Baptism. May this water receive by the Holy Spirit the grace of your Only Begotten Son, so that human nature, created in your image and washed clean through the Sacrament of Baptism from all the squalor of the life of old, may be found worthy to rise to the life of newborn children through water and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>76</sup>

Fire is another symbolic sign of the presence of the spirit in the Old Testament. Fire is a common phenomenon common to all cultures ancient and modern which lends itself to a variety of metaphors and interpretations. The theological meanings of fire in the Scripture are diverse. There is no doubt that it may come as a surprise to many Christians that the word “fire” with its attributes of “light” and “heat,” convey more of the Creator and his goodness than of a destructive force against his enemies. Fire has variety of meanings in the Bible and usually in its spiritual use, it is attributed to God. Fire communicates the very presence of God, which is demonstrated in the burning bush as God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3: 2). Here fire is a manifestation of God himself, for Moses had to turn away from the sight “because he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3: 6). Similar to this is Yahweh’s descent upon Mount Sinai “in fire” (Exodus 19: 18; Deuteronomy 4: 15). To the Israelites at Mount Sinai, “the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire” (Exodus 24: 17). Again, God used fire to manifest his active presence and to inaugurate Aaron’s ministry as priest. Having blessed the people, Moses and Aaron witnessed the appearance of the glory of the Lord in a form of fire which “came forth from before Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and fat that was on the altar,” which sight delighted the people who shouted for joy and worshipped Yahweh (Leviticus 9: 23 – 25). The Jewish people enjoyed the protective presence and guidance of God in the pillar of fire at night and cloud by day in their journey through the desert (Exodus 13: 21 -22). Fire was used to purify the prophet of iniquity (Isaiah 6: 7).

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<sup>76</sup> New Saint Joseph Sunday Missal, Complete Edition, New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2011, pp. 413 – 414.

On the other hand, fire frequently appears in the Scripture as a sign of God's anger and of the judgement and destruction that sometimes are extensions of that anger. The Psalmist in his frustration and despair asks the Lord; "How long, O Yahweh, will you hide? How long will your anger burn like a fire?" (Psalm 89: 47). Isaiah refers to God coming in judgment: "Look, Yahweh will come in fire, his chariots like whirlwind, to release his anger with fury and his threat with flames of fire" (Isaiah 66: 15). Jeremiah speaks in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem: "Like an enemy he has bent his bow, his right hand steadying the arrow. All our pride of manhood he slew as he took his stand as a foe, pouring out fury like fire upon the tent of Zion's daughter" (Lamentation 2: 4). Ezekiel speaks of the impending Babylonian conquest referring to God's "fiery anger" and outpouring judgment: "I have poured out my wrath against them; I have destroyed them in the heat of my fury; bringing down on their heads all they have done ... "(Ezekiel 22: 31; 21: 31).

Fire has other sacred purposes. Sacrifices and offerings (including incense which represented the prayers of the people) were to be made by fire (Exodus 12: 8 – 10; Leviticus 1). Fire often meant the acceptance of a sacrifice by Yahweh (Judges 6: 21; 1 Kings 18: 38; 1 Chronicles 21: 26). Leviticus 9: 24 tells us the sacrificial fire "came forth from Yahweh. At the dedication of the Temple of Yahweh built by Solomon, to the glory of Yahweh, fire came down from heaven to consume the sacrifices offered (2 Chronicles 7: 1). Seeing the fire coming down from heaven and the glory of Yahweh resting on the Temple, the people of Israel bowed and worshipped Yahweh. Again, the sacrifices of Noah on the altar of the Lord were consumed by fire (Genesis 8: 20). Usually Yahweh's answer by fire was a positive act however, there were times when his manifestation in fire, or the use of fire, was used as a correction or destruction of evil, for example, Sodom and Gomorra (Genesis 19: 24;); another example was when people sought quarrel with Yahweh and ignited his anger (Numbers 11: 1)

and when the 250 men dishonoured the holiness of Yahweh (Numbers 16: 35). The wickedness of men and women were punished by fire (Leviticus 20: 14; 21: 9). The victims slain for sin offerings were afterwards consumed by fire outside the camp (Leviticus 4: 12; 4: 21). In war, fire was used in the destruction of cities, like Jericho (Joshua 6: 24), Bethel Joshua (8: 19) and Hazor (Joshua 11: 11). The Israelites burned the images of the house of Baal (2 Kings 10: 26). Punishment of death by fire was inflicted on such as were guilty of certain forms of unchastity and incest (Leviticus 20: 14; 21: 9). Prophet Elijah defended the worship of the Hebrew God over that of the Canaanite deity Baal by calling down fire from heaven to consume the offerings in demonstration of God's power over Baal (1 Kings 18). Moses, the great leader of Israel also called down fire from heaven on the sons of Korah who rebelled against him in Numbers 16: 35; as well as on sons of Aaron (Leviticus 10: 1 – 2).

Fire is also used in describing the glory of Yahweh (Daniel 7: 9), of his holiness (Isaiah 33: 14), of his protection of his people (2 Kings 6: 17), of his jealousy for his sole worship (Deut. 4: 24, Psalm 79: 5), of his wrath (Deut. 9: 3; Psalm 18:8; 89: 46; Isaiah 5: 24), of his Word in power (Jeremiah 5: 14; 23: 29), of Divine truth (Psalm 39: 3; Jeremiah 20: 9; Luke 12: 49), of that which guides men (Isaiah 50: 10), of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 3), of Christ in his glory (Revelation 1: 14), of the power of love to overcome evil (Romans 12: 20), of trial and suffering (Psalm 66: 12; Isaiah 43: 2; 1 Peter 1: 7; 4: 12), of evil (Proverbs 6: 27; Isaiah 9: 18; 65: 5), of lust or desire (1 Corinthians 7: 9), of greed (Proverbs 30: 16), of the evil tongue (James 3: 5 – 6), and of heaven and its purity and glory (Revelation 15: 2; 21: 23). This is not to say I have exhausted ways fire is used in the Bible. I am sure that if we study light and heat which are attributes of fire, we will learn more.

It may not all that be a surprising thing that fire plays sure a wonderful role in the Bible. We may not forget that God the Creator himself is described as a “consuming fire” in the Scripture (Deut. 4: 24; Heb. 12: 29). To some Christians and non-Christians alike, it must be strange to refer to God the Creator as a consuming fire. Does such description of God not frighten off some people about God and put them off from associating with God? The only thing we should not do is to put people away from God who is all loving and merciful. No matter what we do, God offers us forgiveness for the one reason that he is love (1 John 1: 8). To our human understanding this may not seem logical as we do not deserve it, but it is true in spite of all sins and rebelliousness, he loves us. The Scriptures says, “I love you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31: 3). God by coming into the world in human flesh in Jesus Christ becomes the final and complete sacrifice for our sins through his death on the cross. The Bible says that “God so love the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life” (John 3: 16). For Catholics, God’s love and forgiveness becomes a reality when they recognise and accept their sins and be sorry for them by resolving to avoid future sins and confessing their sins to a Catholic priest in a sacramental confession.

Still on the symbolic meaning of fire, in the Semitic Middle East, fire, first and foremost, is a symbol of divinity. Fire is a symbol of Yahweh himself. God manifesting himself in the physical form of fire could be a favourable judgement as when he came down to consecrate the Temple built by Solomon or a negative judgement as when he swallowed up the sons of Aaron for offering up “foreign fire” before the Lord, disobeying his instructions (Lev.10). As human beings, we have a tendency of dwelling on the negative side of things and so usually associate divine fire with wrath and destruction. The church from her earlier existence must have associated God with a ‘shylock’ that was only looking out to see who would offend him

in a slightest form and he would send the offender without a blink of the eye to eternal hell fire. This is a dreadful understanding of God the merciful Father! The unfortunate is the some of us grow up in this erroneous understanding of God to be judgemental, vengeful and legalistic, and so the more likely we are to see fire as God's punishment to the least offenders; hence, it is difficult to see fire as a positive symbol of God. And so, with this mindset, fire is seen as a symbol of Hell and an everlasting punishment. But, on the other hand, the more loving, merciful and compassionate we become, the more likely we see fire as a symbol of love, zeal, and sacredness. We are "on fire for God" is an expression used in a positive sense. Again, there are some Catholic charismatic members who are not yet well schooled in the merciful nature of God, who in their prayers 'command' God to send the "fires" of the Holy Spirit to 'loose and bind, and to 'condemn and destroy' his enemies, and all the evil people who attach his children. This is the type of 'fire-brand' prayer one hears on the lips of Pentecostals and some Catholic charismatic members. If God were to be such a destructive fire, I wonder how many of us who would be alive. Yet when Yahweh went amongst the children of Israel, he manifested himself as smoke and fire which did not burn them to death. Today Christians who allow the fire of God to enter the very recesses of their lives give testimonies of their experience of God's fire in a totally different light. Their experiences are positive as the fire of God does not destroy them but rather purify, correct and cleanse them. God's fire within brings forth a love that desires to bring healing and restoration to all mankind. Those who are spiritually minded and willing to conform to the image of Christ are not frightened of fire in the Bible. It is encouraging that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, continuously leads the church to appreciate God as our Father who created us to be free and endowed us with a conscience, who suffers when we get lost and rejoices when we return.

Fortunately for us, God never fails in his faithfulness in forgiving our errors and speaking to our conscience from within in order to call us back to him.<sup>77</sup>

Can we not think of the use of natural fire? Fire produces flame (light) and heat, two very useful properties in the natural world. If we make efforts to understand the scientific properties of fire, then we will appreciate how useful fire is to mankind. It is wonderful that science and the business community are finding all kinds of uses for the energy waves which come forth from fire, whether the fire is from the sun, or from the splitting of an atom, or other sources. Can we not see connection between the spiritual fire to which Jesus was pointing and the incredible uses of light, such as the laser which is part of God's gift to humanity?<sup>78</sup> We need to keep this in mind. But note that as far as mankind uses fire as instruments of destruction, cruelty, or as in the case of Nazi Germany, to extinguish unwanted people, mankind will continue to have unhealthy fear of fire. The atomic bomb has certainly been an instrument which strikes at the fear in the heart of mankind. Mankind has advanced and continuously advances in technology but for certain, our technology is far from perfect. Fire accidents often produce horrible disasters. This also instils fear of fire in our psychic.<sup>79</sup> Even as I write this thesis, I received dreadful news of fire accident which occurred last week Saturday of a Catholic priest of Nnewi diocese in Nigeria killed in his room by fire outbreak. We continue to pray for his happy repose and divine consolation and healing for his biological and religious families. However, the more we use fire for good and the better we are able to control it, the more comfortable we will be with fire and the less fear we will have of it. It is interesting to note that fireworks were used on the eve of the feast of St John when

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<sup>77</sup> Pope Francis, (2010), *L' Osservatore Romano*, God the merciful Father will never cease seeking us in love, The Holy Father's Angelus Reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son. <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/news/god-the-merciful-father-will-never-cess-seeking-u>. Assessed on November 19, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Tentmaker, Fire in the Bible, Breaking Bread Bible Study, Issue Number 1. <https://www.tentmaker.org/BreakingBread/1.html> Accessed on September 15, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

Christianity was still a force to be reckoned with in Britain. Today firework makers do that to create fun to cheer people up. In Nigeria, on Christmas Eve and Day as well as on Easter Vigil and Easter Day, young people celebrate these significant Days with fireworks and funfairs to incite joy and celebration of life. Some adults fire gun shots in the air as a way of celebrating life. In Britain, they celebrate the Halloween season, and the ushering in of the New Year with magnificent fireworks which brighten up the evenings lightening up hearts of people. Even though, fireworks are aimed at generating fun and sense of celebration, people under the age of 18, should not be allowed to buy and use fireworks since they are viewed as potentially lethal. Again, fireworks should be prohibited by law not to be used in markets, churches or in the midst of crowd of people but only in open arenas distanced from people for their view and entertainment. Such entertainment may incite admiration for fire not as something dreadful. When we center on using fire for the good of all mankind, we will be able to use this very force to turn this world into a paradise again. Before we think of how to turn our earthly city into paradise, can we spare some time and look up the heavens and admire the stars in the sky? Is it not fascinating to you how the stars light up the sky at night? But first, is the fire of your heart enkindled? Do you not see how the heavenly elements are magnificently brightened up by the fire of evening stars? The heavens appear ‘divinely.’

We can turn this world into paradise if we insistently pray to God the Father to send down his Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth. As we continue to meditate on the word of God, we will realize that the fire that Jesus would kindle is the fire of good works poured out as coal upon heads of our enemies (Matt. 38 – 48; Rom. 12: 20). In the same context, Jesus spoke of praying for our enemies. The incense and coals offered up each day in the Tabernacles and Temples of the Old Testament symbolized this act. We Christians have the privilege of offering up these prayers to our Father each day in our lives for ourselves, family, friends and

those who hurt us. If we can refrain from vengeance, and pay back evil with love and forgiveness then our earthly city will be renewed. In this way, the fire which brings righteousness will be enkindled in the world.

There is no doubt that there are some Christians who seek the fire of vengeance, the fire of God's wrath, yet the Bible tells us that when his judgements are in the world we will learn righteousness (Isaiah 26: 9). May no Christian believe that his enemies will get an eternal flame of wrath which will never be quenched? God is a forgiving Father. Jesus said "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they doing" (Luke 23: 34). The Scripture says that God will not always be angry (Isaiah 57: 16). His mercy endures forever (Psalm 136). God's mercy triumphs over judgement and of course, the merciful does not fear judgement (James 2: 13).

Jesus said he came down to send fire on the earth and yearned for it to be kindled (Luke 12: 49). I hope that those who have spirit of vengeance do not think that Jesus is yearning to come and judge the earth and destroy it physical fire. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles has a record of the first fruits of that fire which Jesus yearned for. Do we not know the effects his kind of fire has on the world? We need to read chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles. Tongues of fire came upon the 120 people which drove them into streets and corners of Jerusalem. The tongues of fire caused them to open their mouths which were previously shut out of fire of opposing men and they declared the wonderful works of God. Their testimony of God's love and mercy resulted in three thousand people joining them as Disciples of Christ. What can we call this that on the day Moses came down the mountain with the Law three thousand Israelites were killed (Exodus 32: 28) while when the Law of Life in Christ was made manifest under a different kind of fire in the "Upper Room," three thousand people



were added to the number of the disciples of the Lord (Acts 2: 41)? It is interesting that both laws were connected with fire. The first one brought fear, wrath, and death while the second brought freedom, forgiveness and Life.

What about today? Do we need the two “fires?” I suppose the church needs the two laws or fires to separate the ugly from the good in order to purify and sanctify the people of God. Prophet Malachi speaks of fire to “purge” the sons of Levi so that the priests and their sacrifices will be acceptable unto the Lord for the greater glory of his holy Name and for the salvation of souls. We are many that call on the name of the Lord who go by the name “Christian” but from different Christian denominations. And amongst us there are divisions and confusion. As a result of this apparent disunity, we always need that divine fire which will be able to separate the vile from the holy. There is no doubt that the Word of God we hear every day challenges and judges us as well as blesses and heals us. The Word of God is comforting and consoling for whoever listens to it. This is because the Word of God is the Son of God; it is the source of salvation. The Bible states that the Word of God is truth (John 17; 17); and when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide us into the whole truth (John 16: 13). Of course, we still have the likes of John and James who would like to command fire to come down from heaven and consume the perceived enemies of God as Prophet Elijah did. But Jesus the Son of Man does not come to destroy those who are his enemies but to save them (Luke 9: 54 – 56). When you hear some Catholic charismatic members and some Pentecostal church members pray their ‘fiery’ prayer commanding the Holy Spirit to send his divine fire to uproot, bind and destroy the “enemy”, you cannot but conclude that some modern Christians might be guilty of misusing ‘fire’ as James and John were in Gospel account of Luke chapter nine. What is our attitude towards those we perceive as our enemies? Do we perceive them as our personal enemies or the enemies of God? Does God want us to

fight for him because he is not able to defend himself? Why should we regard him as God if he is not able to fight and defend himself? If your type of 'God' is not able to defend himself, how can he defend those who put their trust in him? Who will put his trust in a 'God' who is unable to defend himself? Can we not understand that religious war is meaningless? Our God, the Father of our Lord Jesus is a God who saves. I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance says the Lord (John 10: 10). The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19: 10). Our Christian living is measured so much with our attitude towards those who hate, persecute and hurt us and even ready to kill us. The Lord says: "But this I tell you: love your enemies; and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5: 44); because whatever you do to the least of my brothers or sisters of mine you do it to me (Matthew 5: 40). In other words, our conduct towards our enemies and friends alike should help other people know whether we are truly children of God. God's love for us in Christ remains a yardstick for us to measure our love for God in our relationship with our brothers and sisters. Here we talk of our fire of love overpowering our fire of anger when we are tempered by the love of Christ. The spirit of God in us sparks us to love, to show mercy to others and to forgive them, and to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5: 48). The Christian who is guided by the spirit of Christ burns with love and compassion, which is like a fire, spreading God's flames of kindness, melting the hearts of those around him, spreading joy of the Holy Spirit and friendship. We must note that the fires of love and anger co-exist in us since we are still in this wounded human nature and broken body. There is always tension within us with these fires of love and anger. It is the spiritual battle between light and darkness within us. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8: 12). As the battle between light and darkness rages on in us, we ought to remember always that at our baptism, he has

rescued us from the power of darkness, and brought us into the Kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1: 13 – 14).

The battle I refer to is the battle between the light of Christ that is in each of us, and is to shine through us, versus the darkness that comes from the devil and his kingdom. In the first place, why should there be contest or battle at all? This question arises from the fact that, in ordinary circumstance of life, light is always superior to darkness and darkness is always inferior to light. In the physical world, this is easily demonstrated. When you turn on a light in a dark room, the darkness immediately disappears. On the other hand, in the spiritual world, Christ's light is far superior to the darkness that comes from the kingdom of darkness. If this is so, the all important question is, 'why is there a battle and why there is so much darkness in the world?' The answer is that the battle is being fought over whether or not Christians will let their light shine, or keep it hidden under a basket (Matthew 5: 15). Satan knows that he cannot defeat the light of Christ in us. He knows that when we show up Christ's light within us and let it shine, he has no alternative than to flee (James 4: 7).<sup>80</sup>

Another important point to take on board is that, Satan knows quite well that he can never overcome the superior light of Christ in us yet, he fights on to convince weak Christians to hide their light under a table. But he is scared of the few Christians who let their light shine come what may. He knows that he succeeds in getting many Christians to keep their light to themselves and those will never have power to defeat him.<sup>81</sup> He knows how to secure his success amongst lukewarm and 'dead' Christians who are ashamed and afraid to identify with Christ and with the Church. The devil uses every human weakness such as anger, hate,

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<sup>80</sup> Maurice Blumberg (2011) The Spiritual Battle Between Light and Darkness in Men. [www.catholiclane.com/the-spiritual-battle-between-light-and-darkness/](http://www.catholiclane.com/the-spiritual-battle-between-light-and-darkness/) Accessed on November 22' 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

injustice, discrimination, persona/collective sins, and feelings of vengeance and unforgiving spirit and to convince us Catholics to obscure the light of Christ within us. Another weapon the devil uses against us to exploit on our fears: Fear of other people's opinion, fear of what others will think of us, fear of failure, fear of rejection and fear of looking foolish. We don't want to look bad at all; we don't want others to think we are crazy or too radical. We can be more concerned with what others think of us than what God thinks of us. Unfortunately, these fears are in direct opposition to our faith and trust in God. In fact, if we let these fears control us they can neutralize our impact on the world around us as light of Christ.<sup>82</sup> And so, when we hide God's brilliance within us, we allow the devil's darkness to come alive and spread around like dangerous virus. Hence, many Catholics join the worldview that brands Catholicism as archaic, outdated, conservative, out of fashion, un-progressive, and 'dead.'

The question that comes to my mind is how do we overcome the obstacles to our light shining, especially our fears which can be paralyzing to some people? Firstly, we need to be completely secure in what God thinks of us. The Lord says: "Since you are precious in my sight, and important – for I have loved you, I give people in exchange for you and nations in return for your life" (Isaiah 43: 4). Again, "You are a chosen race, a community of priest-kings, a consecrated nation, a people God has made his own, to proclaim his wonders. For he called you, from your darkness, to his own wonderful light. At one stage, you were no people, but, now, you are God's people, you had not received his mercy, but, now, you have been given mercy" (1 Peter 2: 9 – 10). This is simply consoling and we need to appreciate it and remember it always as a divine privilege. If we are always conscious of whom we are in Christ, beloved sons and daughters of God then we will be standing on a foundation of rock which is Christ. Let us then be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

aroma (Ephesians 5: 1 – 2). May we always remember that Christ calls his disciples friends. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you (John 15: 15). Remain or abide in Christ on an ongoing basis through prayer, scripture reading, and a confidence and trust in his great love for you. This keeps the flame of your light from going out. It is like what oxygen is to a candle. There is a direct correlation between our light glowing and our passion and hunger for the Lord growing. And this comes from a continual deepening of our relationship with the Lord.<sup>83</sup> Our light shines brightest in the dark when we go public with it, not when we hide it. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom (Luke 12: 32). Our mission and our marching orders are made clear – so go public with your light so that: The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord’s glory as water covers the sea (Habakkuk 2: 14). Of course, when a Christian is subsumed in God’s love, there is passion in him to bring healing, joy, and love to those around him because God’s love is not static but like fire produces changes. The fire of divine love radiates and empowers one to act or to respond.

One characteristic of fire is that it divides. The same thing happened when Jesus sent forth the fire of which he spoke. The words of Jesus were like a spark of fire which broke the power of tradition which held people in bondage. Some, through the power of his word, were released from bondage to serve in a higher kingdom, the Kingdom of God where righteousness, peace, and joy dwelt in abundance. His powerful words brought about the abolition of the Old Mosaic System and replaced it with something, better and higher. That is, giving way to the New Covenant, New Priesthood, New Heaven and New Earth coming forth. Also the entire Levitical Priesthood and the governing body of Judaism along with its regulations had to melt

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

away. Peter spoke of the Day of the Lord when the “elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Peter 3; 10). And a New City comes up whose Maker is God built upon a New Foundation, the very Life of the Son of God! This is a city where perfect love destroys casts out fear (1 John 4: 18). This perfect love is a fire found only in Christ. And when this perfect love burns within a heart, it sets the captive free from the power of fear which is made by men to “control and enslave” the weak.<sup>84</sup> It is true that the Lord rejoices in those who manifest his burning love. **(STOP WITH CARMEL)**

### **2.1. Gradual Understanding of the spirit in the Old Testament**

The description of the fashioning of man out of the dust of the earth was the earliest understanding of the spirit as life-breath (Genesis 2: 7). The author of the Book of Genesis, who is a Yahwist, shows that life is completely a direct gift from God.<sup>85</sup> Again, the author was able to understand the spirit as having a powerful influence that can elevate a person to be a seer, impart wisdom and inspire prophetic abilities. A good example is that the spirit of God came upon Balaam and made him prophesy in the name of the God of Israel (Numbers 24: 2 – 4).<sup>86</sup> We also have Elohist accounts relating how the spirit can come upon a person or persons. Pharaoh talks of Joseph, “Where shall we find such a man possessed with the spirit of God” (Genesis 41: 38)? There is an account of how the spirit came upon the seventy elders and also Eldad and Medad who were not in the camp, yet they also prophesied (Numbers 11: 16ff). God bestowed on them prophetic spirit so that they could be effective pastoral leaders of the people of Israel.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Tentmaker, Fire in the Bible, Breaking Bread Bible Study, Issue Number 1. <https://www.tentmaker.org/BreakingBread/1.html> Accessed on September 15, 2109.

<sup>85</sup> Montague, The Holy Spirit, pp. 6 – 7.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 6 – 7.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

We may ask, how do we recognize the presence of the Spirit in our life or in the life of our contemporary Christians? Or how can I recognize the guidance of the Holy Spirit in my own life? Do we remember the discourse of Jesus with his disciples shortly before his ascension into heaven when he promised them that he would send to them another Advocate would teach and guide all those who believe in (John 14:26, 16:7)? At Pentecost the promise of Jesus was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came in power on the believers (Acts 2). Now, when a person believes in Jesus, the Holy Spirit immediately becomes a permanent part of his life, making him a child of God (Romans 8:14; 1 Cor. 12:13). Those who are possessed by the Holy Spirit are made active members of the Body of Christ, the Church by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has many functions and wants to work with sons and daughters of God in renewing the face of the earth to render it worthy for the second coming of Christ when all creation will be subjected to God who will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). The truth is that the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts according to God's will encouraging sons and daughters of God who use these gifts to work for the God for the wellbeing of humanity. Some are given to speak with wisdom while others are called to teach or heal or work miracles. Yet others have a gift of prophecy and some speak in tongues and others interpret what has been said in tongues. We may note that some are called to be professional footballers or boxers, wrestlers or singers. There are those who are given the gift to be medical personnel. Some are called to be musicians. We must remember always that all of this is the work of the one and only Spirit, who gives to each one, as he so desires (1 Cor. 12:7 – 11).

It is encouraging to know that the Holy Spirit comforts us (2 Cor. 1:4), and remains in us as a seal of promise upon our hearts until the Jesus returns (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The Holy Spirit is our Guide and Counsellor, leading us in the way we ought to follow and revealing to us God's truth (Luke 12:12; 1 Cor. 2:6 – 10). But then, we have to work hard to recognize the

Spirit guiding our life so that we are able to distinguish between our thoughts and the Spirit prompting and leading us. It is important to perceive the signs of the Holy Spirit so that we do not end up fighting the Holy Spirit who guides and empowers the church. We have recorded instances of serious misunderstandings and tensions between the parish priest and leaders of some lay associations in his parish. The administration of temporary goods of these lay associations can be tricky and sensitive. Does the spiritual fatherhood of the parish priest end with spiritual life and not extend to the material and social life of members of some of these pious associations? If the parish priest can wade into the spiritual life and practice of members of the pious associations in his parish, why should he not wade into the administration of their material, social and financial goods? The Christian understanding of human beings is that humanity is made up of body and spirit. God saves us body and soul. So, salvation does not only pertain to the welfare of the soul but the body is included. That is why we do not say to the hungry to go in peace and keep warm without feeding and clothing him. James says that faith without work is dead because lack of works reveals an unchanged life or a spiritually dead heart (James 2:26). So, faith that is meaningful, that is, faith that will save us, is demonstrated by the works of life that we do. How we live our Christian life reveals what we believe and whether the faith we profess in the Creed and put in practice is a living faith.

Faith being a gift from God should be humble. Those who have faith in God should be humble people. True and sincere faith in God propels leaders of pious associations to allow their parish priest to be their spiritual overseer in matters of body and spirit. There are some ugly incidents where the parish priest is shutout of both spiritual and social affairs of the pious associations in his own parish. It boils down to the fact leaders of these parish lay organizations assume absolute powers that do not serve the parish and the church in general



but their egoistic interests. When the parish priest who is de facto their spiritual director, is shutout of their affairs, the result is that their works of charity aimed at the needy are denied those who are actually in need of them but are unfortunately misdirected for the benefit of those who are not in need who are probably their friends. It has been observed that the ministry of charity of some of these pious societies is used as a weapon to dominate and punish not to serve those who are in need but not in the circle of friends of the leaders. In this case, the services of these pious associations are unfortunately used to curry favour, cultivate inordinate friendships and relationships and for the leaders to massage their egos, and are transformed into sources of oppression of the weak and the voiceless. If the spiritual guidance of the parish priest is arrogantly rejected, the spiritual life of the members may turn out to be a false Christianity. Human pride causes a lot of problems. The Scripture tells us that as Christians, we are to submit to one another in lowliness of mind. “Similarly, let the younger ones among you respect the authority of the elders. All of you must clothe yourselves with humility, in your dealing with one another, because God opposes the proud but gives his grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). By being submissive and “clothing ourselves with humility” we can create the atmosphere of peace, harmony and unity with others as well as within our hearts. But if we are so full of ourselves, so full of our own “knowledge and ideas,” how can we then accept correction or exhortation and other useful information necessary for our individual and collective growth? Leaders and the lead should never be of the mindset that only their own opinions and thoughts are always better than the others because such thinking will never lead Christians to any progress, peace or unity in Christ. Christians are perpetual pupils are ever open in mind and heart to learn from others, from the school of life and from the Church which is their mother and teacher, and from the Word of God.

Clergy-parishioners relationship should be studied and integrated for the spiritual wellbeing of both. It is appalling in some cases and mature and enriching in others. It is important that the lay faithful see the priests as shepherds of their souls and fathers in faith. This is the sense of faith that should characterize all their attitude, relationships and dealings with priests.

There is no doubt that many of the lay people are older, more intelligent, more knowledgeable, more educated and better endowed than some of the priests. All the same, all lay faithful are to defer to their priests as those placed over them by God in his infinite wisdom. They owe genuine affection and respect to their priests and are ever willing to forgive their human frailties. The laity may not forget that they owe it to Christian charity to pray for their priests and help them with their moral support in their human weaknesses. As members of God's family, lay faithful should know that it is their Christian obligation and right to make known to the priests in all sincerity and love for God and the Church anything that concerns the wellbeing of the Church and humanity. It is their Christian duty to supply the priest with all the information that will facilitate his pastoral ministry. As members of God's family, truth is told in honesty and with love.<sup>88</sup> Most of the negative stories being told about priests are perceived or hearsay. What do we gain in propagating fake news? Why do we take deep interest in selling news that do not promote love, understanding, friendship, community, reconciliation and peace?

We need to cultivate friendship with our pastors of soul; builders of human-bridge. We should cherish the salvation of our souls. It is God who saves us but we need to cooperate with his grace through the pastoral ministry of the priests. We may be more educated by some of the priests but, at the same time, they are placed over our souls as our pastors and fathers in faith, and so, if we are submissive and humble; it does not mean or suggest in any way, shape

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<sup>88</sup> Most Rev. Hilary Odili Okeke, Catholic Diocese of Nnewi, *The Message of Eternal Life, Post-Synodal Pastoral Exhortation (First Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Nnewi)*, pp. 32 – 33.

or form that we are to “worship or adore” other people. It is only to God that we offer worship and adoration. Paul was very clear when he said that we are to serve God and God alone. For, “you have been bought at a very great price; do not become slaves of a human being” (1 Cor. 7:23). Paul also writes: “Are we to please humans or obey God? Do you think that I try to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). In order to remain submissive and able to accept correction, we need to humble ourselves under God’s will and live and breathe to keep his commands, not to try to satisfy human demands and expectations. Contrary to worldview about humility, Christian humility does not mean silence and passivity. “Do not be taken up with outward appearances: hairstyles, gold necklaces and clothes. There is something more permanent that shines from within a person: a gentle and peaceful disposition. This is really precious in God’s eyes” (1Pet. 3:3 – 4). God desires Christians to possess a gentle and quiet spirit. The virtue of humility helps us to be ‘still in our inner spirit’ so that we can hear God’s Spirit speaking to our hearts throughout the day. However, possessing a gentle and quiet spirit does not mean we are passive. God also requires action and zeal in our relationship with him and with others. Can you ever imagine that Jesus would say that the Kingdom of God is something to be conquered; and violent men take it by force (Matthew 11:12). So, if we want a deeper life with Christ, we need to be zealous, as well as humble in our inner spirit. If the priests themselves are not humble and submissive to ecclesiastical and civil authorities then, their pastoral services lack divine favour, salvation and genuity. They will be counterfeit! The Lord lambasts evil shepherds in his vineyard: “You have scattered my sheep and driven them away instead of caring for them. Now I will deal with you because of your evil deeds” (Jeremiah 23:2).

We continue our discussion with our gradual understanding of spirit in the Old Testament. The word ‘spirit’ means God’s creative, prophetic, renewing presence to the people of Israel or to the world at large.<sup>89</sup> By their fruits we shall know them (Matthew 7: 16). And so, the Spirit is known by what it produces. The Old Testament has something to say about the spirit of intelligence (Exodus 31: 3), the spirit of wisdom (Deuteronomy 31: 3; 34: 9), the spirit of jealousy (Numbers 5: 14), and 1 Samuel 16: 14 speaks of ‘an evil spirit from Yahweh.’ The spirit of God can only be positive. It is termed as spirit or breath of God when its effect is prophecy, gifts of leadership and creation of religious men or women.<sup>90</sup> God is the source of life and sustaining influence and strength of every human being (Judges 15: 19). Everyone should consciously and freely choose to worship God because all life belongs to God (Ezekiel 18: 4). God is the giver and protector of all life (Isaiah 42: 5). That is why Psalm 106: 28 decries the dumbness of the people who worship Baal. It is lifeless; the spirit of God is not in it (Jeremiah 10: 14). To paraphrase our penny catechism, ‘Idols are works of human beings. They have eyes but they do not see; ears but they do not hear. Their makers will come to be like them. They will never see God because the grave will be their permanent home.’ The Church condemns idolatry as a worship of a physical object as a god. An idol is an image or representation of a god. The first commandment of the Church forbids worship of idol: ‘You shall have no other gods before me (Exodus 20: 2 – 5). You shall worship the Lord your God (Matt. 4: 10; CCC 2135).

Do we still talk of idolatry in our modern present day? Of course, we do! Believe it or not idolatry is still alive and active. And it is so well disguised that we often don’t even realize that we are very much deep in it, practising it outrightly. Idolatry is like a sticky mud that sticks to your feet or shoes and soils the carpet. Sometimes, inadvertently, we set up idols in

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<sup>89</sup> Edwards, *Breath of Life*, p. 35.

<sup>90</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 4.

our hearts separating us from God. An example is taken from Ezekiel 14:1 – 8, when a group of elders came to Ezekiel but God cut them off from speaking and making their request because they had set up idols in their hearts and so separated themselves from God through those idols. God said to Ezekiel that the idols in their hearts were a stumbling block to themselves and to other Israelites. In this jet age, what are the idols that can set up a stronghold in our heart? Serious Christians constantly look carefully and sincerely at their life to see the idols that might apply to them and need be removed. Can we not say that today, pride is a common idol that is decimating humanity when the Scripture says that God alone shall be exalted (Isaiah 2:11)? If you think that you do not share in the sin of pride, do you not see proud people all the time in every aspect of life even amongst those who serve in the sanctuary of the all holy God? Is it not unfortunate that some Christians who serve God are sometimes too proud to allow God to control their daily lives? It is true that pride can manifest itself in many ways hiding in our attitudes and subtly in other character traits. We may find ourselves disobeying God because we think no one should tell us how to live or run our life. Another common idol in us is that we may be addicted to lustful thoughts, sight and actions. Jesus said that a lustful look at a woman/man is the same as adultery in God's sight (Matthew 5:27 – 28).

Are there some people who present themselves in such a way as to entice others to look at them in an inordinate way, in a bit to arouse them sexually? In some European countries, nudity is allowed. And when men and women move around nude, are some of them not purposely exciting some people be sexually aroused? There are no laws forbidding nudism in these nations but at the same time that does not mean that one can go to anywhere in the country naked. For example, in Germany nudity is almost a religion. It is historically well accepted in that country. In these countries, they practice a very free and sexually open

culture. In their lakes and other nudist resorts people freely move around naked. In these places nudity is encouraged. Most of their beaches are nude-friendly. It is interesting that there are some places one must strip naked if one must go there. This is in Germany. So for them, social nudity is fine but, note that it is not all the time or in every place. For example, in Spain, there are currently no laws against nudity. But there are many nudist destinations in Spain. However, that the law allows for nudism in public does not mean one should go everywhere without one's clothes. There are still some places in these liberal nations where they are more reserved when it comes to full nudity such as churches, restaurants, bars, shops and other sensitive places. It is interesting that in some parts of the world especially in Europe, there are places where people are permitted to walk around naked and in fact seem to enjoy being naked with the full knowledge that some people are fascinated looking at their naked bodies. In fact, the idea is to celebrated nudism in these places.

The question of how do Christians view nudism must be asked. In the first place, does God make it mandatory for humans to be dressed up in public? When Adam and Eve were created and placed in the Garden of Eden as a couple by God, they were both naked and “felt no shame” (Genesis 2: 25). They only had shame, if any, not because they were naked but from disobeying God (Genesis 3:7). So why then did nudity suddenly become a shame for Adam and Eve? Or put in another way: Why did Adam and Eve become ashamed when they realized they were naked after eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? We can say that prior to their sin of disobedience; Adam and Eve knew good from bad, right from wrong, but they had not internalized an evil inclination. And so the urge to do evil did not come from within them. This urge was represented by the serpent – the external tempter. Since the evil did not reside within them, they were “naturally” good, and their nakedness was innocent and in no way shameful or sinful. They saw no difference between a hand

whose purpose was to eat food, give charity and to do good deeds; a mouth with which to drink water, praise God and say kind words to others, and the parts of the body which are used to “be fruitful and multiply.” With every organ they could fulfil the will of God or vice versa, so no organ was shameful nor did anything need to be covered. But when they ate of the Tree of Knowledge, the evil inclination entered into them and became a part of them. No longer did they need an external tempter to incite them to sin – now the tempter resided within their psyches. And specifically, sexual passion – a passion which is much stronger than the desire to give charity or praise to God, a passion which is much more encompassing and has the potential to be seriously misused – became a part of them as well.<sup>91</sup> Hence when they ate the Tree of Knowledge their “eyes were opened” – they became aware of physical lust “and they realized that they were naked” and so it became inappropriate for them to be unclothed.<sup>92</sup>

We continue to reflect on why they became ashamed after realizing they were naked following the eating of the Tree of Knowledge. We could also say that prior to their fall; they were clothed in light as a result of walking with God in the Garden of Eden. They were physically naked, but because they were clothed in God’s glory, they could not see that they were naked. Exodus 34:29 brings out this idea clearly where the face of Moses became radiant after talking to God “face to face” on Mount Sinai. Considering this, it could be that Adam and Eve were also radiant from being with God in the Garden of Eden and when they disobeyed God and contaminated themselves with sin, their radiance wore off, and they saw that they were naked and hid themselves. This biblical story provides the origin of conscience, which St. Paul describes as “a law written upon men’s hearts” (Romans 2:15).

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<sup>91</sup> Biblical Hermeneutics, Genesis 2 and 3 – Why was nudity suddenly a shame for Adam? (2017) <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/28460/genesis-2-1nd-3-why-was-nudity-suddenly-a-shame-for-adam>.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

The point, however, wasn't that they were naked but that they had become aware of their nakedness. Their "eyes were opened" was metaphorically not referring to the physical eyes of Adam and Eve because, their eyes had been open all along while they enjoyed the beauty of the Garden, and enjoyed each other, and observed how the animals behaved. No, the word is being used in this context in reference to their "mind's eye", i.e. their mental/spiritual faculties. Their eyes were open before they ate the forbidden fruit, observed the animals doing all sorts of playful things ... yes, even procreation things. However, the new eyes of their understanding showed them: Just as they had observed the playfulness and procreation behaviour of the animals, so too God had observed them in their regard. This thought must have hit them hard hence; they had to set off immediately to make aprons to cover their procreation parts, and then to run and hide from God amongst the bushes of the Garden. Adam and Eve became aware that they could be SEEN by God in the same way as they could SEE the creatures of lower estate than themselves. It was a hard humiliating experience for them.<sup>93</sup> One of the underlining points is that God intended humanity always to eat from the Tree of Life which would bring healing and wisdom to mankind, and never to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil which would only bring shame and death to them.

The idea of being naked in front of someone else is the most vulnerable thing for a person. The person has no barriers, no shield, no interface, and no pretence. He has no weapons of defence either. It's no wonder some of us are so afraid of being naked in public. This is because nakedness exposes us to every possible danger that we know quite well such as from cold and pain to assault, criticism and rejection. If we are forcefully stripped naked, we have nothing to help us deflect or absorb the injury – we must bear it all, physically and emotionally. With our freedom, we have the knowledge or awareness of our own

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



vulnerability and so can protect ourselves from potential danger by interacting with life in a way that changes how life interacts with us.<sup>94</sup> However, many Christians would think that their clothing keeps them from sin and from enticing some people to sin against others and against themselves.

In antiquity, in many nations of Africa, Europe, Australia and America sex and sex organs were objects of candour, humour and even veneration. Discussion upon the depths and mysteries of love-making was encouraged, enjoyed and ubiquitous especially amongst adults. In ancient Greece, public nudity was considered to encourage good health.<sup>95</sup> In Greece, the Minoan civilization prized athleticism, and both sexes participated. Men wore loincloth while women wore an open-fronted dress. Topless dress was the cultural norm for both sexes.<sup>96</sup> Sparta had rigorous codes of training events. Spartan women as well as men would sometimes be naked in public processions and festivals. And this practice was designed to encourage virtue in men while they were at war and an appreciation of health in the women.<sup>97</sup> So nudity in sport was very common in Greece, with almost all sports performed naked.

The ancient people must have seen sexual activity between men and women as something very common and normal not something viewed with curiosity or out of place. It was a very intimate and usual activity between normal adults as a way of life. It was a social exercise, welcomed as healthy by the African ancient people. Even in some cultures, the host would present a beautiful lady to his/her august visitor to sleep with him in the night as a way of giving a warm welcome and entertaining him. It was a healthy way of life for them and no one frowned at it. But suppression of naked body and free flow of sexual activity between

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Liam Naston, Pot Boiler, The Love Life of an Ordinary Young Man.

<sup>96</sup> Bernice R. Jones – Ariadne's Threads: The Construction and Significance of Clothes in the Aegean Bronze Age.

<sup>97</sup> "Lycurgus by Plutarch" The Internet Classics Archive. Translated by John Dryden. Retrieved 16 August 2017.

men and women and same sexes too began with the rise of monotheistic religions and their spread across the world which still holds sway today as far as those religions continue to retain and dispense power.<sup>98</sup> Yet today, in some parts of the world, nudity is still practiced. It is determined by different socio-cultural perspectives. What someone regards as nudity is based first and foremost on individual feelings and culture – and time-specific shared meanings vis-avis communal expectations, and socio-cultural conventions. These shared meanings link the collective and the individual. On a collective level, they take shape in norms, regulations, and practices; on an individual dimension, they appear in emotions as shame or desire and in responding to norms or breaking them. Both of these dimensions relate to religion. In Greece, nudity was practiced in religious ceremonies. Men who engaged in religious practice left their genitals purposely exposed. In this case the garment apparently fulfilled a purely ceremonial, priestly function in which modesty was not an issue. In Greek culture, depictions of erotic nudity were considered normal. Expectations in relation to nudity are highly influenced by religious ideas and pragmatics. These religious ideas regulate the spaces and times where nudity is acceptable, for example, private places versus public places, and where nudity is not possible without punishment. Yet such regulations are not always expressed in laws; sometimes unwritten social norms are even stronger. However, the way that people act with their body, and with nudity, is based on shared ideas and is normally transmitted through socialization such that this behaviour becomes “normal” in the social imaginary and the individual feels that such a handling of the body is the possible way to act. Even today, these social norms are often based on religious ideas, whereby the implicit and explicit norms in the Bible play a major role.<sup>99</sup> I remember about 45 to 50 years ago; when there were still indigenous religious worshippers (Christians refer to as idol worshippers) in

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> See Knoblauch, *Populare Religion*; Schlehe and Sandkuhler, *Religion, Tradition and the Popular*.

my native town, some of these men went about in loincloth. Our forefathers never saw nudity as something bad.

However, the beginning of civilizations was a different story. Clothing to cover the body is one of the changes that mark the end of the Neolithic, and the beginning of civilizations. The need to cover the body is associated with human migration out of the tropics into climates where clothes were needed as protection from sun, heat, and dust in the Middle East; or from cold and rain in Europe and Asia as well as from rain and mosquito bite in Africa. Also, it is true that in civilized societies, complete nudity in public had become increasingly rare as nakedness became associated with lower status, but the mild Mediterranean climate allowed for a minimum of clothing, and in a number of ancient cultures, the athletic and/or cultist nudity of men and boys was a natural concept. In ancient Greece, nudity became associated with the perfection of the gods.<sup>100</sup>

Again, in the Western world, with the spread of Christian and later Islam, any positive associations with nudity was replaced with concepts of sin and shame. In the Victorian era, public nakedness was considered obscene. In Asia, public nudity has been viewed as a violation of social propriety rather than sin; embarrassing rather than shameful. In Japan, communal bathing was quite normal and commonplace until the Meiji Restoration. However, despite the historical changes in the developed countries, cultures in the tropical climates of sub-Saharan Africa and the Amazon rainforest have continued with their traditional practices, being partially or completely naked during their daily activities.<sup>101</sup> But it is interesting that the upper classes had turned clothing into fashion. At the same time, acceptance of public nudity re-emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early centuries. And Free Body Culture represented a return to

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<sup>100</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_nudity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_nudity) (Accessed 30/12/19).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

nature and the elimination of shame. In the 1960s naturism moved from being a small subculture to part of a general rejection of restrictions on the body. Women reasserted the right to uncover their bodies in public, which had been the norm until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The trend continued in much Europe, with the establishment of many clothing optional areas in parks and on beaches<sup>102</sup> and even areas where it is compulsory to be nude if one must go there. Now nudism is practiced as recreation in many parts of Europe and even celebrated with great enthusiasm. We have many Christian naturists, who have very little disagreement with core Christian beliefs of long-established churches, and may even be members of these churches. They feel the error of mandatory dress is cultural rather than anything related to salvation. We can argue whether such a position is right or wrong. The only shame they may have is from disobeying God not because they are naked. They claim that God made no mandate for humans to be dressed in public and that such requirement would amount to the legalism of the Pharisees. They say that many people are deceived into thinking that their clothing keeps them from sin, when in fact the opposite is the case. For them being nude is a wholesome way of life, and an acceptable state of dress which was never condemned by God in the Bible. There is the argument that while “openness” and “loving people for who they are” are common concepts throughout Christianity, they are especially emphasized in Christian naturism through “body acceptance.” Having a perfect body as the world sees fit is totally unimportant for both males and females of all ages, in particular, young ladies who are so obsessed today with losing weight culture to keep their youthfulness, suggesting that a slender figure is needed to look pretty in the latest fashions. According to them the biblical Adam and Eve were never commanded by God to wear clothing. When Adam and Eve were created and placed in the Garden of Eden as a couple, they were both naked and “felt no shame” (Gen. 2:25) and committed no sin by being naked. Christian naturists see Adam and

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Eve being in the blameless state that God had intended them to be. God who created them knew they were naked, as this was how he had created them, in his image. That is God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. God allows man to share in his own uprightness and Godly living (Wisdom 2:23). However, the fall of Adam and Eve necessitated by eating from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen.2:17) against God’s wish for them; they realized that they were naked. Hence, they sew fig leaves together to hide their nakedness and moreover, they became afraid when they heard the voice of God walking in the Garden asking Adam, “Where are you?” Adam answered God, “I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” God further asked Adam, “Who told you that you were naked?” (Gen.3:6 – 13). We may note that their shame was not of God, and that, even the fig leaves they made into loincloths to cover their nakedness could not even cover this shame. Could we not say that that “nakedness” was the physical representation of their disobedience to God plus the shame and knowledge of that disobedience? In that experience of shame, they both tried to hide from God who was walking in the garden (Gen.3:8). With the knowledge of the sin they committed came shame and “nakedness” the exposure of the sin. The physical nakedness of Adam and Eve represented and still represents the spiritual exposure (or nakedness) of which we truly are before God from whom we cannot run or hide from either in our hearts or minds, spiritually or physically.<sup>103</sup> Yahweh Sabaoth says: “Your nakedness will be exposed; your shame will be uncovered. I will take revenge on you and no one will save you” (Isaiah 47:3 – 4). But in the case of Adam and Eve, God did not expose their nakedness nor inflict shame on them but they did that to themselves, the result of their disobedience to God. We may not deny that we always have the tendency to “hide” our sin knowing that it is wrong and against what we

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<sup>103</sup> Biblical Hermeneutics Genesis 2 and 3 – Why was nudity suddenly a shame for Adam? <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/28460/genesis-2-and-3-why-was-nudity-suddenly-a-shame-for-adam> (Accessed 20 December 2019).

know is right. At times, consciously or unconsciously, we not only hide from God and from others but even from our very selves. We behave like the ostrich that hides its head while the whole body is exposed to danger.

It is interesting to note that Christian naturalists maintain that the fig leaves Adam and Eve wore were futile attempts to hide from God their nakedness and the wrong they had done. The naturalists claim that they practice nudism as a way of promoting good health and getting in touch with nature. Their question is why this should be a problem to long-established Christian churches and Islam since nudism is not a sexual thing. They even believe that the practice of nudism helps to break the connection between nudity and sex. But we should be too concerned with nudity and insisting on wearing clothes since neither of them can cause nor prevent sin. We remember that before Adam and Eve sinned, they saw nothing wrong with being naked. No part of them was shameful nor need covering. Evil did not reside within them and so the urge to evil did not come from within them. It was only when they ate of the Tree of Knowledge that the evil inclination became a part of them. No longer did they need an external tempter to incite them to sin – now that tempter resided within their psyches. And specifically, sexual passion – a passion which is much stronger than the desire to give charity or praise God, and it is a passion which is much more encompassing and has the potential to be seriously misused – became part of them as well.<sup>104</sup> When their “eyes were opened” upon eating the forbidden fruit, they must have become aware of physical lust and hence, realized that they were “naked” – and only now it was inappropriate for them to remain naked.<sup>105</sup> The reason for their sudden shame is now unfolded. Prior to their fall, they were clothed in light as a result of walking with God who is completely light without any trace of darkness (John 8:12). They were physically naked, but because they were clothed in God’s glory, they could

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

not see they were naked. This idea is rooted in the scriptural text where Moses' face was radiant from being in God's presence, talking to the Almighty God "face to face" (Exodus 34:9 – 25). When we reflect on this interaction between Yahweh and Moses, then we can rightly say that Adam and Eve were also radiant from being with God all the time in the Garden of Eden. But unfortunately, when they disobeyed God and contaminated themselves with sin, their radiance wore off, and they saw that they were naked and hid themselves from God.<sup>106</sup> Although, the point wasn't just that they were naked but that they had become aware of their nakedness. It is not just a reference to the physical eyes of Adam and Eve, because their eyes had been open all along but their "mind's eye", that is their mental/spiritual faculties.

We can now make the argument in favour of Christianity that nakedness is not good for Christian life as far as we live in these fallen bodies in this present fallen world. This is because the inclination to sexual passion is much more powerful in man and woman since after the great fall of Adam and Eve. The Catholic Church teaches that the original human nature is good (CCC 374), and that even after this gift was lost, human nature cannot be evil, because it remains a natural creation of God. The result is that human nature is crippled by sinful lust since Adam by sinning lost the original "state" of innocence not only for himself but for all humanity (CCC 416). Hence, man has lost his natural faculties and so has no longer mastery of his passions. Human nature itself is not the cause of sin; although once it comes into contact with sin it may produce more sin. With this fact in mind, the act of adults moving around naked can create occasions of sin due to the fact of the fallen nature of humanity. Hence, it is more advisable to wear clothes to avert occasions of sin for vulnerable

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

men and women. And moreover, even the Scripture makes it clear that it is a shameful thing to “uncover one’s nakedness” (Gen. 9:20 – 27).

It is true that sects have risen within Christianity from time to time that viewed nudity in a more positive light. We have for example the Adamites and the Freedomites who practiced social nudity as an integral part of their ritual. The Adamites, an early Christian sect, practiced “holy nudism”, engaging in common worship in the nude. Also there is a group who practice nudism as a way of enhancing healthiness and getting in touch with nature, and as a way of appreciating the beauty of the human body and accepting it as it is. It is unfortunate that over the years the human body has been misrepresented and misused in varied ways. Do economists, scientists, sportsmen/women, sexual pleasure-seekers and even religious fanatics know that due respect for the human body is central to all human activities? What moral relationship should a rational person have with his/her body?

Saint John Paul II (1920 – 2005) has answered the above questions and more in his revolutionary integrated vision of the human person in his “baby” the “Theology of the Body.” St. John Paul II in his 129 Wednesday Lecture Sessions popularly known as the “Theology of the Body,” taught the whole world that the human body has specific meaning, answering fundamental questions about human life including the real purpose of human life, what it means by the fact that we were created in the image of God, why we were created male and female and what it matters if we are one sex or another, what the marital union of a man and woman say to us about God and his plan for our lives, the purpose of the married and celibate vocations, whether it is truly possible to be pure of heart and what exactly “love”



is?<sup>107</sup> St. John Paul II answers the above questions and more about humanity with obvious emphasis on the theme of love as self-gift which so importantly counteracts the societal trends which views the human body as an object of pleasure or as a machine for manipulation. The Pontiff emphatically teaches humanity that the body shows us the call and gives the means to love in the image of God.<sup>108</sup> Love is an invitation to mutual self-giving in imitation of Christ who gave up his life on the cross for the salvation all mankind. Pope John Paul II encourages both young and old to employ a true reverence for the gift of our sexuality and challenges us to live it in a way worthy of our great dignity as human persons. The Pontiff says that the human person (February 9, 1983) “is always essentially called and not merely accused” and this invitation takes place precisely because of the human temptation toward selfishness. The truth is that God does not want to punish us for lapses of purity, but primarily wants to invite us to love one another as persons rather than as mere objects of self-gratification. St. John Paul II fundamentally views sex as good, as a gift from God and that like all things can be used well or badly. According to the Pontiff, God invites human beings into relationships which are mutually rewarding and which orient us toward a communion of souls that is deeper than physical love. Sex and human body are good, but must be used responsibly. The Catholic view of love says no to selfishness and yes to self-giving. When sex is used as a means of physical satisfaction and the other person becomes exclusively the object of this satisfaction then the divine plan for human love is grossly violated. According to the Pope, a healthy relationship is rooted in the self-sacrifice of each person for the whole thereby satisfying the complementary aspects of a mature relationship.<sup>109</sup> St John Paul II advises us that if we learn how to stop devaluing our bodies, but respect them out of our

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<sup>107</sup> St. John Paul II (1979 – 1984) *Theology of the Body*, <http://www.theologyofthebody.net/> (Accessed 17/12/19).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Sean Salai, S.J (2014) *In All Things, The Theology of the Body Reconsidered*. <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/theology-body-reconsidered> (Accessed, 17/12/19).

desire for one another' good, then Catholicism might have something to say about sex after all.<sup>110</sup>

There is no doubt that the Theology of the Body of Pope John Paul II has changed the way many people view themselves, God, the nature of love and the very meaning of life itself as they now live the Christian life with renewed fidelity and enthusiasm. It touches the deepest yearnings of the human soul and the beauty of God's plan for human love. It opens new ways of understanding human sexuality and teaches us that our physical bodies are created in such a way that they call us to live as a gift.<sup>111</sup> It is a proclamation of the good news of the human body and a reflection on who we are, what we are created for and how we are called to live.<sup>112</sup> It teaches the true meaning of our bodies which are not just biological but also theological because they reveal in themselves aspects of the nature of God. The teaching speaks about the spousal meaning of our bodies, which are created for love, and about a true understanding of the person – body and soul, and the beauty and purpose of our sexuality.<sup>113</sup> The Pontiff tells us that the physical human body can tell us about God – the fullest revelation of whom was given in Christ, a man with physical human body. God's stamp is on each of us.<sup>114</sup>

Fr Pascal Ide describes the Theology of the Body in this statement: "Gift expresses the essential truth of the human body."<sup>115</sup> Today in some sense there is an alienation of the 'person' and the 'body' which can be traced back to Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), the French Philosopher, who in his theory reduced the human body to 'mere matter' thereby putting body and spirit in opposition to each other. Hence the body can be regarded simply as

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Dominic Baster, *The Theology of the Body, Love, Sexuality & the Human Body*, London: The Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, 2013, pp. 3 – 4.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> Waldstein, M., *Man and Woman He Created Them*, Pauline Books & Media, 2006, p. 124.

a mechanism and an object for manipulation and exploitation.<sup>116</sup> Pope John Paul II insists that contrary is the case. In his 1994 Letter to Families, the Pontiff writes: “It is typical of rationalism to make a radical contrast in man between spirit and body, between body and spirit. The body can never be reduced to mere matter: It is a spiritualised body, just as man’s spirit is so closely united to the body that he can be described as an embodied spirit. The richest source of knowledge of the body is the Word made flesh. Christ reveals man to himself.”<sup>117</sup> The Pontiff maintains that the human person is composed of both body and soul together and in personal relationship with the Creator. Pope John Paul II referring to the fundamental nature of man (both male and female), says that he is alone before God as the only one of God’s creatures on earth who can have a personal relationship with his Creator. The Pontiff says, “Man is ‘alone’: this is to say that through his own humanity, through what he is, he is at the same time set into a unique, exclusive and unrepeatable relationship with God himself.”<sup>118</sup> The Pope brings us to the concept of the communion of persons. The Pontiff explains, “We can deduce that man becomes an image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning ... Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion.”<sup>119</sup> The Pope says “man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons.”<sup>120</sup> The human body carries within it an unquestionable sign of the image of God<sup>121</sup> and this is what is meant by the sacramentality of the body.<sup>122</sup> Pope John Paul II explains it this way: “the body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from

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<sup>116</sup> Dominic Baster, TOB, p. 12.

<sup>117</sup> Pope John Paul II, Letter to Families (Gratissimam Sane) 19.

<sup>118</sup> TOB 19:4, 20.2.80.

<sup>119</sup> TOB 9:3, 14.11.79.

<sup>120</sup> Dominic Baster, TOB, p. 20.

<sup>121</sup> TOB 27:3, 14.5.80.

<sup>122</sup> Dominic Baster, TOB, p. 20.

eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it.”<sup>123</sup> We can deduce from this that because we are created in the image of God, we are created to live in relationship with one another like God and in relationship with God our Creator who is himself a related being – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our human life then reflects and is modelled upon the eternal exchange of love within the Trinity.<sup>124</sup> How do we nurture our relationship with God except by praying all the time? And through prayer we address a personal God who communicates many blessings for ourselves and others. God as Creator and Father wishes above all to transmit to mankind his love in his Word<sup>125</sup> A love which is a total and irrevocable gift of self by God to man. This love is an expression of life according to the Spirit. St. John Paul II brings us back to our discussion on understanding of the Spirit in the Old Testament.

The Deuteronomist tradition portrays God’s powerful influence and presence through God’s breath upon some persons who experience a mighty surge of God’s spirit in their lives (Judges 14: 6) equipping them to perform works for God (1 Samuel 16: 13).<sup>126</sup> The same Spirit enables human beings to carry out extraordinary ministries.<sup>127</sup> There are such leaders the Book of Judges refers to as charismatic leader warriors. We have Othniel on whom: “The spirit (breath) of the Lord came upon him” and Yahweh gave Cushanrishathaim, King of Aram, into his hands (Judges 3: 10). Also on Gideon: “The spirit (breath) of Yahweh took possession of him” and he was able to summon and lead the men of Abiezer (Judges 6: 34). Again, “The spirit (breath) of the Lord came upon Jeph thah” and he could enter the territory of the Ammonites (Judges 11: 29). And also, there is Samson:

“And the spirit (breath) of the Lord began to stir him ... (Judges 13: 25); ‘And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him and he tore the lion asunder ... and he had nothing in his hand’

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<sup>123</sup> TOB 19:4, 20.2.80.

<sup>124</sup> Dominic Baster, TOB, p. 21.

<sup>125</sup> TOB 93:2, 8.9.82.

<sup>126</sup> Montague, The Holy Spirit, p. 18.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

(Judges 14: 6), ‘And the spirit (breath) of the Lord came mightily upon him and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty men of the town’ (Judges 14: 19).<sup>128</sup>

The experience of being overcome by the breath-spirit was a common occurrence in the Old Testament times. Samuel, Saul, and David had similar experiences of sudden possession of the breath-spirit at different times.<sup>129</sup> As soon as David was anointed by Samuel, “From that day onwards, Yahweh’s spirit took hold of him” (1 Samuel 16: 13), empowering him to fulfil God’s divine plan with God’s spirit constantly protecting him.<sup>130</sup> It is important to note that God’s spirit was given to certain people to equip them to perform specific tasks as we could read in the Books of Judges and Samuel.<sup>131</sup> As God’s people grew in their socio-religious-political self-awareness, two roles developed and became essentially important in the development of the history of Israel: the office of prophet and the office of leader or King. In the cases of Moses and Samuel, these two positions were comfortably combined.<sup>132</sup> A close study of the ministry of Moses would show that the prophetic office seems to have originated from the spirit-related phenomenon of prophesying rather than law-related teaching.<sup>133</sup> The example is confirmed when God certified the appointment of the seventy elders by putting the spirit of Moses on them and they prophesied together.<sup>134</sup> It can be traced down to the early history of Israel that those recognized by speech-enabling experiences of the spirit of God were prophets to the nation of Israel (1 Samuel 19: 20). The Old and New Testaments are full of stories of God’s gifts to his prophets, kings and leaders but today, what testimonies have we to give with regard to God’s gifts of the Holy Spirit? Has God stopped bestowing his gifts of the spirit? The answer is no! God gives his gifts continually. We seriously need the gift of

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<sup>128</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 6.

<sup>129</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 37.

<sup>130</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 6.

<sup>131</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 39.

<sup>132</sup> Lloyd Thomas, *Development in Understanding the Holy Spirit/Spirit of God*. <http://www.lloydthomas.org/3-HolySpiritStudies/OTthink.html>. Accessed on April 23, 2018.

<sup>133</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 39.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

spiritual discernment to be able to discern the spiritual God gives to us all the time for specific duties he wants us to carry out. God has not stopped empowering different people for specific works in fulfilling his plans for mankind. The purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is to edify, encourage, comfort and build up his people. Apart from the gifts of the spirit listed by Paul, there is no doubt that there are many gifts not listed by Paul as there are needs in the body of Christ. These gifts are unique skills and abilities given by the Holy Spirit to disciples of Christ to serve God for the common benefit of his people, the church and society. The gifts of the Spirit are simply God empowering Christians to do what he has called us to do. 2 Peter 1: 3 says, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his glory and goodness.” The gifts of the Holy Spirit are parts of “everything we need” to accomplish his plans for our lives. Paul instructed that “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us, let us therefore, use them in proportion to our faith,” (Rom. 12: 6).

## **2.2. The Understanding of the Spirit in the New Testament**

The revelation of the Most Blessed Trinity as a mystery was not made explicit in the Old Testament but rather was revealed to us by Jesus Christ who was identified as the Son of God (Matthew 10: 32 – 33), the promised Redeemer-Messiah in the New Testament (Matthew 16: 16), who promised to send the Holy Spirit as Counsellor to teach and guide the Church to all truth (John 14; 16 – 17, 26; 16: 13). It is important to note that **ruah**, a Hebrew word, which translates in English as “wind,” “spirit,” and “breath,” and “**pneuma**” in Greek, is the word described in Genesis 1: 2 in the creation account, as God’s holy wind/spirit/breath hovering above the waters. It is the same God’s spirit that we read in Genesis 1: 2, that hovered over the waters of the River Jordan at the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist (Matthew 3: 16 – 17; Mark 1: 9 – 11; Luke 3: 21 – 22). Jesus’ baptism at the Jordan (Mark 1: 9 – 11)

symbolizes Jesus going down into the Jordan to open the gates of the true Promised Land, with the Spirit resting on him, revealing the mystery of the love of God – Father, Son and Spirit, just as Joshua (Joshua 1) who leads the people of God through the guidance of the Spirit into their land prefigures Jesus, as we are told in the Letter to the Hebrews 4: 8.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son. It is the Father sending the Son (John 3: 17). And the Son says, “I and the Father are One” (John 10: 30). So, the Holy Spirit is God since he is the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son who the Father sends in the name of his Son Jesus (John 14: 26). The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is breathed forth, as it were, by the Father and the Son, and so he is Their Gift of Love. As a Person, the Holy Spirit has all the characteristics of personhood. Peter said to Ananias: “... Why do you intend to deceive the Holy Spirit ... You have not deceived us, but God” (Acts 5: 3 – 5). The Spirit makes us hear the Father’s Word (Christ) and so ‘unveils’ Christ to us.<sup>135</sup>

The ascension of Christ into heaven inaugurated the advent of the Holy Spirit, as it were, as he promised:

“... and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he is with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you. A little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me, because I live and you will also live” (John 14: 16 – 19).

That is why sometimes the Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8: 9) or the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16: 7). So, the Holy Spirit is the way in which Jesus is present with his followers. We may not forget that Jesus promised that his disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came down upon them (Acts 1: 8). Consequently, Jesus’ great promise

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<sup>135</sup> CCC 687

of power from above was definitely fulfilled when his frightened disciples, oppressed by the memory of the cruel crucifixion on the cross of Jesus their Lord and Master, had an extraordinary experience that extinguished their fear and emboldened them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1 – 13).

### **2.3.The Effects of the Holy Spirit**

The Pentecost event was the outpouring of the Spirit, a gift of the Risen Lord that sustains and guides the free and courageous proclamations of God’s Word, which impels the disciples of the Lord to go out fearlessly to take the Good News to the ends of the world. The same Spirit who spoke through Psalm 2 in the prayer of the Church bursts into the house and fills the hearts of all those who have invoked the Lord.<sup>136</sup> The Pentecost event (Acts 2) filled the Apostles with extraordinary joy, new vigour, new fervour, new energy, new enthusiasm and new vision to carry out their mission of evangelization. Do not forget the divine mandate they received from the Lord who said to them: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matthew 28: 19 – 20). The divine mandate is accompanied by encouragement and power.

He said to them: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). So their Pentecost experience could be likened to the lifeless dust that received God’s breath of life and man became alive with breath (Genesis 2: 7). Again, it can be compared to Ezekiel’s dry bones prophecy that made anything lifeless come back to life

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<sup>136</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Prayer in the Acts of the Apostles*, Harleyford, Greater London: CTS Publications, 2013, p. 24.



after receiving God's breath (Ezekiel 37).<sup>137</sup> **Pneuma**, meaning spirit, is the inherent power which is capable of bringing forth new birth<sup>138</sup> and it was active on the day of Pentecost. The question is how far do we know and enjoy the Pentecost Spirit today? Do we experience the influence of the Holy Spirit in our life and in the church today? There is no doubt that we can perceive the vibrancy of church-life in African nations. Is this vibrancy the influence of the Holy Spirit or is it mere emotionalism? Of course, African church liturgies are music oriented coupled with a lot of singing and dancing which prompts one either to dance or sing or one finds oneself shaking one's head to the rhythms. In the midst of such melodious songs it is hard to remain unmoved. The question is, is all this religious vibrancy as a result of the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit or some psychological release of a disturbed personality? There is no doubt that those who attend these uplifting liturgies become emotionally involved. Do they really know God or are they dwelling on their emotional feelings? I am not sure if my question is a right question to be asked because, in the first place, is it not the thirst for God that pushes them to a religious gathering? Nonetheless, in the African religious liturgy, which is always 'electrified', it is like a religious drug, the effects of which may be short-lived. It is like an abnormal experience, somewhat like a modern Pentecostal meeting where worshippers pray down the "spirit" and speak in tongues. The atmosphere seems 'spiritually-electrical.' Such religious activities are like escapes from the realities of ordinary daily life. But could it not be better than those who find their own escapism in drugs, alcoholism, sex, and other forms of hooliganism? One thing that is true is that knowledge of God does not come by emotionalism but by God's direct self-revelation. In other words, God himself takes the initiative for us to know him, beginning our relationship with him by drawing us by his Spirit (John 6: 44). To conclude this paragraph, it looks like Africans are more religious by nature, but without any form of generalization with regard to

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<sup>137</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 42.

<sup>138</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament, An Interpretation (Revised Edition)* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, p. 95. Hereafter as Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*.

my earlier statement of the short-lived effects of their religious experience, their faith-life should be more demonstrated in their daily living outside the church premises. By their fruits you will know them as the Bible says. Of course, a good tree will always produce good fruit not a bad fruit. You do not pick grapes from thorn bushes; or figs, from thistles (Matt. 7:16 – 17). A person who believes in God and goes to church will consistently produce good fruits of love, forgiveness, friendliness and kindness towards others not only in the church but in his/her daily life outside the church in the society. We may not deny that we are all affected by concupiscence carrying deep down within us the inheritance of Original Man. We are also conscious of the call for an ongoing conversion. St Paul reminds us that the power of redemption is at work within us.

The question that comes to my mind is how much understanding did the early Christians have of the Holy Spirit? We can note that the synoptic tradition presents a developed theology that helps us to acknowledge that the early Christian communities understood that the Spirit that breathed life into creatures in the Book of Genesis was the same Spirit that overshadowed Mary at the conception of Jesus (Matthew 1: 18; Luke 1: 35), descended on Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism in the River Jordan (Mark 1: 10), and who empowered the early Christians on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 4).<sup>139</sup> A close look at the New Testament shows that St. Luke's writings gave credence to the Holy Spirit as fundamental to Christian Spirituality more than other authors did.<sup>140</sup> Christ in his farewell discourse promised his Apostles the Holy Spirit (John 16: 7 – 8). On Pentecost day the Spirit descended on the Apostles and the Church was born (Acts 2: 1 – 4). The frightened Apostles were transformed into brave proclaimers of the Good News. Filled with the Holy Spirit and encouraged by the promise of Christ: "Know that I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew

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<sup>139</sup> Edwards, *Breath of Life*, p. 37.

<sup>140</sup> Michael Downey, Ed. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Collegeville Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993, p. 492. Hereafter as Downey, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*.

28: 20), the Apostles launched themselves with unreserved zeal into the missionary work. The community of believers like the Biblical mustard seed (Mark 4: 30 – 32) blossomed under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit. The Church teaches that the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father through the Son who continued to dwell in the Church inspiring and empowering her to undertake mission in accordance with the command and mandate of Jesus Christ who said, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ...” (Matthew 28: 19). Thus the Holy Spirit was, already in the early Church, at work in individuals and in the community of believers. Peter and the other Apostles under the direct influence and power of the Holy Spirit were able to preach, convert, guide, lead and work miracles (Acts 3: 1 – 10; 5: 12 – 16). In the community of believers the Holy Spirit directed and guided them in fidelity to the Apostles’ teaching, communal life, prayer and in the breaking of bread (Acts 2: 42 – 47). Stephen and his companions, appointed through and imbued by the Holy Spirit, ministered zealously to the early Church and bore courageous witness to the faith by shedding their blood (Acts 6: 1 – 6, 7 – 15; 7: 54 – 60). What about Joseph to whom the Apostles named Barnabas (which means son of encouragement) who through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit sold his piece of land and made a donation of the money to the apostles (Acts 4: 36 – 37). Mention need to be made of Paul, a fanatical Jew, who worked hard to destroy the nascent Church and kill the Apostles of the Lord. But the Holy Spirit had other better plans for him and for the Church. The Holy Spirit, in spite of him rather, chose and made him into a worthy instrument for the preaching of the Good News to the Gentiles (Acts 9: 1 – 19). It is fascinating that during the persecutions of the early Church, the Holy Spirit protected and sustained the Church and transformed the persecutions into favourable means of spreading the Good News (Acts 8: 1 – 3; 12: 1 – 9, 24).

The mission of the church, like that of Jesus, is God's work ... the work of the Holy Spirit. This work of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the life of the Church down through the ages. The growth and spread of the Church through many lands, the inner workings of ministries and functions within the Church, especially in the office of the Successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him as Successors of the Apostles, are all evidences of the action of the Spirit in the Church. The same Holy Spirit guided and inspired the great early Church thinkers, theologians and apologists like Justin the Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius and Augustine who laid the foundations for Church Doctrine and facilitated the conversion of their contemporary cultures to Christianity. In the times of persecution, the Holy Spirit continued to inspire men and women to bear witness to their faith to the point of giving up their lives. The Sanctity of life which brilliantly blossomed in the lives of Christians down through the ages is the work of the Holy Spirit ... Apostles and martyrs, confessors and virgins, doctors of the Church, holy men and women from all walks of life, all who through their lives have courageously borne witness to the Good News. By the prompting of the Holy Spirit the Church has established institutions of learning, houses of spiritual formation and various works of charity and care for the disadvantaged. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit new Congregations have been founded. These have tirelessly cooperated in the missionary activity of the Church. In the face of crisis in the social order, the Church, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, has preached the gospel of social reform and justice in the economic order in the world through specific social teachings.<sup>141</sup>

The age of the New Testament is characterized by constant animation of the sons and daughters of God by the Spirit of God (Romans 8: 14 – 17) who has found a dwelling in his

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<sup>141</sup> Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna, Bishop M. Okoro, Archbishop A. J. V. Obinna, The Jubilee in the World, Africa, The Holy Spirit on Mission in the Early Church. [www.vatican.va/jubilee\\_2000/magazine/documents/ju\\_mag\\_01021998\\_p-40\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01021998_p-40_en.html) Accessed 24/11/19.

children (1 Corinthians 3: 16ff; 6: 11).<sup>142</sup> Luke prominently shows that the Holy Spirit is the source of the life and mission of Jesus and the early Christians. Congar Yves in his book, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit' unreservedly agreed with this idea when he wrote: "This Spirit, who, according to Luke, brought Jesus to life in Mary's womb, also brings the Church into the world. The same Spirit who sent Jesus on his mission after anointing him at his baptism also animates the apostolate from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth."<sup>143</sup> However, the understanding of the Holy Spirit as a distinct person developed later. What was clear was that the Apostles and the disciples of Jesus stayed with Jesus because they were fascinated by his words of wisdom spoken with authority and works of miracles that confirmed his words. What was obvious was that Jesus worked with divine power which the early Christians understood later as we do today to be the power of the Holy Spirit. They were first hand witnesses and Simon Peter answered on their behalf and for the whole of Christendom: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Now we believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6: 68 – 69). There is no doubt that the words and deeds of Jesus stirred people who had become helpless and that they were opening the way for their liberation at all levels. Jesus witnessed and inaugurated the truth of God and must have laid the foundation for all future liberation movements which we experience today in so many ways and places. Pope John Paul II, in his pontificate, constantly emphasized the urgency for a strong re-launching of evangelization which he termed 'New Evangelization'<sup>144</sup>, the principle of which apostolic new vision is the Holy Spirit. Before that, his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Decree on Evangelization in the Modern World, that: "Evangelization will never be possible

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<sup>142</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour, Ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Maryland: The Word Among Us Press, 1988, p. 238.

<sup>143</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 44.

<sup>144</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *New Evangelization, Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, par. 33.

without the action of the Holy Spirit ... <sup>145</sup> The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus of Nazareth at the moment of his baptism when the voice of the Father was heard saying, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,” (Matthew 3: 17), manifests in an external way the election of Jesus and his mission. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4: 14) that he returns to Galilee and begins his public preaching at Nazareth, applying to himself the passage of Isaiah: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me’ (Luke 4: 18). And he proclaims: ‘Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing’ (Luke 4: 21). To the disciples whom he is about to send forth he says, breathing on them, “Receive the Holy Spirit ...” (John 20: 22).

The Holy Spirit, the principal agent of evangelization, empowers the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who impels each individual to proclaim the Good News, and it is he who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be understood.<sup>146</sup> And so, there cannot be evangelization without the cooperation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>147</sup> The command which was given to the twelve: “Go preach the Gospel” (Mark 16: 15) applies to all Christians though in different ways, according to the opportunity and ability of individuals and groups. The Good News of the Kingdom which is coming and has already begun concerns all men of all times. And so, those who have received this message have been united in the community of salvation and have the obligation to disseminate it.<sup>148</sup> Jesus says: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). With St Paul the whole Church declares: “... For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Corinthians 9: 16). The Church takes its origin from the work of evangelization by Christ and

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<sup>145</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, par. 75.

<sup>146</sup> EN, Par. 75.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 75.

<sup>148</sup> EN, par. 13.

the twelve apostles. It follows that the Church is sent forth by Jesus himself. The Church, having been herself sent forth and evangelized, sends out evangelizers in her turn. She communicates to her children the message which she has herself received and sends them out to preach it with complete fidelity.<sup>149</sup>

#### **2.4. The Holy Spirit and the Apostles**

The Pentecost event was a watershed moment for the Apostles. In fact, the great work of evangelization Christ entrusted to the Church took off after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles on the Pentecost Day.<sup>150</sup> To the confused and embarrassed public present at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, Peter explained their mission to the people as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel when he said: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2: 17). Peter himself was filled with the Holy Spirit when he spoke to the people about the Son of God (Acts 4: 8). Paul was also filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9: 17) before undertaking his apostolic mission. Similarly Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit when he was chosen as a deacon and later was killed for his faith in Christ (Acts 6: 5, 10). This Spirit, who caused Peter, Paul and the twelve to speak, inspiring the words that they should say, descends likewise ‘on those who hear the Word of God’ (Acts 10: 44).<sup>151</sup> In other words, the Spirit inspires the work of evangelization and its instruments; empowers and commissions them. The Spirit chooses his agents of evangelization and sends them on mission.

The Holy Spirit gives birth to the Church, nurtures her and causes her to grow and multiply.

We have to note that the understanding of the person, the nature and mission of the Holy Spirit was not automatic but a gradual process which remains continuous in the life of the

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<sup>149</sup> EN, Par. 15.

<sup>150</sup> EN, par. 75.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

Church because God is a mystery beyond the complete comprehension of humanity. The Spirit is always connected to the manifestation or action of God as the principal metaphor of God in the Old Testament<sup>152</sup> but came to be depicted as an unquestionable presence that gives life and meaning to Christianity.<sup>153</sup> In fact, the author of John's Gospel portrays the same Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus in the lives of Christians as their personal Advocate who abides in them forever (John 14: 16).<sup>154</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson says: "The Holy Spirit is an active power intervening in the process of the mission, both impelling and guiding it" (Acts 8: 28, 39; 10: 19; 11: 15).<sup>155</sup>

## **2.5.The Holy Spirit and the Church**

In his early Galilean ministry, Jesus started by gathering a community around him (Mark 1: 16 – 20; 2: 13 – 14). But Jesus' efforts to form a community was primarily within Israel as the Gospel according to Matthew highlights (Matthew 10: 5 – 6; 15: 24). This was the prophetic hope of Israel in the first century. The prophets promised that Israel would be restored one day; its scattered children brought together once more under the reign of the Lord (Ezekiel 37; 39: 23 – 29).<sup>156</sup> That was what Jesus meant when he said "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel" (Matthew 15: 24). The renewal of Israel will afford the rest of the nations the opportunity to share in its salvation (Ezekiel 37: 28; 39: 27 – 28). So Jesus' mission was the beginning of this renewal for Israel that would eventually draw all nations to God.<sup>157</sup> It is from the community that formed around Jesus as he proclaimed the Good News that he appointed twelve, designed as Apostles, who spent their lives with him,

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas, Development in Understanding the Holy Spirit/Spirit of God. <http://www.lloydthomas.org/3-HolySpiritStudies/OThink.html>. Accessed on April 18, 2018.

<sup>153</sup> Efodigbue, Charisms for Ministry, p. 44.

<sup>154</sup> Edwards, Breath of Life, p. 37.

<sup>155</sup> Luke T. Johnson, The Writings of the New Testament, p. 222.

<sup>156</sup> Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, The Drama of Scripture, Finding our Place in the Biblical Story, Croydon, Surrey, Great Britain: Bookmarque Ltd, 2006, p. 109. Hereafter as Bartholomew and Goheen, The Drama of Scripture.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 110.



and to be sent out to preach and drive out demons (Mark 3: 13 – 19). In fact, Jesus called them to be his followers so that eventually they would participate in his mission (Mark 6: 7 – 13).

The death and resurrection of Christ, which stands at the centre of the Christian faith is the dawning of a new era. The resurrection is the beginning of the age to come, and of God's renewal of creation.<sup>158</sup> After his resurrection, Jesus charges them to carry on the task he has begun. 'As the Father has sent me, so, I am sending you' (John 20: 21). Reinhard Bonnke calls it "The Great Commission to each Generation!"<sup>159</sup> This divine mandate, Reinhard not only emphasizes its 'urgency, immediacy and imperativeness' but claims it is 'our existence' as well as saying that: "A Christian is a witness."<sup>160</sup> He says that witnessing is the commerce of the people of the Kingdom of God.<sup>161</sup> Pope John Paul II calls it: "The Missionary Mandate" when he says this is the command which began the great expansion of the Church from the first group of disciples in Jerusalem to the great Christian family spread throughout the world. The Pontiff says: 'You, young people, participants in the International Youth Forum, are involved in a similar process' (Pope John Paul II, 8<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day, 1993). But Luke emphasizes that this witness may not begin until the Father has sent the promised Spirit and clothes the disciples of Jesus with the power they will need to carry out the task Jesus has entrusted on them (Acts 1: 8; Luke 24: 46 – 49). The great commission moulded the disciples into witnesses of Christ and was passed on to us in order that we could do, and be, what the first disciples did and were. Hence, we are the heirs of the Apostles.<sup>162</sup> But we need to note that this commission and the promises of Christ to us are personal to us. We may read

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., pp. 127 – 129.

<sup>159</sup> Reinhard Bonnke, *Evangelism by Fire: Keys for Effective Reaching Others with the Gospel*, Florida, USA: Charisma House Book Group, 2011, p. 78. Hereafter as Bonnke, *Evangelism by Fire*.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

it again: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 19 – 20).

The divine mandate from Jesus to us is personal because the commission includes “even to the end of the age.” This means that if Jesus did appear and speak to us today, he would say exactly the same thing.<sup>163</sup> Jesus never changes – he is the same today, as yesterday, and forever (Hebrews 13: 8). The ministry of the exalted Christ continues even as I write now ‘to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1: 8) through his Spirit. After ascending to the Father, Jesus started his work again by pouring out his Spirit on his followers like tongues of fire resting on their heads, and all were filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>164</sup> With the Pentecost experience, the disciples spoke in different languages, making the Good News available to all the strangers in their own tongues; and God’s message in these signs was very clear: The Gospel is no longer confined to the Jewish nation and the Hebrew language.<sup>165</sup> As Christians, we stand in historical continuity with the early Church as their story is our story as well; we have taken up this mission of the Lord<sup>166</sup> and hope to hand on this divine ‘mantle’ to the next generation. Through the witness of Christians, the Spirit will bring the life of the Kingdom to all nations.<sup>167</sup>

The Holy Spirit, in our times too, continues to work in the lives of the faithful and in the community of believers. This is evident in the continued existence of the Church and the continued growth and spread of the Good News throughout the world. Just like the time of the

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>164</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, p. 136.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

early Church and down the centuries, today “the Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the Church’s mission” (RM. 21). The action of the Holy Spirit as Evangelizer has resulted in the various synods of the Church, notably in our time the Second Vatican Council and the Special Assembly of Bishops for Africa, as well as in the recent call by Pope John Paul II (now Saint John Paul II) for preparations for celebrating – the Great Jubilee Year 2000. We are not only witnesses but also beneficiaries of this action of the Holy Spirit in our own time and in our own land as we can see from the impressive growth and spread of the Church, in the increase of vocations to the priestly and religious life, in the growing involvement of our Local Church in the missionary activity of the Church to foreign lands, in the vigour and commitment of the laity in their faith.<sup>168</sup> What quickly comes to mind is what some Nigerian Catholics designate as the “wonders” of the Nigerian Church – and that is, the Missionary Society of St. Paul of Nigeria. It is the pride of the Nigerian Catholic Church. This Missionary Institute was established in response to the call of Pope Paul VI for the commencement of a new era of evangelization in the wake of the Second Vatican Council to send out missionary priests to needy countries both within and outside Africa. The Missionary Society of St. Paul was established in 1977 by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). It is important to note that it is the first indigenous missionary society in Africa. It is a joy and a challenge to Africans in the wake of the African Church coming of age becoming missionary to themselves and to the world. It is a great development in the African Church which now finds itself more in readiness to share in the missionary activity of the wider Church and to send missionary priests to Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and American nations. It is always our hope that the young shall grow following the footsteps of her elders.

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<sup>168</sup> Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna, Bishop M. Okoro, Archbishop A.J.V. Obinna, *The Jubilee In The World, Africa. The Holy Spirit on Mission In The Early Church*. [www.vatican.va/jubilee\\_2000/magazine/documents/ju\\_mag\\_01021998\\_p-40\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01021998_p-40_en.html) (Accessed 24/11/19).

The action of the Holy Spirit in the world goes well beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. The Spirit which we receive is the gratuitous gift of God who distributes his gifts as he wishes. This is the year of the Holy Spirit and we are challenged to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in all who in faith have received baptism through water and the Holy Spirit that has inspired in recent times a growing concern for the reunion of Christ's divided flock. We must therefore, in the name of the Spirit pray earnestly and work tirelessly "that all may be one" (John 17: 21). Neither is the Spirit to be considered totally absent in those who with a sincere heart seek the true God in other religions outside the Christian faith. For as St. Paul told the pagans of Lystra, "God has not hidden himself completely without a clue" (Acts 14: 17). That is why in this age of the Holy Spirit, we should seek to discover his hidden action in all around us and seek to collaborate with all men and women of good will for the triumph of all that is good and just.<sup>169</sup> The dynamic of love for God and each other shapes the Church's perspective on its members and the society. Everything is evaluated in terms of God's actions in Christ. The new relationship with each other transforms perceptions. Human beings are being restored to the divine image through the power of love. Since death has been defeated our efforts to reach out to others are never in vain. The New Testament which the Spirit introduces us into leads us to an unparalleled vision of God alive and active in history, bringing the historical process to consummation.

## **2.6. The Spirit forms a Community**

After Peter's great sermon in relation to the Pentecost event, many people, about 3,000, repented and were baptized into this community that has now received the gift of the Kingdom: the Holy Spirit.<sup>170</sup> The newly formed community of the early Church was

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, p. 137.

attractive to outsiders as they radiated the light of the Kingdom because they were faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, the breaking of bread, the common life of sharing and the prayers (Acts 2: 42).<sup>171</sup> It is obviously the life of the community as it embodies the powerful working of the Spirit that authenticates the truth of the Good News.<sup>172</sup> This is the witness of the Spirit through the apostolic community, and can be designated as the work of the exalted Christ, the Spirit and the Church.<sup>173</sup> Now mere human opposition cannot stop the spread of the Gospel because the growth of the Church and the coming of the Kingdom are the work of God.<sup>174</sup> That is why Jesus said: “Whatever the Father does, the Son also does” (John 5: 19). He also said: “The Father is more powerful than anyone, and I and the Father are One” (John 10: 29). However, it is important to note that the great persecution that broke out against the Church in Jerusalem rather became ‘external grace’ for the Church. The Spirit used the scattering of the disciples as a result of persecution to spread the Good News to Judea and Samaria and wherever they went (Acts 8: 4).<sup>175</sup> Even while Peter was still speaking, the Spirit fell upon all those listening, and the other Jewish Christians were astonished to see for themselves that God poured his Spirit even on Gentiles (Acts 8: 44 – 48). Another sign of the power of the Holy Spirit was in Antioch where believers – both Jews and Gentiles – had come together to form a church community (Acts 11: 19 – 21). It was from this Church at Antioch that the Holy Spirit ‘Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’ (Acts 13: 2).<sup>176</sup> So for Paul, the Church has become the new temple of God, where he now lives by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3: 16; Ephesians 2: 21 – 22). The Church is alive when she begins to receive the life of the Spirit through the Gospel. That is when she is

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., pp. 141 – 142.

established upon Christ and rooted in him.<sup>177</sup> Pope Francis alluded to this in his sermon on Holy Thursday Chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, when he said that: Priests must do what Jesus did and be "street preachers," going out to encounter and accompany sinners with tenderness and compassion. The Pope says that being close reflects an attitude and a way of relating to or connecting with others that allows the priest to be true to himself and be attentive to those with whom he engages. He says that Jesus' truths are always brought to the people and conveyed naturally, informally, "face-to-face."<sup>178</sup> It is the Holy Spirit who brings believers to maturity, adulthood and fruitfulness: the 'fullness of Christ' (Ephesians 4: 11 – 16).

The Holy Spirit who is the soul of the Church acts in us through the Word and Sacraments entrusted to the Church. Thus we encounter the Holy Spirit in the Word of God especially the Holy Scriptures read and interpreted within the Church. The Sacraments are channels of grace to us through the action of the Holy Spirit. Here we draw attention to the Sacrament of Confirmation which is the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit par excellence and through which we receive in a special way the manifold gifts of the Holy Spirit. Imbued by this Spirit, we contribute to the establishment of justice and peace in our society, we are led not only to desire but also to fight for and implement good government and leadership in public affairs, and we are challenged to reach out to others in dialogue and build bridges of friendship across cultures and other human barriers and thus we engage in the process of converting our cultures to Christ.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>178</sup> Carol Glatz, Catholic Herald, Pope Francis urges Priests, Be Close to Sinners. <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2018/03/29/pope-francis-be-close-to-sinners/>. Accessed on May 14, 2018.

<sup>179</sup> Archbishop A.K. Obiefuna, Bishop M. Okoro, Archbishop A.J.V. Obinna, The Jubilee In The World, Africa. The Holy Spirit On Mission In The Early Church. [www.vatican.va/jubilee\\_2000/magazine/documents/ju\\_mag\\_01021998\\_p-40\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01021998_p-40_en.html) (Accessed 24/11/19).

## 2.7. The Spirit on the Gospel of Saint Mark

The spirit (**Pneuma**) in the Gospel of Mark is classified under three categories: (a) the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit, which we can read in Mark 1: 8, 10, 12; 3: 39; (b) Evil and demonic spirits used concomitantly (Mark 1: 23, 26, 27, 32, 39; 3: 11), and (c) the human spirit as we see in Mark 2: 8; 8: 12; 14: 38.<sup>180</sup> The truth is that, the Holy Spirit communicates divine presence; he always impacts positively whereas evil/demonic spirits conversely come from the forces of darkness and they take possession of people to inflict different kinds of injury on human beings.<sup>181</sup> Though the mysterious afflictions of human beings are more often than not attributed to evil spirits and demons, the New Testament authors never created the impression of evil being equal to God.<sup>182</sup> However, the evil spirits were always portrayed as inferior to God and subject to the Spirit of God working in God's agents as seen in the ministry of Jesus (Mark 3 : 23 – 27).<sup>183</sup> We think of the human spirit as that part of us that interacts with the spiritual realm, through which God encounters us all the time (Romans 8: 16; Galatians 6: 18; Philippians 4: 23; James 4: 5).<sup>184</sup> The human spirit is also that part that opens up a person for a divine experience (Matthew 5: 3; Luke 1: 47; Romans 1: 9).<sup>185</sup>

It is important to note how the author of the Gospel of Mark makes use of the Pneuma/Spirit. The author of the Gospel at the beginning starts with the introduction of the prophecy of John the Baptist announcing the emergence of the Messiah who will baptize not with water but with fire and the Holy Spirit (Mark 1: 4 – 8).<sup>186</sup> The metaphors fire and the Holy Spirit prefigure what would eventually take place on Pentecost Day when the disciples experienced

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<sup>180</sup> Kenny Burchard, Pneuma (spirit) in Mark's Gospel. <http://thinktheology.org/2013/11/27/pneuma-spirit-marks-gospel/>. (November 27, 2013). Accessed May 3, 2018.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Moises Silva, Ed. *New Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014, p. 808.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Brown Collin, Ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3., (English language ed.) Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2002, p. 693.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Gelpi, *The Spirit in the World*, p. 50.

what appeared like tongues of fire on each of them as they were empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 1 – 11).<sup>187</sup> In Biblical usage, the fire was for purification and judgment.<sup>188</sup> The concept was that the divine fire would purify all the imperfections of the human nature and make the human person holy before God.<sup>189</sup> According to John the Baptist, “... the one who is coming will do much more: he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3: 16). It was obvious that John the Baptist was more interested in directing his audience to the Messiah on whom the Holy Spirit reposed.<sup>190</sup> Mark’s account of the baptism of Jesus underlines the idea that creation was being re-established anew as recorded in the Book of Genesis 1: 2: God’s spirit hovering over the waters.<sup>191</sup> The scene at the baptism of Jesus: “the heavens opened” (Matthew 4: 16) was understood by the Jews as God’s readiness to pour out his blessings on his children.<sup>192</sup> With the heaven opening up and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove, Jesus enacts the dawn of a new age.<sup>193</sup> It is important to note that the four Gospels recorded the account of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1: 10; Matthew 3: 16; Luke 3: 22 and John 1: 32). The descending of the Holy Spirit on Jesus in form of a dove was followed by a voice of authentication from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1: 11).<sup>194</sup> After his anointing from above, the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert where he remained for forty days , tempted by Satan (Mark 1: 12 – 13). Yes God placed salvific mission on Jesus at his baptism with the empowerment from above. In other words, being chosen from above does not exempt anyone from the trials and sufferings of our earthly life. As human beings we must go through some disappointments and hardship. The key to victory is the ability to remain under the influence

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<sup>187</sup> Mackenzie, Ed. Dictionary of the Bible, p. 842.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Montague, The Holy Spirit, p. 239.

<sup>191</sup> Daniel, O.S.B. Ed. The New Collegeville Bible Commentary, New Testament, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009, p. 102. Hereafter as Daniel, Ed. The New Collegeville Bible Commentary.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Montague, The Holy Spirit, p. 241.

<sup>194</sup> Collin and Senior, The Catholic Study Bible, p. 1318.



of the Holy Spirit. In his account of the temptations of Jesus in the desert, Mark made it clear that the angels ministered to him in the midst of wild beasts (Mark 1: 13).<sup>195</sup>

In the desert, Jesus rebuffed the attacks of Satan, which recapitulated the temptations of Adam in Paradise and Israel in the desert, and the devil left him “until an opportune time” (Luke 4: 13; CCC 538). We can say he alighted from this encounter with the devil victorious, filled with the Holy Spirit to start his public ministry. He taught with authority, not like the teachers of the law (Mark 1: 22); evil spirits obeyed him (Mark 1: 27), he drove out demons and healed the sick (Matthew 8: 16). For Mark, Jesus is the one anointed to challenge Satan.<sup>196</sup> Mark portrays the superiority of the authority of Jesus over unclean spirits when he says those who were possessed with evil spirits would fall before him and cry out “You are the Son of God” (Mark 3: 11).<sup>197</sup> To prove that his authority over unclean spirits came from above through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus challenged those who likened his authority to that of Beelzebub: “Truly, I say to you, every sin will be forgiven humankind, even insults to God, however numerous. But whoever slanders the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. He carries the guilt of his sin forever” (Mark 3: 28 – 30).<sup>198</sup> The Gospels show us how Jesus allows himself to be criticized by those who do not understand him and those who hate him. Many Pharisees may have done the same out of ignorance or jealousy, and some were genuinely scandalized by Jesus. All this can be excusable, but it is malicious to call evil that which is clearly good. Every good comes from God (James 1: 17). The Scriptures says: “A good tree always produces good fruit. A rotten tree produces bad fruit” (Matthew 7: 17). So to slander the Holy Spirit is to attribute to a bad spirit a work that is manifestly good. We note that out of jealousy or hatred some people directly or indirectly attribute bad intentions to

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<sup>195</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 48.

<sup>196</sup> Montague, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 242 – 243.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

good work done by others or by the Church, and as such sin against the Holy Spirit. Jesus was popular and attracted many followers, but unlike worldly rulers and celebrities, he did nothing to defend himself. In fact, on the contrary, most governments of nations today go contrary to the principles of the Kingship of Jesus.<sup>199</sup> However, Jesus is our freedom and peace (Isaiah 61: 1).<sup>200</sup> It is true that the consolation for Christians and the rest of mankind is that Jesus says: “The Father is greater than anyone. I and the Father are One (John 10: 29 – 30). We should be conscious of our human weaknesses, limitations and inadequacies, and so, put ourselves in a position to receive God’s power through his Holy Spirit. For Christ’s sake, we delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in difficulties. When we are weak, then we are strong (2 Corinthians 12: 10).

We may not forget that in Mark, there are also healings that are not connected with demonic influences: “the paralytic (Mark 2: 1 – 11), the daughter of Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood (Mark 5: 21 – 43), a leper (Mark 1: 40 – 45), Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1: 29 – 30), the deaf-mute (Mark 7: 31 – 37).<sup>201</sup> Subsequently, after his resurrection, Jesus empowered his disciples with charismatic authority to heal and set free all who are possessed by demonic spirits.<sup>202</sup> Believers are able to exercise the same charismatic ministry as Jesus did because openness to the baptism in the Holy Spirit empowers them. Besides, through the redemptive suffering and death of Jesus Christ and by the power of his resurrection, those

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<sup>199</sup> List of Arrested Journalists in Turkey. (Unfortunately, for example, in contrast to Jesus, the government of Turkey, as at January 24, 2018, has jailed 245 journalists who criticized the government with an additional 140 journalists who face outstanding arrests warrants). [https://en.wiki/List of arrested journalists in Turkey](https://en.wiki/List_of_arrested_journalists_in_Turkey). Accessed on May 4, 2018.

<sup>200</sup> 25 Journalists Killed in Turkey. (The experiences of journalists in Turkey are awful where between 1992 and 2018, 25 journalists have been killed and the same horrendous stories are told in nations like Iran, Syria, Egypt, Afghanistan and many other countries). [https://cpj.org/data/killed/Europe/turkey/?status=killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&cc\\_fips%5B%5D=TU&start\\_year=1992&year=2018&group\\_by=year](https://cpj.org/data/killed/Europe/turkey/?status=killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&cc_fips%5B%5D=TU&start_year=1992&year=2018&group_by=year). Accessed on May 4, 2018.

<sup>201</sup> Montague, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 248.

<sup>202</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 49.

initiated into the faith by a participation in baptism in the Holy Spirit are empowered to continue in Jesus' charismatic ministry.<sup>203</sup> **THE AFRICAN MENTALITY!!!**

## **2.8. The Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Saint Matthew**

The common agreement amongst biblical scholars is that it is believed that Matthew comes after Mark despite the fact that Matthew's Gospel is placed before Mark in the present arrangement in the New Testament.<sup>204</sup> And also, many biblical scholars accept that Matthew's Gospel is built on Mark's theology.<sup>205</sup> St. Matthew's Gospel in its infancy narrative, makes it clear that the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit on the life and work of Christ can be traced back to his conception.<sup>206</sup> The angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She has conceived by the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1: 20). The child in the womb of Mary, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose name is Emmanuel, meaning 'God with us' (Matthew 1: 23), with a divine origin, manifests God's salvific presence in human history and his interest to save us from our sins.<sup>207</sup>

John the Baptist in his proclamation in the wilderness, before the baptism of Jesus, announced that, Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3: 11).<sup>208</sup> We note that fire is understood in two ways: it is the same as the Spirit as experienced on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1 – 11) or the symbolism of eschatological judgment.<sup>209</sup> However, Dunn thinks that

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<sup>203</sup> Kilian McDonnell OSB, and George Montague SM, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA: A Michael Glazier Books, The Liturgical Press, 1991. P. 14. Hereafter as McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>204</sup> Montague, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 302.

<sup>205</sup> Edwards, *Breath of Life*, p. 69.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> Gelpi, *The Spirit in the World*, p. 58.

<sup>208</sup> Edwards, *Breath of Life*, pp. 68 – 69.

<sup>209</sup> John Barton and John Muddiman, Eds. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 851. Hereafter as Barton and Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*.

this “would have the element of both warning and promise-warning of judgment to the stiff-necked and promise and grace to the penitent.”<sup>210</sup>

It is curiously interesting that at his baptism, after the voice of the Father was heard from heaven affirming Jesus as the beloved Son of God (Matthew 3: 17), the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4: 1). Every student is tested by sitting for examinations to gauge his knowledge as well as to assure his/her parents that they have not wasted their money on him/her and to certify his/her professor that he/her has not wasted his/her efforts and time. Could we not also say that Jesus as a Son of Man was permitted by God to be tested by the Devil, after he had received the divine confirmation that he is the beloved Son-Servant of God? Since he is the Son of man, he is not exempted from the tests and trials that are associated with the rest of mankind. As the Son of Man, enabled by the power from above, Jesus consistently chose to remain in God’s plan by rejecting the Devil’s suggestions, and so created the atmosphere for the heavenly angels to minister to him (Matthew 4: 11). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was empowered to preach, teach, heal, forgive, raise the dead and do works of compassion (Matthew 8: 1 – 4, 5 – 13, 14 – 17; 9: 1 – 13, 18 – 26, 27 – 31, 32 – 34; 12: 22 – 32; 14: 34 – 36; 15: 21 – 28, 29 – 31; 17: 14 – 21).<sup>211</sup> Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus commissioned his disciples, gave them authority over unclean spirits (Matthew 10: 1) and also assured them of divine support in times of trials: “The Spirit of your Father will speak through you” (Matthew 10: 20).<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit*, Vol. 2., Pneumatology, Grand Rapids, United States: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998, pp. 93 – 102. (Cited in Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, p. 69). Hereafter as Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit*, Vol. 2., Pneumatology.

<sup>211</sup> McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, Evidence from the First Eight Centuries, p. 22.

<sup>212</sup> Edwards, *Breath of Life, A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, p. 69.

Matthew brings to conclusion his Gospel with a baptismal formula, which reveals the baptismal form of his community, which later became fundamental in the development of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. Christ commanded his disciples to baptize those who believe “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28: 19).<sup>213</sup> Matthew’s baptismal formula depicts the most profound personal trait of the Holy Spirit as a divine person in the entire New Testament.<sup>214</sup> He also revealed the Trinitarian formula, which initiates converts into the ministry of Jesus and empowers them into continuing his mission of preaching and healing in the world.<sup>215</sup>

## **2.9.The Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Saint John**

It is John the Baptist who claimed that he saw the Holy Spirit coming to rest on Jesus at the moment of his baptism. He said, “I saw the Spirit coming down on him, like a dove from heaven, and resting on him ... I declare that this is the Chosen One of God” (John 1: 32, 34).<sup>216</sup> Jesus Christ is the anointed Son of God on whom the Spirit of God rested starting from the beginning of his ministry, just as the synoptic Gospels describe him.<sup>217</sup> His experience of the Holy Spirit at his baptism sets Jesus in motion for his divine mission in manifesting God’s healing presence in the world.<sup>218</sup> It doesn’t seem the expression “Holy Spirit” is commonly used in St. John’s Gospel as it appears in Luke and Acts of the Apostles. However, “Spirit of Truth” appears only in John (John 14:17; 15: 26; 16: 13) and 1 John 4: 6 but no other place in the New Testament.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> McKenzie, Ed. Dictionary of the Bible, P. 842.

<sup>215</sup> McDonnell and Montague, Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit, p. 22.

<sup>216</sup> Collins and Senior, The Catholic Study Bible, p. 1405.

<sup>217</sup> Montague, The Holy Spirit, p. 338.

<sup>218</sup> McDonnell and Montague, Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Evidence from the Eight Centuries, p. 72.

<sup>219</sup> Felix Just, S.J., The Spirit/Paraclete in the Johannine Literature. [www.catholic-resources.org/John/Themes-Spirit.htm](http://www.catholic-resources.org/John/Themes-Spirit.htm). Accessed on May 5, 2018.

The word “Paraclete” is another distinguishing word in Johannine pneumatology.<sup>220</sup> The Holy Spirit is “another Advocate” (John 14: 16) indicating that Jesus is the first “Advocate” (1 John 2:1). Consequently, the Paraclete accomplishes several of the same things Jesus said and did.<sup>221</sup> A close look suggests that the Spirit/Paraclete performs different tasks in the Gospel of St. John: He is a companion. He will be with the disciples forever even after Jesus leaves them physically (John 14: 16 – 18; 1 John 3: 24; 4: 13); a teacher, who reminds the disciples all Jesus has taught them (John 14: 26); an advocate, a legal witness who gives testimony to the disciples and the world about Jesus (John 15: 26); a judge who convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16: 8 – 11); and a revealer who leads the disciples to the complete truth about Jesus (John 16: 13 – 15; 1 John 5: 6 – 8).<sup>222</sup> For John, the Paraclete as revealer implies that new revelation and original teaching are to be held in constant tension, so that the Spirit’s role is not just simply that of repeating the original teaching as it had been given and received initially, but, that of illuminating new truth utterly unconnected to the old, and that of re-deciphering the old to give it modern meaning and that of revealing the new in a way that aligns with the old.<sup>223</sup>

He is the multifaceted advocate who comes from the Father who will be a witness to Jesus (John 15: 26) as well as glorify him (John 16: 14).<sup>224</sup> For John, the Spirit can only be given through his glorification (John 7: 39), which only occurs after his death and resurrection (Matthew 16: 21).<sup>225</sup> The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8: 9). In this context, “the Spirit of Christ” doesn’t mean a Christ-like spirit but rather, it is a name of the

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<sup>220</sup> Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology, The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical International, and Contextual Perspective*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2002, p. 35. Hereafter as Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*.

<sup>221</sup> Just, *The Spirit/Paraclete in the Johannine Literature*. [www.catholic-resources.org/john/Themes-Spirit.htm](http://www.catholic-resources.org/john/Themes-Spirit.htm). Accessed on May 5, 2018.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> Brown, Ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament*, Vol. 3., p. 704.

<sup>224</sup> Edwards, *Breath of Life*, p. 74.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

Holy Spirit. But, why is the Holy Spirit called the Spirit of Christ? It is because he is Christ's Gift. The Holy Spirit is not only merely the gift of the Father but also the gift of the Son. We read in John 20: 22 that Jesus breathed on them, and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>226</sup> It is Christ who breathes upon us and imparts to us the Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches us that it is in answer to his prayer that the Father gives to us the Holy Spirit (John 14: 15 – 26).<sup>227</sup> In Acts 2: 23 we read that Jesus, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit," shed him forth upon believers.<sup>228</sup> In Matthew 3: 11 we read that it is Jesus who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. In John 7; 37, 39, Jesus encourages all those who are thirsty to come to him and drink, and the context makes it clear that the water that he gives is the Holy Spirit, who becomes a source of life and power flowing out to others, in those who receive him.<sup>229</sup> He declares that he is the One who gives the living water, the Holy Spirit (John 4: 10). It is the glorified Christ, in answer to his prayer, receives the Holy Spirit from the Father, and sheds forth upon the Church him whom he has been received from the Father, and so the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of Christ."<sup>230</sup>

Another reason why the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of Christ," is that, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ to us. In John 16: 14, we read, "He will take what is mine and make it known to you; in doing this, he will glorify me." In a similar way it is written, "From the Father, I will send you the Spirit of truth. When this Helper has come from the Father, he will be my witness" (John 15: 26). This is the work of the Holy Spirit: to bear witness of

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<sup>226</sup> R.A. Torrey, *The Presence & Work of the Holy Spirit*, New Kensington, United States of America: Whitaker House, 1996, pp. 51 – 52. Hereafter as Torrey, *The Presence & Work of the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

Christ and reveal Jesus Christ to men and women. And as the revealer of Christ, he is called “the Spirit of Christ.”<sup>231</sup>

Again, the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of Christ” because it is his work to form Christ as a living presence within us. In Ephesians 3: 16 – 19, the apostle Paul prays to the Father,

“That he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

It is the work of the Holy Spirit: to cause Christ to dwell in our hearts, to form the living Christ within us. Just as the Holy Spirit literally and physically formed Jesus Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1: 35), so also the Holy Spirit spiritually but really forms Jesus Christ within our hearts today. Jesus told his disciples that when the Holy Spirit came, he himself would come; that is, the result of the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in their hearts would be the coming of Christ himself. “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he is with you, and will be in you”(John 14: 16 – 18).<sup>232</sup>

The Holy Spirit is also called “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” in Philippians 1: 19: “For I know that this will result in deliverance for me through your prayers and support from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” It is the man Jesus, exalted at the right hand of the Father, who receives and sends the Spirit. This is what we read in Acts 2: 32 – 33, “God raised this Jesus; of this we are

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., pp. 51 – 52.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., pp. 52 – 53.



all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth, as you see and hear.”

The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of Jesus” in Acts 16: 6 – 7, “They travelled through Phrygia and Galatia, because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this.”

By using the name “the Spirit of Jesus,” the thought of the relation of the Spirit to the Man Jesus is still clearer than in the name preceding this, the Spirit of Jesus Christ.<sup>233</sup> On a personal experience, the expression “the man Jesus” brings the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, more intimate, personal and closer to me than the name of “Jesus Christ” and many people have indicated the same feeling or idea to me. Our faith journey should be gauged by how personal our relationship to Jesus is. This may bring us to reflect on why Saint Augustine in his quest for truth, peace and joy, after seeking them in vain in many things eventually concluded with his famous words “and our heart is restless until it rests in God” (cf. Confessions 1,1,1). Again, the same saint further says, in the light of his own experience: the Lord is closer to us than we are to ourselves: “**interior intimo meo et superior summum meo**” (“higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self”) (Confessions III, 6, 11).<sup>234</sup>

The Holy Spirit is called the “the Spirit of his Son” as we read in Galatians 4: 6: “And because you are children, God has sent into your hearts, the spirit of his Son, who cries out:

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>234</sup> Benedict XVI, Angelus, Saint Peter’ Square, The Sunday of Advent – “**Gaudete**” Sunday. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2011/document/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20111211.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2011/document/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20111211.html). Accessed on May 7, 2018.

Abba! That is, Father.” From the context of the above text, we can see that this name is given to the Holy Spirit in special connection with his testifying to the sonship of the believer: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption, as children of God” (Galatians 4: 4 – 5). It is “the Spirit of his Son” who testifies to our sonship and the Holy Spirit produces a sense of sonship in us. So, when we receive the Holy Spirit, we no longer relate to God as servant to master who serve under constraint and bondage but as sons who live in joyous liberty. This is because the spirit we receive is not a “spirit of bondage to fear” but “the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8: 15).<sup>235</sup>

## **2.10. The Spirit in Pauline Writings**

In Pauline writings, the Spirit occupies a place of great importance.<sup>236</sup> Surprisingly, Paul did not meet Christ in the flesh, had no experience of the Pentecost, but based his experience of the Spirit entirely on the event of Easter, the resurrection and glorification of Jesus as Christ and Lord.<sup>237</sup> It is encouraging to note because when we hear of the heroic life the saints lived during their earthly life we easily think that they were superhuman beings not as ordinary as we are today. Upon reflection, one understands that they were as human and ordinary as we are today but, they simply did common things in extraordinary ways despite their attendant weaknesses, failures, mistakes and sins as we are today. So, we may not hide in our false assumption that they were special creatures purposely created by God to do spiritual feats and acrobatics that ordinary men and women like us are not spiritually equipped to do. What the saints did, God’s grace is enough for us to accomplish as much. Did Christ not say: “Amen,

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<sup>235</sup> Torrey, *The Presence & Work of the Holy Spirit*, p. 54.

<sup>236</sup> C.D. Stampley Enterprises, INC. *The World Dictionary-Concordance to the New American Bible*, Iowa Falls, USA: World Bible Publishers, 1970, p. 655. Hereafter as Stampley, *The World Dictionary-Concordance to the New American Bible*.

<sup>237</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 30.

amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14: 12).

Paul’s encounter with the risen Lord formed the source of his motivation and grace to produce great work on the Spirit. This experience must have radically transformed Paul to turn from a persecutor of Christians (Acts 8: 3)<sup>238</sup> to one of the greatest gospel preachers the world has ever known. Many scholars believe that the religious encounter of Paul on the road to Damascus that led to his conversion (Acts 9: 1 – 19) prompted his entire Christian message.<sup>239</sup> However, it is important to note that Paul’s encounter with the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Ananias (Acts 9: 17) must have endowed and empowered him with the Holy Spirit:

Ananias entering the house laid his hands upon Saul and said, Saul, my brother, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me to you, so that you may receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes and he could see; he got up and was baptized. Then he took food and was strengthened (Acts 9: 17 – 19).<sup>240</sup>

From the Scripture we learn that the gift of the Holy Spirit is what makes an individual a member of Christ (1 Corinthians 2: 12; 2 Corinthians 11: 4; Romans 8: 9; 1 Thessalonians 4: 8). The Spirit makes us children of God through adoption (Romans 8: 14 – 16). And so, we have union with Christ through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 6: 17) making us members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12: 13). Christians, who receive Christ through their baptism in the Holy Spirit, walk according to the Spirit (Galatians 5: 25). The Holy Spirit leads them (Romans 8: 4) and they produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5: 22 – 23).<sup>241</sup> For Paul, the gifts of the Holy Spirit distinguish a believer from a non-believer (Romans 2: 29; 7:

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<sup>238</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, and John T. Fitzgerald, Eds. *The Writings of St. Paul, A Norton Critical Edition* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2007, p. XXII. Hereafter as Meeks and Fitzgerald, *The Writings of St. Paul*.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> Collins and Senior, *The Catholic Study Bible*, p. 1459.

<sup>241</sup> Stampley, *The World Dictionary-Concordance to the New American Bible*, p. 655.

6; 2 Corinthians 3: 6 – 8).<sup>242</sup> Those who encounter the Holy Spirit experience inward transformation that makes the Spirit the glory of Christ that dwells in them (Romans 8: 10).<sup>243</sup> Hence, Paul asserts: “Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Galatians 2: 20).<sup>244</sup>

## **2.11. The Spirit in Saint Luke**

The Gospel of Luke lavishly shows the importance of the Holy Spirit as the Angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah that the child to be conceived by Elizabeth would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb (Luke 1: 15). It is the same angel who told Mary concerning her conception that she would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit from on high (Luke 1: 325).<sup>245</sup> The Holy Spirit who overshadows Mary from on high anoints her as well for her mission of birthing Jesus and giving him to the world. Mary joyfully carries out her mission as the first messenger of the good tidings, bearing Jesus, the Good News.<sup>246</sup> Mary visiting her kinswoman Elizabeth, she is filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1: 41). Here, Luke skilfully presents Jesus as the medium of the Holy Spirit even in the womb of Mary, his mother, and as John the Baptist comes in contact in the spirit with Jesus, he rejoices and leaps for joy (Luke 1: 44).<sup>247</sup> John the Baptist will eventually declare in Luke 3: 16, “I baptize you with water, but the one who is coming will do much more: he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. As for me, I am not worthy to untie his sandal.”<sup>248</sup> Mary in exuberance in the Holy Spirit proclaimed “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in

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<sup>242</sup> Silva, *New Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014, p. 815. Hereafter as Silva, *New Dictionary of New Testament and Exegesis*.

<sup>243</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour, Ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed), Frederick, Maryland: The Word Among Us Press, 1988, p. 575. Hereafter as Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed).

<sup>244</sup> Collins and Senior, *The Catholic Study Bible*, p. 1564.

<sup>245</sup> Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry*, p. 65.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Collins and Senior, *The Catholic Study Bible*, p. 1358.

God, my saviour” (Luke 1: 46 – 47).<sup>249</sup> Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah’s tongue was loosened to proclaim, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has come and redeemed his people” (Luke 1: 67 – 68).<sup>250</sup> When the Baby Jesus was being presented in the Temple, Simeon came to the Temple in the Spirit, blessing God and prophesying upon the life of Jesus (Luke 2: 25 – 28). At his baptism, we read that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the bodily form of a dove (Luke 3: 22). Before his public ministry and after his temptation in the desert, Jesus returns to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4: 14).<sup>251</sup> Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4: 18)<sup>252</sup> after which he declared, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4: 21),<sup>253</sup> implying that he is indeed the anointed one, the Messiah. Every messenger of God needs the empowerment from above.<sup>254</sup> Some Pentecostal church members refer to it as “anointing from above.” The anointing of Jesus from above to carry out his mission from his Father is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 61. Filled by the Holy Spirit, Jesus, in his public ministry, casts out from many people several “unclean spirits” and “evil spirits” (Luke 4: 33, 36; 6: 18; 7: 21; 8: 2, 39; 9: 39, 42; 10: 20; 11: 24, 26; 13: 11).<sup>255</sup> Jesus taught his disciples that God the Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11: 13).

Many biblical/theological commentators believe that the Acts of the Apostles could also be named “Acts of the Holy Spirit” because it is the Holy Spirit who prompts, empowers and carries out different missions through the various human agents. Jesus instructs the disciples

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 1353.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 1359.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., p. 1360.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Efodigbue, Charisms for Ministry, p. 67.

<sup>255</sup> Felix Just, S.J., The Spirit in Luke/Acts. [www.catholic-resources.org/Bible/HolySpirit.htm](http://www.catholic-resources.org/Bible/HolySpirit.htm). Accessed on May 8, 2018.

“through the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1: 2). The Holy Spirit takes over after the resurrection of Christ and even speaks through his mouth to the disciples of Jesus. The disciples cannot do anything unless they are empowered from above as Jesus instructed them to wait in Jerusalem.<sup>256</sup> At the appointed time, on the Pentecost Day, the first disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8; 2: 1 – 4; 11: 15 – 16). Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles were able to fulfil their ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom of God (Acts 1; 8; 2: 4; 4: 8, 31; 11: 24; 13: 9, 52). God says “I will pour out my Spirit” on all people and nations in the last days (Acts 2: 17 – 18, 33). So believers, including Gentiles, receive the Holy Spirit when they repent and are baptized (Acts 2: 38; 15: 8; 19: 5 – 6). The Spirit is conferred through the “laying on of hands” (Acts 8: 17 – 19; 9: 17).

## **2.12. Conclusion**

We are able to establish who the Holy Spirit is – the Spirit of the Father and the Son. “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever” (John 14: 16). Jesus said: “What my Father has given me, is greater than all things else. I and the Father are One” (John 10: 29, 30). The Holy Spirit has all the characteristics of personhood. So we can relate to the Holy Spirit. Peter said to Ananias: “You have not deceived us, but God” (Acts 5: 4). The Holy Spirit is relational. I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you (John 14: 18). You will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you (John 14: 20). The Father from all eternity expresses himself and this is the Word, the Son. They “look’ towards each other” and they express Their love. This love is the Holy Spirit himself. The Holy Spirit is their Gift to us. He is the source of all redemption and life, the source of sanctifying grace which makes us new creation.

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<sup>256</sup> Efodigbue, Charisms for Ministry, p. 67.

## **Chapter III**

### **Thoughts of some of the Fathers of the Church on the Holy Spirit**

#### **Introduction**

The “Fathers of the Church” are so called because of their outstanding leadership in the early Church especially in defending, expounding, and developing the Catholic doctrines. “Father of the Church” is the traditional title given to the Christian preachers, writers and theologians of the post-canonical period. It is a popular title but not one officially bestowed by the Church. The Fathers of the Church came immediately after the age of the New Testament. They contributed decisively to the shape of Christian belief, and by and large enjoyed a reputation for sanctity and their opinions have always considerable weight in the Church.<sup>257</sup> On no account are we trying to over-emphasize their importance. However, it is important to note that our valuable documents of the Second Vatican Council copiously cite the Fathers of the Church. We note that the other Christian denominations like the Anglicans and those in the Protestant tradition make extensive use of them while even the Orthodox Churches are probably more devoted to them than the Catholics are.<sup>258</sup>

#### **3.1. Common Sense**

It is reasonable that when we want to explore the personality and the actions of the Holy Spirit we consult our ancestors in faith and learn from their experiences, teachings and wisdom. As contemporary Christians, we are confident that we have more to say about God the Father and God the Son but God the Holy Spirit seems a bit far-fetched for modern minds. That is why it is appropriate to consult the wisdom, the thoughts and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church to guide us through this uncharted water.

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<sup>257</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane, Eds. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, A Michael Glazier Book, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987, pp. 386 – 387. Hereafter as Komonchak, Collins and Lane, *The New Dictionary of Theology*.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

The first centuries of the Christian history focused more explicitly on the identity and person of Jesus Christ. However, the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D), which was championed by Athanasius of Alexandria, solved so many problems by defining that Jesus Christ is “of the same substance as God the Father.” Athanasius was able to come to this coherent vision because he was much concerned with the issue of human salvation. For him, if Christ is not God, human beings have no sure access to transformation. It is important to note that this vision compelled Athanasius to extend his line of reflection to include the Holy Spirit as of the same being as God the Father and God the Son.<sup>259</sup> Actually the Council of Nicaea concluded with the confession: “we believe ... in the Holy Spirit” (D.S. 125).<sup>260</sup> In fact, Athanasius, in his later writings, had to spread this doctrine of the Church that the Holy Spirit is as “of the same substance” as God. It follows that the Holy Spirit who works the sanctification and transformation of the human person cannot be other than God, who is the blessed source and goal of all things.<sup>261</sup> He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 22: 13). So the God of the Christian faith remains irreducibly triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We remember the Christian Trinitarian baptismal formula, “Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28: 19). It all means that to deny the divinity of the Holy Spirit is to destroy the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity.<sup>262</sup> Also St. Irenaeus admitted that in the second and third centuries, the most common creedal formulas addressed to the candidates for baptism had a trinitarian structure consisting of three questions regarding belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit of God (Epideixis, chs. 3, 6, 7 and

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 484.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.



100). The person being baptized responded by a simple “I believe.”<sup>263</sup> In the early Church, the Apostles’ Creed served mainly as a confession of faith in the daily worship in the Church which was linked to baptism.<sup>264</sup>

We may rightly say that the early Church Fathers taught that the Holy Spirit is God. The divinity of the Holy Spirit was easily understood because any attempt to propose a distinction between the nature of God the Father and the Holy Spirit would amount to an act of futility. The early Church applied the logic of common sense to claim that God’s Spirit is the same nature of God. As such, the divinity of the Holy Spirit was not a heavily debated topic in the early Church unlike the much prolonged controversy amongst the Church Fathers with regard to the Incarnation and the divinity of Christ.<sup>265</sup> For the early Church, the Spirit is the very essence of God himself. It is like saying that the spirit of man is man himself. So when we refer to man’s spirit, we refer to the man himself. However, the Bible and the Fathers of the Church have always taught that the Holy Spirit is divine and the very essence of God.<sup>266</sup>

### **3.2. The thoughts of some of the Fathers of the Church on the Holy Spirit**

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 153 – 217) believed that our baptism wipes off the sins which obscure the Divine Spirit, and make us have the eye of the spirit free, unimpeded, and full of light, by which alone we can contemplate the Divine, the Holy Spirit flowing down to us from above. Tertullian towed the same line of thought when he said that the Holy Spirit took a great concern for our instruction that we might know the source of everything as well as keeping us informed about heaven and earth, which he made out of nothing.<sup>267</sup> Of course, we

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>265</sup> James Richardson, Quotes from the Early Church Fathers, The Holy Spirit. <http://apostles-creed.org/confessional-christian-theology/theology/quotes-from-the-early-church-fathers-the-holy-spirit/> Accessed on March 2, 2018.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

need both meditative and contemplative prayer to be able to understand what the Spirit of God wants to reveal to us in order to be aware of God's presence and gaze at him. The divine instruction easily comes to us by meditation and contemplation. And Yahweh says: "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29: 13). I, Yahweh, search the heart and penetrate the mind; I reward each one according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds (Jeremiah 17: 10). God reveals things to us through his Spirit, because the Spirit probes everything, even the depth of God (1 Corinthians 2: 10). With regard to meditation and contemplation, we may now understand why Jesus says to his disciples: "I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth" (John 16: 12 – 13). We must understand then that as: "... no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Luke 10: 22); so also, the Holy Spirit who alone searches the deep things of God, reveals God to whom he wills (John 16: 13). The Spirit blows wherever he wills (John 3: 8). The Spirit may want to reveal himself to us if only we care to spare some time to meditate and contemplate him in persistent prayer. Otherwise, God does not force himself on anyone but gives himself to those who search for him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength.

It is important to note how Origen explained John 16: 13 in which Christ talks of the Holy Spirit: "For he will not speak of his own authority, but will speak what he hears ...". Origen teaches that we should not think that the Holy Spirit derives his knowledge through revelation from the Son. To think like that is to mean that the Holy Spirit passes from the state of ignorance into one of knowledge. It is impious and foolish to think like that. It is not by progressive advancement that he becomes the Holy Spirit; as if to say, at the time when he is not yet the Holy Spirit he is ignorant of the Father, but that after he receives knowledge he is

made the Holy Spirit. However, if this were the case, the Holy Spirit would never be reckoned in the unity of the Blessed Trinity, i.e., along with the unchangeable Father and his Son, unless he had always been the Holy Spirit.<sup>268</sup> To substantiate the uncreated nature of the Holy Spirit, Origen says it is proper to inquire the reason why he who is regenerated by God unto salvation has to do both with the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and does not obtain salvation unless with the co-operation of the entire Blessed Trinity; and why it is impossible to become partaker of the Father or the Son without the Holy Spirit.<sup>269</sup> It is important to note that Origen believes that the working of the Father and of the Son takes place as well in saints as in sinners, in rational beings and in dumb animals; nay, even in those things which are without life, and in all things universally which exist; as well as in those which, although living, are yet dumb; but the Holy Spirit is not functioning in those who are engaged in evil courses, and not at all converted to a better life. However, those who are already turning to a better life along the way which leads to Jesus and who engage in good actions and abide in God have the Holy Spirit operative in them (Origen De Principiis. Book 1 Chapter III – On the Holy Spirit Section 4 and 5).<sup>270</sup> Origen believes that the Holy Spirit gives to Christians some specific qualities which it has by nature, such as holiness.<sup>271</sup> We know that we live in God and God lives in us because he has given us his Spirit (1 John 4: 13). God is love; and he who loves lives in God and God in him (1 John 4: 16). And to follow God’s command fills us with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5: 18). The Lord says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ryan Clevenger, *Patristics and Philosophy, A Romp through the History of the Holy Spirit, From Scripture to Athanasius*. <https://patristicsandphilosophy.wordpress.com/2011/11/22/a-romp-through-the-history-of-the-holy-spirit-from-scripture-to-athanasius/>. Accessed on May 13, 2018.

We can understand the argument of Origen that the working of the Father and of the Son takes place in both saints and sinners, and in rational and irrational animals, and even in things without life because God the Father believes that all his creation is good (Genesis 1: 4, 12, 18, 21, 25). And also, he has created everything by the word of his mouth (Psalm 33: 6, 9) through Christ and for Christ (Colossians 1: 16). And the Holy Spirit from the Father through Christ comes to heal the wounded creation (1Corinthians 12: 9) and give it new life (Romans 8). God sent his Son into the world to redeem all creation (Galatians 4: 5; 1John 4: 9).

Irenaeus of Lyons seems to corroborate Origen when he says that the Lord, by telling his disciples to go and teach all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28: 19) confers on them the power to give men and women new life in God.<sup>272</sup> Irenaeus recognizes that the Lord had earlier on promised through the prophets that in these last days he would pour out his Spirit on all peoples, and that they would prophesy. He links the progression of the promised Spirit to the Son of God becoming the Son of Man, and the Spirit descending upon him, and he becoming accustomed in this way to dwelling with the human race, to living in men and to inhabiting God's creation.<sup>273</sup> Irenaeus, referring to the Spirit descending upon him, must be alluding to his baptism by John at the River Jordan (Matthew 3: 16). Irenaeus believes that the Spirit accomplishes the will of God the Father by forgiving and healing the wound of sin in men and women and giving them new life in Christ. He refers to the narration of the Pentecost event of the Spirit coming down on the disciples by St. Luke as God opening the gates of life to all nations and making known to them the new covenant; as well as recognizing the whole event as people of every language joining in singing one song of praise to God; and scattered tribes, restored to unity, were

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<sup>272</sup>Living Bulwark Sources of Strength and Renewal for Christian Living and Mission (2009 – Vol. 30), Quotes From Early Church Fathers on Pentecost, Irenaeus of Lyons, Pentecost and the Sending of the Holy Spirit. <http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/may09p5a.htm>. Accessed on May 12, 2018.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

offered to the Father as the first-fruits of all the nations.<sup>274</sup> Irenaeus believes that the reason why God promises to send the Advocate is to prepare us as an offering to God. He says that we are like parched ground unable to yield harvest without receiving moisture through abundant rainfall from above: that through the baptism that liberates us from change and decay we become one in body; through the Spirit we become one in soul.<sup>275</sup>

Irenaeus is convinced that we have the divine power to defeat the devil because the Spirit that came down upon Jesus the Lord which Jesus in turn gave to his Church as the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of God is our Helper. He believes we need the divine dew in order not to be scorched and made unfruitful. According to him, since we have our accuser, we also need an advocate as well. He says that man has fallen into the hands of brigands, and wounded, and so, God has entrusted him to the healing of the Holy Spirit. According to Irenaeus, through the Spirit, the image and inscription of the Father and the Son have been given to us, and so, it is our duty to use this divine gift committed to our charge and make it yield a rich profit for the Lord.<sup>276</sup>

Irenaeus takes God's Wisdom as God's Spirit (common in Hellenistic Judaism). So, for him, the Spirit is Wisdom and the Son is the Word, and these become the "two hands of God" used in creation. As such, following Proverbs 8, the Spirit is antecedent to creation. By the Spirit man ascends to the Son, through the Son to the Father.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ryan Clevenger, *Patristics and Philosophy, A Romp through the History of the Holy Spirit, From Scripture to Athanasius*. <https://patristicsandphilosophy.wordpress.com/2011/11/22/a-romp-through-thehistory-ofthe-holy-spirit-fromscripture-to-athanasius/>. Accessed on May 13, 2018.

Cyril of Jerusalem thinks along the same lines when he says that our baptism in Christ transforms us into the likeness of the Son of God. Cyril believes that God destines us to be his adopted children by giving us a likeness to Christ in his glory, and when we live in communion with Christ, God's anointed, we ourselves are rightly called "the anointed ones,"<sup>278</sup> because Christ shares with us his anointing which is gift of the Holy Spirit. Our anointing with the Holy Spirit is for us to demonstrate God's love and power. Cyril believes that our anointing with chrism after baptism signifies the Holy Spirit by whom Christ was anointed and of whom Isaiah prophesied in the name of the Lord: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim liberty to captives; and new sight to the blind; to free the oppressed; and to announce the Lord's year of mercy" (Luke 4: 18 – 19; Isaiah 61: 1). The Father who destined him to be the Saviour of the whole world anointed him with the Holy Spirit. The words of Peter bear witness to this: "You know how God anointed Jesus, the Nazorean with the Holy Spirit, and power (Acts 10: 38). And David the prophet proclaimed: "Your throne, O God, will last forever; a sceptre of justice is your sceptre. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore, God, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness, above your fellow kings (Psalm 45: 7 – 8). The oil of gladness with which Christ was anointed was in fact the Holy Spirit himself, who is called the oil of gladness because he is the source of spiritual joy. Our own anointing affords us fellowship with Christ and a share in his life. So through this anointing, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are anointed with this oil we see, but our souls are sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit."<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Living Bulwark, Sources of Strength and Renewal for Christian Life and Mission, (May 2009 – Vol. 30), Quotes From Early Church Fathers on Pentecost, The Anointing with the Holy Spirit from the Catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem. <http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/may09p5b.htm>. Accessed on May 12, 2018.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

St. Basil the Great has similar thoughts to Cyril of Jerusalem who says that Christ was anointed with the oil of gladness which is the Holy Spirit whose life we share through our anointing at our baptism. The divine life Christ shares with us is what St. Basil describes when he says:

“The Spirit restores paradise to us and the way to heaven and adoption as children of God; he instils confidence that we may call God truly Father and grants us the grace to be children of the light and to enjoy eternal glory. In a word, he bestows the fullness of blessings in this world and the next; for we may contemplate now in the mirror of faith the promised things we shall someday enjoy. If this is the foretaste, what must the reality be? If these are the first fruits, what must be the harvest?”<sup>280</sup>

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296 – 298 – 373) is a prominent figure in the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius, through the Scripture, tries to establish the fact that on the whole one could say that the Spirit is intimately connected with God (YHWH) and his activity in the world. He admits that it is not always clear what the Spirit is; whether it is a name to describe the manifestation of God’s power or is an independent agent. However, Athanasius says that in the New Testament the Spirit not only associates with the activity of God but Jesus’ as well (it is even called the “Spirit of Jesus” in Acts 16: 7). It is important to note that throughout the New Testament, there is lot of coordination of activity in the salvific process involving between God (the Father), Jesus (the Son), and the Holy Spirit.<sup>281</sup> The Spirit is part of baptism (Matthew 28: 19). The Spirit sanctifies (2 Thessalonians 2: 13 – 14), gives gifts (1 Corinthians 12: 4 – 6), and regenerates (Titus 3: 4 – 6). The Spirit speaks through the saints and the prophets (Acts 1: 16; 8: 29; 10: 19). The Spirit is another Advocate (John 14: 16; 1 John 2: 1).

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ryan Clevenger, *Patristics and Philosophy, A Romp through the History of the Holy Spirit, From Scripture to Athanasius*. <https://patristicsandphilosophy.wordpress.com/2011/11/22/a-romp-through-the-history-of-the-holy-spirit-from-scripture-to-athanasius/>. Accessed on May 13, 2018.

When we say the Spirit forbids (Acts 16: 6) and sends (Acts 13: 4) and so forth, do we still doubt that the Spirit is a distinct Person from the Father and the Son? The ambiguity with regards to the Spirit is perhaps not completely resolved. However, Athanasius continues to maintain that the Spirit is not a creature of some kind, like an angel.<sup>282</sup> Obviously the Spirit is seen as very active in the role of itinerant prophets/apostles but as more organized ecclesial structure arises, the role of the prophet decreases and so goes the Holy Spirit but does not disappear completely as the late second century sees some revival of sorts in the interest of the Holy Spirit in the movement known as Montanism. However, it is important to note the disappearance of the Montanist movement as a failed prophecy about the end of times in 177 AD marks their downfall.<sup>283</sup>

In actual fact, Athanasius begins his definitive and extensive work on the Holy Spirit when he is exiled in Egypt around 358. He writes in response to the request of Serapion, the bishop of Thmuis in Lower Egypt, in defence of the nature of the Holy Spirit. Here is one of Athanasius Four Letters to Serapion:

“But what is also to the point, let us note that the very tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, was preached by the Apostles, and was preserved by the Fathers. On this was the Church founded; and if anyone departs from this, he neither is nor any longer ought to be called a Christian: there is a Trinity holy and perfect, acknowledged as God, in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, having nothing foreign or eternal mixed with It . . . It is consistent in Itself, indivisible in nature, and Its activity is one. The Father does all things through the Word in the Holy Spirit; and thus the unity of the Holy Trinity preserved; and thus there is preached in the Church one God, “who is over all, and through all, through the Word; and in all, in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>284</sup>

Athanasius vigorously sets out to disprove the Tropicis, the anti-Nicene Creed sect, who deny the Godhood of the Holy Spirit by arguing that the Holy Spirit is a creature. These

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Catholic Faith and Reason (Athanasius 295 – 373 A.D). <http://www.catholicfaithandreason.org/st-athanasius-295-373-ad.html>. Accessed on May 13, 2018.



‘Combaters against the Spirit’ use these scriptural texts, Amos 4: 13, “I am he who creates spirit;” Zechariah 4: 5, “the angel who spoke to me,” and 1 Timothy 5: 21, where we find ranked together God, Christ and “the elect angel” to argue that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, a creature. A quick glance at these texts makes it clear why they think that “spirit” that is being created by the Father is the Holy Spirit (Amos 4: 13). For them, the second and third verses go together and so the Holy Spirit is one of the angels. Again, Zechariah 4: 5 has an angel performing the same task that is attributed to the Spirit elsewhere in the Scripture. Also, 1 Timothy 5: 21, has a Triadic formula without specific mention of the Holy Spirit but rather angels instead. And so, for them, the Holy Spirit must be an angel. According to their thinking, if he is not angel, then he must be another Son, making it the brother of the Son and the grandson of the Father, in which case how can we claim that he is equal to the Father and the Son.<sup>285</sup> To suggest that the Holy Spirit is the grandson of God the Father is an embarrassing assault on the spirituality and faith of Christians.

However, Athanasius, as a man versed in the Scriptures, answers them primarily through exegesis by showing how they are wrong in their understanding of the nature of the Holy Spirit. He expounds his understanding of the divinity of the Trinity and the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit. He defends the central mysteries of the Trinity and the incarnation by means of revealed concepts, rather than by philosophical constructs employed by the Arians. According to Athanasius, when the Holy Spirit is being referred to, it is clear from the context. In the second case, he shows by context that the angel must be distinguished from the Holy Spirit which is referenced shortly after. Thirdly, in 1 Timothy 5: 21 he argues that even if the Holy Spirit is not mentioned, he should be assumed because elsewhere in Scripture we see that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act in union with each other. Where one

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<sup>285</sup> Ryan Clevenger, *Patristics and Philosophy, A Romp through the History of the Holy Spirit, From Scripture to Athanasius*. <https://patristicsandphilosophy.wordpress.com/2011/11/22/a-romp-through-the-history-of-the-holy-spirit-from-scripture-to-athanasius/>. Accessed on May 13, 2018.

is, there are the others.<sup>286</sup> The Holy Spirit is God (Psalm 137: 7 – 10; Hebrews 9: 14; Matthew 28: 19). And God can only be God the Father God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, that is, God is one God, but three coeternal consubstantial persons or hypostases – the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit – as “one God in three Divine persons.”

Athanasius argues that to say that the Holy Spirit is a creature destroys the idea of salvation because the Holy Spirit plays a very important role in the salvation of mankind. He says if the Holy Spirit is the instrument of the Father’s salvation accomplished through the Son in the lives of creatures, then he must himself be on the side of the Creator.<sup>287</sup> In one of his Four Letters to Serapion he says:

“Inasmuch as there is in the Holy Trinity oneness of essence and equality in rank, who then, would dare to separate either the Son from the Father, or the Spirit from either the Son or the Father? Or who would be so rash as to say that the Trinity is dissimilar and of diverse nature within Itself?”<sup>288</sup>

The Holy Spirit is an image of the Son as the Son is an image of the Father. Jesus says: “From now on the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I have told you” (John 14: 26). He says I and the Father are One (John 10: 30).

According to Athanasius, the Trinity contains perfect unity and perfect distinction (John 14: 10 – 11); and each member is co-equal and co-eternal. He begins the study of the Spirit with the role of faith in the Bible as foundational to any theological discussion.<sup>289</sup> He says we look to Scripture because we who are even unable to comprehend the created order are completely

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Catholic Faith and Reason (Athanasius 295 – 373 A.D). <http://www.catholicfaithandreason.org/st-athanasius-295-373-ad.html>. Accessed on May 13, 2018.

<sup>289</sup> Matthew Steven Bracey (posted on March 9, 2015), Helwys Society Forum, Athanasius on the Holy Spirit (Part 1). <http://www.helwysocietyforum.com/athanasius-on-the-holy-spirit-i/>. Accessed on May 13, 2018.

inadequate to the task of studying God who is infinite.<sup>290</sup> Athanasius believes that the Scripture is authoritative because the Holy Spirit has authored it: The Spirit “speaks in the saints in words inspired by him in them.”<sup>291</sup> He says that the Scripture presents the Spirit in the context of a Trinity. He writes that, “the Son is said (in Scripture) to be the Son of the Father and the Spirit of the Son is said to be the Spirit of the Father. Thus, there is one Godhead of the Holy Trinity, unto which there is also one faith.”<sup>292</sup> He concludes that the Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son, and that he shares in their attributes and work. In other words, when we consider the Holy Spirit, we must always do so in reference to the Trinity.<sup>293</sup>

St. Basil the Great is a staunch defender of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He goes all out to establish a cogent argument for the divinity of the Holy Spirit from Scripture and Tradition. He proves that the Holy Spirit is in essence divine by applying the argument for the Son’s divinity to the Spirit. He brings us to think of the titles and attributes the Holy Spirit shares with the Father as well as the Spirit’s role in the work of our salvation.<sup>294</sup> The Pneumatomachoi (fighters against the Holy Spirit) object to Basil’s doxology which reads: “Glory to the Father with the Son together with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>295</sup> The heresy the Pneumatomachoi propagate is that the Father is preeminent because all things come from him, the Son is different in nature because the Father works through him, and the Holy Spirit

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<sup>290</sup> Athanasius, Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit (1: 15 – 33), in Khaled Anatolios, Athanasius: The Early Church Fathers, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 219. Hereafter as Athanasius, Letters.

<sup>291</sup> Athanasius, A Letter of Athanasius, Our Holy Father, Archbishop of Alexandria, to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms, in Robert C. Gregg (trans.), Athanasius, The Life of Antony and The Letter to Marcellinus, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980, p. 127.

<sup>292</sup> Athanasius, Letters, pp. 215 – 216.

<sup>293</sup> Matthew Steven Bracey (posted on March 9, 2015), Helwys Society Forum, Athanasius on the Holy Spirit (Part 1). <http://www.helwysocietyforum.com/athanasius-on-the-holy-spirit-i/>. Accessed on May 13, 2018.

<sup>294</sup> Ryan Clevenger, Patristics and Philosophy (2011), A Summary and Critique of Basil the Great’s “On the Holy Spirit.” <https://patristicsandphilosophy.wordpress.com/2011/12/01/a-summary-and-critiqu-of-basil-the-greats-on-the-holy-spirit/>. Accessed on May 23, 2018.

<sup>295</sup> David Anderson (Trans.), St. Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit, Popular Patristics Series 5 Crestwood: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1980, p. 17. Hereafter, Anderson (Trans.), St. Basil the Great.

is even more different for the activity that the Father produces through the Son happens in the Holy Spirit. They claim that Basil is introducing a new tradition that is contrary to Scripture and that is idolatry.<sup>296</sup> In fact, they argue against the divinity of the Holy Spirit claiming that he is of different nature and lesser in rank than the Father and so should not be afforded the glory of the doxologies as the Father.<sup>297</sup> They believe that the Holy Spirit is a creature; a belief that will drastically change the practice of the Christian faith.

However, for Basil their conclusions are unacceptable and warrant a timely response. Basil the Great produces a wonderful treatise defending the divinity of the Holy Spirit which overturns the dangerous arguments of the spirit fighters and will continue to influence positively future Christian generations.<sup>298</sup> He is able to show through the Scripture that the Holy Spirit is divine in the same way the Son is divine and that their argument is absurd and untenable. Basil shows his opponents that the Scripture uses ‘from’, ‘through’ and ‘in’ interchangeably for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,<sup>299</sup> and so the usage of these prepositions are not restricted to the Father alone. To counteract the arguments of his opponents, Basil concludes that if unlike terms show different natures, then like terms must indicate like natures.<sup>300</sup> There are examples where the Scripture uses ‘from’ in relation to the Holy Spirit. He who sows in the spirit shall reap eternal life from the Spirit (Galatians 6: 8; John 3: 6). In Romans 11: 36, Paul says: “For from him and through him and to him are all things,” which Basil shows to be speaking of the Son.<sup>301</sup> Paul, by using the prepositions from and through and to when speaking of the Son, shows that these said prepositions are not used

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., pp. 75 – 76.

<sup>298</sup> Ryan Clevenger, A Summary and Critique of Basil the Great (2011).

<https://patristicsandphilosophy.wordpress.com/2011/12/01/a-summary-and-critique-of-basil-the-greats-on-the-holy-spirit/>. Accessed on May 23, 2018.

<sup>299</sup> Anderson, St. Basil the Great, pp. 27 – 28.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., pp. 22 – 24.

exclusively which in turn means they do not indicate a difference in natures; otherwise, if they used to refer to the Father, then according to their understanding the Father would become subservient to something else!<sup>302</sup> Therefore, Basil rightly insists that when Paul uses different terms for the Father and the Son, he is doing so not to show their diversity in nature, but in persons.<sup>303</sup>

Basil establishes the argument for the divinity of the Holy Spirit by first presenting the argument of the divinity of the Son. The Son displays the same power as the Father and so he is of equal power and glory with the Father and therefore divine (John 1: 3; 17: 10; 1 Corinthians 1: 24; Colossians 1: 16).<sup>304</sup> Also, since the Holy Spirit's actions are on par with the Son's, then he must be divine as the Son is divine. No one can claim to know the Father except through the Son (Matthew 11: 27), and one cannot confess the Son without the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12: 3). The Son glorifies the Father through his work (John 17: 4) and the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son through his work (John 16: 14).<sup>305</sup> And so, what is true of the Son is equally true of the Holy Spirit via his relationship to the Son and the Son's relationship to the Father. We note that their relationship with each other is eternal, and they are therefore eternally one. As such, the Holy Spirit cannot be ranked with creation as his relationship to the Son proves, then he must be ranked with the divine. This is because the divine is one and simple and cannot be further divided into various ranks.<sup>306</sup> In other words, the Holy Spirit shares the same rank as the Father and the Son, and is divine. There are attributes proper to the Holy Spirit as to the Father and the Son. We have seen that the Holy Spirit can bestow gifts at will, perfects the work of the Son, makes things holy, proclaims the Son, gives

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

knowledge, reveals mysteries, glorifies the Son, speaks with authority and intercedes for Christians.<sup>307</sup> How can such attributes belong to a creature? It definitely cannot be!!!

Again, the Holy Spirit is able to participate in the baptism of the Son (Matthew 3: 16 – 17), the ministry of Jesus (in which he anoints the Son, Matthew 4: 1), the ordering of the Church (through the gifts he gives, 1 Corinthians 12: 28) and the foretelling of resurrection of the dead and divine judgment.<sup>308</sup> Of course, the Christian life is begun by being baptized and confessing faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – something that may not be possible without the help of the Holy Spirit.<sup>309</sup> With all these examples, Basil the Great is asking serious questions of those who deny the divinity of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit plays such important role in God’s dispensation of salvation at large and in each individual’s salvation, then should he not be glorified? Basil has no alternative than to conclude that if the Holy Spirit participates in salvation in such an intimate way, then he must be divine and not a creature.<sup>310</sup>

To disapprove the argument against him that he is perverting the original apostolic tradition by “introducing” a new doctrine and consequently a new understanding of God, Basil shows that the teaching of the Church is not exclusive to what is written in Scripture. Basil demonstrates that he believes in the unwritten tradition reserved for the Church.<sup>311</sup> Despite his arguments from the Scripture, Basil is able to give lists of those who have strong traditional understanding of the Holy Spirit to be equal with the Father and the Son such as Irenaeus, Clement of Rome, Dionysius of Rome, Dionysius of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea,

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., pp. 60 – 64, 78.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., pp. 65 – 67.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., pp. 49 – 50, 74.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., pp. 99 – 100.

Origen, Africanus, Athenogenes and Gregory the Wonderworker.<sup>312</sup> With the above example, no one will be able to accuse Basil of creating a new doctrine.

St. Basil the Great wonders who will fall short in exalting the Holy Spirit since he is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, the upright Spirit, the guiding Spirit?<sup>313</sup> His name the “Holy Spirit” clearly expresses the incorporeal, free of matter and the indivisibility of his nature.<sup>314</sup> This must be the reason why Christ instructed the Samaritan woman who thought that God is to be worshipped in a place: God is Spirit (John 4: 24). So, God as Spirit is not circumscribed by a place, subject to changes, similar to a creature in every way. Basil says that the Holy Spirit is present everywhere as well as to each person in his fullness. He claims that the Holy Spirit is divided but does not suffer by the division because he remains whole even though all share in him who is capable of receiving him.<sup>315</sup> Basil says that the Holy Spirit is the source of holiness that makes people holy. He says that those who seek him are refreshed and helped towards their own natural end. He is the light of our understanding whose light is for the discovery of truth. He is the source of power for those who are worthy to participate in him. Those who seek him are purified through the common union they have with him.<sup>316</sup> The grace of this divine union enables them to foresee the future, to understand mysteries, to grasp hidden things, to receive spiritual blessings, to have their thoughts fixed on heavenly things, so that their perseverance in God unending, so do they acquire likeness to God, so – most sublime of all – do they themselves become divine.<sup>317</sup> Hence, Basil claims that through the Holy Spirit paradise is restored. So we can then, ascend to heaven and regain our sonship. We can address God as our Father with

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., pp. 108 – 110.

<sup>313</sup> Claire Russell, *Glimpses of the Church Fathers, Selections from the Writings of the Fathers of the Church*, England: Sceptre, 1994, p. 169. Hereafter as Russell, *Glimpses of the Church Fathers*.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., pp. 169 – 170.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

confidence and share in the grace of Christ, and can be called children of the light and sharers in eternal glory. In other words, we can become full of all manner of blessings in this world and in that to come.<sup>318</sup>

### **3.3. Thoughts of the Magisterium on the Holy Spirit**

The Magisterium in our modern Catholic usage is associated almost exclusively with the teaching role and authority of the hierarchy. In fact, more recently it is often used to refer not to the teaching office as such, but to the body of men who exercise this office in the Church: namely, the Pope and the Bishops. The Second Vatican Council several times describes their role as “authentic magisterium,” although not that the term “authentic” is used here as “genuine,” but rather “authoritative,” and indeed, “endowed with pastoral authority, ultimately derived from Christ.”<sup>319</sup> In the language of the common man, it is the unifying and authoritative medium and office which the Pope as a successor of Peter and custodian of the teachings and works of Christ uses in feeding the sheep of Jesus. In union with the Holy Spirit, the Pope’s voice becomes an authoritative guide to the sheep. Every bishop, priest, catechist, religious educator, parent or layperson who teaches the faith must do so in union with the voice which is the genuine and authoritative Teaching Office of the Church. To teach anything contrary to the Magisterium is to teach heresy.<sup>320</sup> In other words, the living Magisterium is endowed with authority to teach and interpret the gospel message in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>319</sup> Komonchak, Collins and Lane, Eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 617.

<sup>320</sup> G. Bose Olatunbosun and Bridget Itsueli, *My Faith Companion, Meditations on the part one of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vol. 1 of 3, Lagos, Nigeria: Unusual Publishers and Printers Co., 2108, pp. 3 – 4. Hereafter as Olatunbosun and Itsueli, Eds., *My Faith Companion*.

<sup>321</sup> Komonchak, Collins and Lane, Eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 617.



The question that is always asked is where do we turn to for guidance: the Holy Spirit or the Magisterium? In the first place, this question should not arise if we understand God's relation to us his children. This is because there is no tension between God and his children. Are we not the body of Christ the Church, each of us his member (1 Corinthians 12: 27)? For us Catholics, the Magisterium is the instrument of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not quarrel with his instrument. It is only a bad workman that quarrels with his tools. The Second Vatican Council says that "the task of authentically interpreting the Gospel has been entrusted exclusively to the living Magisterium, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ."<sup>322</sup> The one thing we must do is to understand the many ways God is trying to relate to us his children. Acts 15 which we refer to as the First Church Council of Jerusalem serves as a pointer to us as a believing community and as individual Christians on how we can properly discern the interpretation of the Scriptures and will of God in our journey of faith. On one hand, we note that we are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6: 19); the Spirit of God teaching and empowering us from within. Again, reflecting on the gifts of the Spirit (Isaiah 11: 2 – 3), St. Thomas Aquinas notes that the Christian life entails an exciting relationship with the Spirit. In this relationship, we are brought beyond the limitations of our human nature and enabled to think and act in ways that are nothing short of supernatural.<sup>323</sup> It is important to note that a life of intimate union with God, full of surprises of the Holy Spirit, is not just for the select few, the canonized saints and mystics, but is the inheritance of all the baptized. It all means that with the Spirit's gift of understanding, the mysteries of God can be known from within, though we may not claim that we shall ever know with complete

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<sup>322</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, in A. Flannery, Ed., Vatican II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Vol., 1, New York: The Ambassador Publications, Nigeria, 1998, par. 10. Hereafter as DV

<sup>323</sup> Dr. Marcellino D' Ambrosio, Crossroads Initiative, Holy Spirit and Catholic Church. <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/holy-spirit-and-the-catholic-church/>. Accessed on March 2, 2018.

perfection.<sup>324</sup> However, we can truly begin to “taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (Psalm 34: 9). Was the case that the great saints like Francis of Assisi, Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, and Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes, Teresa of Calcutta and a host of others were highly educated to be able to achieve such brilliant insight into the truth about God?<sup>325</sup> The Spirit moves wherever he wills. It can only happen with those who are born of the Spirit (John 3: 8). We need to be desirous of him because God gives himself to those who seek him with all their heart and mind (Jeremiah 29: 13; Proverbs 8: 17).

That any of us can be instructed and empowered by the light of the Holy Spirit does not mean that we don't need the authority of the Church. This is because the light of the Holy Spirit is not the only influence upon our thinking. It is true that the world bombards us constantly from every corner with its propaganda through the educational system, the entertainment industry and the news media. What Paul calls “the flesh” the lingering wounds of original sin, introduces some distortion into our thinking and acting. And of course the Deceiver never ceases to whisper clever lies in our ears as he did to Eve. It is common to mistake one of these voices for the voice of the Holy Spirit.<sup>326</sup> Today the modern people celebrate unrestricted freedom and mistake popular movement as the voice of the Holy Spirit. That is why as it is today, we need the guidance of the Magisterium more than ever. We always go back to history. In Acts 15, we learn of the very serious disagreement among the leading Christians in the nascent Christian community with regards to their salvation. Every person did not follow their own judgment as to what the Spirit was saying. No, the leaders of the Church of Antioch met with Peter and the apostles in Jerusalem for what historians reckon as the First Church Council of Jerusalem. As they listened to each other and prayed, they came to consensus. We need to note how they proclaimed their decision: “We, with the Holy Spirit, have decided not

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

to put any other burden on you except what is necessary” (Acts 15: 28). You can see that their decision was not just a bureaucratic judgment; it was an authoritative, apostolic discernment of what the Spirit was saying to the Church. And all were bound to accept it. This is the way peace and unity was preserved and the Body of Christ was allowed to grow and thrive.<sup>327</sup> I acknowledge that the Christian family of this day has not been faithful to this tradition the Christians of the First Church Council of Jerusalem period laid down for us. This is why we have proliferations of Christian denominations today, because Christians are not able to come together as family of God to sort out their differences in dialogue and prayer to the Holy Spirit; but allow the vices of pride, selfishness, materialism, vainglory and arrogance to take the upper-hand.

What I am saying in effect is that, all the faithful (who are baptized, confirmed or ordained) can exercise the Magisterium general by virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The general Magisterium has the guidance of the Holy Spirit such that its search for the truth within the Deposit of Faith (Tradition and Scripture) cannot fail to bear fruit that will last. The Magisterium general sincerely seeks understanding of the truths of the Faith found in Tradition, Scripture, and the teachings of the Magisterium proper. It is undeniable that the Holy Spirit guides the faithful who sincerely seek the truths of the Faith. In other words, the Holy Spirit is not restricted to the Magisterium proper (the Pope and the Bishops). We note that the general Magisterium comprising of all the faithful, including those ordained to the Episcopate; sincerely seek the truths of the Faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Pope, known as Servant of the servants of God and his College of Bishops, sincerely seek the truth, and they do not fail to harvest the fruits of the same search for truth among the faithful,

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

who also exercise the general Magisterium.<sup>328</sup> So the Holy Spirit guarantees a search that will produce fruits in the whole Church as in each and every baptized member of the faithful who remains in a state of grace and who sincerely seeks truth in cooperation with the graces of the Holy Spirit.<sup>329</sup> Did Christ not tell his disciples: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you” (Luke 11: 9). In fact, all the faithful are required by the moral law to continually seek the truth on matters of faith and morals; and to refuse to do so is a mortal sin of omission. The Holy Spirit gives the gift of fruitfulness in the search for truth to all the faithful.<sup>330</sup>

We may not claim that all judgments of the Magisterium are equally solemn and binding. However, we need to preserve the principle which is the important thing. We are not denying that the Spirit can indeed guide each Christian on a daily basis especially when we are open to his promptings. We may not forget that the Holy Spirit also guides us through the teaching authority of the Church. We ought to note that the Spirit does not contradict himself. We may need to accept that if our opinions come against authoritative Church teaching, Christian humility tells us that it is our opinion that needs a bit of adjustment<sup>331</sup> so as not to find ourselves fighting against the Holy Spirit. We may not over-emphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit who guides the Magisterium, the Church and the individual Christians.

Pope Francis reflects on the action of the Holy Spirit in guiding the Church and each one of us on to the Truth. The Pope reminds his audience what Jesus said to his disciples about the

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<sup>328</sup> Ronald L. Conte, (2006), Catholic Planet, Roman Catholic Theology and Biblical Studies, The Three Levels of the Magisterium: Sacred, Ordinary, and General. <http://www.catholicplanet.com/TSM/general-magisterium.htm>. Accessed on June 6, 2018.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Dr. Marcellino D' Ambrosio, Crossroads Initiative, Holy Spirit and Catholic Church. <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/holy-spirit-and-the-catholic-church/>. Accessed on March 2, 2018.

Holy Spirit: “he will guide you into the whole truth” (John 16: 13), he himself being “the Spirit of truth” (cf. John 14: 17; 15: 26; 16: 13). The Pontiff reminds his audience that we live in an age rather sceptical of truth.<sup>332</sup> Pope Benedict XVI has spoken many times of relativism, that is, the tendency to believe that nothing is definitive, and think that the truth is given by consent or by what we want. The question arises: does “the” truth really exist? What is “the” truth? Can we know it? Can we find it? Pope Francis recalls the question of the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate when Jesus reveals the profound meaning of his mission: “What is truth?” (John 18: 37 - 38). Pilate does not understand that “the” Truth is in front of him, he cannot see in Jesus the face of the truth, which is the face of God yet, Jesus is just that: the Truth, which, in fullness of time, “became flesh” (John 1: 1, 4), came among us so that we may know it. We may not possess the truth as an object as it were, but encounter him as a Person.<sup>333</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI is right when he talks about the danger of relativism which is plaguing all of us now because for now, whatever that suites the individual or a group of for their privileged position becomes their truth. So for modern people truth is now relative. This brings us to the phenomenon we now regard to as ‘fake news.’ Fake news now easily becomes the ‘truth’ once the media carries it in the news, in audio or written, on consecutive occasions, and some celebrities support it publicly. Even the media has assumed the right and the air of boldness and arrogance to ‘interpret the ‘Bible’ and other moral issues and override the Church. We are now familiar with the historical East and West conflict and it is now worst because the truth has been shifted from the center/middle and this ‘mangled truth’ only serves the bloc or camp you belong to. The cold war continues in a masqueraded fashion

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<sup>332</sup> Carl E. Olson, (2013), Pope Francis reflects on the work and power of the Holy Spirit, Fanning the Flame-About the Holy Spirit-Catholic Renewal Ministries. <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/2015/05/15/pope-francis-reflects-on-the-work-and-power-of-the-holy-spirit/>. Accessed on May 2, 2018.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

which makes it so dangerous. The truth is purchased in cash or kind. If any bloc or group has enough money or mineral resources, they can manufacture their own ‘truth’ which serves them and their cohorts. And the ‘truth’ automatically belongs to them if they have nuclear weapon! Tell me what is it that Russia stands for that China and their allies will not automatically support them? Just mention one thing, only one! I have seen on occasions, on certain issues that American allies disagree with America (especially with the present administration led by Donald Trump), but contrary is the case with Russia and their allies! The smouldering cold war between the East and the West has destroyed more life than the two World Wars. The unwritten law of Russia and their allies is to disagree with whatever America and their allies stand for and truth is continuously denied. The Church seems to be swamped in this modern attack on truth. And the United Nation seems not to know the truth or afraid to say it. Since the truth from the Church is ignored and the United Nation is equally overshadowed and weakened, the different superpowers manufacture the ‘truth’ that suites them and their allies.

Pope Francis leads us on in tracking the truth. The Pope asks who helps us in recognizing that Jesus is “the” Word of truth. According to St. Paul “no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12: 3). It is the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Risen Christ that helps us recognize the Truth. Jesus calls him the “Paraclete,” meaning “the one who comes to our aid,” who is by our side to support us in this journey of knowledge, and at the Last Supper, Jesus assures his disciples that the Holy Spirit will teach them all things, reminding them of his words (John 14: 26).<sup>334</sup> Pope Francis maintains that the Holy Spirit reminds and imprints on the hearts of believers the words that Jesus had spoken, and precisely through these words, God’s law – as the prophets of the Old Testaments had announced – is inscribed

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

in our hearts and becomes within us a principle of evaluation in our choices and of guidance in our daily actions, it becomes a principle of life.<sup>335</sup> The great prophecy is realized:

“Then I shall pour pure water over you and you shall be made clean – cleansed from the defilement of all your idols. I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I shall remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my spirit within you and move you to follow my decrees and keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36: 25 – 27).

The Pontiff says that our actions are indeed born from deep within: it is the heart that needs to be converted to God, and the Holy Spirit transforms it if we open ourselves to him.<sup>336</sup> Pope Francis maintains that it is God who enlightens us interiorly alluding to the promise of Jesus that the Holy Spirit will guide us “into all truth” (John 16: 13) leading us to encounter Jesus, the fullness of Truth, into communion with him, gifting us knowledge of the things of God. The Pope says that the Tradition of the Church affirms that the Spirit acts in our hearts, provoking that “sense of faith” (*sensus fidei*), through which, as the Second Vatican Council affirms, the People of God, under the guidance of the Magisterium, adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life (Dogmatic Constitution, “*Lumen Gentium*,” par. 12).<sup>337</sup>

The Pontiff encourages us to let ourselves be imbued with the light of the Holy Spirit, so that he introduces us into the Truth of God, who is the Lord of our lives. He encourages us to take steps to get to know Christ and the truths of faith by reading and meditating on the Scriptures, studying the Catechism, and steadily approaching the Sacraments. The Pope says that we do

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

not only believe that truth exists, but that it is found through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus; and guides the whole Church into the fullness of truth.<sup>338</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Church Fathers realized at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' ministry that the activity of the Holy Spirit was prominent in Jesus' and his apostles' lives. This indicates how important the Spirit is for us in living out our baptismal call. The Acts of the Apostles shows us how the Church relied on the Holy Spirit in her formation and growth. In Acts 1: 8, we read "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth."<sup>339</sup> We are reminded that the Holy Spirit is already present in us through the sacraments. In 1 Corinthians 3: 16, we find, "Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit abides within you?" So we are given gifts called charisms with which to live the Christian life by building up the Body of Christ.<sup>340</sup> At our baptism, God shares his Divine Life with us as we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Also, St Paul tells us that it is in Christ that we are baptized (Galatians 3:27). We need to remember that we have the truth in us because the Holy Spirit who reveals to us the Truth which is Christ lives us through the sacraments. So the Truth is not far away from us. It lives within us. Are we conscious that we have the Truth within us? Are we afraid to admit it publicly? There is the common tendency to deny the Truth. Or are we searching for the Truth or pretending to be searching for it? Modern Christians are simply afraid and equally shy to stand by Christian truth and bear witness to it by word and example. Majority of modern Catholic Christians will rather remain anonymous than accept publicly the Church's teaching on abortion, euthanasia, sexuality, marriage, divorce and such sensitive topical issues. The

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Catholic Renewal Ministries, Who is the Holy Spirit? <http://www.crmweb.org/HS.html>. Accessed on May 28, 2018.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.



Catholic truth in relation to these moral issues is denied than for one to remain isolated as outdated and archaic. However, in relation to the truth, the Lord says: “Whoever denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:33). If we have the Holy Spirit from our baptism then, we have the truth and the truth will set us free (John 8:32).

Mary the Mother of God presents a good example for us of how the Holy Spirit abides in us. In the first instance, the Holy Spirit descended upon her “overshadowing” her and bringing about the Incarnation of the Word (Luke 1: 35). Again, in the Upper Room after the Ascension, Mary, along with the disciples, was in prayerful waiting, “imploping the gift of the Spirit” (Acts 1: 12 – 14) for herself and for the believing community. The first outpouring of the Spirit prepared her for her divine motherhood which should be repeated and reinforced for her new motherhood in relation to Jesus’ disciples (John 19: 25 – 27). So, we can rightly say that, at the moment of the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit descended upon Mary as the person called to take part worthily in the great mystery of our salvation, accomplishing everything for the sake of the Church, whose image, model and mother Mary is called to be.<sup>341</sup> In the Incarnation, the Spirit formed the physical body of Christ in her virginal womb, now in the Upper Room the same Spirit came down to give life to the Mystical Body of Christ. The Mother of Christ and his disciples are granted new strength and new apostolic energy for the growth of the Church. That is why Christians of every generation frequently have recourse to Mary’s intercession on the long and tiring journey to salvation, in order to receive the gifts of the Paraclete in greater abundance.<sup>342</sup> She is the Mother of God, always full of grace, and as

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<sup>341</sup> Opus Dei, (2011), Christian Life, Getting to know, The Coming of the Holy Spirit, Magisterium, Saints, Poets. <http://opusdei.org/en/article/the-coming-of-the-holy-spirit-magisterium-saints-poets/>. Accessed on March 2, 2018.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

well, the mother of the Church<sup>343</sup> to which Christ has promised to be with until the end of time (Matthew 28: 20).

Pope John Paul II, in one of his General Audience and Catechesis in 1989 said “in Luke’s twofold narrative, just as the coming into the world of God’s Son is set in close relationship with the person of Mary, so now the birth of the Church is likewise linked with her.”<sup>344</sup> The Pontiff says that the Second Vatican Council hails Mary as a preeminent and wholly unique member of the Church.<sup>345</sup> The Pope says that Mary was present at the beginning of the Church, so also in the assembly of the successors of the Apostles in the second half of the twentieth century in continuity with the community of the Upper Room, they desired her presence. In coming together for the work of the Council, the Fathers also wished “to devote themselves with one accord to prayer with Mary the mother of Jesus (Acts 1: 14).<sup>346</sup> Hence, the Fathers of the Council emphasize in the Constitution on the Church where we read:

“By reason of the gift and role of divine maternity, by which she is united with her Son, the Redeemer, and with his singular graces and functions, the Blessed Virgin is also intimately united with the Church. As St. Ambrose taught, the mother of God is a type of the Church in order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ” (LG 63).<sup>347</sup>

As we can now see, the Christian community needs her constant presence and that devotedness to prayer with her, as the mother of the Lord<sup>348</sup> as well as learn how to listen attentively to the Holy Spirit in the Church via the Magisterium.

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<sup>343</sup> CCC 971.

<sup>344</sup> Pope John Paul II, (1989), Catechesis on the Holy Spirit, Mary’s presence in the Upper Room at Jerusalem. <http://www.totus2us.com/teaching/jpii-on-god-the-holy-spirit/marys-presence-in-the-upper-room-at-jerusalem/>. Accessed May 29, 2018.

<sup>345</sup> LG, par. 53.

<sup>346</sup> Pope John Paul II, (1989) Catechesis on the Holy Spirit, Mary’s Presence in the Upper Room at Jerusalem. <http://www.totus2us.com/teaching/jpii-catechesis-on-god-the-holy-spirit/marys-presence-in-the-upper-room-at-jerusalem/>. Accessed on May 29, 2018.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

Every Catholic parish church and Catholic community/group needs to encourage Marian devotion in order to be in constant prayer with Mary the Mother of God who is full of the Holy Spirit. She is also mother of the Church to which Christ has promised to be with until the end of time (Matthew 28:20). The question that rings out all the time is why do Catholics venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary when we have Christ alone as the centre of our faith and the one mediator between God and humanity? This question arises because it irritates non-Catholics and even some Catholic members that Catholics pay ‘too much’ attention to the Virgin Mary when she was a mere human being like any of us. It is true that the focus of our worship is Christ who died on the Cross to save us. Right, should we not sincerely ask ourselves how Christ came about? To make the long story short, we should always remember that we are a fallen humanity. As Catholics, we firmly believe in the incarnation: Mary conceived the man Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26 – 38). Through her, Jesus Christ – second person of the Blessed Trinity, one-in-being with the Father, and true God from true God – entered this world taking on human flesh and a human soul. Jesus is true God and true man. In his divine person are united both a divine nature a human nature.<sup>349</sup> God, in his goodness and mercy, has given us guides to take us to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, the light of the nations. Catholics, since the time of the Apostles, have found in Mary a sure guide. Their relationship with Mary is maternal. She is their spiritual Mother. Catholics believe that Mary is the Mother not only of Catholics but of humanity. This idea is the source of the richness of Marian devotion in the Church.<sup>350</sup> “... when the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman ... to enable us to be adopted, as children of God”

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<sup>349</sup> Silent Crusader (2014), Mary’s Role in God’s plan of Salvation, “Apostolic Crusade to lead former Catholics and non-Catholics back home to the One, True Catholic and Apostolic Church of God.” <http://catholicsilentcrusade.com2014/01/25-marys-role-in-gods-plan-of-salvation.html> Accessed January 15, 2020.

<sup>350</sup> Fr Kevin Beach, Why do Catholics venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary? <https://www.catholicmissionleaflets.org/mary.htm> Accessed on January 14, 2020.

(Gal. 4: - 5). And so, the Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honours this woman Mary, with filial affection and devotion as a most Beloved Mother of God and of humanity (Lumen Gentium, 53).

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit's guidance to the Magisterium in teaching the faithful. Of course this claim is a very important one in order to regulate and educate the incessant disputing minds of modern men and women in the normative basis of early teaching of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit that helps the Magisterium to know the faith especially when there is a dispute. The Holy Spirit helps the Magisterium to know the truth so as to know what to teach. The Catholic Church believes that the human mind is aided by faith to be able to know the truth. This means that the truth in question is beyond unaided human reason's capacity to discover (as Vatican I defined revelation) which bespeaks presuppositions about the capacity of human minds aided by faith to know that truth.<sup>351</sup> So revelation is something given by God which is beyond anyone's ability to acquire without the aid of faith. We believe that the Magisterium has a unique role within the Church to teach this revelation.<sup>352</sup> In other words, the Magisterium teaches authoritatively, and primarily, the authoritative teacher is God, and secondarily the Magisterium because it is divinely instituted to interpret and transmit God's revelation.<sup>353</sup> So the Magisterium has a unique access to truth and secondarily there is the gift of the sacrament of Orders for those called to the Episcopate. Catholics believe that Matthew 16: 13 – 19 means that Peter was the first Pope of an unbroken line of Popes to whom Christ gave authority over his Church to 'bind and loose' on earth and in heaven. So this authority now rests on Pope Francis and will rest in each of his

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<sup>351</sup> Margaret O' Gara and Michael Vertin, *The Holy Spirit's Assistance to the Magisterium in Teaching, Theological and Philosophical Issues, Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, (2013), 51. Hereafter as O' Gara and Vertin, *The Holy Spirit's Assistance to the Magisterium*.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

successors, guided by God ‘until the end of the world’ (Matthew 28: 20). This shows us that Christ’s words to St. Peter, his Vicar on earth has a special relationship with his Father.<sup>354</sup>

It is true that in our postmodern world the contemporary mind questions everything in life including religion even to the ingredients mother traditionally use in preparing soup for our daily sustenance. In other words, modern and postmodern people even question the origin, meaning and destiny of human life. It is hard to know whether they are questioning in order to learn or for the pleasure of destroying everything humanity has believed and lived on. One may not be surprised if they also question whether the food which their mother gives them is safe to eat or poisonous even when the same mother had fed them from when their infants to when they started talking. I am not talking of modernists who disbelieve the elementary teaching of Christianity. Rather, I am talking of postmodern people who may be members of the Catholic Church who are flying on the wings of freedom and so believe that it is their birthright to question and cast doubt on anything imaginable, even their own humanity. They are Catholics but question and distrust every Catholic teaching that one may ask, ‘what is it that makes them Catholic?’ They are postmodern Christians that choose what they want to believe and dismiss what is hard for them. Saint Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* lamented on the so called First World nations where Christianity was flourishing but now are undergoing a radical transformation as a result of a constant spreading of an indifference to religion, of secularism and atheism. The tiff observes a tragic situation in these nations where economic well-being and consumerism coexist with poverty and misery as well as inspiring and sustaining a life lived “as if God did not exist.” According to Saint John Paul II, this indifference to religion and the practice of religion devoid of true meaning in the face of life’s very serious problems are not less

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

worrying and upsetting when compared with declared atheism. He observes that sometimes the Christian faith as well, while maintaining some of the externals of its tradition and rituals, tends to be separated from those moments of the human existence which have the most significance, such as, birth, suffering and death. It can be said that in other regions or nations of Africa, Asia and South America, many vital traditions of piety and popular forms of Christian religion are still conserved; but today this moral and spiritual patrimony runs the risk of being dispersed under the impact of a multiplicity of processes, including secularisation and the spread of sects (Christifideles Laici n.34). To stem this tide of religious erosion, we should step up the call of New Evangelization by St. John Paul II as an urgent action to ensure the growth of a clear and deep faith to serve to make these precious Christian traditions a force for authentic freedom. The Pontiff notes without doubt that a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about what is needed is to first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself present in these countries and nations (Ibid.). If the ancient Christian nations are confused in the living out their Christian traditions because they now live in different situations, it is bound to have negative effects on the postmodern Christians who in their inherited confusion question and doubt the religious message they receive from their parents and contemporaries.

We can also rightly say that modernism, which is sometimes called liberalism, affects the thinking of postmodern Catholic Christians. Modernism adopts negative attitude towards the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Modernism preaches that the God of heaven has not revealed his will to mankind in words that men can understand and therefore cannot claim to know the will of God. It denies that God created man but that man is the result of organic evolution. According to modernists since, God has not revealed his will; man has not transgressed God's will and, therefore, has not sinned. Not having sinned, he does not stand

in need of redemption; therefore, Jesus is not God in the flesh to die by shedding his blood, for the sins of man. The church of the New Testament is unimportant for man does not need to be a member of it. There is no hell to avoid and no heaven to seek after. Concern of religion should be for the social welfare of man, thus the “social gospel” of modernism. Having given up all faith in “another world” modernism centres its thoughts and hopes in “this world.”<sup>355</sup> Anyone who thinks that modernism has no bad effect on postmodern young adult Catholics is deceiving his/herself. On more than one occasions during my expected visits in the primary school within the parish where I worked in the United Kingdom, some Catholic pupils came to argue with me that ‘there is nothing like God’ or if I can prove that he exists. Can you gaze how they got this false idea into their ‘small’ head? Their teacher in the Catholic primary school told his/her Catholic pupils that God did not exist? These pupils accepted this false information because their teacher said it. I asked another parents why their children do not come to Mass. They said that their children who are pupils in Catholic primary school have decided not to attend Mass any longer. Of course, this is a country where freedom is worshipped like “god.” The parents believe that children should not be pressurised but should children not be taught to choose what would build up their moral and religious life without applying force or violence anyway? The point is that some parents are nominal Catholics who do not know the difference whether their children come to Mass or pray or not. They believe they are Catholic although they demonstrate no religious influence on their children such as life of prayer, constant Mass attendance especially on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, faith, hope and trust in God and the attitude of putting God first in whatever they do in the family and outside the family. If they do not seem to have any relationship with God, how will anyone expect their children to appreciate God, and Mass, which is the highest prayer and worship we can render to God our Creator and Father? Of

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<sup>355</sup> Truth Magazine XXII: 42, pp. 679-682 (1978), <http://www.truthmagazine.com/volume22TM022348.html> Accessed January 17, 2020.

course, we all know very well that the Church, the Family, and the State constitute three legs of a tripod on which functional education rests; and if each is lacking, education will necessarily collapse, and become dysfunctional as evidenced in the educational system in many nations. We are equally aware that education aims at preparing people to live meaningful and productive lives in their environment as well as attaining the purpose of existence which, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is the vision of God for his children. I feel concerned about the children of these parents because as a Catholic priest, I know that the Church, following her Divine Founder, is very interested in the well-being of the children of God.

I suggest strongly that parents should learn the habit of communicating with their growing children especially on important issues of life and not just allow children to make adult decisions that can affect them for the rest of their life because our constitution allows freedom on end. Such friendly communication between parents and children enhances their young developing mind. Children are trained and guided not left on their own in making important decisions in life. There is no doubt that children who are under their parents need their constant reassuring presence, their understanding, advice, freedom, and assurance of being needed and loved. Parents should always remember that children have the right to be led to know God who made them, to love and serve him. The child has the right to know about Jesus Christ, our Saviour, about the Blessed Virgin Mary, about the Saints and about the Church which Christ founded. The child has the right to religious education.<sup>356</sup> Religious education begins in the home. It is from father and mother that the child first learns to make the Sign of the Cross and to pronounce the sacred names of Jesus and Mary.<sup>357</sup> “The family”

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<sup>356</sup> Francis A. Arinze (now Cardinal Arinze), *The Child Has Rights*, Onitsha, Nigeria, Tabansi Press Limited, 1979, p.22, n.34.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*



according to the Second Vatican Council, “is, so to speak, the domestic Church. In it, parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children”

(Vatican II: The Church, n. II; cf. also Decree on Christian Education, n. 3).

It is true that freedom is a gift from God. Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him: “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). According to President Donald Trump, “Freedom is not a gift from government; freedom is a gift from God.” Each human being is free, not because we have fought and freed ourselves, but because that is how God has designed us to be. And it is very important to note that God will never interfere with our free will and that is why he will never force us to love him or hate him, to do his will or what is right. If he forces us, he violates our freedom and renders us to be robots or zombies. He created us in his image, with the capacity to love, to give ourselves freely, to choose to become (or not to become) what he created us to be: saints or his friends and his children in word and deed. The Church reminds us that God “respects the freedom of his creatures” and therefore even allows them to go astray, commit evil and, mysteriously knows how to derive good from it. Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has moral evil, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil” (CCC 311). To explain more of this, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (par. 1884), says that: “God has not willed to reserve to himself all exercise of power. He entrusts to every creature the functions it is capable of performing, according to the capacities of its own nature ... The way God acts in governing the world, which bears witness to such great regard for human freedom, should inspire the wisdom of those who govern human communities.” But do we act toward God with gratitude after we have learnt that he created us out of nothing for himself

calling us to a life of happiness. It is only human beings amongst the creatures God has created who can unite themselves to the Creator by using their freedom. Human beings are in a position to give him or deny him the glory that is his due as the Author of everything that exists. This possibility makes up the light and shade of human freedom.<sup>358</sup> There is no doubt that the Lord always encourages us to choose good since he loves us so tenderly. ‘See, today I set before you a choice between life and death, good and evil. If you pay heed to the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you this day, by loving Yahweh your God, by walking in his ways and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live ... Choose life that you may live’ (Deut. 30:15 – 16).

Being aware of God’s goodness to humanity, can we sincerely challenge ourselves with regard to our desire and efforts in responding to God’s magnanimity? How much do we hold firm and unshakable to our choice of life? Do we not hear the loving voice of God urging us on life of holiness? Do we not see ourselves in some way in the story of Jesus’ encounter with the rich young man (Mark 10:17 – 31)? The rich young man lost his happiness because he refused to hand over his freedom to God. Think of Mary the Mother of Jesus who is the opposite of the rich young man. The moment the Archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary the plans of God the Most High, she listens, and asks a question to understand better what the Lord is asking of her. Then she gives her firm reply: The Great Yes! Be it done unto me according to thy word (Luke 1:38)! This is the fruit of the best freedom of all, the freedom of deciding in favour of God.<sup>359</sup> This brings me back to the parents whose children are pupils in the Catholic primary school who have decided at such a tender age to shun Mass and the idea of God while their parents do not see anything wrong with their rash decision and choice.

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<sup>358</sup> A Website Dedicated to the Writing of Opus Dei’s Founder.  
<http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friendsofgod-chapter-2.htm> January 20, 2020.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

GK Chesterton said: ‘To have a right to do something is not at all the same as to be right in doing it.’ In this case, children are not forced to attend Mass or to believe in God but if parents are in dialogue and in friendship with their children, they will be able to lead their children to make reasonable decisions and choices in life.

Do elementary school children have enough knowledge about God’s Fatherhood to humanity? Do they know that life is a gift from God? Do they all know that they are a great gift from God? The Church recognizes that it is the proper mission of parents to transmit human life as well as education to the children God gives them. So, parents are co-operators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Parents will be able to fulfil this noble task with human and Christian responsibility, and as far as they are loyal to God, they will always be able to come to the right decision by common counsel and effort as far as their children are concerned.<sup>360</sup> Parents need to be aware of their moral responsibility toward their children. Second Vatican Council calls the family “the domestic Church” where parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children.<sup>361</sup> In our postmodern world, parents can easily transmit faith in God to their children if they practice what they preach. The question that keeps coming back is: ‘Are Christian parents aware of their fundamental duty to their children as far as faith in God is concerned?’ If the family is the domestic Church then, “the family has received from God its mission to be the first and vital cell of society. It will fulfil this mission if it shows itself to be the domestic sanctuary of the Church through mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God, if the whole family is caught up in the liturgical worship of the Church, and it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for

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<sup>360</sup> Vatican II: The Church in the World of Today, n. 50.

<sup>361</sup> Vatican II: The Church, n. 11.

the service of all the brethren in need.”<sup>362</sup> Children can only learn these human/divine qualities from their parents who teach them by example. Parents almost stamp their own characters on their children. From the behaviour of the children you can tell how their parents are.<sup>363</sup> The Nigerian Ibo people have a saying that when you reach the home of a man you know how he lives and who he is.

It is generally expected that parents should not neglect their duties toward their children otherwise they are not good parents. There are exceptions abound of bad parents who have no clue as to what training for their children is all about as well as children who are problematic who remain irresponsible or perverse despite the genuine efforts of their parents in trying to educate them to be good citizens and responsible children. We have parents who have destroyed their thinking and general behaviour with constant excessive alcohol and at times combined with addictive drugs. You may not expect children of such ill-fated parents to be socially healthy in the family and in the neighbourhood. So there are so many such misfits in the society who may not be able to make good use of the gift of their freedom. In most cases, it remains a vicious circle of moral evil of ‘like father like son’ and ‘like mother like daughter.’ The question must always be asked of how much love do parents have for themselves and for their children. This is because God created us out of love and for love. Of course in training their children, parents must not forget that children need love, acceptance and respect. Despite the age of children the virtues of love, acceptance and respect are their human rights. The human/Christian virtues of love, praying together as family, faith and trust in God, and friendliness, generosity, openness, joy in the Lord and in human success, hope in God and forgiveness are the qualities of Christian life that serve as spiritual manure to ‘grow’

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<sup>362</sup> Vatican II: Decree on Lay Apostolate, n. 11.

<sup>363</sup> Francis A. Arinze, (now Cardinal Arinze), *The Child Has Rights*, Onitsha, Nigeria, Tabansi Press Limited, 1979, p. 17. n. 24.

children into responsible adults who love God, life and humanity. In training children, there is no room for force. Children are loved into doing things that will please God and humanity. Religion is proposed to them as a way of life with God that nurtures and promotes happiness, security, peace and friendship. The love of God is an invitation to joy of life of the children of God and fulfilment of personal aspirations and desires.

Children are taught religious education, human history and life at home by their parents and other elders in the family. The stories of saints and great religious figures in the bible are told children all the time in the family. At home parents should create time to ask children what they learn at school and at catechism classes as well as following their religious practice. Children are also taught about great patriotic men and women of their country and of the world who have contributed significantly in the welfare of mankind. Students/pupils in Europe belong to many social clubs/associations like dancing club, football club, debating club, drama group, and scout/girls guide but do parents care about their children belonging to lay apostolate organizations such as Altar servers association, the Children of Mary or Mary League Association, the Legion of Mary, the Block Rosary Crusade, the Choir and so forth. According to the Second Vatican Council, children, “in their own way can be true living witnesses to Christ among their companions.”<sup>364</sup> The parents cannot get away from the obligation of providing their children proper religious education. This, of course, should be one of the major factors that will guide parents in the choice of a school for their children. Parents should be very vigilant to make sure that the school should promote and not hinder the religious education already begun in the home so that students/pupils should not come home and declare that they do not want to go to Mass any longer and that God does not exist. This is the type of malicious message these young souls get from their teachers who are

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<sup>364</sup> Vatican II: Decree on the Lay Apostolate, n. 12.

theists. Parents should be able to know and monitor what is being taught to their children at school. Such insensitive teachers even deny God's existence as they lecture students and pupils. This type of blasphemous statements and inordinate behaviour cannot be made in Muslim schools but they are freely and boldly made in Christian and especially Catholic schools without apprehension of any kind. This is where reckless and insensitive atheistic teachers poison innocent young minds and this religious confusion contradicts whatever religious efforts busy contemporary parents make at home with their children. Due to busy nature of life of postmodern Christian parents who barely fulfil their basic Christian duties including regularly coming to Mass on Sundays and hardly have time to monitor the faith practice of their children when they themselves demonstrate no serious concerns about God and religion. And so it makes no difference to such parents who are nominal Christians when their children stop attending Mass and even announce that God is an imagination of a sick mind and a frustrated people. However, in his memorable encyclical letter on the principal duties of a Christian citizen, Pope Leo XIII summarizes the rights and duties of parents. The Pope says: "Parents have by nature the right to instruct the children they have begotten; but they also have the duty to ensure that the child's education and training shall conform to the purpose for which God gave them their offspring. They must therefore energetically resist any invasion of their rights in this sphere, and absolutely insist on having it in their power to bring up their children in a Christian manner, in accordance with their duty; above all they must be able to keep them away from schools in which there is danger of their being infected by irreligion."<sup>365</sup> With this in mind, parents, as part of their Christian duty to their children should not shy away, in the name of respecting their children's right and freedom, from helping their children, especially when they are still minors, in making a choice of a state of life, such as marriage, priesthood or the religious life, or religion or irreligion. The faith and

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<sup>365</sup> Leo XIII: Sap. Christ. 10 January 1890, quoted by Pius XI in *The Christian Education of Youth*, n. 40.

generosity and friendship of the parents are important factors in the life of the growing lads. The child's right to religious education is so fundamental that it imposes an obligation on all those who have a stake in what goes on in school, especially teachers, Government and its officials, the Church and Society in general. Those are people who are responsible for the education of the child, and are blamed should they found wanting in this aspect. However, in religious matters, the wishes of parents of minors must be respected. No Government or teacher should bring out his own edition of religion and force it on the children. The practical solution to the administrative problems are best arrived at by discussion between Government, Church, teachers and parents. And when they become adults, the children will make their own individual choice.<sup>366</sup>

What I have been trying to establish all along is that parents in the name of freedom and rights of children should not leave moral decisions in the hands of their children who are still minors in the eyes of religious and civil law. First of all, parents may not forget that moral education is part of the religious education of their children. The moral aspect of life deals with right and wrong, what is to be done and what is to be avoided. If the child is not constantly educated in moral education, he may not be able to make the right choices in life and so will be unable to exercise his freedom in a responsible way. Apart from the fact that they are still minors, we may not forget that we are children of a fallen race, although the consolation is that we have been redeemed by Christ. We should always to note that the inclination to evil and sin still remains with us. We perpetually need to acquire self-mastery of our weakened human nature under the influence of the redeeming grace of Christ. Parents should always be awakened to the moral sensitivity of their children. The conscience of children is delicate and uninformed and so, they are constantly educated on matters of right

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<sup>366</sup> Francis A. Arinze (now Cardinal Arinze), *The Child Has Rights*, Onitsha, Nigeria, Tabansi Press Limited, 1979, pp. 24 – 25, nn. 41 – 42.

and wrong. Parents do this gently so as not to cause any injury on the conscience of their children. It is rather unfortunate that some governments in Europe may have made it difficult for parents and guardians and even schools to correct difficult children as well as apply adequate punishment because as the Book of Proverbs says: “Innate in the heart of a child is folly, judicious beating will rid him of it” (Prov. 22:15). But if the punishment is to be judicious it should be moderate, rare and with love and never with anger, otherwise it may produce repressed children who crack afterwards and become violent. In this way parents will educate their children in such fundamental virtues as kindness, honesty, nobility, chastity, hard-work, generosity and discipline.<sup>367</sup> Unfortunately modern governments view this traditional way of bringing up children as archaic, and their ‘scientific’ method has produced worst attitudes in children. The result is that we witness continual breakdown of the traditional family and its values. That filial respect for authority and the elders are no more. There is constant rising of juvenile delinquency; unrests in the family and schools and in public sphere by young adults are rampant. The frightening thing is that the government is not forthcoming with any remedy for today’s family and society crisis arising from the inability to bring up our children properly with balanced methods. And substitute for sound family life has not been offered by any of the behavioural sciences. I believe that many European governments have sabotaged the traditional way of bringing up children in the family and in the society at large with penitential corrections and appropriate punishment to enforce discipline in formation of character and behaviour. Parents have been stripped off of any authority to discipline their difficult children without incurring prosecution from the government and even condemnation from the general public. The result is that respect for elders and for authority in general is no more. Elders and the weak and the sick are increasingly more vulnerable even from members of their own family and society. Sympathy

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid, pp. 26-27, n. 46.



for weak humanity is no more available. It has become survival of the fittest where the vulnerable are encouraged ending their life as the best option and most of them are so brainwashed that they are eager and happy to do that since they have lost every sense of worth. And the protagonists of this evil are quick to praise those who take their own life as dying with dignity.

In the Garden of Eden, God showed Adam and Eve the Tree they should not eat from. They had the freedom to obey or disobey God. But they freely decided to disobey God and ate of the fruit of the tree God had told not to eat from. And that was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The consequences of their disobedience cannot be over-emphasized, such as, weakness of human nature, subject to ignorance, suffering, inclination to sin and the domination of death. We need to ask whether majority of people understand the essence of freedom especially parents in relation to being the first educators of their children. Definitely not all parents understand. There is no doubt that some understand. The words of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, ring out like a wonderful hymn to freedom, ‘God, who created you without you, will not save you without you.’ It is only human beings who are rational creatures, amongst God’s creation, who can unite themselves to the Creator by using their freedom. Human beings are in a position to give him or deny him, the glory that is due to him as the Creator of everything that exists.<sup>368</sup> The gift of freedom by God is a call to happiness. In his gift of freedom to us, the Lord invites us to choose the good. ‘See, today I set before you a choice between life and death, good and evil. If you pay heed to the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you this day, by loving Yahweh your God, by walking in his ways and by keeping his commandments and his status and his ordinances, then you shall live ... Choose life that you may live’ (Deut. 30:19). Judicious use of freedom facilitates

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<sup>368</sup> <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friendsofgod-chapter-2.htm> Accessed January 20, 2020.

happiness and security. Would you say that that the rich young man who encountered Christ about the type good work that would earn him eternal life was happy when he left Jesus without surrendering to God his freedom (Matthew 19: 16 – 22)? No, he went away unhappy despite his abundant wealth. His wealth did not guarantee his happiness because he was unable to hand over his freedom to God. The freedom to dismiss religion and deny God's existence is to throw away our source of happiness. The parents in question have failed to explain to their children the judicious use of freedom which is used in favour of God not against him, if for nothing else for their happy living and eventual salvation. We may consider the sublime moment when the Archangel Gabriel announced to the Blessed Virgin Mary the plans of God the Most High for the salvation of mankind. Our Blessed Mother Mary listened, and asked a question to the Archangel Gabriel to understand better what the Lord God was asking of her. Would any one claim that the Blessed Virgin understood completely the message from the Angel of God? Not at all! But since the message was from God the Most High, the Blessed Mary gave her firm reply in faith: Fiat! Let it be done to me according to thy word (Luke 1:26 – 38). We can rightly learn from our Blessed Mother the fruit of the best freedom of all, the freedom of deciding in favour of God.<sup>369</sup> In her Fiat, she demonstrated the best use of our God-given freedom - the freedom to choose to serve God. It is always exciting to watch the interaction between a mother and her little child. The mother gives her little child something to eat and straightaway begs her child to share the edible with her. It is interesting to watch the reaction of the little fellow to its mother. In some cases, the little child hands the whole edible to its mommy who takes small of it and eats or in some rear cases, the child refuses to share with its mother. In whatever situation, the mother has a very important duty to inculcate the value/virtue of generosity or an act of sharing into her little child. When the child shares its edible with its mother, her mother expresses her joy and

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

gratitude and calls her child beautiful names. The mother has to teach her child that life is basically sharing. This type of happy interaction between mother and child helps the little one to learn to share spontaneously with its parents, siblings and people whatever it has. Life entails sharing and sacrificing and through that way we are enriched personally and collectively. Did Jesus not spontaneously, freely and unconditionally accept the sacrifice of himself which the Father was asking of him? ‘Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth’ (Isaiah 53:7). ‘This is why my Father loves me, because I am laying down my life to take it up again afterwards. Nobody can rob me of it; I lay it down of my own accord. I am free to lay it down and free to take it up again’ (John 10:17 – 18). The correct use of freedom no doubt secures our true happiness and neutralizes all our inhibitions.

However, we may never fully understand Jesus’ freedom nor his love. The question that will continue to hunt our mind is why God has given us the gift of freedom which we can use to follow in the footsteps of Christ, but also to offend him? Christ has the freedom to offer up his life for the salvation of mankind. What an incredible generous love! Can we not begin to appreciate now that freedom is used properly when it is directed towards good, and that it is misused when people are simply ungrateful and turn away from the Love of loves?<sup>370</sup> Do we know what God wants of us? If we truly know what God wants of us, will we sincerely freely want to do it? If we are frankly in touch with our conscience, do we not so often pretend that we do not know what God wants us to do? Do we not very often rationalize our action to avoid what God wants of us? Or do we not very so often explain away our behaviour rather than take responsibility our actions? Are we truly happy to freely do what God wants us to do? Do we not appreciate that pride and selfishness and independent spirit turn away our

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

desire to wanting to do what God wants of us? The Scripture says the truth will set us free (John 8:32). What is this truth that opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives? Pontius Pilate, questions Jesus' claim that he is witness to the truth, "What is truth?" The question that comes to mind is, 'Is Pilate sincere or is he just being cynical, in his intoxicating power to overcome Jesus brought under his authority?' Jesus is truth. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Our mind presents to us 'false' truths and yet out of pride or fear we refuse to denounce them and still hold on to them and even use them as if they are real, in some cases, to escape punishment or avoid blame or taking responsibility of our actions or omissions. There is a saying that truth is in the middle. Do we agree to that statement or are we more comfortable with manufacturing our own 'truth' to suite our own purposes? Most times, we want to follow the popular/public opinion being intensively propagated by the media so as not to be out of touch or not modern. Today, no one wants to be unpopular or to contradict the flow if the general public decides not to accept the traditional truth that may appear archaic to the modern mind. Not many people want to stand alone with Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Even though, not many modern Christians will like to stand on the lonely path with Jesus, there is certain assurance and joy which flow from that knowledge that there is a close relationship between God the Creator and us his children. It is an incredible knowledge that we have come from the hands of God. We have God as our wonderful Father and if we take this truth to heart, we will be acting as truly free men and women. But not to realise that we are children of God is a serious lack in our humanity and in fact, the deepest lack of truth about ourselves. To lack the truth about ourselves is to lack the truth about God the Author of our being. How then do we have the true freedom to make the right choice which is Christ who alone sets us free since he alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life? The freedom we have is insufficient without Christ guiding us as he alone is our Redeemer who is the Way

and the Truth and giving us everlasting life. Unguided freedom leads to enslavement as choices that prefer error do not liberate. The choices are uninformed since they do not proceed from Christ nor lead to God. Freedom that is informed leads to God who is the source of every good. God who gives us the power to choose or reject him wants us to make good use of this faculty when Jesus says: ‘Thou shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind’ (Matthew 22:37). So we can now see that freedom finds its true meaning when it is put to the service of the truth which redeems, when it is spent in seeking God’s infinite love which liberates us from all forms of slavery.<sup>371</sup> In another place Jesus says, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him alone’ (Luke 4:8). Worship of God entails complete commitment with no conditions attached in our obedience to him. There is always that danger of having double mind within us. Oh, if I say “yes”, am I not going to lose my freedom completely? God gives us the gift of freedom and yet waits for us to exercise our freedom to say yes to him before he can unfold his incredible plan for our life – the promise of his blessings that includes healing from pain, the freedom to prefer good to evil, and the reality of everlasting life. God does not force his gifts on anyone, but he patiently and lovingly waits for us to say YES to him. The Lord says, ‘Look, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my call, and open the door, I will come in to you, and have supper with you, and you, with me’ (Revelation 3:20).

Benefits for those who make correct use of their freedom cannot be overemphasized. To reject God’s plan and choose our own rules and desires is to make unwise use of our freedom. We may not completely trust our choice without help from the Holy Spirit, the Church and other men and women of faith and goodwill because we are conceived in a fallen state, that is, without sanctifying grace. This is as a result of the consequence of Original Sin which affects

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

every human being at conception, rendering us vulnerable to sin by clouding our judgment and weakening our will. Hence we are inclined toward disordered appetites, enslaved to our passions and and so our choices are flawed. Even when we have the best of intentions, we still find it difficult to do what is right. So it is clear that the gift of freedom, given to the first man and woman, was meant to draw them closer to God, to each other, and to their destiny. God asked them, just as he asks us, to recognize their human limits and to trust in him. In the temptation, they were lured into trying to surpass their being human. “You will be like gods” (Genesis 3:5). They abused their freedom, failed to trust God, and disobeyed his command.<sup>372</sup> It is important to note that it is only God’s plan that leads to life and apart from that it leads to death. The disobedience of Adam and Eve has made death to become part of the human experience. So wrong use of freedom can only lead to sin. And the Bible tells us that, “For the reward of sin are death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). For the people of ancient Israel, sin was a spiritual death that leads to separation from God, the source of life, and consequently, to the death of the body. However, the Church’s belief in an ancient alienation from God due to sin has always been part of Revelation from the beginning. Since the time of St. Augustine (AD354-430), the sin of Adam and Eve has been called Original Sin. Unfortunately, each of us inherits Original Sin, but due to no personal fault of ours. This inheritance leaves us in a world that is subject to distorted thinking and will, and suffering and death. Original Sin underlines all other sins and causes our natural powers of knowing, choosing and loving to be wounded. We are also subject to ignorance, which makes it difficult for us to know the truth, and for some, even to believe that truth exists. It is true that for us, Original Sin has had far-reaching consequences however; there is a consolation, of greater consequence has been God’s mercy given to us

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<sup>372</sup> Archdiocese of Saint Paul & Minneapolis. Rediscover: What is original sin? How does it impact me? <http://rediscover.archspm.org/belong/what-is-original-sin-how-does-i-impact-me/> Accessed February 21, 2020.

through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, our tendency toward sin, or concupiscence, remains and, that is why our freedom is misused in the choices we make. But it is Jesus Christ who frees us from Original Sin and our actual sins. By baptism, we share in the redemptive act of Jesus' death and resurrection, are freed from Original Sin, and are strengthened against the power of sin and death.

Are we ready to be guided and strengthened by the redemptive act of Jesus' death and resurrection by which our inclination to sin will not be able to overwhelm us? If we are ready to be guided by love of God demonstrated in the redemptive act of Jesus on the cross, then our individual and responsible use of personal freedom will be possible. We need to internalize the love of Christ for us on the cross otherwise; we remain irresolute at the mercy of circumstances and at the suggestions of the media. We do not want to remain a plaything for the media or anybody or anything that can mould us according to its whim. Our freedom is not safe if we are carried along by the wind of popular opinion. It is like the man who is given the gift of one talent but who refuses to put it to use but buries it believing that: (Matthew 25: 14 – 25) 'my talent is safe!' He believes that his freedom is safe. He only succeeds in turning his talent/freedom towards the most miserable barrenness. God gives him the power to make a choice and unfortunately he chooses badly. God gives us the gift of freedom. Do we choose wisely? Yahweh encouraging his people to choose life said: "See, I set before you on this day life and good, evil and death. I command you to love Yahweh, your God and follow his ways. Observe his commandments, his norms and his laws, and you will live and increase and Yahweh will give you his blessing in the land you are going to possess" (Deut. 30:15 – 16). The best use of freedom is to choose life which God gives us in Christ, his Son, in his commandments and in the sacraments. To choose Christ is to choose eternal life, and he is the fulfilment of the commandments of God. The commandments of God are natural

to man because they are written in the heart of every human being whether they know God or not. There is always the knowledge of good and evil in the heart of man and woman as far as they have conscience and reason as human beings. The laws are directives by which man and woman fulfil their nature and goal which is God. A bird instinctively flies and acts according to its nature and kind and can never act like a dog or suddenly becomes a cow so also a man acts naturally like a human being and cannot behave like pig or become a crocodile and begin to live in water. So the law of the Lord should be strange to man and woman. Even though most times, the wounded human nature rebels against the commandments of God. So this inclination to sin known as concupiscence can misguide our freedom to make a wise choice to follow the commandments of God. And to revolt against the commandment of God is for one to revolt against oneself because the law of the Lord is natural to man and woman. It is like man behaving like a rattle snake that gets annoyed and bites itself. This disorder in human behaviour is a consequence of the fallen nature of man. There is disorder in human thinking and perception. Hence the fallen man thinks that the idea of law is to curtail his freedom, his desire for pleasure and happiness but the opposite is the case because, in actual fact, the law protects his freedom to choose life rather than death, just as the brick-wall around our village/community school is not erected to imprison our pupils/students studying there but to protect them from life-threatening dangers like car accidents, and those who can abuse them sexually and those who are ready to kidnap or kill them and, give them the needed freedom to study, and for recreation within the school compound. That is exactly what the law of the Lord does for us. That is why the Psalmist says that the precepts of the Lord are perfect; they give life to the soul. They are trustworthy; they give wisdom to the simple. The precepts of Yahweh are right: they give joy to the heart. The commandments of God are clear: they enlighten the eye (Psalm 19:8 – 9). On one occasion, even in a situation of physical hunger, Jesus claimed, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me ...” (John 4:34). If the law



of the Lord is food for Jesus, it all means that, the law of the Lord is as important and necessary as food is for our physical sustenance. It is high time then that we gave the laws of the Lord a serious thought since Jesus cannot deceive us. Upon serious reflection, we will understand that the commandments are God's wisdom helping us his children to manage our chaotic life. The laws of the Lord help to teach us the true humanity of man and woman. They are the laws of love encouraging us to love God and our neighbour. And of course, the laws of love are natural to human beings. It is natural for man and woman to love because their origin and end is God who is love. God created man and woman out of love and for love. At least, it is in man's heart to love even if he is unable to actualize this inherent desire in his heart all the time as much he wants or as expected of him. Every human being wants to love and be loved. To love is an act of human nature even though at times, our acts of love are self-seeking.

So the gift of freedom is well used in the context of the choice to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with our entire mind. To be able to keep the commandments of God is an act of freedom to surrender one's will to God who is full of love for human beings. What about a mother who makes a lot of sacrifice for love of her children – a choice she makes out of love, and the more she loves the greater will be her freedom to love. If her love is great, her freedom will bear much fruit. Her children's wellbeing derives from her blessed freedom, which presupposes self-surrender, and from her blessed self-surrender, which is precisely freedom.<sup>373</sup> The more we love the more free we are to love and, do not forget that love abhors boredom. To love means to renew our dedication every day, with loving deeds of service. Freedom can only be given up for love and, love is life; otherwise, why should one give up one's freedom? People have given testimonies both in

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<sup>373</sup> [http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friends\\_of\\_god-chapter-2.htm](http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friends_of_god-chapter-2.htm) Accessed January 20, 2020.

words and in writings that when people give themselves freely, at every moment of their self-surrender, freedom renews their love; to be renewed in that way is to be always young, generous, capable of high ideals and great sacrifices. Our love for freedom ties us down. But to surrender to him shows us that his yoke is freedom because his yoke is the Life he won for us on the Cross.<sup>374</sup> To be up in arms to defend freedom can endanger the faith because such freedom is misguided. Such freedom is lawless and irresponsible and constitutes a threat to faith. So, it is an irresponsible freedom to reject God and his plans for salvation because it goes contrary to the first and most important commandment: ‘Thou shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart’ (Matthew 22:37). Of course, it is in our power to oppose God’s plans but can we defeat God in such irresponsible use of the gift of freedom? Our Holy Mother the Church has always spoken in favour of freedom but encourages us to use the precious gift of freedom in a mature and responsible way. God deciding not to create us impeccable, nevertheless, he judged that we would be better if we served him freely. God brings us to understand that we will attain truth, happiness and freedom if we strive to make the seed of eternal life grow in our hearts. However, we still have the power and the freedom to say ‘no’ to God rejecting the source of new and permanent happiness and freedom. If we reject the new freedom that comes from the love of God we stop being children of God and freely become slaves. Everything is fitted to be according to its own nature; hence, when it goes in search of something else alien to its nature, it is no longer acting according to its own manner of being, but under an alien impulse; and this is to act in a servile manner. Man is rational by nature. When he acts according to reason, he proceeds by his own movement, according to what he is: and this is proper to freedom.<sup>375</sup> So also, a man acts naturally as a human being and cannot suddenly decide to transform into a goat and grow four legs. But when a man sins, he works against reason, and then he is allowing himself to be led by the

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

impulse of another, he is subject to limitations imposed by another and so anyone who commits sin is a slave to sin (John 8:34). A sinner gives up the freedom and the joy of the children of God. But according to Pope Francis in his Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae on July 2013 said that, ‘Reconciliation is the re-creation of the world; and the most profound mission of Jesus is the redemption of all of us sinners. It is truly he, God, who becomes one of us, a man, to heal us from within.’ The Pontiff further said, “It will do us good to think of this and to think that it is so beautiful to be children. This freedom of children is so beautiful, for the Son is at home. Jesus has opened the doors of his house to us, we are now at home. We now understand Jesus’ words: ‘take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.’ This is the root of our courage: I am free, I am a child, the Father loves me and I love the Father. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to understand his action properly.”<sup>376</sup> To enjoy the freedom of the children of God, we need to get rid of bad and evil feelings and thoughts and the conflicting desires waging battle in our minds and turning ourselves into God’s enemy and slaves of sensualities of the world. The power to choose belongs to us whether we want to remain slaves of our self-seeking desires or to allow the service of love to make us slaves of God. To recognise that love has made us slaves of God is to become friends, and sons and daughters of God. From the time we become children of God, everything we do bears fruit for eternity. The love with which Christ ransoms us on the Cross gives us our freedom. So our freedom comes from Christ. That is why he teaches, ‘if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’ (John 8:36). The freedom the world gives is corrupt because it serves to manipulate, intimidate, oppress, pillage and destroy while the only freedom that can save man is Christian freedom. It is through Christian freedom that our lives unfold. Our option for God, to convert our whole life into a means of serving others, out of

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<sup>376</sup> Pope Francis (2013), Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, The freedom of God’s children, <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie20130704freedom-children.html> Accessed February 25, 2020.

love for our Lord Jesus, comes freely not with compulsion of any kind. And this freedom to choose to serve humanity is a gift from God. We can decide to live as God's friend or as his enemy. However, whatever action we freely undertake to perform, we are answerable to God who gives us the power of freedom.

The Church preaches and advocates a climate of freedom for everyone. The Catholic Church does not encourage any element of compulsion in the manner of presenting the faith.

Religious coercion is wrong and the Catholic Church sees it as a violation of human freedom. The decision to follow God comes from personal freedom. If we put our freedom into God's hands, we will find ourselves loosed from many chains that bind us to insignificant things and ridiculous cares or petty ambitions. That is how we can learn properly how to use our freedom to do good entirely. I mean the glorious freedom of the children of God. To decide to follow God is to lose nothing, and to gain everything. The Scripture says: "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it" (Luke 17:33). The decision to follow God is an act of love and, it is only when we love do we attain the fullness of freedom: the freedom to hold on to the object of our love for all eternity. Of course, our freedom has a purpose: We are "created to live in communion with God, in whom we find happiness" (CCC 45). Despite the consequences of the original sin in our life, our nature is made to correspond to all that is true, good, and beautiful. There is no doubt that, we harbour within our deepest being the desire for happiness which can only be fulfilled insofar as we participate fully in God, the source and fullness of all that is true and good and beautiful. We need to note that we can change the world with this precious gift of freedom because every choice we make influences the course of history and the lives of other people, in some way or another. It is important to remember that God gives us the gift of freedom and yet waits for us to exercise it to say yes to him before he can unfold his incredible plan for our life – the promise of his

blessings which includes healing from pain, the freedom to prefer good to evil, and the reality of everlasting life. God does not force his gift on anyone, but he patiently and lovingly waits for us to say YES to him. The Lord says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). So, benefits for the correct use of wisdom cannot be overemphasized. That is why to reject God’s plan and choose to live by our own rules and desires is to make unwise use of our freedom. It is important to remember always that it is only God’s plan that leads to life and apart from that leads to death. The gift of free will God gives us is the ability to make decisions and choices. We are free to choose between good and evil. Without the gift of free will, humans could not be described as moral beings, as they will not be able to make conscious choice to live and act in a moral way. The encounter between Eve and the Serpent in Genesis 3 makes it clear to us that, it is not only that God has given humans the ability to choose; they also have the responsibility to choose wisely. This is because wrong use of freedom can only lead to sin. And the Bible tells us that, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). What makes human beings different from other living creatures of God is that God has given human beings rationality. This means that human beings can use their ability to reason and make decisions or judgements based on this reason, unlike animals and plants. Human beings, unlike other living beings, have the ability to think and understand. This helps them weigh up actions and consequences, using their conscience and experience to guide them. “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6). From the use of reasoning, human beings become creative. God created human beings “to be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). The gift of creativity is given to humans in order to survive in the world. God made the masters of creation both to subdue for their survival and safeguard as stewards. It is immensely fascinating to see how fast humans progress on making use of

the gift of creativity in every aspect of their life. We can only pray and hope that this precious gift of creativity and freedom is all the time used constructively. Do we not appreciate that the creative abilities that humans possess reflect something of God's own nature? The more reason why humans should use their creative ability for building up human life, dignity and general wellbeing of humanity and the environment or mother earth, our common earthly home. This is where mature use of human freedom comes into full play.

The Catholic Church in the United Kingdom, like in other nations, is struggling to find her identity and footing. The Catholic Church in UK has been intimidated from her past history of suppression and persecution and of recent, from the scandal of child abuse by clergy that has left the Church so bruised and so prostrated. It is as if the Church is limping and bereft of her moral authority to exist not to talk of acting like a living Church with moral authority to scrutinize government activities and act as a moral guide for the general public. In some cases the Catholic Church in UK act from subdued self-esteem and fear. An African Catholic missionary priest was posted as an assistant priest to a white parish priest who asked him to visit pupils in the parish Catholic primary school every Tuesday for one hour in their classes. The parish priest asked him never to mention anything religion as he interacted with pupils in the course of his class visitation. The black priest was taken aback and asked his parish priest: 'If I go into the Catholic school as a Catholic priest and do not discuss religion, what on earth, will I discuss with Catholic pupils?' He asked him to discuss with pupils social affairs like what sporting events they like and participate in, and which English Foot Ball Club they support, and what is their best food as well as the social and cultural life in Africa and the like; what programmes they like to watch on television, the types of books they read and so forth. The black priest was genuinely confused. The African priest asked for the reason why religion should not be mentioned in a Catholic school. The parish priest was blunt and bold to

say that he would not like the Muslims and non-believers in God to be annoyed with discussion about religion and God. Do not forget this is Catholic primary school! There was some argument between them about that to which the parish priest termed as confrontational and disobedience to his authority as the parish priest. The black priest later thought better of it and kept visiting the school during his stay in that parish. The backlash for him was that when the Bishop wanted to appoint him as a parish priest of another parish, his parish priest objected to it and said that the black priest was not interested in school apostolate. But that was a lie decorated as truth to avenge some perceived wounded pride. There is what we call weekly moral instruction in Catholic schools in Nigeria and Catholic pupils learn a lot about God, religion, their faith and doctrine through such sessions and about other faiths. I am proud that Catholic pupils/students in Nigeria are able to participate actively in the Mass and other religious activities. This is because in their schools and parishes they belong to the choir, the Block Rosary Crusade, the Legion of Mary, Catholic Boys/Girls Association, Bible Study Group, and Catholic Charismatic Group and they benefit from the moral instructions being organized for them in their schools and other devotional prayer groups. The pupils/students are able to say the basic Catholic prayers especially the Rosary and the Angelus. Also, they are able to say spontaneous prayers because many of them belong to the Catholic Charismatic Group. They always engage in religious quiz and so they have gentleman- knowledge of religion which is encouraging unlike pupils/students in most European nations who lack the basics for their level/age due to the fact that their parents are nominal Catholics or non-practising Catholics.

Another incident in the UK is in a Catholic school where students are not allowed to wear their Rosary bead or a Cross around their neck because such attitude of faith annoys the Muslim students and other non-believers in God. Also crosses or Catholic icons are not

allowed to be displayed in the school classrooms and halls and other such public arenas in the school. So as Catholics, in some parts of the UK, even in Catholic institutions, we are expected to live a life of apology for being Catholic members and even hide our identity as Catholics in order not annoy those who are not interested in religion and those who are simply ant-Catholic. Another interesting incident occurred in the parish where a black missionary priest was parish priest. After a Sunday Mass, a white young man approached him indicating he would like to get married in the parish even though he was not a parishioner there. The priest gave him the bulletin for the parish phone number and email address and asked him to contact him for his marriage preparation course. The priest did not see nor heard from the young man until after five months when he reappeared and demanded his marriage papers to be signed as requested by the priest who would witness to their marriage which would take place in two weeks time. The young man said he had given out invitations to family and friends, and booked and paid for the hall for his reception after marriage. The African priest refused as he never underwent marriage preparation course with him. The young man went away and the next day the Pastoral Coordinator came to see him immediately after the morning Mass and asked him to prepare the marriage papers to give to the young man when he appeared. He said that the Bishop had asked him to come and tell him to do that and get it submitted to the Diocesan Chancery that same day. The priest consulted his mission superior who asked him to obey the Bishop without any further delay. The Pastoral Coordinator explained that the Diocese would not like to engage into legal tussle with the young man who might incur huge financial damages if his marriage was delayed. And that was enough to compromise the required marriage preparation course to make the marriage legitimate and solid. That is the type of make-shift religion and faith that is practised in some part of the United Kingdom. We are Catholics with ‘apology.’ We are Catholics with ‘fear’, not fear of God but of government and the law. On many occasions Catholic teachings



and dignity are flouted even by the government in Catholic space so as to appease Muslims and non-believers.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

We have it so clear in Catholic teaching that freedom is a gift from God without which human beings would not be regarded as moral beings who would be responsible for their decisions and actions. From experience, Christians believe that freedom exercised without responsibility is morally wrong and sinful. Because Christians have personal relationship with God who created every human being in his image and likeness, and as moral beings who conscience and reason, they cannot act without weighing up the morality of their actions because they are answerable to God, who is just and infinitely loving. So as moral beings, we are accountable for our actions. Hence, there is no true freedom without responsibility. And mature and true freedom is only exercised in the love of who loved humanity by offering his life on the cross for their eternal salvation as well as the love of everybody without discrimination. That is why for Christians, the love of Christ is a central element of Christian belief and theology.

### **3.5. Thoughts of Some Contemporary Theologians on the Holy Spirit**

The understanding of the Holy Spirit by the Catholic Church has assumed particular interest since the time Blessed Elena Guerra (1835 – 1914) petitioned Pope Leo XIII requesting him to provide a clearer and more systematic presentation of the Church's Magisterium regarding the Holy Spirit. In 1897, the Pontiff responded with his Encyclical Letter, **Divinum Illud Munus**. The Encyclical Letter was appropriate, as it came four years before the birth of Pentecostalism in 1901, when Charles Fox Parham was the first to formulate a comprehensive

idea of praying for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>377</sup> We may note that before the flourishing of the movement of the Holy Spirit (the Catholic Charismatic Movement), the Catholic Church's Cursillo movement was recognized by both Pius XI and Pius XII as a Spirit-inspired movement. Also, in 1986, Pope John Paul II wrote the Encyclical Letter, **Dominum et Vivificantem**, which further defined the identity and role of the Holy Spirit as Lord and vivifier of the life of the Church.<sup>378</sup> Again, in 2006, the Catholic Church and some classical Pentecostal churches, after some international dialogue, published a document known as *On Becoming a Christian: Insights from Scripture and the Patristic Writings, With Some Contemporary Reflections*. It is a document that specifically discusses the Holy Spirit in his role regarding his bringing people into the Church, (which Catholics view from specifically sacramental perspective, for example concerning baptism and confirmation), as well as that of guiding and sanctifying members to sustain the life of the Church.<sup>379</sup>

Father Philip-Michael F. Tangorra examines how the Holy Spirit engages the people of God in bringing about holiness of life for the whole Church. After the Son had accomplished the work the Father gave him to do on earth (John 17: 4), at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was sent in order that he might continually sanctify the Church, and that, consequently, those who believe might have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2: 18).<sup>380</sup> Christ did not will, as it were, entirely complete and finish this office himself on earth, but as he had received it from the Father, so he transmitted it to the Holy Spirit for its completion. It is consoling to recall those assurances which Christ gave to his disciples before he left the earth: "Believe me; it is better for you that I go away, because as long as I do not go away, the

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<sup>377</sup> Father Philip-Michael F. Tangorra, (2014), *The Holy Spirit and the Contemporary Reform of the Catholic Church*. <https://www.hprweb.com/2014/12/the-holy-spirit-and-the-contemporary-reform-of-the-catholic-church/>. Accessed on June 7, 2018.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> LG 4.

Helper will not come to you” (John 16: 7). He indicated to his disciples the advantage of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and equally that the Holy Spirit would come from the Father and himself and that he would complete, in his office of Intercessor, Consoler, and Teacher, the work which Christ himself had begun. For, in the redemption of the world, the completion of the work was, by Divine Providence, reserved to the manifold power of that Spirit, who, in creation, “adorned the heavens” (Job 26: 13), and “filled the whole world” (Wisdom 1: 7).<sup>381</sup>

The Holy Spirit leads the Church, the Bride of Christ, and, with the Church, “the Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus: “Come!” (Revelation 22: 17)”<sup>382</sup> The Holy Spirit, in his role of guiding, nourishing, and instructing the Church, the People of God, inspires the Church to join with him in preparing to welcome Christ back at his Second Coming. The Holy Spirit, who is not bound by the visible confines of the Catholic Church,<sup>383</sup> draws all humanity, through heightening humanity’s understanding of the **Logos Spermatikos** (God planting in each person a seed of his own divinity) scattered throughout all of creation and in all cultures and religions, into unity with Jesus Christ, so that, through his Paschal Mystery, they may be one with the Father.<sup>384</sup> The Holy Spirit can unite all humanity to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, through the explicit act of faith in the existence of God and trust in God’s divine providence for their salvation (Hebrews 11: 6). Of course, God works in the hearts of men and women of good will where grace is active invisibly. This is a mysterious participation wrought by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit unites people to Jesus from whom the Holy Spirit

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<sup>381</sup> Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter on the Holy Spirit, *Divinum Illud Munus*, 1897, par. 1.

<sup>382</sup> LG 4.

<sup>383</sup> LG 8.

<sup>384</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, par. 5. Hereafter as GS.

proceeds, even if they are unconscious of this reality.<sup>385</sup> **(As Catholics, can we trace the actions of the Holy Spirit in other Christian denominations? Check footnote 390).**

However, in order to understand better the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the Church, we must first understand the Holy Spirit and his relationship with the Father and the Son, and then look at the mission of the Holy Spirit. The love between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit, and so we relate to the Holy Spirit, not as Father or Son, but as gift of love proceeding from the Father and the Son.<sup>386</sup> Hence, St. Paul echoes, as it were, the words of Christ, when he ascribes the pouring forth of love in the hearts of believers to this Spirit of Love: “The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.”<sup>387</sup> So we can rightly say that the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son. All that the Holy Spirit is, or has, he has at once from the Father and the Son.<sup>388</sup> The Son and the Holy Spirit are the “hands” of the Father, who make the Father known and lead humanity back to unity with the Father. “I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I come to you, Holy Father, keep those you have given me in your name, so that they may be one, as we are one” (John 17: 17).<sup>389</sup> The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, so that he can lead all humanity to truth by bringing mankind into relationship with the Father and the Son (John 14: 26, 15: 26, and 16: 13 – 14). The Holy Spirit is not the mediator of salvation but rather brings all humanity into participation in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. So, the Holy Spirit, the gift of love, brings every person to unity with love, which is communion with the Father and the Son. According to Pope Francis, the Holy Spirit

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<sup>385</sup> Father Philip-Michael F. Tangorra, (2014), *The Holy Spirit and the Contemporary Reform of the Catholic Church*. <https://www.hprweb.com/2014/12/the-holy-spirit-and-the-contemporary-reform-of-the-catholic-church/>. Accessed on June 7, 2018.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *On Devotion to the Sacred Heart*, *Haurietis Aquas*, 1956, par. 5.

<sup>388</sup> Jacques Dupuis, (Ed.), *St. Athanasius, Quicumque Vult*, in *The Christian Faith, In the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, New York: Alba House, 2001, pp. 16 – 17.

<sup>389</sup> Father Philip-Michael F. Tangorra, (2014), *The Holy Spirit and the Contemporary Reform of the Catholic Church*. <https://www.hprweb.com/2014/12/the-holy-spirit-and-contemporary-reform-of-the-catholic-church/>. Accessed on June 7, 2018.

is central to our salvation and holiness of life, especially through our participation in the sacraments, which the Holy Spirit leads us to, in order to understand more perfectly the mystery of the life of Jesus Christ. The Pontiff warns us not to limit the works of the Holy Spirit to the sacraments and liturgical, official acts of the Church. The Pope maintains that the Holy Spirit works in the heart, mind and soul of every human being, of all religions and no religion, drawing them to Christ.<sup>390</sup> The Spirit blows wherever he wills (John 3: 8). The Pope exhorts us to discern how the Spirit inspires people of faith inside the Church, and, if truly authentic, should be embraced in order to reform, grow, and continue to enliven Christians of today.<sup>391</sup> **(Our Christians may be rejecting the promptings of the Holy Spirit by all the time rejecting changes insisting on: This is how we do it here. Who are you to come from Africa to teach us what to do?) za**

Pope Francis reminds us that the ordinary means of the Holy Spirit to communicate the love of God is through the Church, but we must not fail to recognize that extraordinary mystical gifts and experiences have been given to many of our brothers and sisters in the human family who are not yet baptized and therefore, not fully incorporated into the life of the Church. The Pope says that these gifts and experiences can communicate great truths to the human family and inspire faith in people seeking fulfilment and meaning in life. The role of missionaries and evangelists is to help people see how such gifts can point to Jesus.<sup>392</sup> The Pontiff reminds us that our common baptismal priesthood may help us gain the perfection of holiness in Christ as well as recognize the capacity for all of us for holiness and the ability to manifest extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit for building up the Church. Pope Francis says that the holiness that we, the people of God, can manifest when we are truly conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the greatest reform of the Church possible, because our

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

witness to the real presence of God in this world, revealed through our holiness, will inflame the hearts and minds of unbelievers. The Pontiff also says that the dynamism of the love that is the Holy Spirit can be manifested in many ways, including disciplinary reforms that express more clearly the reality of the God that is love.<sup>393</sup>

Pope Francis, from the beginning of his pontificate, has indicated great interest in the role of the Holy Spirit in addressing the need of the Church to reform. The Pontiff urges Christians to engage with the Holy Spirit, and to open their hearts to the Spirit before taking important decisions. He says that the Holy Spirit moves our hearts, inspires and triggers our emotions. What place does the Holy Spirit have in my life? The Pontiff exhorts the faithful to let themselves be “disturbed” by the Holy Spirit and not to just have “ideological faith.” The Pope says that the Holy Spirit is the master of discernment, and so, the person who does not have this kind of turmoil does not discern what is happening; he or she “is a person who has a cold faith, an ideological faith.” He encourages us to ask the Holy Spirit to help us to differentiate between good and evil. The Pontiff exhorts us to ask for the grace to be able to hear what the Spirit is saying to our Church, to our community, to our parish, to our family, and for the grace to learn the language with which to understand and respond.<sup>394</sup> **(Can the clergy recognise the signs of the Holy Spirit in the laity apart from themselves?)**

Pope Francis says it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us to say, “Jesus is the Lord:”

“Without the Holy Spirit, none of us is able to say it, to perceive it, to live it. Jesus, in other places in this long discourse, said of Him [the Holy Spirit]: ‘He will lead you into all truth,’ He will accompany you towards the full truth. ‘He will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you; He will teach you all things.’ That is, the Holy Spirit is the travelling

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Linda Bordoni, Vatican Radio, The Voice of the Pope and the Church in dialogue with the World, Learn the language of the Holy Spirit. [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/05/29/pope\\_learn\\_the\\_language\\_of\\_the\\_holy\\_spirit/1315517](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/05/29/pope_learn_the_language_of_the_holy_spirit/1315517). Accessed on March 3, 2018.

companion of every Christian, and also the travelling companion of the Church. And this is the gift that Jesus gives us.”<sup>395</sup>

The Pope reminds us that the Holy Spirit accompanies us and “gives us the assurance of being saved by Jesus.” The Pontiff asks: Where does the Holy Spirit dwell? The Pontiff consults Acts of the Apostles 16: 14, about Lydia, a God-fearing woman, and says:

“The Lord opened her heart so that the Holy Spirit could enter, and she became a disciple. It is precisely within our hearts that we carry the Holy Spirit. The Church calls the Spirit ‘the sweet guest of the heart.’ He is there. But He cannot enter a closed heart. ‘Ah, but where can one buy the keys to open the heart?’ No! That too is a gift. It is a gift of God: ‘Lord, open my heart so that the Spirit can enter it, and I can understand that Jesus is the Lord.’”<sup>396</sup>

The Pope encourages us to say this prayer daily: “Lord, open my heart so that I can understand what you have taught us; so that I can remember your words; so that I can follow your words; so that I can come to the fullness of the truth.”<sup>397</sup>

Pope Francis compares the Holy Spirit to the wind that leads us “towards the safe harbour of eternal life.” He says that “the Spirit is the wind pushing us forward, keeping us going that makes us feel like pilgrims and foreigners and doesn’t allow us to get comfortable and become sedentary.” The Pontiff says that hope is both an anchor (Hebrews 6: 18 – 19) that keeps us safe in turbulent waves and a sail that allows us to glide above the water. He says that hope “collects the wind of the Spirit and transforms it into energy that pushes the boat toward the open sea or the shore.” Pope Francis says that “Men need hope in order to live and they need the Holy Spirit in order to hope.” He says that the Holy Spirit pushes us to go forward and that is why hope does not disappoint. According to the Pontiff, the Holy Spirit gives us the will to hope. The Pope calls it the “invincible hope” which can be shared so that

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<sup>395</sup> Pope Francis, Open your heart to the Holy Spirit, The Voice of the Pope and the Church in Dialogue with the World. <http://en.radiovaticana.va/2017/05/22/pope-francis-open-your-heart-to-the-holyspirit/1313870>. Accessed on March 3, 2018.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

we can be “sowers of hope.” Pope Francis quotes Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman who said that filled with this hope we can become “consolers in the image of the Paraclete . . . advocates, helpers and bringers of comfort to others.”<sup>398</sup>

Pope Francis informs us that the grace of the Holy Spirit is for everyone – something we should keep in mind as we continue to pursue Christian unity through prayer and good works. He says that the most precious gift we have received is our baptism from which the Spirit leads us on the path of conversion.<sup>399</sup> According to the Pope, the Church does not need “cold or lukewarm Christians” who are held back by fear. The Church needs Christians who are on fire with the Holy Spirit and committed to proclaiming the Gospel, even if it costs them their lives. He says the Church needs “passionate missionaries” consumed by zeal to bring the consoling Word of Jesus and his grace to everyone. He says: “this is the fire of the Holy Spirit” and “if the Church does not receive this fire, or allow it to enter; it becomes a cold or lukewarm Church, incapable of giving life, since it is made of cold or lukewarm Christians.”<sup>400</sup> Pope Francis describes the Holy Spirit as the living and working presence in us from the day of our baptism. He says that this fire which is a “creative force which purifies and renews,” as it burns away every human misery, egoism, and sin. He reminds us that “Jesus wants the Holy Spirit to burn like fire in our hearts because it is only from the heart that the fire of Divine love can strengthen and advance the Kingdom of God.”<sup>401</sup> The Pontiff says that the Holy Spirit keeps the Church from being “held back by fear and calculations” or becoming accustomed to staying within secure confines. He reminds us that “the Apostolic

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<sup>398</sup> Claire Giangrave, (2017), Crux Taking the Catholic Pulse, The Holy Spirit is our Wind and Hope is our Sail says Pope Francis. <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2017/05/31holy-spirit-wind-hope-sail-pope-says/>. Accessed on March 4, 2018.

<sup>399</sup> Hannah Brockhaus, (2017), The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are for everyone, Pope Francis says. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/the-gifts-of-the-holy-spirit-are-for-everyone-pope-francis-says-50558>. Accessed March 4, 2018.

<sup>400</sup> Ann Schneible, Pope Francis Encourages Encounters with the Holy Spirit. <http://www.catholic.org/news/hf/faith/story.php?id=70385>. Accessed on March 4, 2018.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.



courage which the Holy Spirit ignites in us as a fire helps us overcome walls and barriers, and makes us creative,” and spurs us along “unexpected or uncomfortable paths, offering hope to those we meet.” He reminds us that “we are called to become ever more a community of persons who are guided and transformed by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>402</sup>

Pope Francis throws challenges at us: “Are we open to ‘God’s surprises’? Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of the Holy Spirit? ... Do we have the courage to strike out along the new paths which God’s newness sets before us, or do we resist, barricaded in transient structures which have lost their capacity for openness to what is new?” He says that “The Holy Spirit annoys us because he is always forward moving.” “Our God is a God who always does new things” says Pope Francis.<sup>403</sup> That is why Pope Saint John Paul II says that the Holy Spirit is the “master of the Christian life.” He says that one way to draw nearer to the Holy Spirit is through devotion to Mary, the spouse of the Holy Spirit. He is no doubt a testimony to this remarkable phenomenon as he entrusts his life to Mary’s maternal care and mentions at one point during his papacy that his consecration to Mary is a major turning point in his life:

“The reading of the book (True Devotion to Mary) was a decisive turning-point in my life. I say ‘turning-point,’ but in fact it was a long inner journey ... This ‘perfect devotion’ is indispensable to anyone who means to give himself without reserve to Christ and to the work of redemption.”<sup>404</sup>

Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter on the Holy Spirit, **Dominum et Vivificantem**, talks about the nature and mission of the Holy Spirit, and in particular, discusses the Holy Spirit as “Person-Gift.” The Pontiff says that the Holy Spirit as gift is the greatest of all

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Fr. Peter Hocken, Catholic Charismatic Renewal. <http://www.ccr.org.uk/articles/pope-francis-on-the-holy-spirit/>. Accessed on March 4, 2018.

<sup>404</sup> Tom Mulcahy, Catholic Strength, Growth in Holiness ... Growth in Well-being ... Growth in Knowledge, The Inward Groaning of the Holy Spirit and Saint John Paul II. <https://catholicstrength.com/tag/pope-john-ii-and-the-holy-spirit>. Accessed on March 4, 2018.

possible gifts as “personal love” proceeding from the Father and the Son, and refers to him as “uncreated Love-Gift.”<sup>405</sup> Is it not the reason why Jesus was so anxious to leave the apostles and return to the Father because he wanted them to receive the ultimate gift of his love – the “Person-Gift” and the “Person-Love” of the Holy Spirit? If I go, I will send the Holy Spirit to you (John 16: 7). He says the Holy Spirit is the final gift, the gift of God’s own life within us, justifying us, sanctifying us, filling our hearts with love, a love “welling up to eternal life” (John 4: 14). The Pontiff encourages us to join the Church in her ancient hymn “Come Holy Spirit, Creator Blest, and in our souls take up thy rest.”<sup>406</sup> **(Beware of self-proclaimed pastors who claim to have monopoly of the Holy Spirit, and say bizarre things they claim to come from the Holy Spirit, eg. Encouraging their members not to receive medicine when they are sick because they are covered by the Blood of Jesus?)**

Pope John Paul II (the Great) reminds us that it is by the Holy Spirit that we are able to believe in Jesus in the first place. He reflects on the “partnership” between Jesus and the Holy Spirit in accomplishing the salvific mission. The Pontiff reminds us that the Holy Spirit will continue the work that the Son came into the world to do: “He will teach you all things and remind you all I have said to you” (John 14: 26). “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16: 14). The Pope says in taking what is Jesus’, the Holy Spirit “takes over” Jesus’ mission on earth in his “absence,” since it is the Holy Spirit who guarantees the continued presence of Jesus in the fullness of the Gospel. The Pontiff maintains that it is by his departure that Jesus remains fully and universally in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Again, it means that the Holy Spirit receives the complete Redemption accomplished by Jesus on the Cross, and it is by the Holy Spirit that this Redemption is

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<sup>405</sup> Tom Mulcahy, Catholic Strength, Growth in Holiness ... Growth in Well-being ... Growth in Knowledge, Pope John Paul II and His Reflection on the Holy Spirit, It is through the Holy Spirit that God exists in the Mode of Gift. <https://catholicstrength.com/tag/pope-john-paul-ii-and-his-reflection-on-the-holy-spirit/>. Accessed on March 4, 2018.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

accomplished in us. So, we can rightly say that the fullness of Jesus' accomplishment is the ushering in of the Age of the Holy Spirit – the Age of the Church which began on Pentecost Day. It is the Holy Spirit that we receive in baptism. We need the guidance of the Spirit to know how best to please God from moment to moment says the Pontiff.<sup>407</sup> The Pope reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the living breath of all the prayer we say. He says that prayer is always the voice of those who apparently have no voice. The Holy Spirit is the gift that comes into man's heart together with prayer. In prayer he is that gift that "helps us in our weakness" says the Pontiff. As St. Paul's Letter to the Romans says, "For we do not know how to pray as we ought to, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8: 26). He is present in our prayer and gives it a divine dimension. Pope John Paul II says that prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit becomes the ever more mature expression of the new man who by means of this prayer participates in the divine life.<sup>408</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI, in referring to St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, wants us to note that prayer should not be seen as a good deed by us to God. He wants us to know that prayer is a gift, the fruit of the living presence, the life giving presence of the Father and of Jesus Christ in us. The Pontiff reminds us of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans where he writes that it is only the Spirit himself who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words (Romans 8: 26). This is because "we do not know how to pray as we ought." According to the Pontiff, the Apostle says: this very lack of words, this absence of words, even the desire to enter into contact with God is a prayer that the Holy Spirit not only understands, but carries, interprets, to God. He says that it is precisely our weakness which becomes, through the Holy Spirit, true prayer,

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<sup>407</sup> Thomas V. Mirus, (2015), Convincing the World, St. John Paul II's Encyclical on the Holy Spirit. <https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/otc.cfm?id=1317>. Accessed on March 4, 2018.

<sup>408</sup> Tom Perna, Evangelization, Catechesis, JP2 Generation, 5 Quotes on Pentecost from Pope St. John Paul II. <https://tomperna.org/2014/06/08/5-quotes-on-pentecost-from-pope-st-john-paul-ii/>. Accessed on March 4, 2108.

and true contact with God.<sup>409</sup> The Pope says that it is the Holy Spirit who is almost the interpreter who makes God and we ourselves understand what we want to say. The gifted German Pope observes that in prayer, we experience our weakness, poverty and being created because we stand before the omnipotence and transcendence of God. The more we progress in listening to and dialoguing with God, prayer becomes the daily breath of our soul, the more we perceive the meaning of our limits, not just before the concrete situations of every day but in our relationship with the Lord too. He maintains that it is the Holy Spirit who helps us in our incapacity, who illumines our minds and warms our hearts, guiding us to turn to God.<sup>410</sup> He says that according to St. Paul, prayer is above all the work of the Spirit in our humanity, taking charge of our weakness and transforming us from men attached to the material world into spiritual men.<sup>411</sup> In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart these words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2: 12 – 13).<sup>412</sup>

The Pontiff maintains that with his dwelling in our human frailty, the Holy Spirit changes us, intercedes for us, leads us toward the heights of God (Romans 8: 26). He says that with this presence of the Holy Spirit our union with Christ is realized, for it is the Spirit of the Son of God. In the Spirit we are made children of God. He says we can enter into the communion of the Spirit since Christ is the Son of God, and so, his Spirit is also the Spirit of God who is become close to us in the Son of God and the Son of man.<sup>413</sup> And so, the Spirit directs our heart towards Christ in such a way that “it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us” (Galatians 2: 20). The Pontiff maintains that with prayer animated by the Spirit we are

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<sup>409</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, (2012), General Audience, St. Peter’s Square. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audience/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120516.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audience/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120516.html). Accessed on March 4, 2018.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

enabled to abandon and overcome every form of fear and slavery, living the authentic freedom of the children of God. On the other hand, without daily prayer that nourishes our being in Christ, we find ourselves unable to do the good we want to do, but the evil we hate to do (Romans 7: 19). The Apostle wants us to understand that primarily it is not our will that frees us from these conditions, nor even the law, but the Holy Spirit, since, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3: 17). The Pope says that in prayer, we experience the freedom given by the Spirit, which is freedom from evil and sin.<sup>414</sup> It is rather, the Spirit of freedom which is identified with “the fruit of the Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5: 22). The Pontiff says that the true freedom is to be able to follow our desire for good, for true joy, for communion with God and to be free from the oppression of circumstances that pull us in other directions. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that prayer animated by the Holy Spirit leads us to live every day a journey of life with its trials and sufferings, with the fullness of hope, with trust in God who answers us as he answered his Son, Jesus.<sup>415</sup>

### **3.5. Conclusion**

We ought to be happy and optimistic because God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts and so we have received a spirit of adoption through which we can now call God our Father (Galatians 4: 6), and the Spirit of the Son is the Spirit of the Father. May we not forget the teaching of St. Paul to always open ourselves to the presence of the Holy Spirit who prays in us with sighs too deep for words to lead us to adhere to God with all our heart and with all our being. This is because, in our limitation, the Spirit of Christ becomes the strength of our “weak” prayers, the light of our “darkened” prayer, giving us true inner freedom, teaching us to live facing the trials of existence, in the certainty of not being alone, opening to us the

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

horizons of humanity and of creation which “has been groaning in travail” (Romans 8: 22).<sup>416</sup> Saint Paul helps us to understand that the Holy Spirit is the driving force of the Church’s mission as well as the Spirit’s presence and activity in the life of each individual Christian and in the world. We only need to endeavour to be conscious of the Holy Spirit who leads us to all truth in particular to know the truth concerning sin, and to acknowledge and accept the salvation that God offers to us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Parish Charismatic Renewal in Nigeria**

#### **Introduction**

The advent of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal into the Catholic world may not be very different from many other religious movements we have in the Catholic Church, although this religious movement has been marred by suspicion, doubts and at times serious controversies, as well as marked by blessings that are both visible and implicit. However, we may note that many people within and outside the Catholic tradition have come to see that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) movement as a result of a gift/call that has been referred to as prophetic. In other words, many people may regard this religious movement as a divine initiative. Yves Congar, a prominent theologian of the Church has this to say in relation to the gains of the Second Vatican Council:

“A new theology, or rather a new program of ‘ministries,’ giving the Church a new face that is quite different from the one that earlier pyramidal and clerical ecclesiology presented, has developed since the Second Vatican Council on the basis of these charisms used for the common good and the building up of the Church.”<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Davis Smith, (Trans.), Congar Yves, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, New York: Crossroad Publications, 2005, p. 170.

Let us not forget the prophetic move of Pope John XXIII who prayed and called for the opening of the windows of the Church to let the fresh air of the spirit blow through as he called and inaugurated the Second Vatican Council (October 11<sup>th</sup> 1962). Pope John XXIII believed that God loves and cherishes people of all faiths: hence, he took ecumenical unity very seriously, and so, opened the door of the Catholic Church to other religions and to the world. By launching Vatican II Council, the Pontiff opened the Catholic Church for reform. This prophetic move has led to many exciting new developments in the Church. The aftermath of the Second Vatican Council is that the Church has recognized the need to engage with the modern world and continues to grow in her understanding of herself and of the need to share the treasure of faith in Christ with all people. The Pope inculcated the spirit of ecumenism into the Catholic mind and heart. According to Joseph Hogan, “Vatican II foresaw more than structural changes; the renewal was aimed at its members, at changing the lives of Catholics and putting Christ at the center of Church life.”<sup>418</sup> There is no doubting the fact that the Vatican II Council has become a huge success story which has truly opened wide the windows of the Catholic Church to new spiritualities, cultures, civilizations and exciting movements.

#### **4.1. Origins**

It is generally accepted that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal started when two professors at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania attended a Cursillo Congress in 1966 in search of a deeper relationship with God. At the event they were given a book: “The Cross and the Switchblade,” written by Pentecostal pastor David Wilkerson, which tells of the spiritual conversion of a street gang leader, Nicky Cruz who later became a Christian evangelist. The professors were deeply impacted by the book, which emphasized the Holy

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<sup>418</sup> Ralph Martin, *The Spirit and the Church, A Personal and Documentary Record of the Charismatic Renewal and the Ways It Is Bursting to Life in the Catholic Church*, New York: Paulist Press, 1976, p. 116. Hereafter as Martin, *The Spirit and the Church*.

Spirit and his miraculous gifts. The following year the two professors, still in pursuit, attended a prayer meeting where they received the baptism with the Spirit and spoke in tongues. Professor Keifer immediately began laying hands on faculty members, students and others at Duquesne, who were dramatically filled with the Spirit. The result of all this was to seek an interdenominational and quite informal prayer group, who had undergone the experience called “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit.” The follow-up was where about twenty-five students and University theology professors from Duquesne University got together for a retreat weekend to study the Acts of the Apostles and consider the claims of the Pentecostals as described in the book, “The Cross and the Switchblade” and “They speak with other tongues.” They prayed for a new Pentecost throughout the weekend.<sup>419</sup> The book made such an impression on them that it led them to pursue a relationship with the person of the Holy Spirit as they explored Pentecostal forms of prayer.<sup>420</sup> It was all new experience for all of them.

Another spiritual incident on the Saturday of the weekend was when Patti Gallagher was on her way to gather people to come down for a birthday party for one of the priests; she made a stop in the second floor chapel. She remembers,

“I wasn’t going in to pray, just to tell any students there, to come down to the party. But as I entered into the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and knelt there, I was filled with a sense of awe. I had always believed by the gift of faith that Jesus is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, but I had never experienced his glory. As I knelt there, my body literally trembled before his majesty. I felt really scared and said to myself, ‘Get out of here quick because of what is going to happen if you stay in the presence of God’. As I knelt there before the Lord, for the first time in my life, I prayed what I would call a prayer of total surrender. I said, ‘Father I give my life to you and whatever you want of me, that’s what I choose. If it means suffering, then I accept that. Just teach me to follow your Son Jesus and to learn to love the way he loves.’”<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Jeevan Jal Ministries, The Origin of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. <http://www.jeevanjal.org/jeevanjal/origin-ccr.html>. Accessed on December 17, 2017.

<sup>420</sup> Don Gelpi, Discerning the Spirit among Catholic Charismatics, *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 41, no.1. 2002, p. 26.

<sup>421</sup> Jeevan Jal Ministries, The Origin of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. <http://www.jeevanjal.org/jeevanjal/origin-ccr.html>. Accessed on December 17, 2017.



In the next few moments Patti found herself prostrate, flat on her face before the tabernacle. She was filled with an awareness of God's personal love. She wanted to remain in the chapel, but yet wanted others to experience God's love in such a profound way. She related her experience to the other two students in the chapel and the priest-chaplain. A few other students asked her 'What has happened to you? Your face looks different!' Patti told her story, and then took them by hand to the chapel. There she prayed, 'Lord, whatever you did for me, do it for them!' Within half an hour, 12 of the 24 students were in the chapel, singing and praying from 10 pm to 5 am: the following morning and during the night God touched each one in a unique way. Some felt God's love so deeply, that they couldn't do anything but weep. Others laughed and laughed. Some including Patti, felt a tremendous burning in their hands or going through their arms like fire. Others experienced a clicking in their throats or a tingling in their tongues. "You have to remember. We didn't know about the gifts of the Holy Spirit," says Patti.<sup>422</sup> According to Vinson Synan, something remarkable happened that although those coming together in prayer "had not planned a service in the chapel, but rather a birthday party for one of the participants. However, in various ways, God led these twenty-five Catholics to the chapel, where they encountered a tangible presence of the Spirit."<sup>423</sup> There is no doubt that this then, "in February 1967 represented the beginning of a recognizable movement of the Charismatic Renewal among Catholics."<sup>424</sup> We can then rightly say that this group of students and professors "became the first Catholic Charismatic Renewal prayer group"<sup>425</sup>.

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Vinson Synan, "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal by Peter Hocen," In *The Century of the Holy Spirit, 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901 – 2001*, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2001, p. 209. Hereafter as Synan, In *The Century of the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, p. 211.

<sup>425</sup> Martin, *The Spirit and the Church*, p. 8.

However, in the weeks that followed, the students gradually learned about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They told their friends and colleagues about it and within a few months the Catholic Pentecostal Movement, as it was known then, had spread to half a dozen other campuses and within a few years, there were prayer groups and meetings all over America.<sup>426</sup> In trying to explain the beginnings of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Charles E. Hummel said that “this ‘Duquesne Weekend,’ one of the most remarkable events in the Charismatic Renewal, marked the beginning of its rapid growth within the Catholic Church.”<sup>427</sup> He also said:

“In the late 1960s, following the Second Vatican Council, renewal had been high in the Church’s agenda. But attention was focussed on liturgical reforms, Biblical studies, promoting lay participation and the like. No one dreamed that the renewal of Catholic life would come through restoration of the New Testament gifts.”<sup>428</sup>

We may note that:

“The Duquesne weekend was not an isolated event, a sudden eruption of Pentecostal fervour in the Church of Rome which spread through sheer uniqueness and force. We call it the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal because the baptism of the Holy Spirit first experienced through the renewal there quickly spread to these men. It animated the renewal movement they had long been advocating.”<sup>429</sup>

This is as a result of their understanding that “a fundamental renewal of the Church would succeed only if a group of men and women dedicated themselves to it as their primary apostolate.”<sup>430</sup> However, we may not forget that even long before the Duquesne event, there was “Elena Guerra, foundress of the Oblate Sisters of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>431</sup> Val Gaudet pointed out that “it is interesting to note that the first person to be beatified by Pope John XXIII who

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<sup>426</sup>Jeevan Jal Ministries, The Origen of Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

<http://www.jeevanjal.org/jeevanjal/origin-ccr.html>. Accessed on December 17, 2017.

<sup>427</sup> Charles E. Hummel, Fire in the Fireplace, Charismatic Renewal in the Nineties. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993, p. 31. Hereafter as Hummel, Fire in the Fireplace.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>429</sup> Martin, The Spirit and the Church, p. 24.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

prayed for the letting in of the fresh air of the Holy Spirit, was Sister Elena Guerra, forerunner of today's Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church."<sup>432</sup> She must have been "inspired to write to Pope Leo XIII to urge him to renew the Church by means of a return to the Holy Spirit."<sup>433</sup> It was through her spiritual director, "Bishop Giovanni Volpi, and with his help, Elena Guerra was able to send 12 confidential letters to Leo XIII between 1895 and 1903."<sup>434</sup> Through these letters and her many efforts, she

"called for a renewed preaching on the Holy Spirit. She believed the Holy Spirit is the one who forms the saints. In the last paragraph of her first letter, she says that Satan's empire will be broken by the Spirit, and that God would 'grant us a long-awaited renewal of the face of the earth'. Pope Leo answered indirectly by publishing **Provida Matris Caitate**, in which he required the whole Church to celebrate a solemn novena to the Holy Spirit during the nine days before the feast of Pentecost."<sup>435</sup>

It is logical to ascribe it to her credit and in his answer to her relentless requests that there was a return to the Lordship of the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Church:

"That the Pope had promised that he would do everything so that the Holy Spirit would be honoured. Shortly afterward, the Pope published his Encyclical Letter **Divinum Illud Munus**, the richest doctrinal treatise about the Holy Spirit any previous Pope had produced. In this document, Pope Leo XIII explicitly recommends to all Christians a devotion to the Holy Spirit. He sees in it the efficacious and indispensable means of a renewal for contemporary society, for the family, and for individuals."<sup>436</sup>

From Ralph Martin, one may rightly infer then that:

"Today, as we see that the Charismatic Renewal has reached so many shores, that Elena's dream of a Universal Cenacle of prayer is finally being implemented. The triumph of the Holy Spirit for which Elena Guerra worked is without doubt, the deepest objective of hundreds of prayer groups all over the world. These prayer groups are not the same as the ones formed by Elena Guerra and her nuns; yet, as she had hoped, they are substantially making of the Church a permanent Cenacle of praise and expectancy."<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

From the above, it can be inferred that:

“Renewal is a sovereign act of God which touches our lives by the power of his Holy Spirit and changes us. Renewal is both a state-of-being and a process. Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a movement of the Spirit, offered to the entire Church and destined to rejuvenate every part of the Church. When we say that the Charismatic Renewal is for the whole Church, we mean that it, indeed, is for all: the clergy, religious, and laity.”<sup>438</sup>

As we continue to reflect on the origins of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, let us examine the prayer of Pope John XXIII in preparation for the inauguration of the Second Vatican Council which was, “O Holy Spirit pour forth the fullness of your gifts, renew your wonders in this our day as by a new Pentecost.” There is no doubt that events unfolded, a great renewal for the Catholic Church began in earnest after the Council ended in 1965, a renewal that would encompass the entire Church: clergy, religious, laity. Obviously, one of the aftermaths of the Council was the Catholic Charismatic Renewal which remains one of the fastest growing religious movements in the Catholic Church.<sup>439</sup>

It is an important move for the Renewal to establish an International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS) in Rome which acts as the center of communication within the worldwide Charismatic Renewal as well as serves as liaison between the Renewal and the Vatican. This gives the Renewal some Catholic identity. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal continues to make inroads into every aspect of the Church worldwide as well as attracting the support and encouragement of the Bishops of the Catholic Church. The belief of many Catholics is that the Renewal is a direct result of Vatican II and Pope John XXIII’s prayer to the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that at the beginnings of the Charismatic Renewal Popes

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<sup>438</sup> Catholic Charismatic Renewal Center For Chicago, About Catholic Charismatic Renewal. <http://chicagorenewal.org/about/>. Accessed on June 20, 2018.

<sup>439</sup> Jeevan Jal Ministries, The Origin of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. <http://www.jeevanjal.org/jeevanjal/origin-ccr.html>. Accessed on December 17, 2017.

Paul VI and John Paul II actively encouraged the faithful and the clergy to become involved in the Renewal. The enthusiastic spirits and leadership of the two Pontiffs inspired many Bishops in United States, Canada, South America, Europe, Africa and Asia to write pastoral statements supporting and encouraging the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. In 1972, Leo Joseph Cardinal Suenens, Archbishop of Malines, Brussels in Belgium, personally encouraged the Charismatic Renewal during a visit to the United States. He said, “Rather than a movement, Charismatic Renewal is a moving of the Holy Spirit which can reach all Christians lay or cleric.” Cardinal Suenens was invited by Pope Paul VI to lead and encourage the Charismatic Renewal worldwide. In his book ‘A New Pentecost’ the Cardinal says: “It is comparable to a high voltage current of grace coursing through the Church.” In 1984, in their pastoral Letter to the American Church, the Bishops of the United States of America wrote that: “The Charismatic Renewal is rooted in the witness of the Gospel tradition, Jesus is Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit to the Glory of the Father.”<sup>440</sup>

#### **4.2. The Coming of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal to Nigeria**

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Nigeria owes its origin to the Dominican Order of Preachers. In 1967 the Dominican novitiate was opened at Ibadan in Nigeria, and there were four American Dominicans: Reverend Fathers Ed. Riley, Mathias Walsh, Bertrand Ebben and Reverend Brother Gilbert Thesing while Fr. Richard Farmer was assigned as chaplain to the University of Ife, Ile-Ife in Nigeria. In 1970, Fr. Ed. Riley went on leave to America where he had baptism in the Holy Spirit in a Charismatic Renewal prayer meeting. On returning to Nigeria, he gave a talk to the novices about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Welcome to the Catholic Renewal of Nigeria. <http://www.ccrnigeria.org/index.php/about-ccrn>. Accessed on December 17, 2017.

The interest generated by Fr. Riley's talk led to the decision to hold a Pentecost novena in 1971. On completion of the novena on the eve of Pentecost, the participants including Frs. Riley and Walsh, Sr. Maura, and Brothers Nonye, Calistus IHEME, Gilbert Thesing, Chukwubikem Okpechi, Clemet Tyulen, Jude Mbukanma, John Ekekwe-Nwanze, prayed with one another on Sunday evening. Before long, some individuals from outside the Dominican house started participating in the weekly prayer meeting. Among the early lay people that joined the Dominican prayer group were Justina Odogwu, Fred Isichie, Pius Molokwu, Akin Otiko, and Mrs Chinwuba.<sup>442</sup>

The growth of the group was facilitated with the two series of Life in the Spirit Seminars that were organized in 1973. Clear manifestations of charismatic gifts followed. The Dominican Prayer Group known as 'Glory Bound Community' became a watershed for the spread of the Renewal to parishes in and outside the Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan. Also, a prayer group was started in the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in October 1972, where Fr. Richard Farmer was doing chaplaincy work. This is because Fr Farmer experienced the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' when he travelled to the United States earlier that year.<sup>443</sup> Again many students/staff members on leaving/transferring from the University carried the touch of the Renewal with them to their new destinations. Also Fr Farmer played a crucial role in spreading the Renewal with his journalistic skills in writing in the weekly Catholic Newspaper 'The Independent' entitled 'Life in the Spirit.' More so, Fr Farmer circulated a bulletin titled 'Praise God' disseminating information about the Renewal. The third prayer group to come into existence was the "Upper Room Community" at St. Dominic's Parish in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria in 1973.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

When Fr Farmer was transferred from University chaplaincy to work in a parish, he introduced the Renewal in his parish. This is how prayer groups started springing up in quick successions across the country. Before long, in September 1973, the Renewal was started in Gusau at Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Sokoto Diocese in Northern Nigeria. Before the end of 1973, a number of prayer groups sprang up in other places in Nigeria including Uturu in Okigwe, Benin City, Onitsha and Kano.<sup>445</sup>

From October 1974, the history of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Nigeria entered a new phase. At the invitation of Fr Ebben, O.P., a team of five Americans visited Nigeria and conducted workshops on the Charismatic Renewal and healing ministry in Ibadan, Benin City, Onitsha, and at the University of Ife. One beautiful thing about the team was its ecumenical thrust. It comprised Catholics, including Fr. McNutt, Sr. Jeanne Hill, Fr. Gus Biehl, Fr. John Healey, and a Methodist, Revd. Joe Petree. These workshops attracted many attendees including: clergy, religious and laity, and these contributed immensely to the growing awareness and spreading of the Renewal across Nigeria. There was a rapid proliferation of prayer groups and growth of membership across the nation.<sup>446</sup> It was obvious that the Catholic Church in Nigeria was ready for the Renewal which within a space of few years spread across the country like a wild fire.

#### **4.3. The History of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, Bariga, Lagos, Nigeria.**

St. Gabriel's Catholic Parish Ladi Lac Bariga is a parish in Yaba Deanery in the Archdiocese of Lagos in Nigeria. The parish of St Gabriel Bariga got her interest in the Renewal from St Dominic's parish Yaba Lagos. The Upper Room Community Renewal in St. Dominic's

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

parish Yaba was established by the founding members of the Renewal from the mother Renewal ‘Glory Bound Community’ of the Dominican Institute in the Archdiocese of Ibadan.

St Gabriel’s parish Charismatic Renewal is known as ‘Joy of Our Salvation.’ The Charismatic Renewal started in St. Gabriel’s parish Bariga when it was still an outstation of St. Denis parish Bariga. The prayer group of St. Denis is known as ‘Yahweh Nissi’ which was founded by the St. Dominic’s parish prayer group Yaba, Lagos. We need to note that St. Dominic’s parish prayer group had a sub-deanery council which foresaw the activities of all the Renewal prayer groups in the Yaba Deanery. With the approval of St. Dominic’s prayer group Yaba, the St. Gabriel’s prayer group Bariga was formally inaugurated on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1985. St. Gabriel’s parish Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group (Joy of Our Salvation) is the focus of my writing. It gives me firsthand information of the nature of the Charismatic Renewal Group and its members.

#### **4.4. St Gabriel’s Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group: Structure, Vision and Mission**

St. Gabriel’s Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group, known as Joy of Our Salvation, operates under the jurisdiction of the parish priest, Rev. Fr. Francis Anozie and his assistant, Rev. Fr. Cyprian Arinze Ijezie. The Renewal organizes elections to elect their officers who oversee the affairs of the prayer group. The chief coordinator is in charge of the whole prayer group in the parish while all the other officers are under his/her command. We note that the chief coordinator has a deputy coordinator. These elected members are known as the service team which comprises leaders of various ministries, members elected from the general body and those from higher council of the Renewal. The present chief coordinator of the Renewal under review is Bro. Desmond Ezeh who was elected in 2016.



First of all, it is important to note the vision and mission of the Renewal as expressed in its aims and objectives as stated by the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS):

1. To foster mature and continuous personal conversion to Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.
2. To foster a decisive personal receptivity to the person, presence and power of the Holy Spirit. These two spiritual graces are often received together in what is called in different parts of the world a baptism of the Holy Spirit, or a release of the Holy Spirit, or a renewal of Christian initiation and as an empowering for personal Christian service in the Church and in the world.
3. To foster the reception and use of the spiritual gifts (charismata) not only in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal but also in the broader Church. These gifts, ordinary or extraordinary, are abundantly found among the laity, religious and clergy. Their proper understanding and use in harmony with other elements of the Church life is a source of strength for Christians on their journey towards holiness and in carrying out their mission.
4. To foster the work of evangelization in the power of the Holy Spirit, including the evangelization of the unchurched, the re-evangelization of nominal Christians, the evangelization of culture and social structures. Catholic Charismatic Renewal promotes sharing the Church's mission by proclaiming the gospel in word and deed and by bearing witness to Jesus Christ through personal testimony and through those works of faith and justice to which each one is called.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>447</sup>Welcome to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria. <http://www.ccrnigeria.org/index.php/about-ccrn>. Accessed on December 17, 2017.

To facilitate growth in holiness, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal guideline encourages members to engage fully in the life of the Church. This is accomplished through participation in a rich sacramental and liturgical life, an appreciation of the tradition of the Catholic prayer and spirituality, and ongoing formation in Catholic doctrine. This is guided by the Church's Magisterium, and participation in the pastoral plan of the Church.<sup>448</sup> Of course, total submission to the Magisterium gives authenticity to any religious movement in the Church. Again, the spirituality of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal must be rooted on Catholic practice and tradition. Its spirituality centers on 'Life in the Spirit' that transforms members inside out and disposes them to the Word of God, the truth that sets free, and to the anointing of the Spirit. Life in the Spirit teaches members the truth about our faith which leads them to personal relationship with Christ. It is about one's fruitful response to the Holy Spirit, and his gifts, by commitment to Jesus and the Catholic Church.<sup>449</sup> Charismatic spirituality is not about outbursts, shouting and clapping, prophetic utterances and healings one observes during prayer meetings. Authentic spirituality depends on what builds up the faith of members based on free, conscious, and personal choice. And some of the activities of the Renewal which facilitate the faith journey of the members include: prayers, bible studies, seminars and workshops, fellowship, teachings of Catholic doctrine, conferences, exercising the gifts of the Spirit, and a life of witnessing.<sup>450</sup>

Life in the Spirit Seminar brings charismatic members into deeper experience of the work of the Holy Spirit. It helps them to know more about living in the Spirit. It is all about allowing Christ to establish or restore or deepen a relationship with them. The gift of the Spirit fills our whole life and changes us to begin to know and experience God's love and the abundant life

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

Jesus spoke about.<sup>451</sup> Did the Lord not say: “I came that they might have life and have it to the full?” (John 10: 10). He also said: “The water I give shall become a fountain within them, leaping up to provide eternal life” (John 4: 14).

So Life in the Spirit is preceded by Baptism of the Holy Spirit which makes one a renewed person. A Life in the Spirit Seminar is a spiritual exercise that takes few weeks after which participants are prayed over to receive Baptism of the Holy Spirit. However, we have to note that neither Life in the Spirit nor Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a sacrament. Baptism of the Holy Spirit amongst charismatic members is an action of God through prayer leading to a deeper conversion to Christ which facilitates the work of the Holy Spirit in the members. The powerful action of the Holy Spirit is often accompanied by the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (Romans 12: 6 – 9; Ephesians 4: 7 – 14; 1 Corinthians 12: 7 – 12), and the Letters of St. Paul (Acts 15: 8; 1 Corinthians 2: 10 - 13).<sup>452</sup>

We have to admit that Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a new term for majority of Catholics, even for some who are members of the Renewal. However, this term does not come out of the blue. We may note that the term “Baptism of the Spirit” is scriptural. Each of the Gospels records the words of John the Baptist pointing out our Lord saying that while he baptized in water, the Lord would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1: 8; Luke 3: 16; John 1: 33). The Lord himself used the phrase in Acts of the Apostles as he commissioned his Apostles to wait in Jerusalem. “John baptized with water but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1: 5). However, it is true that many people have received this deep personal experience of Jesus Christ which the Baptism of the Holy Spirit signifies,

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<sup>451</sup> Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Archdiocese of Hartford, The Life in the Spirit Seminar, “Renew in our day, O Lord, your wonders as in a new Pentecost” John Paul II. [www.hartfordcharismatic.org/fmLISS.html](http://www.hartfordcharismatic.org/fmLISS.html). Accessed on June 24, 2018.

<sup>452</sup> Fr. Pat Collins, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, The Spiritual Gifts. [www.ccr.org.uk/about-ccr/about/the-spiritual-gifts/](http://www.ccr.org.uk/about-ccr/about/the-spiritual-gifts/). Accessed on June 24, 2018.

and enjoy a new power in overcoming the bondage of sin. So, Baptism of the Spirit represents a power given by Christ to his Church which for many centuries has not been part of the daily preaching and faith of the Church, but which has always been a part of the Church's ascetical and mystical teaching.<sup>453</sup> Baptism of the Spirit does not overtake the Rites of Initiation: Baptism and Confirmation. Rather, Baptism of the Spirit leads to a deep devotional life, an attraction to prayer, Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments, and marks the beginning of a closer union with God. So, it remains that sacramental Baptism and Confirmation bestow the gift of the Spirit dwelling within the Christian. From experience, we may admit that many powers associated by the indwelling Spirit are untapped so to speak. So, Baptism of the Spirit helps to bring the Christian to a personal knowledge of Christ and a new experience of prayer, of outlook, of behaviour and in general of the Christian life.<sup>454</sup>

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is commonly known as a movement of the Holy Spirit.

The members believe that without the Holy Spirit:

- God is far away
- Christ dwells in the past
- The Gospel is a dead letter
- The Church is simply an organization
- Authority in Church is a matter of domination
- Mission is a matter of propaganda
- Liturgy is no more than a social gathering
- Christian living is simply a slave morality

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<sup>453</sup> Msgr. Vincent M. Walsh, *A Key to Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church*, Ibadan- Nigeria: I. Loyola Books Centre, 1974, p. 30. Hereafter as Msgr. Vincent M. Walsh, *A Key to Charismatic Renewal*.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 31 – 32.

But with the Holy Spirit:

- The Risen Christ is here
- The Gospel is the power of life
- The Church shows forth the life of the Trinity
- Authority becomes a liberating service
- The liturgy is both memorial and anticipation
- Human action is deified<sup>455</sup>

Desmond Ezeh, in his email to me, says that the programme of activities of the Renewal in St. Gabriel’s Parish Bariga Lagos Nigeria goes from January through December. In other words, each month of the year has activities lined up for the Renewal for their spiritual growth and spiritual empowerment in their various ministries.<sup>456</sup>

**St. Gabriel’s Charismatic Renewal Programme For 2018.**

Month	Programme	Dates
January	• Prayer into the new year	1 <sup>st</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> January
	• Parish beginning of the year programme	21 <sup>st</sup> – 28 <sup>th</sup> January
February	• Mass Evangelism	18 <sup>th</sup> February
	• Community revival programme	18 <sup>th</sup> – 24 <sup>th</sup> February

<sup>455</sup> Welcome to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria. <http://www.ccrnigeria.org/index.php/about-ccrn>. Accessed on December 17, 2017.

<sup>456</sup> Desmond Ezeh, The History of St Gabriel’s Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria, 2018. [ezejustina1@yahoo.com](mailto:ezejustina1@yahoo.com). Accessed March 17, 2018. “Field Notes:” Fr Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, Telephone Conversation on the Life and Activities of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of St Gabriel’s Parish, Bariga, Lagos, Nigeria, on June 22, 2018. Hereafter as Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All ministries vigil</li> </ul>	30 <sup>th</sup> March
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 day Hannah/Ruth prayer</li> </ul>	23 <sup>rd</sup> – 29 <sup>th</sup> April
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pentecost novena starts</li> <li>• Pentecost retreat starts</li> <li>• Pentecost celebration</li> </ul>	11 <sup>th</sup> May 14 <sup>th</sup> May 20 <sup>th</sup> May
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paris-wide ‘Life in the Spirit’ seminar starts</li> </ul>	2 <sup>nd</sup> June
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paris-wide ‘Life in the Spirit’ seminar ends</li> </ul>	29 <sup>th</sup> July
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth seminar starts</li> </ul>	4 <sup>th</sup> August
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All ministries vigil</li> </ul>	28 <sup>th</sup> September
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth seminar ends</li> </ul>	27 <sup>th</sup> October
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mass evangelism</li> </ul>	18 <sup>th</sup> November
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 days fasting and prayers (Thanksgiving)</li> <li>• Dessert experience</li> <li>• Community Thanksgiving</li> </ul>	1 <sup>st</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> December 9 <sup>th</sup> December 9 <sup>th</sup> December

According to Desmond Ezeh, the Renewal begins each year with a programme called ‘Rededication Prayer.’ This is a programme which is run for two weeks in January packed with religious activities. It is aimed at beginning the New Year by dedicating members of the Renewal to God along with their endeavours: social and religious, through the year. Through the years, this programme has spiritually enriched members so much so that St. Gabriel’s Parish Pastoral Team has adopted it as parish programme for the spiritual benefits of the whole parish, with the Charismatic Group of the Parish organizing and facilitating it annually.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

The Service Team of the Charismatic Renewal of St. Gabriel's Parish Bariga believes that the ultimate aim of the Renewal is to help the members to live out their full and mature Christian life according to Catholic tradition. The Renewal thrives to embark on programmes that will help members to have personal experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit who brings to life the graces of baptism in them. The Renewal emphasizes on the power of the Holy Spirit to "release" the gifts bestowed on the members through Sacramental Baptism and Confirmation which remain untapped most of the time. This is because the gifts are meant for the service of God's Kingdom. The members of the Renewal strongly believe in the power of the Spirit from witnesses of members who have experienced Baptism of the Holy Spirit who pray in tongues and manifest the charismatic ministries.<sup>458</sup> That is why the leadership of the Renewal insists on organizing Life in the Spirit Seminar (LISS) for members as one of the first things in the New Year to enable them to establish a deep relationship with the Spirit who helps them to recognize the gifts they have been given at their baptism and confirmation so that they can work for Christ who leads them to the living God.<sup>459</sup> The leadership of the Renewal constantly plans programmes to promote and sustain the spiritual growth of members. These include organizing retreats, seminars, conferences and revival programmes within the Prayer Group, and on the Deanery, Archdiocesan, Provincial and National levels. The Renewal does not concentrate on the spiritual wellbeing of the members only. The Leadership also organizes empowerment programmes aimed at equipping members with

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<sup>458</sup> Msgr. Vincent M. Walsh, *A Key to Charismatic Renewal*, pp. 31 – 33.

<sup>459</sup> Roland Amedu, Report of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of St. Gerald's Catholic Parish, Soluyi Gbagada, Lagos, Nigeria, for the Annual General Meeting of the Laity Council, 2018. [successplatform@yahoo.com](mailto:successplatform@yahoo.com). Accessed on March 19, 2018. "Field Notes." Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Roland Amedu, Telephone Conversation on the Life and Activities of the Charismatic Renewal of St. Gerald's Parish, Soluyi Gbagada, Lagos, Nigeria on June 19, 2018. St. Gerald Catholic Church was an outstation of St. Gabriel's Parish Bariga Lagos. Now St. Gerald's Catholic Church Soluyi Gbagada has been elevated to a parish. With the permission of St Dominic's Parish Charismatic Renewal Sub-deanery Council, St. Gabriel's Parish Charismatic Renewal Group was able to inaugurate St. Gerald's Parish Charismatic Prayer Group in 2006 whose chief coordinator is Bro. Roland Amedu. Hereafter as Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Roland Amedu, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

technical and soft skills required for successful business ventures.<sup>460</sup> Did Christ not say that man does not live on bread alone (Matthew 4: 4)? Hence, St. Paul prays for the Thessalonians: “May the God of peace make you holy and bring you to perfection. May you be completely blameless, in spirit, soul and body till the coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5: 23).

The spiritual programmes of the Renewal aim at:

1. Encouraging the members to know that God is a loving and forgiving Father (Romans 8: 14 – 16).
2. The need to help the members develop a personal relationship with Christ as Lord and Saviour (Romans 10: 9 -10).
3. Helping the members to appreciate the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 4 – 5).
4. The need to help members to appreciate the importance of the Scripture (2 Timothy 3: 16) and the Sacraments (CCC 1131 – 1134).
5. Helping the members appreciate the call to prayer, praise and worship of God (Acts 2: 42 – 47; Psalm 9: 1 – 3).
6. To help members to understand the importance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in serving the Church (1 Corinthians 12: 4 – 11).
7. The need to build community (Acts 2: 42 – 47).
8. The need for members to appreciate their calling to evangelize and bear witness to Christ (Acts 1: 8).

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid.



We need to note that the Renewal has a variety of “ministries.” Many of them are local (i.e. functioning in the parish/(arch)diocese), while others take a trans-diocesan, regional and sometimes international scope. Some of these ministries include:

- A) Preaching
- B) Teaching
- C) Evangelizing
- D) Healing
- E) Intercessory
- F) Praise and Worship
- G) Music
- H) Welfare
- I) Singing

The word “ministry” which was reserved for the function of the members of the clergy would normally perform was accorded broader understanding in the Church by the Second Vatican Council<sup>461</sup>, as, for instance, when it spoke of the duty of pastors “so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their ministries and charisms that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common understanding with one heart” (LG 30). The word “ministry” is a translation of the Greek word **diakonia**, which is also, translated “service.” 1 Peter 4: 10 – 11 brings out a close association between charisms and ministry: “As each has received a gift (charisma) employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service (diakonia) as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies.” So, charismatic ministry describes the various kinds of services which members of Renewal groups perform which are justified by the fact

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<sup>461</sup> Francis A. Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal, A Biblical and Theological Study*, Dublin Ireland: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1982, p. 82. Hereafter as Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal*.

that “as each has received a gift, they are employing it for one another; rendering services by the strength which God supplies.”<sup>462</sup> It can be fascinating that members of the Renewal who have had no professional training for such ministries very often demonstrate remarkable gifts in performing them. Of course, most of the ministries which they perform contribute to the building up of the group in the regular prayer meetings.<sup>463</sup>

There are some special ministries they have. For example:

**The Liberation Team:** The leadership of the Renewal established this ministry to take care of the spiritual needs of both members and non-members of the group in the areas of deliverance in case of those who are “alleged” to be possessed by the evil spirit. There are some family members they “discern” that they are held bondage by ancestral causes and those held slavery by the powers of darkness. These people need to be set free. And it is the work of the healing ministry (the prayer-warriors) who pray for healing for those possessed by evil spirit to be delivered from the grip of the power of the devil through the power of the Holy Spirit. These prayer-warriors spend time and weeks within the parish/diocese and even outside the diocese “fighting” the powers of darkness in order to liberate those who are being “destroyed” by Satan. We need to note that in their prayer meetings they give many testimonies of the “wonders/healings” the Lord accomplishes through the ministry of the healing team.<sup>464</sup> Many people will come to the meetings with urgent needs for which they seek the prayer of the group ministry. There will usually be some time during the prayer meeting set aside for such intercessory prayer. But probably the most effective prayer ministry is carried out after the large charismatic meeting is over, when people with special

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

needs are invited to go to a “prayer room,” where members of the group who have shown a special gift for helping people by praying with them will pray with them individually.<sup>465</sup>

**Joy of Our Salvation Solution Ground:** It is run by the praying ministry. Their aim is to pray and counsel Catholics especially charismatic members who because of spiritual and physical problems move from one Christian denomination to another in search of healing. The praying team tries to bring back these spiritually sick and confused members to the fold. They try to convince them that the charismatic praying team can pray and bring healing to them through the power of the Holy Spirit. They counsel those and pray for those who are spiritually sick or confused.

The Teaching Ministry organizes a New Comers’ class to educate the new members of the Renewal on the teachings of the Church, the charismatic spirituality and life in the Charismatic Renewal to prepare them for the Life in the Spirit Seminar.

The Renewal also has the Sisters Wing where ladies, young and old, learn how to participate fully in the Charismatic Renewal Movement. This is because most of the time, men instinctively move up to leadership positions and women are left behind. But with this ministry in place, women are trained to take up leadership positions especially to make sure that women are properly taken care of in the Renewal. Women in this special ministry are trained to take up ministries in prisons, orphanages, taking care of rape victims, unwanted pregnancies and old people’s homes. There is the Youth Wing as well. This is a ministry that caters for the spiritual growth of the youths and their training as future leaders. The annual Deanery/Archdiocesan Youth Wing Bible Quiz is a very big event, and the youths of the

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<sup>465</sup>Sullivan, Charisms and Charismatic Renewal, pp. 83 – 84.

Renewal are thoroughly prepared for it. The youths in the Renewal are trained in charismatic spirituality, leadership skills and Scripture. It is important to note that the Charismatic Renewal members take ample of time to study the Scripture almost on a daily basis.<sup>466</sup>

St Gabriel's parish Renewal is very outward going. The Renewal is very active in the Deanery, Archdiocesan, Provincial and National levels. Some of the outside -of-the-parish events the Renewal participates in include:

- Beginning of the Year/Desert Programme
- Deanery Vigil at a proposed parish
- Archdiocesan Evangelism Outreach
- Archdiocesan Empowerment Programme
- Deanery Youth Wing Bible Quiz
- Catholic Charismatic Renewal Peace Day Programme
- Lagos Provincial Conference
- Deanery Sisters Wing Prison Visitation
- Ministries Visitation to Homes

The Beginning of the Year/Desert Programme is a one week spiritual activity when members of the Renewal organize themselves and pray and fast and book Masses for their various intentions. This type of programme ushers them into the New Year. During this period they arrange for priests/lay people to give them spiritual talks. This one-week event ends with Eucharistic celebration.

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<sup>466</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

The Renewal participates in the Deanery Vigil of the charismatic groups when they pray for various intentions all through the night in the chosen parish, and this ends with the celebration of Mass. Within the all-night vigil, they have the opportunity for sacramental reconciliation.

The Renewal does Archdiocesan Evangelism Outreach a number of times yearly, identifying any part of the Archdiocese where the presence of the Church is almost absent. They put out posters and announcements against the chosen weekend (Friday through Sunday) when they go on Evangelical Rally. During this period, they preach, pray and sing along the streets and in open places. They bear public witness to Christ. They pray for people who ask for prayers, and explain the Scripture and the life of the Church to those who care to know. When they preach in public, people gather and listen to them. Through the Evangelism Outreach lapsed Catholics have come back to the faith; new converts joined the Church, and new outstation Churches have been carved out and some elevated as parishes. The Renewal members always liaise with the priests in the nearby parishes, and the Archbishop, and through that the Church corroborates their pastoral efforts.

The Service Team of the Renewal also organizes Mass Evangelism when those in teaching and preaching ministries choose an area within their parish on a particular Sunday to preach in the streets and talk to people about Jesus. They also identify lapsed Catholics and encourage them to begin again to practice their faith. They even visit them in their homes engage with them in person to person discussion to know their spiritual frustrations, reservations and doubts or any other problems that agitate them as much as they want to be open to share. There is a lot of spiritual encouragement and counselling through which many people come back to religious practice in the church or even new members join the church.

The charismatic members organize one week of Hannah/Ruth Prayer when they gather together families that pray for the fruits of the womb. They fast and pray for one week along with these families. This seven-day prayer session always ends with the sacraments of anointing and the Eucharist by the priest. This is also very much cultural issue where many people still perceive barrenness as an evil attack or as ancestral cause that needs to be broken through power of the Holy Spirit. Do not forget we come from a culture where women are blamed most of the time for barrenness. It is most of the time a situation of total ignorance from the society where people are not enlightened enough to seek medical solutions for their health problems which are very much blamed on the attack of the devil or evil people bewitching them when their real problems simply need medical attention. It is a serious pastoral problem when the leaders of the charismatic group, out of pride or ignorance, fail to discern that most of the problems they are praying and fasting to solve are cases that should be channelled to medical personnel or to their parish priest for pastoral attention of the clergy.

The Renewal organizes her members to participate in the Archdiocesan Empowerment Programme. In this event, the professionals are called in to educate members on different business skills, on how to develop new skills, on how to discover their skills and use them, and how to succeed in different business ventures. The Renewal believes that members are not only developed spiritually but physically and socially as well as being business-minded. Man and woman are body and soul, and God saves them body and soul. The Lord says 'I have come that they may have life abundantly' (John 10: 10). This is very good because people need to know that they should work hard to take care of their dependants, the poor and financial care of the church, and not believe that through prayer and fasting manner will fall from heaven to feed them and their families. Of course, as much as we pray and fast, we equally work hard for our daily bread. This is because there are so many unemployed able-

bodied men and women who align themselves with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal who come to the parish church and pray from morning till night time and one wonders whether they ever spare some time to search for work. It is unfortunate that amongst these people who never leave the church but are absorbed in an unending prayer sessions, some of them have been observed to take away valuable property from the church to go and sell to stay alive from dying from hunger. There is a Nigerian slogan or philosophy of life which says that “man must survive”, but is that at the cost of the church’s property being stolen? The parishes usually remain open through the day for people to come in at will to pray but now the common experience is that parishes lose their valuable goods through people who pretend to come in to pray. It is now a common thing especially in cities where people roam about on daily basis to see that these parish churches are put under lock and key to prevent their properties from being vandalized or stolen. And the churches that must remain open for people to come in for prayers must have security personnel to guide them.

The Renewal encourages her members to participate on Catholic Charismatic Renewal Peace Day. This is an Archdiocesan Catholic Renewal Event which takes place yearly at a chosen parish every First October. First October is Nigerian Independent Day and it is a day of national holiday in Nigeria which affords all the parish charismatic groups to come together to pray for the spiritual wellbeing of the country of Nigeria. The Renewal Group of every parish or institution in the Archdiocese on this day come together at a chosen parish to pray for Nigeria for peace, progress and good leadership. You can see that to pray for the Church and country is the responsibility not only of priests and consecrated religious men and women but of the whole priestly people of God (1 Peter 2:4 – 5,9). It is very important that the Archdiocesan Charismatic Council makes day of prayer for the whole Church and the Archdiocese known to all parishioners of the Archdiocese since all are branches of the Body

of Christ through whom the Love of Christ reaches and bears fruit in those for whom he laid down his life (John 15:4 – 13; Colossians 1:24).

The leadership of the Renewal organizes members to attend Lagos Provincial Conference (comprising Lagos Archdiocese, Abeokuta Diocese and Ijebu-Ode Diocese). In this Conference, the members are given spiritual encouragement, directives and the teachings of the Church. It is started with Mass.

The Renewal organizes Deanery Sisters Wing Prison Visitation for her lady members. These ladies converge on a Deanery level to visit prisons, especially women sections to pray, encourage and provide basic needs to inmates. They give inmates gifts donated by members. They encourage them to embrace God and his good news as they serve their time in jail. They alert the Church as to their physical and spiritual needs as well as encourage other Church members to visit them.

The charismatic leaders organize Ministries Visitation to Homes for their members. The members of the Renewal donate basic needs for the elderly in the homes and visit the elderly homes for prayers as well as doing some domestic works for the wellbeing of the elderly in these homes.

The Service Team of the Renewal in agreement with the parish priest organizes Parish-Wide Life in the Spirit Seminar for the whole parish, not necessarily for the charismatic group. This is become a very big event in the parish, often lasting up to a month. Different priests and members of the laity are invited in to give parishioners spiritual talks on gifts of the Holy Spirit, the call to service, how to discover their talents, awareness of the presence of the Holy



Spirit in their individual and communal lives and so forth. In this period of spiritual exercise, parishioners are helped to discover their gifts/talents and how to employ their discovered talents in the service of the Church/parish and humanity.

The leadership of the Renewal makes sure that members of the Renewal are organized to attend the yearly National Conference of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal at the National Service Centre at Ubulukwu in Delta State in Nigeria. This Conference serves as spiritual enrichment for charismatic members as well as an occasion to form spiritual bonds and friendship with each other. It is a one week programme which starts and ends with Mass. It is like the brand new spiritual programme currently running in the Diocese of Portsmouth in the United Kingdom known as Called and Gifted. It is a discernment process that is specifically designed to help Christians to discover and develop their individual specific gifts God has given them to help them become more effective missionary disciples of Jesus Christ for the service of the poor and the needy in the church and society. The interesting thing about this programme is that the Church maintains that the gifts God has given us are not just specifically for the service of the church but can be used in the family or for the wellbeing of humanity in the society. It is very fascinating and challenging that Christ has called each of us ordained or lay to be his disciples. This is a programmed that is run in three stages of teaching weekends, secondly, the individual will come face to face with a facilitator to help one see where one feels most fully alive which could be a way the Holy Spirit seems most likely to collaborate with one for the greater good of one's soul and for the salvation of all. And thirdly, the individual is encouraged to join one of the small groups to help him/her to discern and develop those gifts for the service of God's Kingdom.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> <http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/calledandgifted/> (Accessed on January 7 2020)

The Service Team of the Renewal organizes seven days prayer and fasting, including one Desert Experience Day, and concludes with Community Thanksgiving for all the members in December each year as end of the year programme. For the Community Thanksgiving, members contribute goods/items which are sold in bazaar sales as a way of generating funds for the Renewal for their communal spiritual and social upkeep. We ought to note that members of the Charismatic Renewal tend to be very generous in every aspect of their spiritual and social/communal life. On the Community Thanksgiving Day, the Renewal organizes a sort of ‘love-feast’ when food is cooked for members and whoever comes around to eat and drink and celebrate their joy in the Holy Spirit. They also invite their friends and family members and parishioners to join them in their feasting. It is always a fantastic way to end the long year programme.<sup>468</sup>

#### **4.5. The Renewal at St. Gabriel’s parish Gariga is viewed with mixed feelings**

Desmond Ezeh, the chief coordinator of the Renewal at St. Gabriel and Roland Amedu, the chief coordinator of St. Gerald’s Charismatic Renewal Soluyi Gbagada Lagos, in their emails and telephone conversations with me, both admit that the Renewal is viewed by some parishioners with deep reservations. The writer of this book was alert to that phenomenon because he was the parish priest of St. Gabriel’s Parish Bariga for eight years (1996 – 2004). So, the present researcher writes from recorded experience of what he knew of the relationship between parishioners and the members of the Renewal who were parishioners of both parishes.

From the above description of the life and the scope of activities of the Renewal, their membership grows so large and powerful that their leadership may become power-drunk and

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<sup>468</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Roland Amedu, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

controlling – as to command more authority than the parish priest. The loyalty and influence they command from the members may undermine the moral authority of the parish priest. Any organization, be it civil, social or religious with two captains at the same time, can never be united and so cannot stand together and survive. Did Jesus not say: “If a family divides itself into groups that family will never survive (Mark 3: 25). First of all, does the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) leadership accept that the Renewal is a spiritual movement within the Catholic Church? Do the members of the Renewal know that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement promises allegiance and obedience to the Gospel, the Catholic teaching and the Magisterium? Does the leadership of the Renewal understand that the Renewal is under the jurisdiction of their local parish priest who is co-worker to the Bishop, the chief pastor of his diocese, under whose authority the priest operates? If these facts are understood then, the vices of pride and arrogance and disobedience would disappear. There will be no tension between the parish priest and the leadership of the Renewal. The parish priest and the leadership of the Renewal are collaborators in the Lord’s vineyard and the parish priest their spiritual father in Jesus Christ. The parish priest is the spiritual overseer of the parish Renewal and the other devotional societies within the parish.

Desmond Ezeh, chief coordinator of the Renewal in question, in his emails and telephone conversations with the writer of this book, agrees that, among other things, the Renewal is accused by some parishioners of pride, disloyalty and feelings of independent. He knows that some parishioners accuse the Renewal of being anti-Catholic, of misinterpreting, or in some cases violating Church teachings on worship and liturgy because of how the members conduct themselves in their prayer meetings during songs, ‘worship’ and praying in tongues and healing sessions. Their prayer sessions are like house of ‘madness.’ Some parishioners constantly accuse members of the Renewal of generating intolerable ‘noise’ during their

prayer sessions which renders the church premises not conducive for private or other communal prayers.<sup>469</sup> But then Catholics, especially traditional Catholics, need some periods of silence which is necessary to be able to speak to and listen to God ‘speak’ to them. Unfortunately, charismatic members, in their prayer meetings, depend on emotions, activity, noisy music and singing, and as a result, there is little or no room for silent prayer in order to hear God’s voice. We may recollect Jesus finding time for silence, solitude and prayer (Luke 6: 12). As we talk to God in prayer, we should be able to maintain interior silence to listen to God talk to us. Spirit of God definitely speaks to our own spirit. Again, we can read the encounter between Yahweh and Elijah not in the earthquake or fire but the murmuring of a gentle breeze (1 King 19: 11 – 13). Here we can quote Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI who said:

“The Gospels often show us ... Jesus withdrawing alone to a place far from the crowds, even from his own disciples where he can pray in silence. “The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ are linked to silence, and only in silence can the Word find a place to dwell within us. This principle holds true for individual prayer, but also for liturgies which, to facilitate authentic listening, must also be rich in moments of silence and non verbal acceptance. ... Silence has the capacity to open a space in our inner being, a space in which God can dwell, which can ensure that his Word remains within us, and that love for him is rooted in our minds and hearts, and animates our lives.”<sup>470</sup>

The Psalmist says be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46: 11). As baptised Christians, we are always conscious that God lives with us. In actual fact, many hunger for silence and for the ability to find small spaces within a busy day to find themselves and to find God. There is no doubt that our earthly life is busy especially in this computer age but at the same time, we need to device how to make small pockets of ‘awareness’ even in the most unconducive of situations of busy life. However, we may not dismiss singing and music in our liturgical assemblies. The Psalmist also encourages us to make a joyful noise unto the Lord (Psalm 98:

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<sup>469</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezech, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

<sup>470</sup> Unam Sanctam Catholicam, Seven Reasons Why the Charismatic Renewal Does Not Foster Deep Spirituality. <http://unamsanctamcatholicam.com/spirituality/82-spirituality/214-seven-reasons-why-the-charismatic-renewal-does-not-foster-deep-catholic-spirituality.html>. Accessed on February 21, 2018.

4 – 8). Fr. Liam Lawton says that music is part of the symbolic language of worship. He believes that music is a vehicle of God's revelation and a symbol of unity in a worshipping community between the people and their God and also among themselves. Fr. Liam says that a liturgy without music and singing would be an empty experience for him because he would not be fully communicating with the Creator who has endowed us with gifts of sound and silence. He quotes the great French liturgist Joseph Gelineau who said: 'If one person in the assembly is not singing then the praise of God is incomplete.' Fr. Liam believes that in our liturgy we are called to express beauty, joy and life. These are elements in presenting a loving and caring God. Liturgies that do not express beauty and life are an injustice against the creative God. Music remains a vehicle of God to touch and heal lives.<sup>471</sup> So, we may not dismiss music from our liturgical worship and assemblies but not to encourage a charismatic 'noise' where the members feel compelled to put themselves into such highly-charged emotional state in order to feel that they have spiritual experience or to compel themselves to feel spiritually high above the earthly realms.

It could be that parishioners have not understood the spirituality of the parish charismatic group. I am not saying that the non-members of the parish charismatic renewals are right and the parish charismatic members are wrong. Will I be wrong if I say that parish charismatic members should be allowed to pray and worship God in whatever way that uplifts their souls and minds to God? However, what comes to my mind presently is that the Church should constantly continue its catechesis to parishioners on how to remain in communion with our God who is both God of silence and God who is all the time communicating to us his children. The Church in her wisdom helps us to find the balance. Of course, according to Fr. Liam Lawton, we need music in our liturgy to make it lively and spiritually enriching. He

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<sup>471</sup> Fr. Liam Lawton, (1999), The Role of Music in Worship. <https://www.catholicireland.net/the-role-of-music-in-worship/>. Accessed on June 29, 2018.

echoes the idea of the Psalmist who encourages us to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. The truth is that the charismatic prayer and worship sessions can be very noisy but then, we need to tolerate that. But is that a way the members are drawn closer to God? The other Christians who criticize their way of prayer and worship sessions say that their spirituality is based on emotions. In honesty, if you look at them from afar it seems they are carried away with emotions. However, this criticism could be constructive and healthy. It is important that Christian criticism be constructive in order to help us to grow in Christ and in humanity.

Traditional Catholics, in particular, argue that charismatic practices shift the focus of worship away from reverent communion with Christ in the Eucharist towards individual emotions and non-liturgical experiences as a substitute. Desmond accepts that some parishioners express their disappointment that the mode of the Renewal members often causes distractions to other members of the Church especially during common parish worship. Parishioners complain a lot and find it so irritating about the indiscriminate use of **Holy Ghost Fire** by charismatic members in their prayers.<sup>472</sup> It is as if there are elect-souls who enjoy a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit who are ready to use the awesome ‘Holy Ghost Fire’ to inflict injuries on their perceived enemies. Do we really need to develop an intense personal experience as proof of the presence of God so much so that we need to search desperately for such deeply emotional feeling? Jesus said to his disciples: ‘In your prayers do not babble as pagans do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him ...’ (Matthew 6:7 – 8). The obvious attempts to elicit emotional feelings and outburst cause embarrassment to non-members of the renewal on sight. One may be tempted to ask whether this emotional display is to convince God how serious they are or to demonstrate to onlookers how spiritually elevated on high voltage they

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<sup>472</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

are. It is always a high charge of emotional spiritual display especially during the prayer sessions when all the members are asked to shout out their personal prayers all at the same time.

Members of the Renewal are accused of being inappropriate in their prayer sessions. On occasions in their prayer meetings one sees boys and girls or men and women, at times weeping, lying on the floor next to each other between the altar and the tabernacle while the leaders claim that they are “slain in the spirit.” This bizarre attitude of the Renewal members sends shockwaves to on-looking members of the faithful who are in the Church for private or communal prayers. At times, it is like a high-charged drama. We need to admit that some of these complaints are not out of place. But then, children of God and members of God’s family must find a balance in order to live together in the family of God. One part of God’s family is very much at home with their mode of spirituality while the other part of the same family of God finds the former so distracting and annoying. So, how do we find the balance? The Church must continuously do its catechesis with clarity, audacity, prudence and lovingly. Here the Church must display her maternal love towards her spiritual children in keeping them together despite their differences in the one family of God. We may not deny that the charismatic renewal members are one of the devotional groups in the church who practice **lectio divina** the ancient way of praying the Scripture in which study is transformed into prayer. Pope Benedict XVI during his pontificate, frequently encouraged Catholics to the need of retrieving the ancient practice of **lectio divina**.

Parishioners also accuse charismatic members of the practice of “prophesying” especially during their prayer meetings. It is part of the prayer meeting when a member stands out as the centre of attention and communicates to the rest what God sends as message for the members.

This is done over the microphone while members listen intently as if they are in the presence of God speaking to them as it happened on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19: 18 – 20). Parishioners allege that through this type of prophesying, they give people false hope.<sup>473</sup> One educated member of the Renewal, a role model, gave a testimony during their prayer meeting of how he went to a restaurant to eat and paid for plate of rice and chicken meal and immediately he heard the Holy Spirit telling him, “Eat no meat!” He took this as a divine instruction from God! So, from that day onwards to date, he has been a vegetarian.<sup>474</sup> You cannot imagine the rapturous applause given to him by members – that is, for a member to be able to forgo eating of meat, may be, for the rest of life, was a tremendous sacrifice and service to the Lord! So, he had to be praised and highly commended for such a great service to the Lord! What a public ‘glory and praise’ given to the highly respected member of the renewal for such bold spiritual accomplishment, but, how much ‘glory’ is measured out for the Lord of glory? This is the type of cock and bull story members of the Renewal share within themselves in the name of giving testimony of the wonders of the Lord, and shout ‘praise God!’ only to excite themselves emotionally and feel “good.” Is that what spirituality is all about in the Catholic Church? Or is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal spirituality different? How could healthy, mature and responsible members of the Catholic Church claim that this type of “silly” story is a revelation from the Holy Spirit? Theologically, the messages from the team of the ministry of prophesy can be contrary to the teaching of the Church – presumptuous sayings foreign to Catholic faith. The leaders allow this falsehood to be fed to members to the detriment of their salvation. Again, some parishioners express doubts over their claims of outlandish accounts

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> “Field Notes.” Mr Peter Umeh, a friend and former parishioner, came to see me on August 10, 2014, when I was on holiday in Nigeria from my mission in the UK. I spent five days at St. Paul’s Missionary Seminary’s Spiritual Year Formation House at Iperu- Remo, Ogun State in Nigeria, where Mr Peter Umeh came to see me, and told me about his experience when he was aspiring to become a member of the Charismatic Prayer Group at his parish at St. Paul’s Catholic Parish Ebute- Emeta, Lagos Archdiocese. Mr Peter ended up not becoming a member of the Renewal because he taught that they were over-dramatizing their spiritual experiences. He told me he could not fit into such spirituality.



of spiritual and bodily healings during the time for testimonies at their prayer meetings. The manner these testimonials of miracles are announced repeatedly over the microphone in a bragging way gives one the impression that these alleged miracles need to be shouted out from the roof tops to authenticate the charismatic movement and prove that they are genuinely full in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As Catholics we believe in God's ability and readiness to heal our infirmities (hence the Sacrament of Anointing). However, charismatic members are accused of giving the impression that it is only when one becomes "a born-again charismatic" that the healings of God flows like a running stream. In all their prayer meetings, their testimonies of tremendous wonders and healings of the Lord abound. I suppose that many people would be encouraged when they hear the wonders of the healings of the Lord given in testimonies in the prayer meetings. But there is no denying the fact that there is a danger that some of people might be coming to these prayer meetings only because they are searching for miracle! Again, we cannot deny that there is a possibility of people making up these 'healing experiences' may be to make Jesus appear 'more' authentic! More so, some people may like to 'exaggerate' whatever spiritual experiences they have in order to appear more authentic or to promote Jesus or to display how spiritual they are after all. These dramatic ways of giving testimonies of miracles of the Lord could compel some people to seek and worship only the God of miracles because according to the teachings and the theology of the New Pentecostals the redeemed children of God cannot be affected by suffering, pain and sickness even though they still live with us in this fallen world. There are plenty of spiritual dramas amongst Catholic Charismatic members that are apparently contrary to Catholic faith and doctrine. We can only look up to the Church to show us the way because Christ promised that he would remain with the Church until the end of time (Matthew 28:20).

There is no doubt that when people decide to give themselves completely to God through constant mental prayer, reading of the bible, spiritual meditation and reflection, and preaching the word of God in the streets and public places as charismatic members do boldly and works of penance and charity, the Devil, the deceiver, will begin to suggest things or make influences that may first appear good to them. They will begin to hear voices in their mind and even quotations from the bible that will in no long turn into malice. It is disturbing when you listen to testimonies charismatic members give during their prayer and worship sessions. They mention curious things they pass as miracles from God; things that are more or less confused human thinking and imaginations. The question is, in what ways do they tests the spirits to see whether they are of God ...? The Scripture says that every spirit which does not confess that Jesus is of God is false; the spirit of the anti-Christ is in the world confusing people (1 John 4:1 – 3). Do not forget that the Devil is very much capable of presenting ‘false’ Christ to Christians who make efforts to know God. The Devil is like a roaring lion, prowling around looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). The Devil may not even seriously border those who are spiritually complacence, who are probably comfortable in a situation of sin even though they are professed Christians. There is no doubt that the Devil is out in full gear to attack the charismatic members who read and pray the bible all the time as well as fast as and ‘seek’ for healings for themselves and for their spiritual clients. If these spiritual endeavours are not properly monitored and managed, the Devil will have a field day in supplying plenty of confusion and division and confrontation.

The Devil is good at presenting a false spirituality which is confusing especially to the young members of the Renewal. From personal conversation with young members of the charismatic movement, it appears some of them are torn apart because they feel they don’t get these verbatim instructions or they want to believe that every thought and inspiration they

have is coming from the Holy Spirit as far as they read and pray the Bible. Again, some think that God doesn't love them; hence he doesn't speak to them as he does with those who always claim that God says this or that to them. But the promptings of the Holy Spirit are not just the thoughts and inspirations that come to our mind. And so, how do Catholics discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit? The charismatic members should not confuse the weak and the young minds! The Scripture says: "If any of you should cause one of these little ones, who believe in me, to stumble and fall, it would be better for him to be thrown into the depths of the sea with a great millstone around his neck" (Matthew 18: 6). The charismatic members are blamed for their over indulgence with emphasis on supernatural inspiration as a means for discerning the will of God while little or no attention is paid on promoting growth in virtue as a means of discerning God's will.<sup>475</sup> **(No attention is paid on the sacraments of the Church!!!)**

You will always hear them in their prayer screaming: "Let the Holy Ghost Fire burn your enemies to ashes, consume them, confuse them, annihilate them and so forth" as if God is a vengeful, unforgiving and wicked Father who cuts the pound of the flesh at the slightest mistake. It is as if the more they 'shout and command' the Holy Ghost Fire with such threatening tone, the more their members feel safe and assured that their prayers are answered and they are protected by the Blood of Jesus. They appear to believe that the Holy Ghost can only manifest himself in indistinguishable tongues and body gyrations with screams, shrieks, rolling on the floor, hysterical laughter, barking like dogs and ordering the Holy Ghost Fire to strike and destroy! They believe that these uncontrolled outbursts are true manifestation of the Holy Spirit. If you watch their prayer sessions closely, it appears as if some members are out deliberately to create such abnormal displays and mysterious dramas. That presents some

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<sup>475</sup> Solutio Problematis Omnes, (2015), The Dangers of the Catholic "Charismatic" Movement. <https://solutioproblematisomnes.wordpress.com/2015/02/11/the-dangers-of-the-catholic-charismatic-movement/comment-page-1/>. Accessed on February 21, 2018.

difficulties because how do you distinguish authenticity from pretence and display of spiritual madness? However, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI acknowledged good aspects of the Catholic Charismatic Movement while urging caution, pointing out that members must maintain their Catholic identity and communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>476</sup> Like the Pontiff implies, we may not throw away the baby with the bathwater. We may not throw away the emotional charismatic members in their outbursts but that all of us may need to be open to the Church Magisterium who discerns the promptings of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, we may not dismiss the genuine charismatic members who sincerely seek God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some members of the Renewal describe non-Renewal parishioners as **not born-again** and therefore **carnal**. Some members of the Charismatic Renewal claim that they possess ‘superior powers and gifts’ which non-members of the Renewal do not have, and so, assume some airs of ‘spiritual’ superiority. The members of the Renewal never think that it will be very hard to sell these emotional outbursts in prayer session to non-members as genuine ways of praying to God. They don’t ever think of the type of anxiety they cause to non-members. There is no doubt that members gather together in sincerity to pray to God but they must challenge themselves and understudy the extreme emotionalism and gyration and strange noises of some of their members as a way of testing the spirits. It is not true that their mode of worship and prayer demonstrates superiority and genuineness. It only spreads confusion and anxiety to non-members and even amongst themselves as well. I am not sure that God needs strange spiritual drama and demonstrations in order to be convinced that we are serious in our prayers to him. If the members of the Renewal are not acting these spiritual dramas and acrobatics to woo God then, who are they trying impress or convince?

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<sup>476</sup> Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Catholic Charismatic Renewal Today, “Hispanics and the Future of the Catholic Church in the United States” pdf on June 23, 2015. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic\\_Charismatic\\_Renewal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Charismatic_Renewal). Accessed on June 28, 2018.

Again, some parishioners constantly accuse members of the Renewal of being lukewarm in their participation in parish programmes. Parishioners complain a lot about the irregular attendance at Mass by charismatic members. Parishioners hear some members of the Renewal publicly condemn and avoid the sacrament of Reconciliation. Again, some charismatic members publicly talk against the holy Rosary and refuse to pray it. It is noticeable that some members of the Renewal do not receive the Blessed Eucharist.<sup>477</sup> These accusations are not hearsay; the writer of this book witnessed these negative attitudes by some parish charismatic members when he was the parish priest of St Gabriel parish Ladi Lac in Lagos Archdiocese in Nigeria.

One of the greatest reservations by most parishioners about the charismatic Renewal Movement is the idea of praying in tongues. The Renewal if one may say, consciously or unconsciously, pays undue attention to the idea of praying in tongues. This issue of speaking in tongues continues to cause enormous and serious confusion in relation to the Renewal. Praying in tongues is an attractive venture to the members but a very difficult obstacle to non-members of the group. St. Paul was particularly worried about an abuse of the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 12; 14). Speaking in tongues is a phenomenon that arouses many fears, confusion, anxiety, worry and even suspicion. Even those who speak in tongues seem not to understand it and find it difficult explaining it to others. It appears suspicious because in the prayer meeting it seems to indicate that every member speaks in tongue. The leaders in the prayer meeting sort of compel everyone to speak in tongues. One seems out of kilter if one is in the prayer session during the time of praying in tongues and one is not just doing that. That is exactly where the suspicion is coming from. The truth is that there is no way every member

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<sup>477</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Roland Amedu, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

of the Renewal has the gift of speaking in tongues. There is rather a diversity of gifts but the Spirit is the same (1 Corinthians 12: 4). One is given the gift of speaking in tongues the other the gift of interpreting what has been said in tongues (1 Corinthians 12: 10) and yet some are given of faith or healing (1 Corinthians 12: 9), and of course, God gives variety of gifts to different persons for different specific purposes. But when too much emphasis is laid on speaking in tongues, it inflicts unnecessary pressure on the spiritually weak members.

However, the charismatic members prize speaking in tongues as equivalent to securing the Kingdom of God. They give the impression that speaking in tongues is a sign of a special indwelling of the Holy Spirit which results in deeper worship and a closer walk with God in the ‘Garden of Eden.’ In other words, those who do not manifest this sign are implicitly led to believe that they are not close to God as they should be, that there may be something defective with their spiritual life, and so a deeper walk with God is not possible for them. Besides being cruelly false, this leads some Renewal members to unduly focus more on spiritual manifestation as the key to closeness with God rather than personal holiness and aggressively rooting out personal sin.<sup>478</sup> So, in their prayer meeting, when it is time to speak in tongues, the leaders are all out encouraging as well as pressurising the members to speak in tongues, and one can clearly observe how “artificial” they all appear to be. The whole exercise looks “unreal.” All of this, of course, leads to a situation in which members of the Renewal are practicing a form of Catholicism that is strangely different from that known by the Saints and Doctors of the Church, and the teachings and the doctrine of the Church. Without the traditional liturgy and the Latin prayers of the Church that have been sanctified by the long passing of centuries, and the traditional spiritual direction as laid down by masters of spiritual life like St. Bernard, St. John of the Cross, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Alphonsus

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<sup>478</sup> Solutio Problematis Omnes, (2015), The Dangers of the Catholic “Charismatic” Movement. <https://solutioproblematisomnes.wordpress.com/2015/02/11/the-dangers-of-the-catholic-charismatic-movement/comment-page-1/>. Accessed on February 21, 2018.

Ligouri and St. Therese of Lisieux. It is tradition being replaced by something different and strange to traditional Catholics, something that substitutes devotion for emotion, only to end up producing confusion, stunting spiritual growth and failing to teach proper spiritual discernment and enlightenment. The obvious thing is that the characters some members of the Renewal exhibit in the parish is strange and even “an embarrassment” to the historic Catholic Church. For that, their critics at best describe them as a form of Catholic Protestant Pentecostalism, from which they alleged that all charismatic movements are derived.<sup>479</sup>

The question that comes to mind is: “Is the attitude of charismatic members to the gift of tongues the same as St. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians?” I ask this question because modern exegetes agree that our understanding of the New Testament gift of tongues should be based on what St. Paul tells us about it in 1 Corinthians because he did not only witness it but spoke in tongues himself (1 Corinthians 14: 18).<sup>480</sup> Catholic charismatic members should pay attention to what the Holy Spirit teaches the Church through St. Paul and not just be carried away by the distinctive belief of the Pentecostal churches that every Christian who has been “baptized in the Spirit” would have to speak in tongues as an abiding gift to be used both in private and in community worship.<sup>481</sup> It becomes problematic when charismatic leaders who may not be knowledgeable enough believe that “baptism in the Spirit” must be authenticated by **glossolalia**, and so “push” those who seek the “baptism” to pray for the gift of tongues, as the “normal and expected sign” that the Holy Spirit is now working in their lives in a new and more powerful way.<sup>482</sup> For some charismatic members “speaking in tongues” has become the

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<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Sullivan, Charisms and Charismatic Renewal, p. 121.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>482</sup> Ranaghan Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, Catholic Pentecostals, 1969, p. 221.

key that seems to unlock the door to personal contact with God in prayer.<sup>483</sup> L. Christenson is typical in his statement:

“One speaks in tongues, for the most part, in his private devotions. This is by far its most important use and value. It offers the believer a glorious new dimension in prayer . . . Although one does not know what he is saying as he speaks in tongues, he does have a clear sense that he is praying to God. The heightened awareness of God’s presence is one of the greatest blessings one receives through this experience.<sup>484</sup>”

St. Paul does not see the gift of tongues as superior because it is unintelligible both to the speaker and the hearers (1 Corinthians 14: 13 – 14). However, he sees it primarily as a form of prayer. The speaker in tongues speaks to God rather than to men (1 Corinthians 14: 2), and as such edifies himself (1 Corinthians 14: 4) which is an exhortation to prayer.<sup>485</sup> In other words, St. Paul is not being sarcastic about speaking in tongues. So according to St. Paul speaking in tongues is primarily useful in private prayer and discourages it when there is no corresponding gift of interpreting it to the praying community. When there is no interpreter, the tongue-speaker should “be silent in the assembly and to speak to himself and to God” (1 Corinthians 14: 28). St. Paul claims to speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 14: 18) but has determined never to use this gift in the assembly of believers.<sup>486</sup> Actually we need to follow the spiritual advice of St Paul and avoid what appears to be a display of praying in tongues in charismatic prayer sessions especially when members are pressurized to speak in tongues.

How is it then that some charismatic leaders pressurize those who seek for baptism in the Spirit to seek to acquire the gift of tongues as if it is the only gateway to heaven? With St. Paul’s edification in relation to tongues (1 Corinthians 14) we will be able to discern a

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<sup>483</sup> Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal*, pp. 135 – 136.

<sup>484</sup> Christenson Larry, *Speaking in Tongues*, Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1968, pp. 28 – 29. Hereafter as Christenson, *Speaking in Tongues*.

<sup>485</sup> Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal*, pp. 124 – 125.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126 – 127.



genuine **glossolalia** in the believer. It is true that there is a very highly correlation between tongue-speaking and having been “baptized in the Spirit.” There could be many human and natural factors as well as with the operation of divine grace in associating speaking in tongues with being “baptized in the Spirit.”<sup>487</sup> This is evident when members are preparing for Life in the Spirit Seminar because in the Team Manual, much stress is laid on the importance of the candidate’s speaking in tongues when he/she is “baptized in the Spirit.”<sup>488</sup> So, one of the purposes of the “Life in the Spirit Seminar” as presented in the Team Manual is to create such a desire. In other words, the Team Manual is packaged in such a way that speaking in tongues is presented as an important proof of the Spirit’s new presence and working in the participant. The approach is: “If you really want this new presence of the Holy Spirit strongly enough, then you should also want this experiential sign of his working within you.”<sup>489</sup> And for them the sign that the Holy Spirit is now active in one’s life is, for one to speak in tongues.

Hence, the Renewal in question places undeserved importance on speaking in tongues. If a member does not speak in tongues, it means that something is lacking in his commitment to the Renewal and so unnecessary pressure is put on the member.<sup>490</sup> However, these factors are human and natural. Nevertheless, we may not deny that there can be genuine work of divine grace involved in the person speaking in tongues. The act of “yielding” to tongues can be truly symbolic of a much deeper surrender to the Lord – a “breakthrough” needed for one to give one’s life completely to God. It can be a true expression of conversion. The proof, of course, of whether a real “baptism in the Spirit” has taken place is the subsequent transformation of the person’s life, not his speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues does not account for a deep spiritual renewal or an authenticating sign of spiritual renewal, but itself

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>490</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

needs to be authenticated in being contrite for sin, free from the bondage of sin and growing in personal holiness.<sup>491</sup> The Scripture says by their fruits, we shall know them (Matthew 7:16).

#### **4.6. Some charismatic members can pose serious problems**

Through telephone conversations and exchange of emails, Bro. Desmond Ezeh admits that some members of the Renewal can pose serious problems to the Church. Bro. Ezeh agrees that some members of the prayer group go to the extreme of questioning and disapproving some Church teachings, doctrine and practices such as the Holy Mass, the Rosary, the sacrament of Reconciliation, veneration of the Cross on Good Friday, venerating the Saints and celebrating summer fair and bazaar sales and so forth.<sup>492</sup> Some of the things they question are very serious issues of faith, catholic tradition, teaching, doctrine and practice! Now we can ask serious questions. How Catholic are those who disapprove the Holy Mass, the sacrament of Reconciliation, veneration of the Holy Cross of Jesus on Good Friday, the holy Rosary and devotion to our Blessed Mother Mary, veneration of the Saints and some other items of faith of the Catholic Church. These articles of faith have been questioned by some of our brothers and sisters in the Catholic Charismatic Group as experienced by the author of this book. There is a problem here!

As the parish priest of St. Gabriel's parish Bariga Lagos (1999), I had to invite the leaders of the Renewal to the parish office to explain why some members preferred to hang around the Church during the 6.00pm Mass on Thursdays only to troop in for their prayer meeting (7.00 – 10.00pm) immediately the Mass ended.<sup>493</sup> From all indications, they preferred their prayer

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<sup>491</sup> Francis A. Sullivan, *Charism and Charismatic Renewal*, pp. 142 – 143.

<sup>492</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, *Email and Telephone Conversations*, 2018.

<sup>493</sup> "Field Notes:" Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa met with the Charismatic Leaders of St. Gabriel's Catholic Parish, Bariga, Lagos, Nigeria on March 16, 1999, in the parish office.

meeting to Eucharistic celebration. Desmond Ezech admits that some Renewal members engage in 'private' ministries/programmes outside the parish against the directive of the Church and the parish priest. Again, some members find it difficult to obey and respect the parish priest if they think that he doesn't like the charismatic group or that he is a 'non-charismatic' priest. They even go as far as refusing to attend Mass or receive Holy Communion from him when he celebrates Mass.<sup>494</sup> If there is a fraternal relationship in the parish family, why should the members of the Renewal not approach their parish and ask whether he is happy with the charismatic group or discourse their reservation with him.

The all important question that must be asked is: Do parish charismatic members understand what Mass is all about? Do they know that Mass is the sacrifice offered by Jesus on Calvary? Do they know that Mass is the representation of the sacrifice of the death of Jesus on the Cross offered once and for all? So in the sacrifice of the Mass the suffering and the death and the resurrection of Christ are made present by the power of the Holy Spirit. The charismatic members are deeply in love and in devotion to the Holy Spirit and yet some of them avoid coming to Mass. Do they not know that they are annoying the same Holy Spirit they claim to invoke all the time? It is important to note that the sacrifice of the Mass takes away sins, heals and transforms us when we apply it to our need. They all the time pray to the Holy Spirit and yet some of them do not appreciate that Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice in order to bring us salvation and give us his Spirit which is the Holy Spirit they pray to all the time. And also they do not understand that the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross of Calvary. The charismatic members are always hungry for the Holy Spirit and yet they do not know that every Mass is a new Pentecost, a new opportunity to receive the Spirit afresh (CCC 739). And so we can rightly say that Mass is the

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

sacrifice of Christ on the Cross made present to those who attend it worthily. And as a sacrifice, it is equally our sacrifice too. The Mass is also our sacrifice in that we join our own offerings to Christ's. "Like living stones be yourselves built into spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

Roland Amedu also admits that some Renewal members of St. Gerald Catholic Church Soluyi Gbagada Lagos do not receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, and are irregular at attending Mass, and refuse to register as parishioners or belong to any Small/Basic Christian Community, show lack of interest in any parish activity, unwilling to belong to any statutory body in the parish, and completely avoid praying the holy Rosary, abhor and ridicule any reverence and prayers offered through Mary the Mother of God. They openly frown and complain at parishioners who reverence the holy Images in the Church or pray at the Marian Grotto. Many parishioners accuse the charismatic members of running parallel programmes alongside the parish which they claim to belong.<sup>495</sup> As I indicated earlier on, the charismatic prayer group have a lot of spiritual activities lined up for their members year in year out and so, truly it is not out of place to accuse them of running a parallel programme along with the parish. And in most cases, they even have more religious activities than the parish to which they belong. It is not false that they have some air of superiority over the parish to which they belong. We must always watch out for the vanity of pride, arrogance and self-satisfied and presumption.

#### **4.7. Some Renewal members have complaints**

In his emails and telephone conversations with me, Desmond states that some charismatic members accuse some priests/bishops and some members of the faithful of regarding the

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<sup>495</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Roland Amedu, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

charismatic movement as anti-Catholic. They accuse the parish priest and the parish pastoral council of promoting policies that directly or indirectly disrupt the activities of the Renewal and so cause great disaffection amongst members of the prayer group. They even accuse the Archdiocesan hierarchy of doing the same against the Renewal. They accuse the parish priest of accepting all gossip some parishioners bring to him against the Renewal, and as a result, he is always ready to come heavily on the Renewal at every slightest provocation. They accuse parishioners of not accepting members of the Renewal as an integral part of the parish/Church. They believe that parishioners do not see them as bonafide Catholics. They accuse some parishioners of discriminating against the charismatic members. Some Renewal members believe that many members of the Church hierarchy and members of the faithful misunderstand them. They accuse the parish priest of not allowing the Renewal to have their prayer meetings and other programmes inside the church even when he knows that their number is large. Again, they are not happy that the parish priest does not permit some of their activities to be carried out and this leads them to execute these programmes outside the parish without them seeking his authorization. They are not happy that the parish priest always probes their ministries and activities and their spiritual exercises. They feel that they are always suspected by the parish priest and parishioners.<sup>496</sup> There is mistrust between the Renewal and the parish priest as well as the non-charismatic parishioners. It is obvious that members of the charismatic Renewal see themselves as a ‘separate’ group within the parish and the non-charismatic parishioners equally see them as ‘different entity’ within the parish family. There is a ‘gulf or crack or a division’ within the parish family that needs to be bridged or healed as far as the charismatic members are concerned. This is because “If a family divides itself into groups, that family will not survive” (Mark 3: 25).

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<sup>496</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

Roland Amedu in his emails and telephone conversations with me says that members of the Renewal believe that some parishioners/religious societies display hatred, jealousy and unhealthy competition against the Renewal. Some members of the Renewal complain that the parish priest entertains visitors with alcoholic drinks as well as uses alcohol and so see the priest as ‘evil, unreligious and uncommitted’, and as such, they refuse to attend to his Eucharistic celebration and refuse to receive Holy Communion from him. For them the parish is evil simply because they believe that he drinks alcoholic drink. They are not saying that he gets drunk but that as far as he drinks alcohol, he is a sinner. You can begin to understand the level of their spirituality, the type of Catholic teaching their leaders saturate them with, their level of mentality and social growth. Of course, other Catholic members easily perceive that their version of Catholic teaching is faulty, not intelligent, not rounded and so may not help them to become responsible Catholics who will help themselves and others to grow and to mature in their faith in God. They complain that some of the music the choir sings is not gospel-oriented or Christ-centred. Some of the charismatic members also frown at parishioners who drink alcoholic drinks. They also frown at parishioners especially ladies who dress up indecently to Mass. In this modern life, they frown at ladies who come to Mass in trousers even when trousers give them more security and decency. They see them as immoral and source of sin. They regard some parishioners as immoral who deliberately commit sin to go to confession, and as such, they dismiss the sacrament of Reconciliation. Some of them are not happy that the priest regulates on how they say their prayers and practice their spirituality. Some members of the Renewal complain that parishioners pray to the Virgin Mary and the Saints and not direct their prayers to Christ alone.<sup>497</sup> Some charismatic members have a pharisaic/moralistic mind-set and so assume

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<sup>497</sup> Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa and Roland Amedu, Email and Telephone Conversation, 2018.

moral authority over the parish priest and non-charismatic parishioners. It is apparently clear that this group needs continuous growth in catechesis, spirituality and humanity.

#### **4.8. Conclusion**

We may have to accept that the Charismatic Renewal Movement is Catholic. The Charismatic Prayer Group can trace its origin from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 and 1 Corinthians 14. It is on record that Popes Blessed Paul VI, Saint Pope John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI gave their massive support to the Charismatic Movement as well as the present Pontiff, Pope Francis. It is also true that many Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops accept and support the Renewal in their dioceses/archdioceses. There is no doubt that the Catholic Church has authenticated the Charismatic Prayer Group and gives it its support. There are Catholic priests who are staunch members of the charismatic movement. We may further have to recognize and accept that the Charismatic Movement still remains controversial and has the potentiality to cause enormous problems in the Catholic Church. It is true that the Church authority authenticates and supports the Prayer Movement, but has not put adequate measures on the ground to educate, monitor and guide the large and ever growing Charismatic Renewal Movement. This is because we may have to recognize and accept that the Charismatic Renewal has come to stay as a religious movement in the Catholic Church. And so now, the onus is on the Church hierarchy to educate the Catholic faithful to accept and support the Charismatic Renewal as part of the evangelical strategy of the Church's endeavour in the New Evangelization programme. Also, the Church authority has an obligation to carefully and gently bring the Charismatic Renewal Movement to understand that they cannot operate and be Catholic except under the jurisdiction of the parish priest, the Bishop/Archbishop and the Magisterium.

## Chapter V

### 5.1. Solution to the perceived problems of the Catholic Renewal Movement

First of all, the Catholic faithful have to be educated to recognize and accept that the Catholic Renewal Movement is a recognized religious society in the Catholic Church. And we note that the Catholic Church is one as we profess in the Creed.<sup>498</sup> She is one because she acknowledges one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one Body, and one Spirit, and one hope (Ephesians 4: 3 – 5), at whose fulfilment all divisions will be overcome.<sup>499</sup> Secondly, and very importantly, it is extremely necessary that the clergy accept without reservations that, the Charismatic Renewal is recognized by the Church Magisterium. We note that four Popes have acknowledged the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as a religious lay association in the Catholic Church. Pope Paul VI in his address to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Rome in 1975 gave them his fatherly support:

“How then could this “spiritual renewal” not be “a chance” for the Church and for the world? And how, in this case, could one not take all the means to ensure that it remains so? [...] Nothing is more necessary for such a world, more and more secularized, than the testimony of this “spiritual renewal”, which we see the Holy Spirit brings about today in the most diverse regions and environments. Its manifestations are varied: deep communion of souls, close contact with God in faithfulness to the commitments undertaken at Baptism, in prayer that is often community prayer, in which each one, expressing himself freely, helps, and supports and nourishes the prayer of others, and, at the basis of everything, a personal conviction. This conviction has its source not only in instruction received by faith but also in a certain experience of real life, namely, that without God, man can do nothing, that with him, on the contrary, everything becomes possible.”<sup>500</sup>

Saint John Paul II in his pontificate supported the Renewal:

“As you celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, I willingly join you in giving praise to God for the many fruits which it has borne in the life of the Church. The emergence of the Renewal following the Second Vatican Council was a particular gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. [...] At this moment in the Church’s history, the Charismatic Renewal can play a significant role in promoting the much-needed

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<sup>498</sup>CCC 811

<sup>499</sup>CCC 866

<sup>500</sup>Blessed Paul VI’s, (1975), Address to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal on the occasion of the Second International Leaders’ Conference, Rome, Italy, International Catholic Renewal Services, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, What is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? <http://www.iccrs.org/en/the-ccr/>. Accessed on July 16, 2018.



defence of Christian life in societies where secularism and materialism have weakened many people's ability to respond to the Spirit and discern God's loving call."<sup>501</sup>

The Pontiff, in 1998, exhorted Catholic Charismatics "to safeguard their Catholic identity" and maintain the proper relationships with their diocesan bishops and the Holy See. In fact, the Pope was telling them to be properly grounded in Church teaching and submissive to Church authority. But unfortunately from general observation, the Renewal has left a bitter taste in the mouth of most Catholics. The fascinating growth and enthusiasm associated with the Charismatic Renewal often resulted in poorly formed Catholics, who left the Church because they perceived their local parishes as "dead", despite the ongoing reality of the Eucharist and other life-giving sacraments in those parishes. And in some cases, they find it difficult to comply with parish regulations or are not able to take pastoral instructions from their parish priest. Some are now able to quote from the bible and preach powerfully and command loyalty from members, and so appear more knowledgeable and have more authority than the parish priest and as a result not able to obey the parish priest.

Should we not see the statements from Pope St. John Paul II as the Church supporting and approving the Catholic Charismatic Renewal?

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI also gave his support to the Renewal:

"What we learn in the New Testament on charism, which appeared as visible signs of the coming of the Holy Spirit, is not a historical event of the past, but a reality ever alive. It is the same divine Spirit, soul of the Church, that acts in every age and those mysterious and effective interventions of the Spirit are manifest in our time in a providential way. The Movements and New Communities are like an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in contemporary society. We can, therefore, rightly say that one of the positive elements and aspects of the community of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is precisely their emphasis on the charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit and their merit lies in having recalled their topicality in the Church."<sup>502</sup>

The current Pontiff, Pope Francis, massively supports the Charismatic Renewal Movement:

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<sup>501</sup>Saint John Paul II's, (1992), Audience with the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office Council, Rome, Italy. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, What is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? <http://www.iccrs.org/en/the-ccr/>. Accessed on July 16, 2018.

<sup>502</sup>Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's, (2008), Address to Participants in a meeting organized by the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships, Hall of Blessings, Rome, Italy. <http://www.iccrs.org/en/the-ccr/>. Accessed on July 16, 2018.

“The Charismatic Renewal has reminded the Church of the necessity and importance of the prayer of praise. When we speak of the prayer of praise in the Church, Charismatics come to mind. When I spoke of the prayer of praise during a homily at Mass in Santa Martha, I said it is not only the prayer of Charismatics but of the entire Church! It is the recognition of the Lordship of God over us and over all creation expressed through dance, music and song.”<sup>503</sup>

And so, it is under the jurisdiction of the parish priest to supervise, direct and guide the activities of the Renewal. Thirdly, it is equally important that the charismatic members are thoroughly enlightened to understand that they are a religious lay association in the Catholic Church under the authority and guidance of the parish priest who is under the authority of the diocesan bishop, whose ministry of Christ he is called to share.<sup>504</sup> The two coordinators of the two charismatic groups of the parishes of St. Gabriel Bariga, Lagos and St. Gerald Soluyi, Lagos, Nigeria, do accept that some of their members give more allegiance and respect to them than their respective parish priests. Such attitude is not Catholic.

However, it is important to note that any priest/bishop who ignores the charismatic group in his parish/diocese does that to the detriment of the parish/Church. This is because the charismatic group is dynamic, large and ever growing, and any church authority which tries to ignore or suppress/ban them will end up driving them away from Catholicism, and the end result is proliferation of Christianity. The dissident group will always end up forming another church/prayer group, and this is a common phenomenon in the Nigerian religious context.<sup>505</sup>

The charismatic group can only be handled with Christian faith, understanding, maturity, tolerance, friendship, charity, education, patience and love. The Renewal is like a tsetse fly

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<sup>503</sup>Pope Francis', (2014), Address to Members of the “Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships”, Blessed Paul VI Audience Hall, Rome, Italy. <http://www.iccrs.org/en/the-ccr/>. Accessed on July 16, 2018.

<sup>504</sup>Canon 519

<sup>505</sup>“Field Notes:” Pastor Martin Anigbogu, Wounded Messiah Prophetic Ministry, Umueze Utuh, 2003. Pastor Martin was Catholic and a member of St. Stephen’s Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Utuh parish in Nnewi Diocese in Nigeria where Fr Sebastian Umunnah was the parish priest. Fr. Umunnah tried to bring Mr Martin to comply with the Catholic tradition and practice, but he disobeyed and abandoned the Catholic faith to form his own church and prayer group attracting some Catholic charismatic sympathizers who joined his group. This is one of the hundreds of cases.

that patched on a person's eye-ball. If you try to kill it with force you destroy the person's sight. If you leave it, it destroys the person's eye. It is only the elder/mature person who can remove it with utmost care and caution without causing the person to lose his/her sight. So, the Church hierarchy has pastoral obligation to care, guide and nourish the Renewal.

The Catholic Renewal in any Catholic parish needs some demonstration of Christian leadership. We may not educate and build up the Renewal through unhealthy argument or ecclesiastical sanction but through mature leadership from the church hierarchy and through constant education. With regard to Charismatic Renewal, associated with much controversy and misconceptions, the Church hierarchy simply needs to demonstrate some high quality of Christian leadership so as not to throw away the baby with the bathwater. The Church has an obligation to educate the faithful. Hence, the pastors of souls have the proper and serious duty to catechize the Christian people, so that, through doctrinal formation the faith of the people may be living, manifest, enthusiastic, joyful and active.<sup>506</sup>

However, the issue of good leadership is part of education. It is not only that the Church should equip the clergy with appropriate education in leadership but the laity as well, because, the pastor is the first among leaders in the parish context. We need Christian leaders and educators who can actively promote an integral and holistic approach to education whereby our daily Christian living is harmonized with the civilization of ethical, moral and spiritual values.<sup>507</sup> Again, we need a cadre of Christian leaders who not only positively impact on the life of Christians but the world of politics, government, social and business and help to infuse the values of the Kingdom into these spheres of life. So Christian leadership does not

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<sup>506</sup>Canon 773

<sup>507</sup>Emmanuel Ngara, *Christian Leadership, A Challenge to the African Church*, Nairobi, Kenya:Pauline Publications Africa, 2004, p. 10. Hereafter as Ngara, *Christian Leadership*.

only begin and end in Church premises but in secular society and in the world.<sup>508</sup> When the priest says: “Go in peace the Mass is ended”, that is exactly when the mission our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to his disciples begins in earnest. “The Lord Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal diseases. He sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9: 1 – 2). And the only way the Church can effectively play its role in promoting good leadership in society is to demonstrate within its ranks a vibrant culture of good leadership, a culture of leadership which reflects and projects the qualities and leadership style that Jesus stood for.<sup>509</sup>

The Church leads by example. What is the nature of leadership in the Church today? We may not rightly claim that the Church has demonstrated exemplary leadership in the issue of clergy sex abuse and the institutional cover-up that allowed it to persist for such a long period of time.<sup>510</sup> Again, the Church may not claim to have shown mature leadership in the area of financial integrity and apostolic charity. So today more than ever, the Church is desperately in need of good and effective leadership. The priest is ordained to lead the Christian faithful, and so, the Church should constantly organize leadership training for her pastors to become better and more effective agents for God.<sup>511</sup> The priest as leader has to learn to develop a good relationship with his parishioners in order to lead them to make a difference in their lives. It is also through the same relationship that his parishioners can make a difference in his life and ministry. The priest in his leadership-relationship can influence the thoughts, behaviours, beliefs or values of his parishioners. In other words, leadership is about relationships that

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<sup>508</sup>Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>509</sup>Ibid.

<sup>510</sup>The Investigative Staff of the Boston Globe, *Betrayal, The Crisis in the Catholic Church, The Findings of the Investigation that inspired, Spotlight*, Boston, United States of America: Little, Brown and Company, 2002, pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>511</sup>Ngara, *Christian Leadership*, p. 14.

make a difference.<sup>512</sup> The pastor is called to serve God and the people in the same way that God called the Prophets of old and Apostles to serve his people. And so, the pastor is an apostle of Jesus who should always be conscious of his leadership obligations in this regard.<sup>513</sup> He must learn how to model himself on Jesus Christ, the High Priest, the Supreme Pastor, the one who today calls those upon whom the privilege of serving as priests and ministers has been bestowed. The priest needs to emulate Jesus, the great teacher, who knew and taught the Scriptures with authority and humility; while associating with the lowly and the downtrodden, and showing compassion for the suffering humanity.<sup>514</sup> His leadership quality should be able to facilitate friendly interaction with every category of his parishioners to include constructive criticism, observation and suggestion. His leadership quality should create the atmosphere for spiritual-father/spiritual-children relationship and vice versa. If Jesus physically appears in our midst now, should we not be able to approach him, ask him questions that worry us, relate our reservations, fears and doubts to him? Should we not be able to interact with him as our spiritual father? Should we be afraid to approach even when our questions may appear challenging? There are some grievances, complaints and reservations some parishioners have put forward in writing to the bishop against their parish priests which some bishops said openly to his priests that these were so minute or insignificant or irrelevant. In other words, there is little or no friendly relationship between the parish priest and his parishioners. This is because most of these petty petitions settled in a friendly way between parishioners and their priests. The grievances are so flimsy that if there is friendlier relationship between the parish priest and his parishioners, parishioners can easily approach their parish priest and discuss those complaints instead of writing to the bishop. Again, some parish priests could be inapproachable, unfriendly and intolerant of even

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<sup>512</sup>Walter C. Wright, *Relational Leadership, A Biblical Model for Leadership Service*, Cumbria, United Kingdom and Waynesboro, United States: Paternoster Publishing Press, 2000, pp. 1 – 2. Hereafter as Wright, *Relational Leadership*.

<sup>513</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 14 – 15.

<sup>514</sup>*Ibid*, p. 15.

constructive criticism and such uncondusive atmosphere could make some parishioners appear negatively reactive to their parish priest. The parish priest should be father in faith to his parishioners and so parish life will flow in Christian fraternity. The parish family is the family of God where equality, respect, loyalty, friendship, freedom and love flow abundantly.

Jesus drew people to himself largely by sheer force of character and also succeeded in making the apostles loyal to him because he was a role model to them. He was the very embodiment of the values of the Kingdom of God that he preached. In Jesus, God uncovers his face to us. It is very interesting because Jesus is true God and true man and so shows us what a true man and woman should strive to be. We should truly treasure our identity in Christ. The priest's conduct must befit the conduct of a spokesman of Jesus.<sup>515</sup> Stephen R. Covey pointed out the absolute importance of character for a leader when he wrote:

If I try to use human strategies and tactics of how to get other people do what I want, to work better, to be more motivated, to like me and each other – while my character is fundamentally flawed, marked by duplicity will breed distrust, and everything I do – even using so-called good human relations techniques – will be perceived as manipulative. It simply makes no difference how good the rhetoric is or even how good the intentions are; if there is little or no trust there is no foundation for permanent success. Only basic goodness gives life to technique.<sup>516</sup>

We all know the common saying: “Actions speak louder than words.” Stephen R. Covey is saying that character communicates more eloquently than whatever means we may employ. He quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson as saying: “What you are shouts so loudly in my ears, I cannot hear what you say.”<sup>517</sup> To be able to work with, supervise, educate and guide the charismatic members, the parish priest must be Christ-like. He must wear the character of Jesus like one wears a dress. Like John the Baptist, the priest should be a humble servant of the Kingdom of God. He has to befriend the Renewal members by showing interest in them

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<sup>515</sup>Ibid, pp. 15 – 16.

<sup>516</sup>Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1991, p. 21. Hereafter as Covey, *The 7 Habits*.

<sup>517</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

and making time to attend their prayer meetings and other activities, and giving them spiritual talks once in a while. He has to be attentive to their activities not by 'policing' them but rather a way of demonstrating some personal friendly interest in them. He must show practically that he is their friend. The parish priest must show interest in their spiritual endeavours and that is the only way he can enlighten them on the teachings and the doctrine of the Church as well as nourish them with the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that they need such fatherly care and close relationship and friendship. This is because they have the high potentiality to go astray. Thousands of Catholic Charismatic members have gone astray and left the Church by founding their own church perhaps they lacked the spiritual care and guidance of the Church. Unfortunately this huge drift from the Catholic Church continues to happen unchecked. The temptation is highly possible. This is because the charismatic members feel extremely autonomous and utmost sense of freedom because they believe that they are fully saturated with the Holy Spirit who guarantees their freedom and salvation. Hence, they do not bother with the Sacraments of the Church! I am not saying categorically that all of them do not bother with the sacraments of the Church. Some of them feel extreme sense of 'divine safety' and are always 'joyful' in the Holy Spirit. The majority of them do not feel the need for the sacrament of Reconciliation because they feel 'divinely safe' and at home in the Holy Spirit of God. That is why in their prayer sessions, the leaders do not normally mention the need for the sacrament of Penance but rather emphasis is laid heavily on giving oneself to the power of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues as a sign of being fully possessed by the Holy Spirit, testimonies of healings and miracles and sticking to the messages from the Lord through the ministry of those who are the prophesying team. Their leaders continuously emphasize to them to give themselves to the power of the Holy Spirit who empowers them to preach powerfully and to heal all the sick and cast out demons from many people in the society who are possessed. So this spiritual pressure from their

leaders without ever mentioning or referring them to the healing and saving power of the sacraments of the Church will never in any way encourage them to seek the sacraments of the Church or to have any recourse to the Church. This is because they obey the authority of their leaders more than they obey the Pope or the Church. So if the parish priest can swallow his pride and sense of authority and befriend the charismatic members and interact and encourage their leaders every so often, the power of the Spirit of God will draw them to be loyal to the Church to the glory of God and the salvation of their souls.

The Renewal members in question have a mind-set that they are covered by the 'Blood of Jesus' and that the 'Holy Ghost Fire' will destroy their enemies in Jesus' Mighty Holy Name! A mature Catholic member needs only few days to observe their religious sessions to be convinced that they appear to be Catholic in name but not in reality because they have serious reservations with some of the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, and doubts with the honour, reverence and respect the Catholic Church accords to Mary, the Virgin Mother of God and the Saints and the holy Images in the Church. Apparently, they appear to have serious suspicion towards the Magisterium. They easily believe and accept whatever the leaders teach them because they are the 'authentic' voice of the Holy Spirit for them, and so, the Magisterium of the Church appears suspicious to them. This is a serious phenomenon! This is because the Nigerian Ibos have a saying that: 'The fly that has no counsellor will follow the corpse into the grave.' I do not believe that the charismatic members who ignore the sacraments will be able to save themselves just by merely 'speaking in tongues' and shouting commanding orders to the 'Holy Ghost Fire;' or just merely by obeying word that comes out of their leaders and believe it to be verbatim from the Holy Spirit.

## **5.2. Ongoing formation for clergy**



The most urgent thing for the Church hierarchy is to educate the Renewal members on the life of the Church, the doctrine, and the basic Catholic teachings. But before that, the clergy equally need continuous formation to be able to educate those placed under their pastoral care, in particular, the members of the Renewal. According to Vatican II's **Presbyterorum Ordinis** and Saint John Paul II's **Pastores Dabo Vobis**, we can say that formation for priests is a life-long task. These two documents define ongoing formation as the continuing integration of priestly identity and functions of service for the sake of mission and communion with Christ and the Church. In other words, priests are permanently "pupils" until they see God face to face. So formation for them is truly co-extensive with life itself. Of course, human beings never stop growing in knowledge or being transformed. So education is a movement toward a unity of life that draws together and dynamically relates who we are, what we do, and what we are about (our purpose or mission). In this case, priestly identity is something sacramentally given, and can as well be consciously appropriated enabling priests to appreciate who they are.<sup>518</sup> Firstly, priests are human beings whose very humanity ought to be a bridge for communicating Jesus Christ to the world today.<sup>519</sup> Priests are disciples of Jesus Christ who are conformed to Christ through sacramental ordination. According to Saint John Paul II in **Pastores Dabo Vobis**:

"In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the Head and Shepherd, authoritatively proclaiming his Word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation, particularly in Baptism, Penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the Head and Shepherd."<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (2001), The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/national-plan-for-the-ongoing-formation-of-priests.cfm>. Accessed on July 7, 2018.

<sup>519</sup> Saint John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 1992, no. 43. Hereafter as PDV.

<sup>520</sup> PDV, no. 15.

The parish priest conformed to Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, has an obligation to care for the flock entrusted to him in various ways. He stands for the parish, and nurtures the bonds that link the parish with the diocese and the universal Church. The priest takes pastoral care of the parish by encouraging and fostering its discernment of God's direction and, at appropriate times, gives directions. Today, the pastoral situation tends to be multicultural and so, its pastoral situation calls for greater spirit of flexibility in the priest.<sup>521</sup> For the priest to be relevant to the changing pastoral situations of our computer age, he has to aspire to grow continuously to Christian maturity into the image and likeness of Christ. He must allow his human personality to be penetrated by the mystery of Christ whom he serves in the people of God. The priest who looks after the pastoral wellbeing of people must first of all overcome the self in order to be absorbed into an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ, his personal Lord and Master, to be rendered ready for the service of humanity. To be conformed to Christ is a lifelong business. It is being born again which is a lifetime process of transformation and change until Christ is fully formed in the priest. The priest has to experience the unconditional love of God for his people before he will be able to share the same love of Christ with the people he serves. The priest leads his parishioners to experience God's unconditional love. He leads his parishioners with the love of Christ. The priest, co-worker with the diocesan Bishop, whose under leadership he works, leads his parishioners for and in agreement with the Bishop. With the spirit of humble service the parish priest should create and nurture a spirit of communion and cooperation amongst existing parish devotional societies and different parish organizations to collaborate as agents of evangelization in the parish family. City parishes are multicultural. One characteristic of Catholic parishes in Nigeria is they comprises a number of praying groups or devotional societies and these religious societies have different charisms, ministries, and apostolate. These parish religious

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<sup>521</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (2001), The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/national-plan-for-the-ongoing-formation-of-priests.cfm>. Accessed on July 7, 2018.

societies are all agents of evangelization within and outside the parish and it is the pastoral duty of the parish to coordinate their religious/pastoral activities as well as their social interactions amongst their members and non-members. Their religious/social activities might arouse tension within or outside their group like the activities of other people who share the general fallen nature of humanity. It is true that any tension in the family of God always leads to positive results for the growth of the Church.

We take the example of the first Christians who lived a dedicated Jewish life, holding all property in common and giving generously to the poor (Acts 4:32 – 35). They also took highly uncommon step of admitting non-Jews into the community of believers. In those days of the first Christian era, some of the prophets had predicted that in the Last Days the pagan nations would share Israel's belief and abandon their idols (Isaiah 2:2 – 3, Zephaniah 3:9). When the Christians discovered that they were attracting gentile converts, many of them already sympathetic to Judaism, this confirmed their belief that the old order was indeed passing away and the Spirit of Christ was moving them (Roman 8:9). So as in those days, when the number of believers was increase, the human element reared its head up; the Greek-speaking Jews complained against the Hebrew-speaking Jews that, that their widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The Twelve called a meeting of the believing community and said, "It is not fitting that we should abandon the word of God to serve tables. They suggested that the community should select seven men full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom from amongst them and put them in charge of the 'liturgy of the stomach.'" But as for us, we will give our undivided attention to prayer and to the service of the word. The believing community saw this suggestion as a good idea and sanctioned it. They selected seven men and presented them to the apostles, who, first prayed over them, and then, laid hands upon them (Acts 6: 1 – 7). Today this is how we have the order of deacons in the

Catholic Church. This positive development was a consequence of a bad feeling in the community of believers which could at first appear as odious in the eyes of the world. It is only God who can do the impossible. Does the Scripture not say that where sin increases, grace abounds all the more (Romans 5:20). I remember during our Spiritual Year in Iperu-Remo, our beloved Fr. Michael Golden, of blessed memory, said to us that as followers of Christ, 'In whatever situation we find ourselves, whether good or bad, should always serve for our spiritual growth.' That is why St Paul encouraged Christians of Thessalonica to give thanks to God at every moment as the will of God in accordance with their vocation as Christians (1 Thessalonians 5:18). In the same vein, Pope St. John Paul II on one occasion said to us, 'Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter People and hallelujah is our song.'

It is interesting to note that Jesus, whom Catholics believe as the Founder of the Catholic Church, didn't seem to spell out for his apostles how exactly they were supposed to organize the Church. However, the apostles and the contemporary Catholic Church have abundant scriptural sources to be the living Church we have today. The Catholic Church cherishes this Scriptural Text from the Gospel of Matthew (16:18) where Jesus says, "You are Peter; and on this Rock I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it." With this text in question, can Catholics not claim that Jesus directly founded the institution, the offices, and procedures within the Church? Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, and the Christian community called the Church was born (Acts 2). The consolation is that Jesus promised to remain with his Church until the end of time (Matthew 28:20). So the Spirit remains the glue between Jesus and his Church. Jesus did indeed found the Church on the Rock of Peter, but Peter and the Apostles are always guided by, strengthened by, and accountable to the Holy Spirit of Jesus the Christ. It is true that because the Apostles and the Disciples were open to

the promptings of the Holy Spirit that we have the Church today as witness to the living Christ. It is necessary to note that the Church is entrusted with both the spiritual and material wellbeing of man and woman. The bread/food shared with the Spirit of God nourishes both physically and spiritually. So in the assembly of the children of God bread/food is very important. Did Jesus not pray over the five loaves and two fish from which five thousands men (women not counted) were fed to their satisfaction; and yet, twelve baskets full of food were gathered (Luke 9:15 – 1)? The importance of bread as food that nourishes body and soul cannot be overemphasized when during Mass after the Prayer of Consecration by the Catholic priest, through the power of the Holy Spirit; Christ becomes present under the form of bread and wine. We can even listen to the voice of one the saints of the earliest Church, St Cyril of Jerusalem (315-87) who says: What seems bread is not bread, even if it seems such to the taste, but the Body of Christ, and what seems wine is not wine, even though it has its taste, but the Blood of Christ (Catecheses 4, 9). The bread is no more bread after the words of the sacrament but the flesh of Christ. There will be feasting and rejoicing in the Kingdom of God. On this mountain Yahweh Sabaoth will prepare for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, meat full of marrow, fine wine strained (Isaiah 25:6). Matthew 8:11 discusses that many will come to eat at the future feast with the Lord: “I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of heaven...” (Matthew 8:11). Revelation 19:9 “Happy are those invited to the wedding of the Lamb.” Even in our own Nigerian context, there is a lot eating and drinking at a marriage feast; so it would be reasonable to expect a celebration involving food with the Lord in his Kingdom in heaven.

It is worth noting that one of the most vivid parables Jesus ever spoke, and the lesson is as clear as the summer day is that God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to human

need. God is not interested in the amount of knowledge we have or in our fame or popularity or the amount of wealth we have acquired, but in the help we have given those in need of it. He will open his Kingdom to the generous. “For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty you and gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me into your home. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to see me” (Matthew 25:35 – 36). Whatever you do to the least of my brothers or sisters, you do to me (Matthew 25:40). On the judgement day, we may be amazed at the God whom we have loved or despised in the person of our neighbour. It is true that majority of the people do not in normal circumstances think about the afterlife. There may not be a neutral ground because the law of the Kingdom of God, which is the law of **LOVE** is written in the heart of every human being. The person who lives and loves is the person who exists and lives for God not the person who quotes the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The person who loves does the will of God and knows God and lives in God and God lives in him. Jesus is an example who does not send the tired and hungry people away but feeds them with the word of God and with the food that they need. As Christians, called and commissioned for the work of the New Evangelization, this sets us a good example as we seek to proclaim the Good News by feeding the hungry and proclaiming the message of salvation through the teaching of the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that it is our Christian duty to feed the poor as Christ identifies with them. The option for the poor in fellowship with Jesus comprises of giving simple help to the people we meet every day. This is a parable which opens the glory of God to every human being. If you have nothing to give, you can give a friendly good human relationship, the gentleness and humility that breed peace and harmony. It does not cost money to cultivate and give peace and friendliness which nurtures the joy of humanity. The loving heart instinctively and naturally gives help because it flows from within. God blesses the help that flows from the heart for the sake of helping.

That is the type of help that Jesus surprisingly claims that it is given to him. Jesus relates to us along human logic for us to understand easily. If we truly wish to make a mother/father happy, and move her/him to gratitude, the best way to do it is to help her/his child. God is the Father of all; and the best way to make him happy is to help his children, our fellow men and women, who are in need of help.

If you know the life history of Saint Francis of Assisi you will understand how he appreciated this parable. Francis was from a wealthy family who had all he needed but yet, he was not happy. He felt that something was missing in his life. It happened that one day Francis was riding on a horse and met a leper, loathsome and repulsive as a result of this ugly, destructive and debilitating disease. Francis was deeply moved to dismount and fling his arms around this disgusting sufferer; and in his arms the face of the leper changed to the face of Christ.

Another example is St. Martin of Tours, who was a Roman soldier and a Christian. One cold winter day, as he was entering the city, a beggar approached him for help. But Martin had no money on him; but the beggar was completely helpless and shivering with cold. But as Martin had no money to give him, he took off his military coat and cut it into two and gave half of it to the beggar. That night he had a dream in which he saw the heavenly places and all the angels and Jesus in the midst of them; and Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. One of the angels said to him, "Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak? Who gave you such a wretched rag? And Jesus answered boldly, "My servant Martin gave it to me." When we learn the generosity which without much calculation helps men in the simplest things, we too will know the joy of the children of God and the joy of helping Jesus Christ himself in our brothers and sisters. The lesson of the statement of Jesus, "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me" comes easy to us to understand.

There is no doubt that Francis and Martin were possessed by the Spirit of Christ. Their actions were acts of eternal value, and anything of eternal value in this life comes through the work of the Holy Spirit. There is no way a man without the power of the Holy Spirit would forget himself, his life and his dignity to embrace a leper with such contagious deadly disease or cut into two his military uniform to clothe a wretched man in a biting cold condition. The truth is that if we develop such burning desire to be a follower of Jesus, God gives us his Holy Spirit guide and lead us. The burning interior desire for Jesus is a prayerful thirst for God and God gives his Spirit to those who seek him with all their will, mind, heart and strength. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you (Galatians 4:8). To seek the Lord with all your will, mind, heart and strength is an act of love of God who loves us first by giving us the gift of his Son Jesus who gave up his life on the cross for the salvation of mankind. The Holy Spirit works in us and transforms us into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Francis and Martin simply set their minds on the things of the Spirit who empowered them to act Christ-like ways contrary to the mind of the world. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to do things that contradict the ways of the world. "But you shall receive power when the Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witness to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is in the Spirit that the believer in Christ will find the strength to be witnesses of the Risen Lord in the midst of the world in their contradictions of life. The Holy Spirit gives believers the power to serve God in the work he intends for them. God is glorified when Christians bear fruit. It is true that Christian life is a chain of miracles. God continuously draws us to himself despite our sinfulness and rebellion against him is a great miracle. When we come to trust Christ as Saviour and Lord, he regenerates us by his Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us spiritual gifts that enable us to minister and help others especially when we yield and surrender ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit.



The Church continues the mission of Jesus Christ in the world, and does so as mystery, communion and mission. The Church remains a great sacrament of God's design for humanity, for ultimate unity in God. As communion, the Church is a sign of peace and an instrument of reconciliation in the world. As Church documents abundantly indicate, the purpose of priestly ministry is to serve the Church.<sup>522</sup> There is a prayer by St. Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, a line in this prayer says, 'The Lord has called me to this place to thank him.' Firstly, the priest must be ready to share with the people of the love of Christ which is the central element Christian belief and theology – referring to the love of Jesus Christ for humanity, the love of Christians for Christ, and the love of Christians for others (John 15:9 – 17). For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Think of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross based on his love for humanity which is symbolized by the Good Shepherd (John 10:1 – 21). And the only way Christians can respond to this love and attract God's love is to obey his commandments (John 14: 23). Christians are able to love because Christ loved them first, their love can only mirror Christ's love. The Church through the priest helps Christians to be conscious of their capacity to love. Love is the new commandment Christ gives to his followers when he says, 'Love one another as I have loved you ... By this shall all men know that you are my disciples' (John 13: 35). Christ so loved the Church that he gave himself up for it (Ephesians 5: 25). How much do Christians understand the enormity of this love of the Lord? Ephesians 3:17 – 19, relates the love of Christ to the knowledge of Christ and considers loving Christ to be a necessity for knowing him. But, it is logical that if one loves another, one will do everything to know and interact with the beloved. And that knowledge of the beloved and the desire to always be and interact

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<sup>522</sup> GS 24.

with the beloved is a demonstration of that love. And further expounding on the love of Christ, St. Augustine wrote that, “The common love of truth unites people, the common love of Christ unites all Christians.” St Benedict instructed his monks to “prefer nothing to the love of Christ.”

The Church as mission is an evangelized and evangelizing community that seeks to extend the mission, message, and person of Jesus Christ to the world. The priest serves the mission of the Church as much as he sustains and encourages the Church to stay on course in its mission and on its journey as the pilgrim people of God until they share fully in the mystery of God when the mission is fully completed and the earthly Church is fully transformed into the heavenly Church.<sup>523</sup> The priest supplies the sacramental presence of Christ in the parish family. It is his duty to preach the true faith to counteract all heretical ideas about God and religion flying around his parish and in the community where parishioners live so that no one lays alternative foundation other than that which is already laid: Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:11; see also Mk. 12:10; Acts 4:10, 12). The true faith has its beauty which attracts people, and of course, people are instinctively attached to something beautiful which is the desire of the heart. The priest who is able to bring people to true faith can only achieve through constant prayer and study. The truth of faith the priest preaches could help parishioners to receive the grace of the sacraments by inciting them to conversion and have them come to confession or teach someone about the reality of the Holy Eucharist and receives it with more understanding and earnestness. Yes the Catholic faith should be preached in all its fullness, both the beauty and the burden. The preaching of the priest should be catechetical in orientation in the bid to educate his congregation. His preaching should more or less what can

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<sup>523</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (2001), The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/national-plan-for-the-ongoing-formation-of-priests.cfm>. Accessed on July 7, 2018.

be called adult education or faith formation. This is because after reception of the sacraments, Christians remain shallow or “babies” in faith knowledge and practice as European parishes have almost no spiritual nourishment after one hour Sunday Mass each week. As St. Paul says in Romans 10:14, ‘But how can they call upon the name of the Lord without having believed in him? And how can they believe in him, without having first heard about him? And how will they hear about him, if none preaches about him? And how will they preach about him, if no one sends them?’ It is now a mission emergency for the priest to make his parishioners more knowledgeable about their faith. It is simply a pastoral urgency! With this basic knowledge about their faith, they are able to live according to God’s will. We exist to save our soul and help others be saved. The gift of the priesthood is the source of so many of his divine graces to us.

The presbyterium of the archdiocese need urgent education on the teaching of the Church Magisterium in relation to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal so as to ensure presbyteral unity in dealing with the prayer group in question. This requires immediate and significant attention to avoid personal prejudice and ill-feelings on the part of priests toward the prayer group. So, presbyteral unity is indispensable as far as priest-charismatic prayer group relationship is concerned. It will foster presbyteral fraternity and help priests to come to terms with the unifying love of Christ the God Shepherd as the source and goal of their ministry and lives in giving themselves to the community of believers. It might help to restore some trust in the Renewal toward the priest and the Church. The parish family does not belong to the priest or any religious group in the Church but to God. It belongs to the prayer of Jesus that: “They all may be one, as you Father are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17: 21). The priests need the spirit of the mission of

unity in pastoral care of their individual parishes as well as leading their individual parish to be in interaction with the archdiocese and connect them to the universal Church.

The ongoing spiritual formation of priests must include a daily life of prayer that involves contact with the word of God, faithful participation in the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation. Their discipleship will grow if they engage in daily celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, which, as the prayer of the Church, links them with the whole body of Christ in praise, petition and thanksgiving. It is education in discipleship for the priests to live a life of self-denial, self-discipline, and detachment. Again, education in discipleship involves cultivation of a devotional life, which can include, for example, the rosary, the Stations of the Cross, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and keeping in contact with Mary, the Mother of God, and the Saints. It enhances communion, love, and giving life through pastoral charity, the all encompassing love of Christ, the Good Shepherd for his people.<sup>524</sup> These constant spiritual exercises will help them to be aware always that they are called to be servants of Christ and stewards of God (1 Cor. 4:1). Priests are stewards of Christ by preaching the word of God, celebrating the sacraments and being sacramental presence of Christ in the world. Through their prayers and the sacrifice of the Mass, they offer the people and the intractable situations of life to God the loving and merciful Father, knowing that only his Spirit can bring true healing and peace to people in distress. By constantly being stewards for the mysteries of God, they grow in deep relationship with Christ, their shepherd and friend, and so they become more available to him and to his flock. Their relationship with Christ who shares his priesthood with them is inevitable because as St. Paul reminds them, they are very human and can do nothing without his grace, “However, we carry this treasure in vessels of clay, so that this all-surpassing

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

power may not be seen as ours, but God's" (2 Cor. 4:7). Priests in constant prayerful contemplation will learn that their fragility is a reminder that they need to be enfolded by the mercy of God and so become ambassadors of Christ who know their need of God's mercy and so can be merciful stewards of the sacrament of reconciliation to others with whom they are fellow sinners. The priests should always learn from standing in for Christ at the confessional that they are at times more sinners than those who come to them for the sacrament of reconciliation. The confessional is a school of humbling experience for priests who hear people's confession who entrust themselves once again to the mercy of God and set out for conversion and greater love and compassion for others. Another growing process for priests at the confessional is that they learn how to be present to people at different stages in their journey of faith: the failures in their marriages, the loss in their business endeavours, the joy of baptism and marriage celebration, the birthday celebrations, the success in examinations, the sadness of sickness and suffering, the shock of tragedy, the grief of death of the beloved and in the daily routine of everyday life when prayers are led and many pastoral needs are to be completed. As the priest, who is a sinner himself, dispenses God's grace and healing to penitents at the sacrament of Reconciliation, God the merciful Father and the Good Shepherd teaches the priest on how to carry the wounded lamb on his shoulder and to model his life on Christ's own life, especially by carrying the cross. The priest learns that he is a servant to his people in imitation of Christ himself. The Catholic priesthood is a school where the mystery of humanity, the joy and tragedy of life are learned and experienced. The priest is more in a position to help people learn the origin, meaning and destiny of human life and vocation.

It is part of the continual education of the clergy to study and emulate the supreme example of character and exemplary leadership of Jesus whose sheer force of character drew people to

him. Jesus was an exemplary leader who walked his talk. Emmanuel Ngara in his previous publications quoted Milan Machovec who argued that Jesus was a role model who was the very embodiment of the values of the Kingdom of God that he preached.<sup>525</sup> Also, priests should study and imitate the disciples of Jesus who saw in him “what it meant to be not only a preacher but himself the product of his preaching.”<sup>526</sup> It is important for priests to copy Jesus who believed in teaching by example especially when he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13: 5). Priests can only learn and teach more by example in imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd and the best of all teachers. We admire and want what is good and want to be led toward the good, the truth and the beautiful. We want to achieve happiness and fulfilment, and so we follow what and who we think will lead us to that goal. That could be the reason why almost all baby’s medicine is in syrup form coated with honey or sugar otherwise sick children will never get well because ordinarily they will never willingly take medicine that is generally bitter in taste. Sometimes adults start down a path they think will lead them to their desired goal, but are later disappointed by an unexpected turn in the road. Many would-be masters offer only the illusion of happiness, truth of goodness. How can we keep from being deceived and disappointed? We need sincere leaders who have our interest at heart who are selfless like Jesus the Good Shepherd. A priest-leader study and pray to be Christ-like and wins the confidence and trust of his parishioners who believe that they are being led toward the source of all goodness, truth and beauty which is God. The people of God are seeking for healing, for redemption and for truth. They desperately need a good priest-leader who leads them after the heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Prophet Jeremiah condemned the leaders of Israel for failing to be good shepherds of God’s flock. “You have scattered my sheep and driven them away instead of caring for them. Now I will deal with you because of your evil deeds” (Jeremiah 23:2). And this is why Christ the Good Shepherd established the Church

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<sup>525</sup> Ngara, *Christian Leadership*, pp. 56 – 57.

<sup>526</sup> Milan Machovec, *A Marxist Looks at Jesus*, 1977, p. 90.

and the sacrament of Holy Orders; to leave us with good shepherds who could speak with his voice and make his presence known to us. The priest conscientiously in his ministry makes Christ known and present.

Priests are formed in obedience as we have in **Presbyterorum Ordinis**. This priestly obedience is inspired by the spirit of co-operation that is based on the sharing of the Episcopal ministry which is conferred on priests by the sacrament of Orders and canonical mission.<sup>527</sup> Priests have a ‘special obligation to show reverence and obedience to the Supreme Pontiff and to their own Ordinary.’<sup>528</sup> So, for the mission Christ came to inaugurate to continue through his Church, there must be priestly obedience which is Christological in foundation. The Word was made fleshed and lived among us in obedience to the Father’s will (John 1: 14). I have come not do my own will but the will of my Father who sent me (John 6:38). It is in Jesus, the perfect mirror of God, we discover the will of the Father for us. The priests do not only make a promise of obedience at their ordination, they are also invited to grow in obedience, so that the Church’s mission may advance through healthy collaboration and greater fidelity to God’s will and design.<sup>529</sup> It is through experience that the priest learns the meaning of the words of Jesus who says, “My food is to do the will of the One who sent me, and to carry out his work” (John 4:34). For Jesus obedience to the Father becomes his food which satisfies his strongest desire, and quenches all other desires as long as he continues to obey his Father’s will. Jesus was talking, not of his own will, but the Father’s which the sacrificial cry which redeemed the world was. His motive was all the time to do the will of his Father which sustained him, and the prayer he put upon the lips of mankind was

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<sup>527</sup> Presbyterorum Ordinis, no. 7.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid, no. 62.

<sup>529</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (2001), The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/national-plan-for-the-ongoing-formation-of-priests.cfm>. Accessed on July 7, 2018.

“Thy will be done.” The priest must then learn to forgo his personal will, desire and interest for the commands of the Lord, and his bishop and superiors, so as to be able to teach by example by leading his congregation to finding fulfilment and satisfaction in obeying the commandments of God. Do we not reflect, pray and learn why the psalmist says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye” (Psalm 19:8 – 9). If Christ can claim that his food is to obey the will of God his Father then, the best way to respond to his love for us on the cross is to obey the commands of God the Father who sent him to die for us on the cross. The Lord says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The priest needs to appreciate the “joy” which the psalmist in Psalm 19, claims that the law of the Lord gives to his soul; the same “joy” Pope Francis continues to hammer on in his sermons, as the hallmark of the Catholic priesthood. Pope Francis says that at priestly ordination, “The Lord anoints the priest with the oil of gladness” and exhorts priests to accept and appreciate this great gift: “the gladness, the joy of being a priest.” When the priest interiorizes this “joy” that comes from the anointing of Christ, he will be able to lead and teach his parishioners to obey the commandments of the Lord which bring wisdom, refreshment, healing, peace and joy to their mind and body.

Priests learn the virtues of gratitude, simplicity and generosity in their relationship to the world and material things after the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself completely to the Father on the cross for our sake. This is how priests grow in the right use of material goods on the principles of Catholic stewardship. This is a food for thought for most of the Nigerian Catholic priests who are furnished with material goods and wealth by parishioners and friends. It is become a general trend for most of them to take over the



physical needs of their family members, relations and friends. This is a sure way of losing sight of the mark and beginning to sing outside the “sanctuary choir.” There could be a psychological hock on the “things that belong to Caesar” that take away the mind from the spiritual to the flesh. When you are hocked to the flesh, you feel compelled to compete with the JONES to build mansions where your body will not even be buried, where you have no posterity. “We” are still entangled with the extended family mentality where the siblings grab us on the cassock or be blackmailed until you solve every financial problem that crops up in the family. Hence, abundant accusations of “interference” on parish purse ... Rumours go on ... Suspicions ... are rife! The man of God could be hocked to the things of the flesh! Wrong impressions are definitely being sent out there. It is very true that the Nigerian Catholic communities are becoming “business centers.” “Their books and spiritual songs,” and a wild sense of thanksgivings/second collections that never end that definitely take away “values” of the Mass are all new spiritualities which obviously annoy many brethren. If these “business” that are becoming part of our modern Nigerian Catholic worship are properly controlled; we could be waiting for endless time for Jesus’ second coming to use his whip to cleanse the “sanctuary” and the main “church” building. But if the church authorities insist on waiting for Jesus to return before proper actions are taken, Jesus may not recognize his “Church” on his second arrival. May we not squander this second chance to put things in order!

The priests have to go back to their original dream. Like the apostles, they must return to Galilee when the dream was born. Along the way they lost their orientation and perspective. If the focus is lost, disillusionment sets in. They begin to pursue goals that contrary to their proper identity. Like all those who live in the world, they become secularized by the world. Their dream and goals are forgotten. They lose their vision and the original reason for their vocation to the priesthood. With God, there is always a second chance. The grace of God

abounds for priests to recover their lost vision of wanting to bring peace, love, reconciliation, friendship and forgiveness of Christ to a suffering and helpless humanity. The priests are instruments of God in reconciling humanity and the whole of creation to God. The second coming of Christ anticipates the channelling of the whole of humanity and creation back to God the Creator. As priests recover their dreams, they evangelize parishioners to become missionary disciples who likewise make for Jesus who commandment us before he ascended into heaven saying: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ...” (Matthew 28:19). The mission of the church is not for priests alone but they are to work in union with the laity in communion. The mandate the Lord has given to priests and all the baptized Christians is to bring all men and women to the Lord God, who is the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1:8). So all of us, by the virtue of our baptism, are to do what Jesus did. This vocation of us is reiterated by the Book of Revelations when St. John wrote, “He loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood, and made us a line of kings, priests to serve his God and Father; to him then, be glory and power forever and ever” (Rev. 1:6). So, as members of the royal priesthood, all of us are called to serve God and glorify him in our lives of service and love for the brothers and sisters. It is in God’s loving plans to give to the Church the gift of the ministerial priesthood in order to form and nourish adequately the royal priesthood so that all members of God’s family may become zealous and committed missionary disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Ordained Ministry as a precious gift to the Church perpetuates the presence of Christ the Lord in the world through the greatest gift of the Holy Eucharist. In the Holy Eucharist, the Church celebrates the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, simplicity of lifestyle and a spirit of poverty are always linked in the Gospels with generosity. Priests should learn to grow in spirituality by walking in the footsteps of the Saints like, Teresa of the Child Jesus, Therese of Lisieux, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of

Calcutta, Teresa of Avila, Pope St. John Paul II and Ignatius Loyola and a host of others. Following the footsteps of Saints is something lived out as well as something studied. Through this way, priests learn about spirituality from various traditions. They will appreciate more the meaning of ongoing conversion of life. They will grow more in the spirituality of celibate life.<sup>530</sup> 'I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). This spiritual attitude should be adopted by priests who are prepared to follow Christ who is the way, the truth and the life they have committed their life to live. The priests should always contemplate the face of the crucified Lord as he hangs on the cross of pain. In his agony on the cross, Jesus identified with the hungry, the thirsty, the poor, the sick, the prisoner and the stranger (Matthew 25:35 – 36). Do we not see the face of the crucified Lord in our world today on the war-torn faces of the people of Syria and Yemen; in the cry of the victims of child abuse everywhere and their cry for justice; in the weary and exhausted bodies of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers; the victims of modern slavery; and in those caught up in the ravages and devastations of natural and manmade disasters? We need to remember that contemplation of the face of Jesus, died and raised, restores our humanity even when it has been broken by the troubles of this life or marred by sin (Gaudete et exsultate 151). If you are tempted to doubt God's love, look at Christ crucified. Here the mystery of God's love is revealed. St. Augustine said, 'God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.' I have experienced some Christians who said things against God which are simply unprintable because, for example, the beloved suddenly died or maimed permanently through accident. I have also seen when some believers were so uncontrollably annoyed with God that they turned their back on God, and even denied his existence. Some vowed that if God ever existed, they hated him. Will they

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<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

eventually come back to serve and worship the Lord of life; I pray and hope they do. The Nigerian Ibos have a saying that, ‘The little bird called “nza” had a sumptuous meal and challenged its Creator God to out and wrestle with it;’ and let the whole watch and judge who would win. When the death that will kill the royal dog knocks on the door, the dog will not perceive the delicious smell of its food. In actual fact, some people who feel too powerful and well-accomplished in every aspect of life act consciously or unconsciously, as if they are stronger than death, and even appear as if they cannot die at all; as if death itself fears them. It is obvious that some people appear to be so full of themselves that they can even face God in a confrontational challenge. Physical death is a common equalizer but it is clear that some people prefer to disagree until it comes to them. But for the Christians, ‘He was destroyed because of our sins, crushed for our wickedness. Through his punishment we are made whole; by his wounds we are healed’ (Isaiah 53:5). What is it that can separate us from God’s love? Could death, angels, spiritual powers, present or future cosmic powers from heaven or from the deep world below or from any creature whatsoever? (Romans 8:38 – 39). If we make out time to read the whole Prophet Isaiah 53, the Word of God living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, has the power to speak to our heart in a deeply and intimate way than our personal importance and egoism. Pride of life can only hurt man and woman. But the best sacrifice we can render to God is ‘a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, God does not despise’ (Psalm 51:19).

Part of education of priests is to walk in the footsteps of the Saints. For God has chosen each one of us to be holy and blameless before him in love (Ephesians 1:4). The Gospels voluminously say that Jesus calls all of us to seriously pursue our own sanctification, as well as the sanctification of the whole world. His words are clear and to the point: “Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy” (Matthew 5:48). For priests to begin to understand the

importance of the lives of the Saints for their spiritual growth, I recommend they turn to the introduction of St. Justin Popovich's compilation of the lives of the Saints. St. Justin saw no dichotomy between the lives of the Saints and the theological writings of the Church. For him, as for the Church, theology and the lives of the Saints form one whole. He called the lives of the Saints "experiential theology" or "applied dogmatic theology," and viewed them and wrote about them in theological manner. According to St. Justin Popovich, the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ, uniting human nature to Divine Nature, forms the reality to which everything else must be viewed, whether it be the nature of the Church or the problems and issues of everyday life. So for St Justin, the lives of the Saints should be viewed in the light of the God-man. Real and true life – eternal life in God – became possible only with the Incarnation, death and Resurrection of Christ the Saviour, and this life is the life of the Saints. The lives of the Saints bear witness to the life of Christ. St Justin Popovich wrote:

"What are Christians? Christians are Christ-bearers, and, by virtue of this, they are bearers and possessors of eternal life ... The Saints are the most perfect Christians, for they have been sanctified to the highest degree with the podvigs of holy faith in the risen and eternally living Christ, and no death has power over them. Their life is entirely Christ's life; and their thought is entirely Christ's thought; and their perception is Chris's perception. All that they have is first Christ's and then theirs ... In them is nothing of themselves but rather wholly and everything the Lord Christ."<sup>531</sup>

St Justin suggests that lives of Saints may be said to be the continuation of the life of Christ on earth. The life of the Lord, the God-man Jesus, is continued in the Saints. Justin says that when we read the lives of the Saints, we read the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. So the importance of filling our souls with the lives of the Saints cannot be overemphasized. St Justin also says that the lives of the Saints are a continuation of the Acts of the Apostles. It cannot be otherwise because Acts of the Apostles are acts of Christ which the Apostles did by the power of Christ who lived in them and acted through them. The summary of what St Justin Popovich has been saying is that true spiritual begins when we live in Christ and Christ

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<sup>531</sup> St. Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ* (Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1994, pp. 35-36.

lives in us, right here on earth not when we die and become Saints in heaven. This is true because the lives of the Saints bear witness to us that the life of Christ on earth did not end with his Ascension into Heaven, or with the martyrdom of his Apostles. The life of Christ continues to this day in his Church, and is seen most brilliantly in his Saints who always intercede for us as well as bringing our spiritual sacrifices, exercises and prayers and works of charity and penance to the Throne of Grace in Heaven. ?????

Again, St Justin claims that the most pious and those who make the most progress in the church are those who read lives of the Saints. The Saints remain the proofs and illustrations of the reality of Christ and of his saving work of redemption. ???????

It is important to note that priests are responsible for their ongoing formation based on their commitment at their ordination to serve sincerely the people of God through their ministry and their own personal faith commitment. It is their responsibility to map out their plan of ongoing formation.<sup>532</sup> Each diocese or religious community provides ample opportunities priests can access to grow in their formation in spiritual life. A priest of God must be roundly formed in the spiritual life just like a soldier must be well-trained, well-armed and equipped to be able to defend his country. In the same way, an athlete must be well-trained, fit, trimmed and prepared to be able to compete to win trophies for himself and his nation. Priests as those who act in the place of Christ, they must make use of the tools and arms at their disposal and use them to be victorious in attaining the salvation of their souls and that of the flock under their spiritual care. One of the tools apart from constant spiritual reading is spiritual direction which helps the priest to grow in his prayer life and in his relationship with God. Spiritual reading is spiritual feeding which leads to the conversion of the soul to God.

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<sup>532</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (2001), The Basic Plan for the Formation of Priests. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/national-plan-for-the-ongoing-formationofpriests.cfm>. Accessed July 7, 2018.

One of the most well-known examples of someone who was converted by solid and substantial Spiritual Reading is the conversion of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who co-founded the religious order called the Society of Jesus known as the Jesuits, the order to which Pope Francis belongs. We are all a work in progress. Are we not? The priest who engages in constant spiritual reading will sooner or later encounter the Truth. And Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life ... and the Truth shall set him free to be able to surrender his mind, his will and heart entirely to God. Spiritual reading is inevitable for the transformation of minds and hearts that are tormented by worldly values. Some priests have testified that whenever they are engaged and absorbed in captivating spiritual reading, they pray better because, spiritual reading lifts our mind to the higher realms of heaven and heightens our desire to reach our heavenly home. How can a priest whose head and heart are spiritually empty edify and sanctify others? St Thomas Aquinas says that, 'Charity is willing the good of the other.' But no one gives what he doesn't have. Your conversations formed by good spiritual reading can only give out the treasures of the Truth, the treasures of the Word of God. A priest retreat preacher once said that after good Spiritual Reading, 'the heart experiences greater peace and joy which overflows into the priest's life and dealings with others. St Paul must have experienced such inner joy hence he encouraged Philippians by saying: "Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). Priests should know and lead others to learn that mental laziness can easily lead to sin and vice. On the contrary, solid Spiritual Reading can lead to life of holiness and virtue. Another benefit from solid Spiritual Reading for priests is that through that way, they can be profoundly schooled to act as brass wall to defend the most noble principles and teachings of Truth in the Catholic faith. The Catholic Church at present more than any other time needs such erudite apologists as the Church is being ruthlessly attacked on a constant and relentless basis. Venerable Servant of God, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen once asserted: "Very few leave the Catholic Faith for what the Church teaches, but for

what they think the Church teaches.” In other words, what most people believe about the Catholic Faith is erroneous, falsified and perverted. Do we not admire Patrick Madrid, Tim Staples, Scott Hahn, and many other lay men and women who truly know the Faith, study the Faith, and proudly and boldly teach and preach the Faith? If you read the history of the journey of faith of these three men of God, you will realize that they spend long hours in the practice of Spiritual Reading and study so as to be a shining light for countless souls and their eternal salvation, all for the glory of God. Today more than any other period in our generation, we need urgently men and women who are courageous enough to bear witness to Christ in public.

It is equally important that priests should learn what some Saints say about Spiritual Reading. St. Bernard says that spiritual reading and prayer are the arms by which hell is conquered and paradise is won. It gives us lights and directions to escape the illusions of the devil and our own self-love, and at the same time to submit our will to the divine will. Hence St.

Athanasius used to that we find no one devoted to the service of the Lord that did not practice spiritual reading. That is why most founders of religious Orders have strongly recommended this holy exercise to their religious members and communities. St. Benedict, among the rest, commanded that each monk should make a spiritual reading on a daily basis. Many testimonies have been given by Christians those souls that are imbued with holy thoughts from spiritual reading are more spiritually equipped to fight off internal temptations and evil thoughts. Hence, St. Jerome in his advice to his disciple Salvina said: “Endeavour to have always in your hand a pious book, that with this shield you may defend yourself against bad thoughts.” It is also stressed that spiritual reading serves to help us see the stains that infect the soul and to be able to remove them. The same St. Jerome recommended to Demetriade to avail herself of spiritual reading as a mirror meaning that, as a mirror exhibits the stains of the



countenance, so holy books show us the defects of the soul. St. Gregory, speaking of spiritual reading, says: “There we perceive the losses we have sustained and the advantages we have acquired; there we observe our failings or our progress in the ways of God.”

In reading holy books we receive many lights and divine calls. St. Jerome says that when we pray we speak to God; but when do spiritual reading God speaks to us. St. Ambrose says the same thing: “We address God when we pray; we hear him when we do spiritual reading.” In prayer God hears our petitions, but in spiritual reading we listen to his voice. This is because we may not always have a spiritual father at hand, nor can we always hear the sermons of sacred orators, to direct us on what to do and give us light to walk according to the will of God; but good spiritual books supply for sermons and spiritual guidance. St. Augustine writes that good spiritual books are as it were, so many letters of love the Lord sends to us; in them he warns us of the impending dangers to our soul, teaches us the ways of salvation, animates us to suffer adversity patiently, enlightens us, and inflames us with his divine love. Whoever then, desires to acquire divine love and be saved, should often read these letters of paradise. We may not be able to recount the countless Saints who, after reading a spiritual book, were induced to forsake the pleasures of the world and to give themselves to God. Many Catholics and non-Catholic Christians and even people of no religious faith know the faith-story of St. Augustine who was miserably chained by his own passions and vices and by reading one of the Epistles of St. Paul was converted to lead a life of holiness. Another beautiful example who was converted to the Lord after reading some lives of the Saints while recovering from his wounds he sustained while fighting as a soldier to defend his country was St. Ignatius of Loyola. St. Colombino was another good example who left the world to serve the Lord after reading a spiritual book. St. Augustine told a story of two courtiers of the Emperor Theodosius who on one occasion entered into a monastery of solitaries, and one of them

picked up a book on the life of St. Anthony which he found in one of the cells. This book about the life of St. Anthony made a gripping impression on him that he resolved to take leave of the world to serve the Lord. He then addressed his companion with so much fervour that both of them remained in the monastery to serve God. The Duchess of Montalto in Sicily also by accident read the works of St Teresa and was deeply touched by them; sought and obtained her husband's consent and became a Discalced Carmelite.

Spiritual books do not only contribute in the conversion of Saints but aid them in their earthly life to persevere and to advance in perfection. St. Dominic used to embrace his spiritual books, and press them to his bosom, saying, "These books give me milk." St Gregory told a story of a beggar called Servolus, who used part of the alms he collected to purchase books of devotion. Even though Servolus was unable to read yet, he engaged some friends who read to him, and through that way acquired great patience and a wonderful knowledge of the things of God. He left the world poor in earthly goods, but rich in virtue and merits. A priest will definitely enhance his knowledge, love and service of God through spiritual reading. Spiritual reading is a school of divinity. St Augustine says: "Nourish your soul with divine lectures." Spiritual reading helps us to advance in divine love. The best way to gain from spiritual reading is to read slowly and with attention, and to ponder on it very well and apply it on oneself. And of course, daily spiritual reading renews our search, commitment and love for God.

### **5.3. Facts priests must know about the Renewal**

The priests of the Archdiocese/Diocese must recognize and accept that the Catholic hierarchy supports the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as ecclesial movement. It is on record that four Popes have acknowledged the movement: Saint Paul VI, Saint John Paul II, Emeritus

Benedict XVI, and the present Pontiff, Francis. Speaking to the International Conference on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal on May 19, 1975, Blessed Pope Paul VI encouraged the attendees in their renewal efforts and especially to remain anchored in the Church.<sup>533</sup> Again, in his address on the occasion of their first International Leaders' Conference, His Holiness Saint Pope Paul VI said:

“We rejoice with you, dear friends, at the renewal of the spiritual life manifested in the Church today, in different forms and various environments. [...] In all that, we can recognize the mysterious and hidden work of the Spirit, who is the soul of the Church.”<sup>534</sup>

Saint John Paul II was explicit as he spoke to a group of International Leaders of the Renewal on December 11, 1979 saying “I am convinced that this movement is a very important component of the entire renewal of the Church.”<sup>535</sup> The Pontiff in his meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities on May 30, 1998 said:

“With the Second Vatican Council, the Comforter recently gave the Church, according to the Fathers the place “where the Spirit flourishes” (CCC 749), a renewed Pentecost, instilling a new and unforeseen dynamism. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Ecumenical Council during which, under the guidance of the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the people, leads them and enriches them with virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills (1 Corinthians 12: 11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank ... He makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church (LG 12).”<sup>536</sup>

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI then, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect for the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, acknowledged the good occurring in the Charismatic Renewal as well as providing some cautions. Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said:

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<sup>533</sup> Colin B. Donovan, Charismatic Renewal – General, (EWTN.com), Ecclesiastical Acknowledgements. [https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/charismatic\\_renewal.htm](https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/charismatic_renewal.htm). Accessed on July 10, 2018.

<sup>534</sup> Blessed Pope Paul VI, Address on the occasion of the first International Leaders' Conference, Grottaferrata, Rome, Italy, 1973. International Catholic Renewal Services, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, What is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? <http://www.iccrs.org/en/the-ccr/>. Accessed on July 16, 2018.

<sup>535</sup> Colin B. Donovan, Charismatic Renewal – General, [EWTN.com], Ecclesiastical Acknowledgements. [https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/charismatic\\_renewal.htm](https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/charismatic_renewal.htm). Accessed on July 10, 2018.

<sup>536</sup> Saint John Paul II, (1998), Speech of the Holy Father, Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities. [w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_1998530\\_riflection.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_1998530_riflection.html). Accessed on July 12, 2018.

“At the heart of a world imbued with a rationalistic scepticism, a new experience of the Holy Spirit suddenly burst forth. And, since then, that experience has assumed a breadth of a worldwide Renewal movement. What the New Testament tells us about the charisms – which are not just ancient history, over and done with, for it is once again becoming extremely topical.”<sup>537</sup>

In his forward to a book titled, ‘Renewal and the Powers of Darkness’ by Leo Cardinal Suenens who at that time was Saint John Paul II’s delegate to the Charismatic Renewal, he pleaded with those who read the book to pay special attention to the author’s double plea,

“... to those responsible for the ecclesiastical ministry – from parish priests to bishops – not to let the Renewal pass them by but to welcome it fully; and on the other hand ... to the members of the Renewal to cherish and maintain their link with the whole Church and with the charisms of their pastors.”<sup>538</sup>

His Holiness Pope Francis demonstrates an enthusiastic support for the Renewal. In his address to the members of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships in Rome in 2014, the Pontiff said:

“The Charismatic Renewal has reminded the Church of the necessity and importance of prayer of praise. When we speak of the prayer of praise in the Church, Charismatics come to mind. When I spoke of the prayer of praise during a homily at Mass in Santa Martha, I said it is not only the prayer of Charismatics but of the entire Church! It is the recognition of the Lordship of God over us and over all creation expressed through dance, music and songs.”<sup>539</sup>

So the clergy must know that the Church accepts that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, and so, all its ministries are inspired and carried out by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the essence of the Renewal is to help others have their Christian lives renewed. It is to help members to foster mature and continuous personal conversion to Jesus Christ, our Saviour. The Renewal is under the pastoral care of the local Bishop. In general, the Church has always encouraged the Charismatic Renewal, as far as it is properly grounded in Church teaching and submissive to Church authority. For example, in 1998, Pope St. John Paul II exhorted members of the Catholic Charismatic Movement “to safeguard their Catholic identity” and maintain the proper relationships with their parish

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<sup>537</sup> Colin B. Donovan, Charismatic Renewal – General [EWTN.com], Ecclesiastical Acknowledgements. [https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/charismatic\\_renewal.htm](https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/charismatic_renewal.htm). Accessed on July 16, 2018.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>539</sup> Pope Francis’ Address to members of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships, Rome, Italy, 2014. International Catholic Renewal Services, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, What is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? <http://www.iccrs.org/en/the-ccr/>. Accessed on July 16, 2018.

priests, diocesan bishops and the Holy See. There would be no problem if the fatherly advice of Pope St. John Paul II was adhered to. At times, even in religious circles the problem of human pride disguises itself in external display of holiness – all in the name of obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit and decorates it with bible quotation, ‘It is better for us to obey God, rather than human authority’ (Acts 5:29). The problem is that, at times, some members of the Renewal fill “saturated” with the Holy Spirit, and so, take their command directly from Spirit and ignore whatever the priest or the Bishop says. As far as they shout their prayers to the heavens and profusely read their bible, they take their instruction and direction only from the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, in few years past, the spiritual enthusiasm associated with the Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group quite often resulted in poorly formed Catholics who left the Church in droves because they perceived their local parishes as “dead,” and worshippers of idols (for example statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and other Saints). This is despite the fact that the Eucharist was being celebrated on daily basis and other life-giving sacraments in those parishes. Do you think that the Charismatic members are now educated enough to know that no amount of ‘shouting prayers to the Holy Spirit and reading of the bible’ will give them eternal life without the sacraments of the Catholic Church to which they claim to belong?

However, priests have to learn and understand that the Charismatic Renewal has both the approval and support of the Church authority. In 1975 Pope Paul VI greeted thousand Catholic Charismatic members from all over the world at the ninth international conference of the renewal, “The Church and the world need more than ever that ‘the miracle of Pentecost should continue in history’ ... How could this ‘spiritual renewal’ not be ‘good fortune’ for the Church and the world?” It was as early as 1969, only two years after the Renewal came in full swing, the United States Bishops investigated the fledgling movement and the Committee on Doctrine wrote that “theologically the movement has legitimate reasons of existence. It has a

strong biblical basis. It would be difficult to inhibit the working of the Spirit which manifested itself so abundantly in the early Church.” It is also on record that subsequent statements of 1975, 1984 and 1997 have all been equally affirming this prayer movement. The 1984 Statement, A Pastoral Statement on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, concluded with these words: We wish those in the charismatic renewal to know that we make our own the view of Yves Congar: “The charismatic renewal is a grace for the Church.” We assure those in the charismatic renewal of the support they enjoy from the Bishops of the United States of America, and we encourage them in their efforts to renew the life of the Church (39). The Statement also says: Echoing the words of Pope Saint John Paul II, we commend the charismatic renewal to the priests of the United States: “The priest, for his part, cannot exercise his service on behalf of the renewal unless and until he adopts a welcoming attitude toward it, based on the desire he shares with every Christian by baptism to grow in the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (May 7, 1981). The priest’s responsibility to give pastoral guidance remains, even though an individual priest may not be a participant in the renewal (37). Again, in 1991 “on the occasion of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal’s thirtieth anniversary” we, the U.S. Bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, want to affirm again all those Catholics involved in this movement of the Holy Spirit in our day. We, likewise, ‘encourage them in their efforts to renew the life of the Church.’” The Statement concludes, “Thus, we can say again, with great thanksgiving and enthusiasm, that in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and in the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit we see God’s outpouring of a new Pentecost.”<sup>540</sup> In the days when the Church was preparing for the New and Third Millennium, Pope John Paul II alluding to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as a gift to the Church, said as early as 1969, we affirmed the good fruits of the Renewal. Our Holy Father and other Bishops’ Conferences have testified to these abundant fruits. In 1984 we wrote:

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<sup>540</sup> <https://www.nsc-chariscenter.org/about-ccr/> Accessed March 16, 2020.

“Insofar as the Renewal makes its own what is central to the enduring reality of the Gospel, it cannot be dismissed as peripheral to the life of the Church ... It witnesses to elements of the Good News which are central, not optional: the covenant love of the Father, the Lordship of Jesus, the power of the Spirit, sacramental and community life, prayer, charisms, and the necessity of evangelization.” Again, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is, as Pope John Paul II said in 1979, “A sign of the Spirit’s action ... (and) a very important component in the total renewal of the Church.”

Some priests who have reservations about the Charismatic Renewal can be rest assured that the Catholic authority has given her support and legitimacy to this new prayer group and continues to support it. I have outlined some evidence of papal support of successive popes to substantiate my point. Even priests who have reservations towards the Renewal may not genuinely withhold their priestly duty of giving the group their fatherly pastoral guidance. The right pastoral approach is not to distance themselves from the group or throw them away from the parish. The parish priest is the spiritual director of the Renewal and the other devotional groups in the parish. He is the pastor or the spiritual leader of the parish family and so he is to account for those under his spiritual leadership. The parish priest despite his reservations, conscious of his pastoral duty to his individual parishioners and parish groups, and the ecclesiastical approval of the Renewal in question, and his vow of obedience to the Bishop with whom he is a co-worker; he is spiritually obliged to study the approval the Church gives to the Renewal and see how he can incorporate the Renewal in the pastoral duty of renewing the faith, evangelising and serving the unity, and building solidarity of friendship in the parish and the church at large. Priests are to set the pattern of the Good Shepherd always before them as pattern of their calling. They are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent. They welcome the members of their flock where

they are and lead them to know and love Jesus and love one another as they should.

Archbishop Donald William Wuerl (2006 – 2018) of Washington DC in a talk on May 31, 2017 said, “According to Pope Francis, the essential features of the priest and of his ministry are derived from the understanding of the Church as the people of God in continuous journey.” One of the major themes of Pope Francis is “on the emphasis of going out to others to accompany them in their life’s journey, and being in close proximity to them.” Pope Francis wants priests to help people know that the doors of the Church and of God’s mercy are always open to them. But more that the Pontiff emphasizes that priests should not wait for people to come to them, but like the shepherd who goes out to the lost sheep, the priests need to be going out to encounter people where they are, in the circumstances of their lives and situations. Archbishop Wuerl said, to understand Pope Francis’s vision, “we and individual priests must view our priestly ministry through the lens of the New Evangelization,” the call to share the Gospel in today’s world.

For priests who have doubts with regard to the Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group, they need to adopt the vision of Pope Francis for priests as missionary disciples. In his first general audience in the Holy Week 2013, the Pontiff said, “Following Jesus means learning to come out of ourselves ... in order to go to meet others, to go towards the outskirts of existence, to be the first to take a step toward our brothers and our sisters, especially those who are the most distant, those who are forgotten, those who are in need of understanding, comfort and help.” For some priests with doubtful feelings, Charismatic Renewal very much falls into this group of Christians who can appear strange and difficult to deal with. Pope Francis encouraged priests to “be shepherds, living with the smell of the sheep ... as shepherds among your flock.” As shepherds, priests are configured to and must remain close to Jesus the Good Shepherd, and must stay close to their flock. “To take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ means



to be out amongst the flock entrusted to you; it means not simply being available in the office or celebrating the sacraments – as central and primary to the priesthood as that is – but being engaged in the lives of parishioners and others in the community.” Pope Francis has underscored how to walk with people or a group of parishioners who may appear to be strange and difficult, and yet, it is the pastoral duty of the priest to guide them on the path to Christ who is the Way the Life and the Truth. The priest cannot shepherd the flock from afar, he must be there with people in their journey. He must walk with them, side-by-side.

#### **5.4. The Challenges of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group**

There is no parish priest in the Catholic Church who is serious with his pastoral work that will not admit that any prayer group is a desirable thing for his parish and for every parish. The obvious reason why parishioners come together as a group to pray is to attract God’s love and mercy on individuals and to secure the spiritual and social support of one another. Christians believe deeply that where two or three of them are gathered together in God’s name that God will definitely be there in their midst (Matthew 18:20). The parish priest wants a praying group in his parish because they are the driving force of the parish family. The prayer group is where the church comes together to find comfort, learn how to be devoted, and seek answers to individual attendees needs, needs of the praying group, needs of the parish family and needs of the country and the world at large. Also the parish priest is happy to have prayer groups because they promote union and brotherly love amongst parishioners. They improve the spirituality of attendees and empower them with the strength of the Holy Spirit. Was it not a prayer meeting that was performed by the disciples in Acts of the Apostles 2, where the

Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles enabling them to speak in foreign languages which were understood by people from those nations? Also, prayer meetings assisted the disciples of Jesus while they suffered persecutions from the enemies of the Gospel. The advantages of parish prayer groups cannot be overemphasized not to deny the challenges they can bring about.

In Nigerian Catholic setting, every parish comprises of many prayer groups, and in honesty, these pious associations are the mainstay, the glory, the spiritual and financial strength and the life of the parish church and the Nigerian Catholic Church at large. It is very important to note that these pious associations are missionary orientated which is a plus to the parish and the Church in general. A parish prayer group demonstrates the nature and dynamics of laity participation in the evangelical and missionary life of the Church. Professor Gabriel Afolabi Ojo says that after the Second Vatican Council, the Church has become preoccupied with the issue of laity participation in the mission of the Church, probably more than with any other issue<sup>541</sup> especially through the promotion of parish prayer associations. It is heartening that the lay faithful are continuously encouraged by apostolic exhortations to keep the work of the new evangelization on track which happily forms the heart of the prayer groups in the parish setting. This constitutes a general re-awakening of the laity throughout the world in the mission of the church which is generally referred to as the new Pentecost of the Church.<sup>542</sup> The Second Vatican Council categorically says that all baptised Christians are called to follow Jesus Christ, by living according to the Gospel and making it known to others (cf *Lumen Gentium* nos. 32-33). This informs why parishioners in Nigeria are encouraged to join lay missionary associations that normally meet on weekly basis for prayers and engage on works of evangelization. That is why we parishioners who are happy and eager to share their

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<sup>541</sup> Ojo G.A; (2004) *Catholic Laity in Nigeria, Yesterday, Today Tomorrow*. Ibadan, Nigeria, p. 75.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid*, p. 86.

faith and experience of God's love and mercy. The Holy Father, Pope St. John Paul II must have stirred up the laity of the world much more than any of his predecessors through numerous and incessant exhortations to them, some of which extracts of his exhortations are contained in *John Paul II speaks to the Laity* (1987, pp. 1 – 108). We can look at this beautiful piece to buttress this point:

The Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* reminds us that 'in order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order – in the sense of serving persons and society – the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in public life, in many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good. Moved by Christian charity and in harmony with the teaching of the church, the lay people must always offer their contribution to Christian renewal of the temporal order, aware that the basis of the moral norms that inspire their conduct should be the recognition of God as the source of life and salvation. In this way, their individual and collective apostolic activity, the fruit of a life of personal faith, will also be a school of perfection and Christian values that will reveal the mystery of God to others and show that love is the only thing that brings salvation (John Paul II, 27 March, 1989, p. 12).

It is not an exaggeration to regard these Apostolic Exhortations as Papal Charter to the Laity.<sup>543</sup> They expose the lay faithful to what the Church expects of them at all levels. They remind the laity of their role and task in the Church, especially with regard to human promotion by being the salt of the earth and leaven of the world which is irreplaceable. The laity are made to understand that they are to appreciate their responsibilities and duties so as to be able to rise to expectation of "the Lord himself who is once more inviting all the laity to unite themselves to him ever more intimately, to consider his interest as their own, and join his mission as Saviour" (Decree on the Apostolate of lay People, n. 33). The different prayer groups in the parish serve as school for lay missionary evangelizers within and outside the parish setting. It is in these prayer groups that lay faithful learn their faith, the teachings of the Church, the doctrines of the church and are schooled to share their faith as missionary evangelizers.

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

So the emergence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, for some, was a great sigh of relief for the Catholic Church has been under siege by violent secularization and consequent eradication of the sense of the supernatural. The nascent Renewal movement came like a ravaging fire that would restore the Reign of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Renewal on board with such sweeping force, held out a hope of genuine spiritual renaissance for the reasons I gave above and many more. The Renewal drew out many souls to the fire of the Holy Spirit that was hovering on “air.” There was a genuine thirst for renewal of mind and spirit; for the renewal of the church – a deep thirst for the Holy Spirit. There was such lukewarmness in the church hence, the huge hunger for revival through the power of the “hidden” God, the Holy Spirit. Many souls were ignited by the fire of the Holy Spirit. However, as with all renewals, the traditional Catholics were watching with their eyes wide open with perceivable fear, suspicion and their breath-held. The rapid growth in number and enthusiasm amongst members could be attributed to heightened spiritual thirst ravaging Christian souls. But this spiritual enthusiasm was spiralled out of control to spiritual “intoxication” which was causing the members of the new movement almost abandon the normal Catholic practices, beliefs, and modes of discourse, and this has been a cause of serious concern for traditional Catholics. The question has been, ‘must Catholic Church be turned into Pentecostal spirituality and practice in order to prove the genuineness of the new power of the Holy Spirit?’ Can we not be Catholic and Charismatic members? Must we change our Catholic faith and practice in order to become ‘Catholic’ Charismatic Renewal members?

What makes the traditional Catholics to raise eyebrows about this new movement of the Holy Spirit is that their central teaching is centered on the “baptism of the Holy Spirit; the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy.” For traditional Catholics this is a ‘new teaching, a new

doctrine' with a 'new language' and a 'new mode of practice.' This proves too much to take. This is simply a new spiritual revolution sweeping across the Catholic world and actually wiping away the Catholic teaching, doctrine, faith and practice and replacing it with "neo-Pentecostalism" of new found Pentecostal churches deriving from the Methodist Revival Movement which was dubbed the "Holiness" Movement which was actually an effort to revive the Wesleyan doctrine of "entire sanctification." The Wesleyan doctrine taught "second blessing" which was a gift of total interior conversion enabling the recipient to lead a life of genuine moral perfection. And this is manifested itself at revivals as an intensely emotional experience of a purely subjective nature. For the sake of Catholics, a distinction should be made to show that charisms did not accompany the "Holiness" experience of the Methodist Revival Movement of the nineteenth century.<sup>544</sup> It is very true that members may not even know the history of the movement. It is inevitable that the question of where does it come from will be asked. It is obviously causing a lot of confusion, controversy and challenges to the Catholic Church. It raises a lot of spiritual questions begging for answers.

The unorthodox attitude, teaching and practice of the members of this new movement prompt many Catholics to reject it and see it as a danger to Catholic faith and practice. Firstly, the scripture says that a rotten tree cannot produce a good fruit (Matthew 7:17 – 18). For the enemies of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the fact that its root is traced to Pentecostalism casts a dark shadow to it. It is already a biblical bad tree that can never produce edible healthy fruit. For them, the movement is rotten from the roots. This conclusion is drawn from the confusion, controversy and anxiety the Renewal is generating the Catholic world. The birth of Pentecostalism is attributable to Charles F. Parham, a former "Holiness" preacher, master and founder of the Bethel Bible School, Topeka, Kansas, who used the Bible as sole textbook to

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<sup>544</sup> Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal*, Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1982, pp. 50-52.

answer any question raised through study and researches with his students. As fate would have it, Parham posed the question: “What is the scriptural sign of true baptism in the Holy Ghost?” After ransacking the Acts of the Apostles, they came up with the answer as: ‘speaking in tongues.’ They went into prayer for several days and nights in preparation for the coming of the Holy Ghost. On January 1, 1901, Agnes Oznam, a Bethel student, requested that Parham laid hands on her head, while the group of students fervently prayed. Agnes is said, as a result of this, to have spoken Bohemian as well as several other languages. The result of all this is that within few days, this phenomenon had been experienced by all the students and the movement was born.<sup>545</sup> From this point on, most Pentecostals would subscribe to the notion that speaking in tongues must accompany the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” in order to authenticate the genuine bestowal of power for effective witnessing to Christ.<sup>546</sup> It may not be necessary to recount here the number of various Pentecostal denominations which arose from Parham’s modest experiment. It is necessary to note that the “neo-Pentecostal” outbreak of the last few decades was a direct cause of the parallel phenomenon which attained to such gigantic strides within the Catholic Church that “Bishop Mckinney (U.S.) expressed in the early days of the Renewal, to attend at least half a dozen prayer meetings before making a decision either to reject it or participate in it.”<sup>547</sup> Bishop Mckinney’s statement was pregnant with different interpretations. In other words, what looks like a “pet” may actually be a dangerous “snake.” It is not about casting aspersion. The entire tree is examined branch by branch and all of its bitter fruit is thrown out and edible ones are retained. The Bishop wants us to “test all things; and hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

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<sup>545</sup> Edward Dearn, *Christ and Charism*, Sydney, Australia: Renda Publications, 1982, pp. 112-113.

<sup>546</sup> Sullivan, pp. 52-53.

<sup>547</sup> Dearn, p. 4.

## 5.5. Some Doctrinal/Theological Difficulties of the Renewal

The inception and the practice of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have been suspicious, to put it mildly. The Charismatic Renewal roots in the Pentecostal tradition and practice easily put the moderate Catholics on edge. The traditional and moderate Catholics are both disturbed in relation to the idea of “baptism in the Spirit” which is as central to the entire Pentecostal churches and Catholic Charismatic Renewal members as experiences of the divine. The Catholic catechesis for the sacraments of initiation is so solid if we can say the least. This solid catechesis is at the fingertips of even nominal Catholics and not far away from the lapsed Catholics. Even those of them from my town Utuh in Nnewi South of Anambra State that have abandoned the Catholic faith to belong to the ‘new churches’ as born-again Christians, still remember the solid foundational catechesis of Catholic Christianity of Late Emmanuel ‘Onyenkuzi’ Obi and Late Teacher Francis of Akwuata of Utuh and Late Catechist Peter Okafor of Nkete village in Utuh. With such profound catechesis on Catholic sacraments of Initiation, how can you explain to a Catholic who has received the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Baptism, and further, received another indelible character upon his/her soul, as a Christian soldier, as well as the “sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit”<sup>548</sup> by which is imparted “full growth and perfect spiritual strength”<sup>549</sup>, that the new “baptism of the Holy Spirit” of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement subverts the Sacraments of Initiation? Is subversion too harsh to be used here? I am pretty sure that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal members do not mean to subvert the Sacraments of Initiation. However, the simple truth is that this new teaching of this new religious movement (the Renewal) should be thoroughly explained to clear the air that is full of misconceptions, fears and doubts in relation to the Renewal. It is quite evident that the intention of the original Holiness and Pentecostal evangelists as to “create” a spiritual experience which would beg

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<sup>548</sup> Catechism of the Council of Trent, Hawthorn, CA: Christian Book Club, 1975, p. 194.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

God to provide these very gifts as a manifestation of his presence and power (you may recall Wesley's "second blessing"). Should Catholic Charismatic Renewal members absorb this Methodist Revival Movement to revive the Wesleyan doctrine of interior conversion hook, line and sinker? This Wesleyan doctrine emphasizes "second blessing" which is absurdity to the Catholic teaching. To do otherwise would be to call into question the validity of the Sacrament of Confirmation and implicitly the teaching authority of the Church. Secondly, the Pentecostal implication that it is necessary that some visible sign such as was manifest in the diversity of tongues at Pentecost is clearly refuted by of the One, Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It is curious that speaking of tongues being manifested by these Pentecostal churches bear no resemblance to the specific form of tongue speaking manifest through the Apostles at the event of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. How then can the Catholic Charismatic Renewal inherit this classical Pentecostalism of "baptism in the Spirit" and justify it as authentic Catholicism? As we all know, "baptism in the Holy Spirit" has become a primary component of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. It is rather unfortunate that this total embrace by Catholic Renewal members of the Pentecostal church's idea of "baptism in the Spirit" teaches Catholic members false ideas about grace, spiritual experience and the mutual relationship held by its adherents. Hence, Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. and Simon Tugwell, O.P. agree that the term "baptism in the Spirit," from a Catholic viewpoint, is "exegetically unsound, theologically confusing and risky pastorally."<sup>550</sup> Fr. Sullivan, S.J. finds evidence that there was the expectation on the part of the Christians in the early Church to receive a "second blessing" by which they would receive the fullness of Spirit, in the Wesleyan sense.<sup>551</sup> This is simply a clear refutation of Pentecostal theology of "second blessing."

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<sup>550</sup> Dearn, pp. 41-42.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.



The “baptism in the Spirit” experience that Catholic Charismatic members pursue so vigorously is what they have already along with other Catholic members who have received the Sacraments of Initiation. It is the experience of every Catholic Christian. “ ... Through it, everyone – clergy and laity, men and women, young and old, black and white, rich and poor – everyone has the opportunity to say a clear and definitive “yes” to God. But there is more than that. As well as making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, we are saying “yes” to the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit and to his gifts – the charisms. Many of us failed to do this when we went through the process of Christian initiation. We can do it now by allowing the Holy Spirit to change us at the very heart of our being and equip us for service in the Church and in the world.”<sup>552</sup> Even Catholics in remote undeveloped African villages know this much because they are very conversant with their catechism. They know quite well that Charles Whitehead is referring to the Sacrament of Confirmation in which the Holy Spirit is confirmed on us in a special way making us true Christians and perfect soldiers of Christ.

I cannot imagine that the Catholic Renewal members are positing an “eight sacrament” needed to complete the other seven by overemphasizing the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” when they have all received the Christian Initiation. On the contrary, Charismatic members deny any clear connection between “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” and the Catholic Sacraments since “sacramental rite and religious experience are complementary parts of the basic Christian initiation.”<sup>553</sup> But if we have received the sacraments, why do we still expect conscious manifestations of invisible graces through a type of charismatic “baptism in the Spirit?” The Catholic Renewal members are consciously or unconsciously desperately looking for consolations in their spiritual exercises in the form of extraordinary

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<sup>552</sup> Charles Whitehead, *Charismatic Renewal – A Challenge*, (1993).

<sup>553</sup> Rev. Fr. Vincent M. Walsh, *A Key to the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church*, St. Meinrad: Abbey Press, 1974, p. 46.

manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The Sacrament of Confirmation does not make us to remain infant-Christians who are still being fed with spiritual 'milk' but adults in the faith who do not keep shouting and gazing into the empty sky waiting for the manna of spiritual consolations to continue to fall from heaven, even when we have left the desert and are now in the Promised Land.

The root for expecting extraordinary manifestations of the Holy Spirit is the false assumption that emotional experience always accompanies the conferral of grace. It is those who are still spiritual infants seek for spiritual manifestations. How can adults in Christian faith be expecting God to demonstrate that he is there or that he exists? It is babies in Christian spirituality who need divine demonstration. However, I very much believe that charismatic spirituality is, at best, a stage or phase within the spiritual lives of individuals, and that it should eventually be overgrown when they do not congregate just to seek for spiritual manifestations of speaking in tongues, of healing, prophecy and of working miracles. Otherwise those who seek for spiritual signs will remain in spiritual childhood and adolescence. Of course, many spiritual masters encourage us to be childlike but childish in our relationship with God. There should no confusion with being childlike in the Lord and being childish. The members of the Catholic Renewal who have received the Sacraments of Initiation should not remain spiritual infants who need divine manifestations to prove anything. If not, they will find it very difficult to grow spiritually beyond what their external and visible expressions of spirituality permit. Being charismatic becomes an issue of personal spiritual identity. If God calls someone to something more, charismatic Christians often find it difficult, even a crisis of faith, to abandon habits that are an integral part of their understanding of themselves as Christians. I can only say that Christianity does not begin with manifesting of spiritual powers ends with working miracles and healing the sick. I have

witnessed a situation where a group of charismatic members could not just the rest of Catholic members to pray the rosary because it was not a charismatic prayer. That was strange enough! This is because many charismatic members think that authentic Christianity constitutes in manifestations of divine signs. However, on the contrary, as far as sacramental grace is concerned, often the only sensible indication of the conferral of grace is the sacramental sign itself. The Catechism of the Council of Trent defines a sacrament as “a visible sign of an invisible grace, instituted for our justification.” So, it is a sign which effects what it signifies. And so, since the visible signs of all the sacraments are completely objective and fixed by the Church according to our Lord’s command or inspiration, one’s personal feelings have no bearing whatsoever on the conferral of grace in the sacraments (and of course as long as there is no impediment or no contrary intention is held). Personal feelings can be deceptive despite one’s good intentions or piety. Masters of spiritual life throughout Catholic history have told us to be wary of our emotions because they have been corrupted by Original Sin. I do not mean that Catholic faith disregards emotions completely. There is no human being without emotions. What I mean is that despite our perceived spiritual maturity, we still submit our emotions to be investigated, criticized because human nature has been wounded by the Sin of Adam and Eve which affects all of us adversely. There are human emotions that judged rightly ordered emotions, not absence of emotions. What I put out is that most of the time, charismatic exuberance is often an enshrinement and institutionalization of emotions as an integral to the spiritual life of the Charismatic Renewal Movement. The consequent result is that, absence of those emotions in non-charismatic Christians, are often judged “not filled with the Holy Spirit” by charismatic Christians. It is very true that many Christians are made to feel inferior in the midst of charismatic Christians. This situation should not be but, it happens. Some new members of the Renewal feel frustrated when they open up in a sort of semi-spiritual direction situation about, how they filled with anxiety and

discouragement because their initial inability to speak in tongues is judged by their leaders as a sign that they are not truly yielding to the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life. These new members of the Renewal are stopped from interacting with the parish priest by the leaders of the Renewal as he may not be able to help them grow in spirituality since he is not a charismatic priest. Saint Pope John Paul II, who throughout his Pontificate supported and approved the nascent Renewal Movement, would be very surprised to hear that if he were to physically appear now. Pope St. John Paul II would be described as a charismatic Pope during his Pontificate. He was a man seen by Catholics and non-Catholics as visibly filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

There is no doubt that members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have a false idea of grace, the sacraments and ecclesiology. It is serious that the Renewal has a fundamental wrong idea of Catholic teaching and practice. The Catholic Renewal members are so convinced of the holiness of the “baptism in the Spirit” experience, and for other traditional Catholics they seem to make mockery of the sacrament of Confirmation. You might be disturbed to attend a Mass being celebrated solely for a group of charismatic members which is normally termed as charismatic Mass. To describe it in a proper Catholic way is to say, Mass being celebrated for charismatic members. But charismatic Mass has become a common way of describing Mass being celebrated for a particular charismatic group. Their Mass is termed to be “inspired by the Holy Spirit.” This is a theological fallacy. Is there any Mass celebrated by a Catholic priest that is not inspired by the Holy Spirit? The “holy noise” of the charismatic members during Mass is characterized as Mass inspired by the Holy Spirit. To witness a typical ‘charismatic Mass’ one will observe straightaway that, there is something deeply troubling behind the visible appearances of the joyful enthusiasm of the members. This said, we cannot deny that Mass is a celebration of our redemption and so, it ought to be a

joyful celebration – a celebration of our salvation. In reality, if Mass is the representation of Our Lord’s Sacrifice on Calvary for our salvation then, we ought to make a joyful noise unto the Lord of life (Psalm 100) during Mass. The Catechism of the Catholic Church discusses the Eucharist as thanksgiving and praise to God the Father (CCC 1358), and so, it ought to be a joyful celebration. ‘Eucharist’ means first of all ‘thanksgiving’ (CCC 1360). It is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a sacrament of gratitude in which the Church sings glory to God in the name of all creation (CCC 1361). Each Eucharist is therefore an Eastertidal moment, and there should be a note of ‘festive joy’ (CCC 1334). However, despite our joyful mood during the celebration of the Eucharist, we still conduct ourselves with appropriate referential decorum. In a Mass celebrated for a charismatic group which is open to all to attend, this common attitude of charismatic members greeting the elevated consecrated Host and Wine with unending “Hallelujah” and “singing in tongue” makes Catholic Mass appear strange and unorthodox. People complain bitterly about this charismatic attitude at Mass. Some of them even sing or hum in tongue while the priest does the all important prayer of consecration of the bread and wine. And at times, they are so carried away that their ‘singing in tongue’ is so loud that the prayer of consecration by the presiding priest is lost on some people. This attitude of some charismatic members is odious and should be completely outlawed during the sacrifice of the Mass. Yes Catholic Mass should be lively and joyful but at the same time, it should resemble the response of Our Blessed Mother Mary at Calvary. If the Eucharist is the living memorial of the Cross of Christ, we must stand at the foot of the cross of the poor and oppressed, sharing their suffering and acting in love for their deliverance: ‘In the Eucharist, the Church is, as it were, at the foot of the Cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ’ (CCC 1370).

Also we must admit that the charismatic members teach us how to be active at Mass and how to enjoy a lively Mass. Their music can be uplifting. They can make the celebration of Mass enjoyable in a decent way if they are well trained and organized by the priest. Their singing and music at Mass can attract and retain the young people in attending Mass. I say this because sometimes people especially young people stop going to Mass because they say that they ‘get nothing out of it.’ This often means that they have not come away with their hearts uplifted, with great feelings of spiritual nourishment and joy of the spirit. One of their blames is boring celebration which is mainly caused by uninspiring music. A well organized parish charismatic group can make celebration of Mass lively and enjoyable by their uplifting music and choruses – all about making a joyful noise unto the Lord of glory. There is no doubt that celebration of Mass can bring a great feeling in the spirit if we have a good choir who can motivate the congregation to join in making a joyful noise unto the Lord of life. I am never suggesting that it is applaudable to abandon the Mass altogether just because there are flaws and failings in our way of celebrating the Mass. As a family of God, we all have the responsibility to put our entire talents together – celebrating the Eucharist. Do we give up eating and drinking completely simply because most meals are not wonderfully prepared? In the Nigerian context, there are many wonderful parish choirs that make beautiful sounds that uplift the spirit and the soul which also bring health to the body. On the contrary, some parishes in the United Kingdom have no existing choir which renders the atmosphere as if it is a funeral. Such situation at Mass may not attract the youth and some elders only come to fulfil the obligation they inherited from their parents, and others only come at Easter and Christmas periods and other days of the year the priest and few members are on their own; just as the unwanted reality of the Corona virus will force the priest to be alone not even with few adamant members. No one would have ever predicted that the priest would ever be alone celebrating Mass for the intentions of his parishioners and for his own intentions and for the

merciful Lord to save the whole mankind from the deadly Corona virus which has claimed so many lives, and has prevented local and international travels and almost every human activity clamped down and people locked down in their houses. The pigeons and the foxes and the horses that close to British people will be asking, ‘What has happened to men and women and children?’ The dogs that live with people in their houses are better off than other domesticated animals because, if you look through the window, you may be lucky to see someone walking his/her dog. Such momentary sight will help your psychic to convince you that you are not going out of your mind. If you are a Catholic priest who lives alone, you have no one to tell you whether you are wearing your shirt upside down, and that you are not going out of your mind. By the time we come out of this general quarantine; foxes will have gained confidence and they will no longer run away from men and women, as pigeons, dogs and horses do. They will join the club of the royal animals protected by the Queen. It is better to be alone with the Lord than to remain alone with Corona virus. This is because those who are with the Lord are with both the Father and the Holy Spirit, and so, they are never alone. He is in the company of the Most Holy Trinity. And do not forget that those who are with the Lord are in majority. But whoever is with Corona virus is completely isolated; he is completely alone. Whoever is with the Devil is never with a friend; he is completely alone. Is there any Devil more satanic than Corona virus?

#### **5.6. Continued education for members of the Renewal**

It is clear that most of the leaders and members of the Renewals are ignorant of what the Renewal should be, its vision and mission, and aims and objectives as well as the basic teaching and running of the Catholic Church. One to one conversation with the leaders and members of the Renewal reveals an enormous ignorance of the basic knowledge of the

Church and the Renewal by members of the Renewal. When you join or observe their prayer meeting, you may not be so much edified by their method of praying. But do we blame the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Group when there is no reference to statements from Church authorities or theological treatises on Charismatic spirituality? The result is that leaders and members of the Renewal prayer group work according to their whims and caprices. Whatever development and change this “new” prayer movement is bringing into the Church some great measure of clash between the old order and an oncoming one. The “new” method of prayer they are bringing in is raising a lot of dust. However, there are many ways we pray to God but the central point should be that we are having a personal communion with God. We talk to God on a personal level and listen to God talk to us. I don’t think that such community prayer session should be an external force playing up the emotions of members to spice up the prayer. The members need to know that the Renewal is a movement of the Holy Spirit within the Catholic Church. They need to be taught that the Renewal is the action of the Holy Spirit to whom they need to open themselves so that they can live ‘Life in the Spirit.’ Of course, it is a divine obligation and a moral duty of the Church to educate the faithful. The Lord mandated his disciples:

“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matthew 28: 18 – 20).

According to the Vatican II declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, Catholic education aspires to the highest standard: that students “learn not only how to bear witness to the hope that is in them (cf. Peter 3:15) but also how to help in the Christian formation of the world that takes place when natural powers viewed in the full consideration of man redeemed by Christ



contribute to the good of the whole society”.<sup>554</sup> And *Ex corde Ecclesiae* demands that graduates should be prepared to “devote themselves to the service of society and of the Church, but at the same time be prepared to give the witness of their faith to the world.”<sup>555</sup> Pope Benedict XVI said that Catholic education is “an essential resource for the new evangelization,” while cautioning that Catholic colleges especially “need to reaffirm their distinctive identity in fidelity to their founding ideals and the Church’s mission in service of the Gospel.” He added, “It is no exaggeration to say that providing young people with a sound education in the faith represents the most urgent internal challenge facing the Catholic community in your country.”<sup>556</sup> Saint Pope John Paul II said, “In the overall work of the new evangelization, the educational sector occupies a place of honour.”<sup>557</sup> The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is ever new and young in the Holy Spirit when it remains open to the Magisterium of the Church, receives ever anew the strength born of the word of God, the Eucharist, and the daily presence of Christ and the power of his Spirit in the lives of the members (Christus Vivit n. 35).

As I pointed out earlier, the Renewal is under the pastoral care of the local bishop. And the Nigerian Bishop’s Conference has laid down some guidelines for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria (CCRN) by which the Renewal should operate. So now, how far do the National Service Team (NST) and the National Executive Council (NEC) of the Nigerian Charismatic Renewal know about the guidelines of the Bishops’ Conference for the Renewal, and how much do they make sure that the Provincial Service and the Diocesan Service Team (DST), and the leaders of the parish Renewal are constantly informed and supervised to

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<sup>554</sup>Blessed Pope Paul VI, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965, no. 2.

<sup>555</sup>Saint John Paul II, The 1990 Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, no. 20.

<sup>556</sup>Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, “Address to the Bishops of the United States of America (Regions X-XIII) on Their Ad Limina Visit”, May 5, 2012.

<sup>557</sup>Saint John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesiae in America* to Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and Men and Women Religious, and all the Lay Faithful, on the encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America, 1999, no. 7.

operate according to the guidelines? Again, how much do the leaders of the Renewal (National, Provincial, Diocesan and Parochial) know about the aims and objectives of the Renewal as stated by the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS)? It is obvious that many of the members of the Renewal act as if the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria is a sect or a parallel church in the Catholic Church because they are ignorant of the diocesan guidelines and the aims and objectives laid down for the Renewal by the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services. Apart from ignorance on the part of the leaders and members of the prayer group, the ugly head of pride rears its head.

In some parishes, the vanity of pride is so glaring that if it is not stamped out it will destroy the Church and members of the Renewal. The large and the ever growing number of the members of the Renewal send a false idea of the Renewal and the Church into the psyche of the members. Their sheer number, their acclaimed knowledge of the Scripture (through daily studying/praying), and their presumed assurance of the fullness of the Holy Spirit give them false airs of authority, freedom, assurance and superiority over non-members of the Renewal including the clergy non-members. Pride can be a deadly vice. The members of the Renewal need to receive constant education on the nature, structure and running of the Catholic Church. They need some lessons on the meaning of the Magisterium of the Church. They need to learn and accept that the Renewal is a renewing breath of the Holy Spirit for all members of the Church under the pastoral care of the local Bishop and the jurisdiction of the local parish priest who is a co-worker of the Bishop. According to the Code of Canon Law, the faithful have a right to gather freely but it is the pastor who permits the establishment of a Prayer Group of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in his parish and recognizes it as a

Catholic group in the Diocese.<sup>558</sup> Hence, Pope Francis exhorted as well as warned the leaders of the Renewal saying:

“There is danger of becoming the arbiters of God’s grace. Many a time leaders fall into the temptation of believing that they are indispensable no matter what task they perform. The devil wants them to desire to be the ones who give orders who are at the centre of everything. And that is how, step by step, they fall into authoritarianism and personalization and through that way, they do not allow the members of the prayer group to be renewed by the Spirit. This type of temptation makes them to see their leadership position as something eternal and so consider themselves indispensable, a position that always has some or another form of power over others. You may be used by the Spirit as dispensers of God’s grace but not its arbiters! Do not act like a tollhouse for the Holy Spirit!”<sup>559</sup>

The Pontiff further says that the Renewal that fails to renew itself loses its capacity to renew others. Therefore, it is important that positions, structures, the way of presenting the message of the Gospel, and, above all, the hearts of every member of the prayer group should be renewed constantly. Hence, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is always young and new!<sup>560</sup>

There is the tendency to become so powerful that one usurps the power of the Holy Spirit and cages the Holy Spirit and manipulates His power over others. That is simply the manipulation of the DEVIL. The leader becomes so powerful that his evil ways of manipulation are passed as the power of the Holy Spirit. The Devil gives him such a long rope to hang himself and those he leads in the false name other than the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is the pastoral duty of the parish priest to make sure that members of the Renewal undergo constant education on the doctrinal formation with regard to knowing the Catholic faith which facilitates them to confidently give reasons for their belief in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The parish priest should see to it that all the teachings, seminars and courses the Renewal always organizes are geared toward deepening the knowledge of the members in

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<sup>558</sup>Canon 299

<sup>559</sup>Patrick Reilly, (2015), *The Cardinal Newman Society Promoting and Defending Faithful Catholic Education, Teach, Witness and Advocate: Catholic Education’s Response to Secularism*. <https://newmansociety.org/teach-witnee-advocate-catholic-educations-response-secularism>. Accessed on July 7, 2018.

<sup>560</sup>Ibid.

doctrinal formation, and growth in communal living. The importance of doctrinal formation cannot be overemphasized, and it includes basic catechesis, a good knowledge of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and basic biblical knowledge as a medium for better comprehension of their faith and their ministry in the new evangelization. The members of the Renewal should be constantly updated in the life of the Church in the world and the Archdiocese itself. The members of the charismatic group should be constantly educated on ecclesial events and on documents that emanate from various Roman dicasteries. The Renewal should be thoroughly educated on the meaning and working of the Church Magisterium and should be taught that they are established and recognized by the parish priest who for grave and just reasons can in dialogue with the archdiocesan director of the Renewal suppress the Prayer Group of his parish.

Again, it is extremely important to constantly train members of the Renewal on developing the human virtues of friendship that is open to all, obedience to all constituted authority, sincerity, and respect for non-members, responsibility for the Church, generosity to the Church, simplicity, and loyalty to Church authority. The sense of loyalty of members to Church authority will help them to lay their activities open to the Church and to appreciate and adapt happily to the Magisterium of the Church. The parish priest should work closely with the Renewal to help them make their faith and experience of God more genuine in order to facilitate their work in evangelization. The parish priest should endeavour to corroborate the efforts of the parish pastoral team and the leaders of the parish Renewal so that, in particular, the apostolic efforts of the Renewal will impact on the spiritual life of all parishioners. In this way, the pastor harnesses the gifts of the members of the Renewal for the spiritual wellbeing of the whole parish, as well as facilitating the work of the new evangelization. The parish priest should try to incorporate some of the members of the

Renewal who have some ministries to use their gifts to work for the parish as parish choir members, church warden members, readers, members of the parish pastoral council, parish evangelization team, altar servers and so forth. This will help members of the Renewal to have some sense of belonging in the parish family. Their sense of responsibility to the parish is very important so that they do not appear to look like another church in the parish Church family.

### **5.7. The Catholic Doctrine**

It is a divine duty on the Church founded by Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations and to teach them (Matthew 28: 19 – 20) that Jesus is the Son of God, believing they might have life in his name (John 20: 31), and to educate them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.<sup>561</sup> The Church founded by Christ is guided in the way of all truth by the Spirit (John 16: 13) which he unites in communion and in works of ministry, equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with his fruits (Ephesians 4: 11 – 12).

The role of the pastors of the Church is prominently highlighted when it is pointed out in the Second Vatican Council document that “finally, conciliar teaching constantly recognizes the essential role of pastors in the discernment of the charisms and their ordered exercise within the ecclesial communion.”<sup>562</sup> Those who have charge over the Church should judge the genuineness and proper use of these gifts, through their office, not indeed to extinguish the

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<sup>561</sup>Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, On Catechesis In Our Time, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979, nos. 1 and 2.

<sup>562</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter “**Iuvenescit Ecclesia**” to the Bishops of the Catholic Church regarding the Relationship between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and Mission of the Church.  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20160516\\_iuvenescit-ecclesia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160516_iuvenescit-ecclesia_en.html). Accessed on July 14, 2018.

Spirit but to test all things and hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5: 12, 19 – 21).<sup>563</sup>

The Renewal members should be made to understand that they are subject to the supervision of the competent ecclesiastical authority.<sup>564</sup> In this case, their parish is the legitimate ecclesiastical authority over them. Their parish priest uses the authority that the Church gives him to serve them and lead them to the workings of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual guidance of the parish priest may be an opportunity for the members of the Renewal to become loyal and submissive to the actions of the Holy Spirit who purifies the parish priest and members of the Renewal.

The Christian faithful are called to lead life worthy of the gospel teaching and so, they have right to Christian education which the Church hierarchy is obliged to give them.<sup>565</sup> The Renewal members should be taught that they may not choose what to believe. In a spirit of Christian unity, the parish priest should in a continuous and fatherly way teach the Renewal members that the sacraments and the doctrine of the Catholic Church can never be compromised in any form if they want to remain Catholics in spirit and in truth. Christ instituted the seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony) of the new law which touch all the important moments of Christian life.<sup>566</sup> The purpose of the sacraments is to make people holy, to build up the body of Christ and finally to give worship to God. The sacraments not only presuppose faith, they also nourish, strengthen, and express it, and hence, they are called “sacraments of faith.”<sup>567</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that: “Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine

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<sup>563</sup>LG 12

<sup>564</sup>Canon 305, pars. 1 & 2.

<sup>565</sup>Canon 217

<sup>566</sup>CCC 1210

<sup>567</sup>Sacraments of the Catholic Church. <https://www.catholic.org/prayers/sacrament.php>. Accessed on July 17, 2018.

life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.<sup>568</sup> The members of the church in general should be constantly educated on the values of the sacraments of the Church. Pope Francis says that sacraments are gifts of faith. So, the life of the Church revolves around the sacraments. The sacraments impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them disposes the faithful most effectively to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, worship God rightly, and practice charity.

The Church must continuously teach her children the history of their redemption – how God came to men and women. God came to bridge the gulf separating him and humanity in the person of the one Mediator Jesus Christ through his work of redemption. So by means of his Church and the institution of the sacraments Christ makes his grace available to all who are willing to receive it. The Church as God's sacrament in the world mediates the grace of redemption of Christ to mankind, and through that way, the redemptive action of Christ is completed. We can rightly say that the doctrine of the sacraments is the doctrine of the second part of God's way of salvation to mankind. It deals with the holy signs which Christ instituted as the vehicles of his grace. They effect in men and women the grace for which Christ made them the sign. The Church must therefore be concerned for the sacraments instituted by Christ, their proper preservation and administration so that the grace which Christ has all time linked with these signs and which is communicated by them, would always rightly benefit his sons and daughters. When the Church takes conscientious grip of the precious gifts of the sacraments and administers them properly, the effect of the sacraments will bear witness to the work and presence of Christ in mankind and the entire creation at large. Yes, the effects of

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<sup>568</sup>CCC 1131

the sacraments are the signs of Christ at work in humanity. The effectiveness of Christ's continuing work in his Church cannot be dependent on man's inadequacy and potential weakness. A sacrament administered properly according to the will of Christ and with the proper intention, gives the grace it signifies. The sacrament is effective not by reason of the power of intercession of the prayer of the priest or on account of the worthiness of the recipient, but solely by the power of Christ who administers the sacrament through the priest. The power of Christ lives in the sacrament hence, it is called the "sacrament of faith", and that is why its efficaciousness does not depend on the holiness of the priest nor the recipient. The sinfulness or unworthiness of the priest cannot impede the effect of the sacrament which works through the power of Christ. The Church has no alternative than to continually teach that the sacraments are necessary for salvation. The sacraments are the vehicles of grace which they convey. Of course, these sacraments imprint an indelible character on the recipients. According to Elizabeth M. Kelly, the 'sacraments have the power to bring heaven to earth, rip the veil between all things seen and unseen, and allow humanity and eternity to commingle, in mysterious, yet palpable ways. Through the sacraments, heaven comes, not just to visit, but to live with us and in us. In the sacraments, we are graced. Living a sacramental life is the great gift and calling of every Catholic, and we sometimes forget just how powerful and healing that is.'<sup>569</sup> She points out that it is important for us to teach children that sacraments are so much more than a ceremony to prepare for; they are God's way of reaching down to us and offering us a lifelong gift – a gift of grace that gives us a glimpse of heaven and a taste of eternity.<sup>570</sup> This is very crucial because the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, in many ways, through their teaching, proclamation, action and behaviour have threatened some of the sacraments of the Church which remain the life, the

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<sup>569</sup> Elizabeth M. Kelly, A Little Reminder on Why the Sacraments Are a Really Big Deal. <https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/sacraments/the-seven-sacraments/why-the-sacraments-are-a-really-big-deal>. Accessed on 28 March, 2020.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.



centre and the source of the Church. The sacraments remain the vehicle, by which God touches, communicates and lives with us, and so, to threaten the sacraments, is to threaten our relationship with God as well as our very salvation. We note, especially the Renewal members that, the Bible and the Tradition contain all the truth we need for salvation, but the same God who gave us the Bible, has chosen to institute the Sacraments as additional signs of his truth. To take a low view of the sacraments is to ignore the way God has always acted in revealing himself and his purposes to mankind. We need to be reminded again and again that the sacraments celebrated by the Church are signs of grace that make a deeper reality present to us. One reality we encounter through the sacraments is Christ's presence in the Church community, his Body. And this recognition of Christ's presence in the community should lead to a stronger awareness of being sent on mission to engage in love-inspired action in the world. As Pope Benedict XVI notes in *Deus Est* (God is love), the celebration of the sacraments and the ministry of love are "inseparable." Love in action, he says, is "inseparable expression" of the Church's being (no. 25).

As I mentioned earlier, we need to touch more on the importance of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. No life flourishes without food and drink. Thus, the Eucharist offers the Body and Blood of Jesus as food and drink for the spirit. As a ceremony, the Eucharist is both a meal that nourishes, as well as a sacrifice in which the death of Jesus is offered to the Father. The Eucharist is also the object of adoration among the faithful. Since the graces of all the other sacraments flow from the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Eucharist is considered the central sacrament of the Church. The Church lives by the Eucharist. It is the visible grace and source of supernatural strength for the church as the people of God. As they participate worthily in the Eucharist, they grow in eucharistic life and piety and develop spiritually in the climate of the eucharist. The magnitude and the full meaning of this holy sacrament are deep.

The Eucharist is the mystery of mysteries. The Catholic Christian cannot take away from the Eucharist because one cannot separate it from Christ. To accept it is to welcome completely the message of Christ and the Church. The Eucharist is entirely the whole Christ. And we cannot talk of Christ without the Father and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Eucharist is the Trinity. Today it is crucial for the Church to restore to Christians the sense of worship and fervour for the Eucharist. This is because it is only from the eucharist, deeply known, loved and lived, can we expect that unity in truth and in charity willed by Christ and advocated by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>571</sup> So the Eucharist remains the most venerable sacrament in which Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered and received, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. The Eucharistic sacrifice, the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ, in which the sacrifice of the cross is forever perpetuated, is the summit and the source of all worship and Christian life. By means of it the unity of God's people is signified and brought about, and the building up of the body of Christ is perfected. The other sacraments and all the apostolic works of Christ are bound up with, and directed to, the Blessed Eucharist (Canon 897).

From the above understanding, Catholic Christians should hold the Blessed Eucharist in the highest honour. They should take active part in the celebration of the most august sacrifice of the Mass; they should receive the sacrament with great devotion and frequency, and should reverence it with the greatest adoration. And so in explaining the doctrine of this sacrament, pastors of souls are assiduously to instruct the faithful about their obligation in this regard (Canon 898).

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<sup>571</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to pilgrims from Milan and Allessandria and to French Jurists. 14 November 1981, cf. in "L'Osservatore Romano", ed. English, 30 November 1981, p. 3.

However, my observation of the attitude of some members of the Renewal with regards to the Sacrament of the Eucharist is not in any way encouraging. The importance of the Eucharist to Catholics cannot be overemphasized. The members of the Renewal should be taught that the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the Christian life.<sup>572</sup> The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are orientated towards it. For in the Blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.<sup>573</sup> The parish priest has a serious pastoral catechetical duty to the members of the Renewal with regards to the sacrament of the Eucharist. If it is Christ that we receive when we receive the Eucharist, how can some members of the Renewal refuse to participate in the Eucharist? Do they know that in the Eucharist, Jesus himself is personally present as our crucified and risen Saviour (CCC 1340)? There we powerfully ‘proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes’ (1 Cor. 11:26). And it is Jesus himself who tells us to ‘Do this as a memorial of me’ (1 Cor. 11:24, 25). The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body (CCC 1362). So, the Eucharist is the ‘sacrament of salvation.’ Hence Jesus says: “Truly, I say to you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). It all means that ‘the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice’ (CCC 1367). So when we take part in the Eucharist, we participate in Christ’s saving sacrifice, his death and resurrection. In other words, the Eucharist is the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ. By instituting the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood, Christ perpetuates the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again (CCC 1323, 1330). By our participation in the Eucharist, we ask that Christ ‘make us an everlasting gift’ to the Father, by uniting us to his own gift of himself

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<sup>572</sup>LG 11

<sup>573</sup>CCC 1324; PO 5

(Eucharistic Prayer 3). We become ‘a living sacrifice of praise’ (Eucharistic Prayer 4), united with Jesus himself in his own worship of the Father. This is because in the Eucharist, we encounter Christ, whole and entire. We are in the very presence of Christ, the High Priest. This special presence of Christ begins at the consecration and lasts as long as the Eucharistic elements (CCC 1377). Christ gives us his sacramental presence as one of the ways in which he is with us, even to the end of time (Matthew 28:20). In communion, we receive the whole Christ body and soul which makes us to grow closer to Jesus Christ (CCC 1391), sharing his life and deepening our friendship with him (CCC 1395). Christ offering himself to us in the Holy Communion becomes our strength in our spiritual journey to God our Father just as manna was for the chosen people in their forty-year desert journey to the Promised Land. In our own case, Christ is our life, and without him we die. Jesus says, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall never be hungry, and whoever believes in me shall never be thirsty” (John 6:35). The Last Supper was symbolic between Jesus and his close friends. They were accustomed to being with him at table, listening to him, breaking bread with him, sharing their lives with him as friends. Jesus knew what this friendship meant to them. Naturally, the disciples would want to continue these intimate meals with Jesus, their Lord and friend. Who would not want that? Who does not want to be loved and to give love to those they cherish and love? Jesus shows us that God is love; and who does not want to receive love? Those who hunger for love (both erotic love and otherwise ...) are thirsting for Jesus because, Jesus is God’s gift of love to humanity. So when we come to Mass, to the Lord’s Supper, we join the Apostles, all the Saints in heaven, all believers in Christ and all men and women of goodwill to be with the Risen Lord, to listen to his Word, to share his life given for us and to open our lives to his presence, and to the love and friendship of the brothers and sisters in the service of the entire humanity.

Eucharist in the Catholic Church is inexhaustible. I don't need to be an expert in the theology of the Eucharist. I believe I have shed a little light on this ineffable gift of Christ – the gift of himself in the Blessed Eucharist to mankind. I will be doing myself eternal disservice if I do not open my mind, heart and soul to learn from those who are ready to share their knowledge and experience of the power of God's love in the Holy Eucharist. I was deeply appalled at the attitude of some Catholic Charismatic Renewal members towards the Eucharist, when some members of the Renewal would hang around the parish premises waiting for the 6.00pm Mass to finish for them to start their (7 – 9pm) prayer meeting. Immediately the 6.00pm Mass ended, they swamped the church compound like locusts. Their number was intimidating. And they were Catholics. But I have to confess that their prayer meeting was great. They prayed; they sang and their charismatic choruses were so melodious. I bet you, you would like their singing. Their singing was uplifting! They engaged in spiritual activities of giving testimonies; teachings in groups, counselling and those who were prayed over and so forth until 9.00pm. Even after their official closing time, they still hanged around discussing, counselling, and individuals consulting with different leaders and so on and so forth. If such huge number of Catholic members attended the Thursday 6.00pm Mass, it would be very encouraging to have such great number of believers worshipping the Lord. I must admit that some of their leaders did attend weekday Masses. Their nonchalant attitude towards other parish social/spiritual exercises was prominently noticeable. There was a GULF between the charismatic members and the rest of the parish family. I believe it was an artificial gulf, and not like the type Abraham was describing to the rich man who was dying of thirst in his place of torment: "Between your place and ours a great chasm has been fixed, so that no one can cross over from here to you, or from your side to us" (Luke 16: 26). It was an artificial gulf created by the members of the Renewal because no one debarred them from attending parish activities. As the parish priest, I never interfered with their spiritual

activities, and I frequently talked to their leaders about their voluntary noticeable absence from parish programmes. As a result, some of their leaders came for parish activities. I think, the leaders of the Renewal failed themselves, the Renewal members, the parish and the Church by not encouraging Renewal members to be part of the parish activities most especially, attending weekday Masses and adoration of the Blessed Eucharist during the holy hour exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Am I exonerated? Not completely! Thinking back, I still thank God that I was never tempted to use ‘ecclesiastical harmer’ on those ‘prayer warriors’ of the Holy Spirit. I believe it was the Holy Spirit that held me back, for the simple reason that two wrongs do not make a right rather, the vice becomes a vicious circle. I hope that such unholy behaviour toward the Mass and the parish has been transformed into the joy of the sons and daughters of God in the Holy Spirit in the parish family of God. Do I need to fight for God? Not at all! Both those who go to Mass to worship God and those who prefer prayer meeting to Mass are all children of God. And I believe that God knows how to save his children. But as pastor of souls, I will be failing on my pastoral duty as a priest if I do not tell those who want to hear that participating in the Mass is sharing in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross of Calvary. Participating in charismatic prayer meeting consecutively every day for six months or more cannot be equated with attending one Eucharistic celebration for one day in six months. Mass remains the highest prayer and adoration we can offer to God the Father which surpasses the entire numerous spiritual exercises we can offer to God all the days of our life.

What on earth would make a Catholic member to prefer prayer meeting to Mass? My mind cannot comprehend it! How could ignorance excuse such absurdity in the Catholic community? I cannot deny the joy, the enthusiasm and the friendship that exist amongst the Renewal members when they come together in any imaginable gathering. How could this

‘perceived’ happiness in the meetings of the Renewal take precedence over the Catholic Eucharist? I have to tell you that the Eucharist is the heart of the life of the Catholic priest, and it is in presiding at the Eucharist that the special ministry of priests is most evident (CCC 1142); you can understand where my pastoral concern is coming from. But how would any Catholic priest think of his own salvation without the salvation of his parishioners and of the whole of humanity? With this in mind, the Vatican II says: “As often as the sacrifice of the cross by which ‘Christ our Pasch is sacrificed’ (1 Cor. 5: 7) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.”<sup>574</sup> And of course, the Church lives this sacrifice of redemption; she continually renews herself in it, travelling as a pilgrim through all the trials of earthly life to the eternal meeting in the Father’s House.<sup>575</sup>

In first place, from where does Renewal members draw their strength to exhibit such spiritual power and joy if not from the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic celebration? The Eucharistic celebration in the parish on daily basis should be the launching pad of the Renewal members to start their prayer meeting like the rest of the parish societies. If not for the Eucharist, what on earth is the Catholic parish there for? If as Catholics, we ignore the Mass in our thoughts and actions, whatever we do remains sheer human power. How much does mere human power and feelings accomplish and last without reference to the Holy Spirit? The Labourer could be working in vain unless the Lord builds the house. So also, the guard keeps vigil in vain unless the Lord watches the city (Psalm 127:1). All our spiritual enthusiasm and works of charity and evangelization could end up in vainglory if we have no reference to the power of the Holy Spirit. Mass is one celebration in which we encounter God the Father God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. How can we belittle the Mass and yet claim to be doing wonders for God and humanity? We may not appreciate how easy and dangerous it is to

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<sup>574</sup> LG 3; SC 47

<sup>575</sup> Cf. in “L’Osservatore Romano”, ed. English, July 7, 1980, p. 4.

deceive ourselves. We may not know that most of the time, the ‘God’ we invent, even as Christians in all our religiosity, is a pagan god. They force me to take a deep breath and thought about their unparalleled spiritual demonstration in prayer, hymns of praises unto the Lord, testimonies upon testimonies of God’s wonders, healings and miracles and casting and binding and breaking up of the powers of Satan and releasing of those who are possessed and tormented by evil spirits and so on and so forth and yet, their apparent and obvious ‘neglect’ and ‘despise’ of the holy sacrifice of the Mass leaves a huge gap in my honest anticipation of this very important and mighty prayer group in the holy Roman Catholic Church. Mass for me, is the soul and the life of the Catholic Church. And to look down on the Eucharist casts doubt on whatever we do as Catholics.

Firstly, the common spiritual ‘slogan’ of the members of the Renewal is ‘Praise the Lord.’ Their favourite divine Person is the Holy Spirit. And who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Son of God. So the Holy Spirit must be the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son. I refer to the Renewal members as sons and daughters of the Holy Spirit. They are also interested in Jesus Christ in his power to heal, moreover, he sends the Holy Spirit. “And I will ask the Father, and he will send you another Advocate to be with you forever” (John 14:16). The question that agitates my mind is, since the Renewal members are so deeply absorbed in the Holy Spirit and so much thirst for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and, I believe they are gathered by the power of the Holy Spirit: ‘Why then, are some of them not interested in participating in the Eucharistic celebration since, in each celebration of Mass, there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit?’ It is in the celebration of Mass that they will swim in the flood of the Holy Spirit. I am surprised that they do not know that. Through the sacraments the Holy Spirit makes present the wonders of God: it is above all in the Eucharist that ‘The Spirit makes present and communicates the Father’s work,



fulfilled by the beloved Son' (CCC 1155). In the Mass, we encounter his Son, Jesus, who we are thirsting for. "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I go and see the face of God?" (Psalm 42:3) All serious Catholic members are thirsting for the Eucharist while some Catholic Charismatic Renewal members think that they do not need Mass because they are covered by the Holy Ghost Fire and the Blood of Jesus. Is there any difference between the Eucharist and the Holy Spirit and Jesus? In the Catholic Church, we have many teachers who are ready and happy to teach the ignorant if they are humble enough to learn from the Holy Spirit who is the source of all truth. Unless you think you can avoid the Holy Eucharist and still go to heaven by shouting Holy Ghost Fire and the claiming to be saved by the Blood of Jesus. The Renewal members always cling onto the Holy Ghost power and power in the Blood of Jesus and yet, it is in the celebration of Mass that we encounter God the Father, Jesus the Saviour and the Holy Ghost. Those who underrate the Mass, do they understand what they are saying and doing and what they are not saying and doing?

Another reason why I encourage all Catholic Charismatic members and other parishioners to not only attend Sunday Mass and holy Days of obligation but weekday Masses if possible is that, the Eucharist gives meaning to our life. St Paul reminds us that, 'If there is no resurrection of the dead ... if Christ has not been raised, our preaching ... our belief ... our faith ... our hope ... would be nothing. We would have been the most unfortunate of all people' (1 Cor. 15:13 – 19). If there is no resurrection, we wouldn't be thinking of Mass which gives meaning to our life. It is the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the Eucharist which gives meaning to our life. What type of spirituality, works of charity or prayer group in the Catholic Church that has meaning without drawing that meaning from the Eucharist at the same time referring to the same Eucharist? At the Last Supper Jesus 'gave a new and definitive meaning to the blessing of the bread and the cup' (CCC 1334), and 'gave the

Jewish Passover its definitive meaning' (CCC 1340). Presently, the world is looking for meaning – the nature and cause of Corona virus, in order to manufacture the appropriate medicine to tackle this global deadly malaise. Normally people come to Mass seeking meaning for their lives, and a sense of value and worth for themselves and their beloved ones. The Eucharist gives new meaning, and value to God's creation, life and to the people: 'the lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value' (CCC 1368). Where shall humanity find meaning except in the Eucharist? Today, the whole world is going through the scourges of COVID 19 virus, and all international and local travels are suspended and movements within individual nations are discouraged by governments, and these necessary restrictions are to slowdown and gradually and consequently stop the spreading of this deadly virus. And of course, these measures cause enormous hardship to individuals and nations in general, in particular the poor, the refugees, and war-torn zones and the homeless. Due to all these drastic restrictions and general lack of medicine and care facilities and resources to curtail and cure the pandemic, lives are lost on daily basis. Even the long restrictions to stay indoors slammed on everybody will definitely cause short and long health problems for people who will survive this epidemic eventually. In other words, it will get worse before it gets better. In most nations, especially third world countries, these restrictive measures to curtail and cure this pandemic inflict hunger and cause other types of sickness and evil from which many will probably die. As far as movement and business are not allowed for now, many people from poor nations will die of hunger and other related diseases.

There are rumours flying around about the cause of COVID 19 virus. The perpetrators of these rumours are not singing from the same hymn book with the scientists. However, even if some claim that COVID 19 virus is man-made, the point is that God has permitted it.

According to Bishop Philip Egan, the Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth, in United Kingdom, “We do not know why God in his providence allows this dreadful disease to hold humanity to ransom. What we do know is that he has given us victory through the death and resurrection of his Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ and poured into human history the power of the Holy Spirit to guide all things in the right direction. That is why, in the words of St. Paul, we know that nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked. ... These are the trials by which we triumph by the power of him who loved us. Indeed, we can be certain that neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power or height or depth, nor any created thing can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-36, 38-39). As Catholics, we must tackle this crisis with spiritual as well as human resources. Let us work for an end to this scourge. Indeed, the ministry of prayer at this time is crucial. Let us pray for a speedy solution, for those who are sick, for the protection of the elderly and the vulnerable, for those in self-isolation, for all who are suffering anxiety and worry, for the homeless and needy, for the well-being and financial security of all, for the NHS medical staff and all who care for the sick, and for the repose of those who have died.” We may not waste our time debating whether it has come about out of human error or malice; it is become a problem facing all humanity so, all hands must be on deck to root it out. Using the words of an Italian lady speaking about the Corona virus over the BBC radio few minutes ago, at 2.00pm news broadcast, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, we can all see it as: ‘The wound that unites the country and the pain that makes us a community.’ It is causing much concern to all of us, both at home and abroad.

Medical scientists are presently swamped with work trying to manufacture a new vaccine both for short and long terms to deal with this overwhelming pandemic. Human beings have advanced so much in medical discoveries and treatment to improve and prolong human life and other sciences for the well-being of humanity. But so far, this Corona virus pandemic has proved indefinable and has kept the whole of humanity sleepless both at night and day. Those who believe in God are tirelessly looking up to the heavens in prayer and penance fervently and ceaselessly. With the psalmist, I ask: "I lift my eyes to the mountains – from where shall come my help? My help comes from Yahweh, maker of heaven and earth. Will he let your foot slip, the one watching over you? Will he slumber? No, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. Yahweh is your guardian; Yahweh is at your side; and you, in his shade; Sunstroke will not be for you by day, or the spell of the moon, by night" (Psalm 121: 1 – 5). We are journeying to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. We have here no lasting city and we are looking for the one to come (Hebrews 13:14). The COVID 19 virus scourge is causing every nation to close their borders. Now we have nowhere safe to run to except to Mount Zion, the city of the living God. The good news and consolation is that God is always faithful and watches us day and night. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus accompanies them but they do not recognize him (Luke 24:13 – 35). So even in the pain of the scourge and the death of beloved ones from this deadly disease, the Lord is in the midst of it all, walking along with us, and we can only encounter him and his healing mercy at the breaking of the Bread of the Eucharist. If God is with us, who can be against us (Romans 8:35)? If he is walking along with us in this COVID 19 virus attack then, he is offering us many wonderful graces. The suffering will unite us body and soul and make us a community of the children of God. These are the trials by which we triumph by the power of him who loves us (Rom. 8:38 – 39). As Catholics and believers in God, for now, our sure response to the COVID-19 crisis and the unimaginable disruption it is causing to every aspect

of life, must be prayer, converting all the time to our Father whose love and mercy has no end. Our continuous conversion, and all the spiritual resources the Lord is constantly offering us, will help us to fight and defeat the virus, and to contribute to the common good and care for the sick and the needy at home and abroad. It is wonderful and encouraging to hear the spiritual efforts parishioners relate when I phone them: how they live-stream Masses, join in praying the Rosary and other prayers through wonderful electronic means. Now God wants us to communicate with him through such means of spiritual communion until he makes it possible for us to come together again to worship and adore him in the church. God wants us to know that his time is the best as the saying goes: 'God's time is the best.' The most important thing now is to hold on to our faith and trust in the Lord and not to lose heart.

Now that we are all locked-down in our houses due to COVID 19 virus pandemic, and unable to access the church to pray before the Blessed Sacrament or attend Mass, we resort to spiritual communion because our heart remains restless until we rest in the Lord (St. Augustine). Jesus takes us to his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob. Jesus said to her: "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you shall worship the Father, but that will not be on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ... But the hour is coming, and is even now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; for that is the kind of worshippers the Father wants" (John 4:21, 23). As we are not able to go into the church now to worship God, he reminds us that his sanctuary is our heart (1 Chronicles 22:19). Does God so much need the words of our prayers than simplicity, beauty and nobility in our spirit? God needs the conversion of our heart, our thirst for the truth and our eagerness to live according to truth for him to make our heart his sanctuary. So if we have no access to the church presently, God is waiting for us in the sanctuary of our heart.

Spiritual communion with the Lord is important but that does not replace the Eucharist which is the centre and the soul of our Christian life. As we commune with the Lord in Spirit and in truth, we thirst for the Eucharist which brings us together as members of God's family. We continue to encourage those who think that they can go to prayer meeting and engage in other spiritual exercises that satisfy their heart and think less about participating in the Eucharistic celebration. We convert daily and seek the Lord in the Blessed Eucharist. There is nothing that can take over the place of Mass in the Catholic family.

Again, some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have the habit of inventing unorthodox behaviour during Eucharistic celebration to the annoyance of the other members of the Church. "In the Eucharistic celebration we do not invent something but rather enter into a reality that precedes us, indeed that embraces Heaven and earth and therefore also past, future and present" (Pope Benedict XVI). A liturgical abuse risks being much more than an unauthorised inappropriate modification of the Liturgy, for it can also be an abuse of the rights and dignity of both the priest and the people (cf. *Redemptoris Sacramentum* n. 24). "The faithful have a true right to participate in the liturgical celebrations as the Church wills and not according to the personal likes of a particular minister, nor according to unapproved and unusual rites, expressions of specific groups which tend to cut themselves off from the universality of the people of God" (Directory on the Life and Ministry of Priests, n. 64). This is to educate some Catholic Charismatic members who "praise God in tongues" while the priest says the prayers of consecration during Mass. One person begins it, it prompts others to join in and their unorthodox noise even overshadows the words of consecration. This unholy attitude is so upsetting the solemn moment of silent prayer and meditation and turns the joy of the Eucharistic people into sadness and unnecessary distraction. We come to Mass to celebrate the joy of the life of the children of God not to endure unnecessary distraction.

“The recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer requires a moment of special attention if it is to be spoken in such a way that it involves others. It is important not to forget the words of consecration the priest says over the gifts of bread and wine are the words of Jesus himself at the Last Supper with his apostles. I believe we should also find opportunities in catechesis, in homilies and in other circumstances to explain this Eucharistic Prayer well to the People of God so that they can follow the important moments – the account and the words of the Institution, the prayer for the living and the dead, the thanksgiving to the Lord and the epiclesis – if the community is truly to be involved in this prayer” (Pope Benedict XVI). It is also to warn some Catholic priests who change the words of the rubrics of the Mass. There are some Catholic priests who claim or presume or are referred to as “charismatic” priests, who during Mass for Catholic Charismatic group change the wordings of the Mass to excite the emotionalism of the members to make the Mass more “charismatic” or to be well-known as charismatic priest. It is all about displaying personal ego. The priest ceases to be an instrument of God and now assumes the glory and the position of God. It is spiritually odious! It is completely un-Catholic; un-liturgical and unacceptable and spiritually insensitive to God and to the people of God for the priest to change the wordings of the rubric. The only way to save the dignity of the Eucharist is to sanction the priest. That one is ordained a Catholic priest does not mean that one can introduce whatever one wants in the name of celebrating Mass because the members of the church will not question him, and more so, they may be ignorant. Must the priest make the Mass ‘charismatic’ in order to be accepted by the charismatic members? If we annoy men, must we also annoy God? Must Catholic priests do whatever Pentecostal pastors do in worship in order to be charismatic? In Nigeria today, a priest who is not charismatic is almost snubbed. And so, in Nigeria of our generation, it is as if every priest wants to be a healer in order to be accepted or “charismatic” in order to be popular. The new “ones” are so busy making impressions in order to be accepted. The church

is now becoming where we please people and “shine”; and no more a place of worship. The church is turning into a “marketplace”, and no one knows when Jesus is coming back to “knock over the tables of the money-changers, scatter their coins and order the people selling doves to go away. Take all this away, and stop making a marketplace of my Father’s house!” (John 2:15 – 16). We need the radicalism of Jesus to purify his Church. St Benedict declared in his Rule for monks that the church should be a place which is conducive to prayer: “Let the oratory be what its name implies, and let nothing else be done or kept there.” When we emphasize special and insignificant practices and neglect essential and necessary things, we bring religion into derision and lessen the dignity of worship (Mediator Dei, n. 189). I do not think Catholics want priests who have no respect for God nor for parishioners; who assume the power to introduce whatever please them during Mass. The Eucharistic celebration is not a place to make impressions! The worship God accepts is humility, reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28). So, “Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40). The priests should be constantly reminded that “The Eucharistic Prayer is the centre and summit of the entire celebration. The different Eucharistic Prayers contained in the Missal have been handed down to us by the Church’s living Tradition and are noteworthy for their inexhaustible theological and spiritual richness” (Pope Benedict XVI).

Of course, the liturgy of the Mass is constantly being renewed to suite our modern life. Did the church language for Mass not change from Latin to vernacular? Do we not now use local and modern musical instruments in our Eucharistic celebration to spice up the liturgy? During thanksgiving after post-Communion prayer, we sing and dance to the altar in Nigeria. It can be wonderful when the charismatic band play during Mass. It makes Mass beautiful and inspiring. Pope Benedict XVI says that ‘The Church takes from the Liturgy the strength for Life.’ Any changes in the liturgy of the Mass are supervised by the authority of the Church.



Pope Pius XII had said that “in the Liturgy there are human elements as well as divine. The latter, obviously, having been established by the Redeemer, cannot under any circumstances be changed; but the human elements may be modified in various ways ... according as time, circumstances and the needs of souls demand” (Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, nn. 54-55).

Against arbitrary introduction to the Liturgy, Pope Benedict XVI has often drawn attention to the continuity of tradition and has insisted that what preceded the Council and what followed are a manifestation of the living tradition of the Church. Such arbitrary introduction into the Liturgy distorts the beauty and dignity of the Liturgy of the Mass. The Liturgy is a Work of Art. The Liturgy is a precious work of art and to make arbitrary modifications to it should be as unthinkable as trying to improve the work of a great painter, sculptor (such as Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci) or musician (like Bob Marley, or Michael Jackson or Madonna). The failure to recognise the Liturgy as a precious part of the patrimony of the Church has caused grave harm to the Church.<sup>576</sup> Pope Benedict XVI says that, “Beauty is not mere decoration but rather an essential element of the Liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation.” The Liturgy of the Roman Rite is a notable and precious part of the liturgical treasure and patrimony of the Catholic Church (GIRM 397). All personal additions distort this beauty. Much anguish and upset could have been avoided if the Second Vatican Council’s exhortation had been followed: “that all things set apart for use in divine worship should be truly worthy, becoming, and beautiful, signs and symbols of the supernatural world” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 122). Pope Benedict XVI reiterates that “The beauty of the Liturgy is a sublime expression of God’s glory.” We may not add or subtract to the glory of God. It all means that wanton addition to the liturgy of the Mass can disturb the faith of the worshipping community. The beauty of holiness should be reflected in the quality and dignity of our sacred liturgy. The liturgy of our worshipping community is a

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<sup>576</sup> Dom Cuthbert Johnson OSB, *Participating in the Mass, Celebrating the Liturgy with dignity & beauty*, Living the Liturgy, CTS, 2011, p. 12.

reflection of the Resurrection. When we gather for our Eucharistic celebration, we celebrate our Redemption. It is time to put an end to cheap and tasteless additions to our church liturgy in order to ensure that beauty is restored to our Eucharistic worship. Pope Paul VI says that, “Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart.” To add or subtract from the rubric of the Mass in order to “shine” is to usurp the glory of God. Our God shares his glory with no one (Isaiah 42:8). He is only seeking approval and glory from the people of God and not the glory God himself gives to true believers and worshippers in spirit and in truth (John 5:44).

Since the Liturgy of the Mass is the celebration of our salvation, we want our Mass to be lively. The importance of singing cannot be overemphasized. One beautiful thing about Nigerian church is that apart from the parish choir(s) societies are allocated Sundays each of them sings for the parish Mass. The parish charismatic movement is known for their singing. They always have a band which produces melodious music. When it is their turn to sing for the parish Sunday Mass, the Mass is lively and enjoyable. We will continue to encourage the charismatic members to appreciate Mass since it is the sacrifice of the Cross made present on the altar which is also the Lord’s table to which the faithful are invited to share the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation. The Church urgently needs the singing talents of the charismatic members in promoting the cause of God in the parish community. Music is an integral part of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Mass and the musical tradition of the Church is “a treasure of great price.” The Gospel tells us that at the end of the Last Supper the Lord and his disciples sang before leaving the upper room where they had celebrated the Passover Meal to go to the garden of Gethsemane. The example of the Lord and his disciples shows us that singing should be an integral part of our celebration of the Liturgy of the Mass.<sup>577</sup> “Let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly, in all wisdom; teaching and

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

admonishing one another in psalms, hymns; and spiritual canticles, singing with grace in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). The first Christian communities were instructed by Saint Paul to praise the Lord with “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” The first followers of Jesus, being from a Jewish background, were familiar with the psalms and canticles of Holy Scriptures.<sup>578</sup> So, church music should be chosen to facilitate the participation of all present so that with one harmonious voice praise is rendered to the Most Holy Trinity. And in composing music, especially songs for the celebration of Mass, like the charismatic renewal group that has music ministry, the Church authority must take time to supervise what is to be used in the Liturgy to highlight, clarify emphasise and underline elements of the sacred text. This is very important in order to encourage composers to put their gifts at the service of the Liturgy. Of course the Church is happy and deemed it appropriate that at all Masses celebrated with the assembled people of God, there should be some music and singing for the joy of coming together to worship the Lord of life. This is done in the Nigerian weekday and Sunday Masses, and could be made possible in the churches of the United King and Wales. In the United Kingdom and Wales I am not sure if parishioners will be able to sing in the weekday Masses when in some parishes it is a tug of war to sing on Sunday Masses. In the Nigerian church, for parishes to fail to sing on any weekday or Sunday Mass is enough to for the Catholics to lose the Catholics to the Pentecostal churches where their “choruses and praises” can easily captivate the soul like a fly to honey. The only thing that could make the educated Catholics to remain is their sacraments. You can give pass mark to the Nigerian Pentecostal church members in quoting the scripture and their uplifting choruses and praises unto the Lord. They preach with enormous power the prosperity gospel and claim to have power to heal and work miracles, and with their melodious music, choruses and praises attract so many people to their church. However, the Nigerian Catholic church is well known for their music

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

ministry. Music that uplifts the spirit keeps Nigerian church alive and attractive. We may not be able to estimate the benefit that can be brought to the Liturgy by a well-groomed choir. As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out, a choir can contribute to developing “the sense of prayer, of dignity and beauty” in the Liturgy. It is worth spending parish money in developing parish choir(s) and the parish charismatic band to enrich parish spirituality and worship. To make parish Mass attractive, we should not only sing at Mass, we should sing the Mass. In other words, the texts of the Mass should be sung. This will help not only to attract the youths but to retain them.

It is in the office of the Bishop to teach the members of the clergy and the lay Christian faithful the Rites of the liturgical celebration to forestall any form of interference with laid down Rites. The Bishop both by word and example “should make clear the inherent meaning of the rites and the liturgical texts, and nourish the spirit of the Liturgy in the Priests, Deacons and lay faithful so that they are all led to the active and fruitful celebration of the Eucharist” (RS 22). For the whole Christian faithful to fall line with the Catholic Liturgy, liturgical formation should be made available to all: “The Bishop should be determined that the Priests, the Deacons and the lay Christian faithful grasp ever more deeply the genuine significance of the rites and liturgical texts, and thereby be led to the active and fruitful celebration of the Eucharist” (GIRM 22). What the Church wants is to make the mystery being celebrated present, and to become a source of life for the children of God. Abbot Gueranger spoke of the Liturgy as the most solemn and popular form of teaching and he exhorted the bishops of his day to follow the example of the Fathers of the Church and give homilies on the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacred Scriptures. He was convinced to a degree which few people are today of the incomparable value of liturgical catechesis: “who can tell what life giving graces

would be poured out on the Christian people, as a direct result of a teaching based upon the explanation and understanding of the mysteries, words and rites of the Liturgy?”<sup>579</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI insists that, “We must learn to understand the structure of the Liturgy and why it is laid out as it is ... To the extent that we have interiorized this structure, comprehended this structure, assimilated the words of the liturgy; we can only speak to God as individuals, but enter into the ‘we’ of the Church who is praying. And we thus transform our ‘I’ in this way, by entering into the ‘we’ of the Church, with the words of the Church, truly being in conversation with God.” It is extremely important to understand that the essential elements in the structure of the Mass have remained unchanged from the time of the Apostles. There have been developments and enrichments in the form of the Mass, but as Pope Benedict XVI remarked, “The liturgy which developed in the course of two millenniums has always remained a continuation of ongoing growth of worship and proclamation.” We may not add or subtract from the elements of the Mass. There may not be any alteration of the essential elements of the Liturgy if the knowledge of their history is appreciated. It will at the same time help us to understand when the Church undertakes some changes and development, not in the essential elements of the Eucharist, but in the way the Liturgy is celebrated. Abbot Gueranger wrote that to think that the Liturgy is unchangeable is “a contradiction of the genius of the Church which enables her to adapt to the needs of the times, and she, like every inhabitant of this world, is subject to the law of salutary progress ... The Church, the mystical body of Jesus Christ, is subject to a law of development.” If the Catholic Charismatic members are well monitored and guided, they will bring a lot of positive changes in the church because they demonstrate a lot of eagerness in seeking the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

It still resides in the office of the Bishop to educate the whole Christian faithful on how to participate collectively and individually in the celebration of the Eucharist in their parishes and in the diocese in general. This is to forestall any parish group trying to downsize the meaning of Mass. “The celebration of the Eucharist is the action of Christ and of the Church, namely, of the holy people united and ordered under the Bishop, who celebrates either in person or through Priests who are his helpers” (GIRM 91). It is an obligation for the whole People of God to participate in the celebration of the sacred mysteries on Sundays and on days of obligation. Sunday is by apostolic tradition, the day the paschal mystery is celebrated. The observance of Holy Days of obligation is part of the Sunday Duty the first of the Precepts of the Church as listed in the Code of Canon Law (Canon 1246). In the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, it is said that “in the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God’s own possession and a royal priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him, and so that they may learn to offer their very selves.” It is inferred that from participation in the sacrifice of the Mass, the faithful continue to offer their daily activities, their lives and their thoughts to God in their homes and places of work. Their life and work become a prayerful daily generous offering to God. The spiritual celebration of Mass continues as they go about their daily living. Their spiritual communion with the Lord goes on as far as they are conscious that the Lord is within them as they go about their daily business. To be aware that God lives in us is a continuous prayer and communion with the Lord. In other words, as far as we are breathing, we are praying. To be alive is to pray.

To fail to join the worshipping community in celebrating the Eucharist is to lack in spiritual charity. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal sees the exercise of charity as being rooted in the coming together of the People of God who, “should, moreover, take care to

show this by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration.” Do they know that celebration of Mass is a mystical renewal on the altar of the redeeming unique sacrifice of the cross? Again, do they understand that the height of prayer and worship to the almighty God is the holy Mass? In the Eucharist, Christ gives himself to us and to the whole world without reserve, should we not be generous to share with one another especially those who are in great need? The Eucharist is traditionally understood to be the bond of charity that unites the church as the body of Christ on earth. Those or a group of Catholics who choose to absent themselves from Mass, how do they work for the unity our Lord Jesus wished and prayed for his followers before his ascension? Do they not believe in the prayer Jesus gave to us: the Our Father? In the Our Father, we pray that the Kingdom of God may be made present for us even on earth. And the Kingdom or the Reign of God is realized in our coming together in love as members of God’s family. If we fail to come to Mass, how do we participate in the Kingdom promised us by God which has been acquired for us by the blood of Christ poured out in his passion?

Our Eucharistic communion presents us with a number of challenges in relation to those who are literally hungry and thirsty and have no food or clean water to drink. Is it not a challenge to us when we have food to eat and money for medicine if we are sick and Eucharistic food when we go to Mass and so committed to the poor? To paraphrase St. John Chrysostom, who challenges us to recognize Christ in the poor, ‘you have tasted the blood of the Lord at the Eucharistic Table and yet you do not recognize your brother ... You dishonour the table of the Lord if you do not judge your brother worthy to share your food. ... God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful.’ So the Eucharist leads us to unity and communion with one another in Christ, the unity of the Body of Christ:

Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body – the Church. Communion renews, strengthens and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism (CCC 1396).

As St. Paul clearly taught:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion with the blood of Christ? And the bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? The bread is one, and so we, though many, form one body, sharing one bread (1 Cor. 10:16 – 17).

This communion through the body and blood of the Risen Christ, besides being a personal encounter with Christ, makes of all of us one body. We form one body. This does not only mean that we feel united, but that the Risen Christ unites us to himself and, so doing, gives us the community new strength. Eucharistic Prayer 2 asks that ‘all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit’, and that we may grow together in love. By receiving together the body of Christ, we become together the body of Christ, the Church. The question we should always ask ourselves is, how do we as individuals and as a believing community deepen this new strength and communion between members of our Eucharistic communities as a central purpose of the Eucharist? How do this communion and new strength affect the way we celebrate the Eucharist in our parish family? Do we appreciate the way Christ’s presence in the Eucharist challenge us to be “present” to the Eucharist and to the needs of others especially those on the margins of life? Are we present to the Eucharist that is present to us? Do we realize that Christ is present and active amongst us as a believing community through the Eucharist? We can appreciate that Christ is active amongst us by the way we are present to others in the community with whom we celebrate the Eucharist as well as be Eucharistic people to others in the society where we live and work. As we participate in the Eucharistic table of the Lord, we are transformed into what we receive but; we cannot share the Eucharist with other Christian and non-Christians. And so, the question is, how can we bring the Eucharistic love and blessing to other Christians, non-Christians and unbelievers? This is because our Eucharistic life is lived out in the worshipping community and in the civil society. This question comes to mind because



Catholic Charismatic Renewal members are very good at proclaiming Jesus to others outside the church premises, and it is extremely important that they are encouraged to be Eucharistic people since the Eucharist is the Christ they preach. If members of the Catholic Renewal are always enthusiastic in outdoor evangelization and, yet fail to interact and engage with fellow parishioners and participate in parish activities, they become a contradiction unto themselves. It is as if they “shine” to outsiders but abhor members of their own parish. This is a spiritual irony. There is a missionary gap in their Christian living. This is what we want to outline because it is causing a scandal. Our Christian generosity should start from home otherwise, it becomes a public show-off.

Some members of the Charismatic Renewal snub adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It is a tradition in Catholic parishes to expose the Blessed Sacrament in the church or in the chapel once or more a week for parishioners to come in at will to adore the Lord exposed in the monstrance. It is sadly observed that some members of the Renewal do not participate in this spiritual exercise. I want to say that this attitude constitutes a scandal to our spiritual sensitivity. As Catholics, we know that devotion to the Eucharistic species has marked much of devotional practice of the Catholic Church. It is our Catholic practice to come before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle or exposed in the monstrance to adore the Lord, to talk to the Lord and listen to the Lord talk to us. Some just come before the Lord in the tabernacle in a prayerful silence, in prayerful meditation or adoration. To remain silent before the Lord in the tabernacle or exposed in the monstrance and be aware that the Lord knows that you are there is such an enriching prayer and divine experience. The Scripture says “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:11). But some members of the Renewal unfortunately regard Eucharistic adoration outside of Mass as sometime that is passive or does not require any response or attention from them. It doesn’t seem important to some of them. They don’t

participate in such spiritual exercise. The members of the Renewal are very vocal, active and loud in their spirituality and probably find silence before the Blessed Sacrament very dull, uninspiring and unfruitful. But in actual fact, the prayer sessions and meetings of the Renewal are very exciting and energetic, and so, silence before the Blessed Sacrament seems so unbearable and unattractive to them. But as a pastor of souls, I need to encourage them to learn how to “be still, and know that I am God.” Do not forget the encounter between Yahweh and Elijah. Elijah was on the run for his life when he complained to Yahweh. Yahweh said to him, “Go up and stand on the mount, waiting for Yahweh.” Yahweh was not in the windstorm nor earthquake nor fire but the gentle murmur of a breeze (1 Kings 19: 10 – 18). The Lord talks to us in the silence of our heart and mind. We need inner quietness in order to hear the gentle voice of Jesus.

We do not deny that charismatic renewal members may have a different type of spirituality from the Trappist monks but, at the same time, every human being needs some quiet time to examine his/her life, to speak to God and to listen to God, if possible, on a daily basis. Susan L. Taylor says, “We need quiet time to examine our lives openly and honestly – spending quiet time alone gives your mind an opportunity to renew itself and create order.” It is true that there is a lot of noise and distraction in the world around us and, even some negative feelings such like a “war” (with self or with others) going on in our mind. Feelings of hate, anger, jealous and sadness can be negative and yet, in the right context, they are completely natural. And negative emotions can stop us from thinking and behaving rationally and seeing situations in their true perspective. When this occurs, we tend to see only what we want to see and remember only what we want to remember. Hence, the human heart yearns for peace and quiet which is an integral part of growth, renewal and joy of living. The answer to the question: Why does anyone need quiet time is not farfetched. In our present computer

generation, it is simply humanly impossible to just keep going without ever stopping to think and to rest. So human beings ever so often need uninterrupted silence that is so elusive and prized, to rest and renew. It is true that charismatic prayer meetings tend to be more attractive and a lot of voicing prayers out to God. We also need to maintain some silence and be attentive to the gentle voice of Jesus in the silence of our heart and mind. In our prayer, we should not all the time shouting out prayer requests to God who is definitely not deaf without making out time in the silence of our heart to listen to the voice of God which is only audible enough if we cultivate some quietness in our inner self.

The Catholic Church is here to help. Mother Church is our spiritual mother. The Church document **Eucharisticum mysterium**, issued in 1967 was written to give instructions about the Blessed Eucharist and established norms for worship. This document reminds the Church of the central importance of the Eucharistic mystery in the life of the Christian faithful and encourages them to receive the Eucharist frequently at Mass. The document also very importantly provides a rationale for worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass, and gives regulations for its practice so that Eucharistic piety would not distract the faithful from the liturgy. The only shortcoming of this document is that it provides a rich theology of the Blessed Eucharist but fails to provide a particular ritual or order of service for Eucharistic worship and adoration. Our spiritual consolation is that, the order of service is provided in the 1973 ritual book, *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, and the 1994 ritual book from the United States of America, the *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist*. And so, many parishes leave the church open for people to come in and spend some quality time with the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle and in some big parishes, there is perpetual adoration of the exposed Blessed Eucharist, all day long every day of the week, year in year out. This is something big for those who appreciate the

presence of the Lord of life in the Blessed Eucharist. Others expose the Blessed Eucharist in the monstrance on specific days and times as a spiritual life-spring for people to come in at will to be refreshed and recollected to face the complications of life.

In the Catholic Church, the members of the Renewal are among the foot-soldiers of Christ in the ministry of the New Evangelization. They are both internal (within themselves) and external evangelizers. It is interesting that they are so eager to be out there in the streets, in public arenas, and on the buses preaching with power and enthusiasm. What are they preaching about? Who are they preaching about? Of course, they are definitely preaching Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. They invite people to come along and experience the Kingdom – the reign of God, the reign of justice, peace, truth and love. And Christ himself is the Kingdom of God. But, it is sadly observed that some members of the charismatic group avoid coming to parish weekly adoration of the Blessed Eucharist exposed in the monstrance only to congregate in their great number for their prayer meeting immediately after the adoration. If the Renewal members are not patient enough to “waste” sometime in the presence of God in the Blessed Eucharist, what do they actually preach to people in their evangelical ministry? If they are not prepared to spend some time in worshipping the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, how can they nourish and energize their body and soul? What ‘type’ of Christ will they package and give to the people they evangelize? They are so eager to go out and preach Christ and yet, they are not ready to spend some time with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and how do they know Christ then? How can they give what they do not have? When they go out to preach, do they invite people to Christ or to themselves or to who since they find it unbearable to spend time with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. During the time of Our Lord Jesus Christ, there were the doctors of the law, the Scribes and the Pharisees who were the teachers and preachers of religion who

were equally powerful in their ministry. They believed that they were in God's favour and yet, they hated Jesus, planned to kill him and eventually succeeded in killing him. Not only that they intended to kill Jesus, the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus as well, since it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus (John 12: 10 – 11). Pope Francis, in his homily on September 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 during Mass at St. Martha's church, said they were "far removed from the people," who "spoke well, taught the law well." The Pontiff said, their way "was not a visit from the Lord; it was something else." Such that "the people did not feel this as a grace, because it lacked closeness; it lacked compassion and suffering with the people." The Pontiff commenting on the resurrection of the widow's son in Nain (Luke 7:11- 17) said that "God has visited his people" which constitute something extra and something new. He gave example of God visiting Naomi in her old age and made her a grandmother as well as Elizabeth, Mary's cousin and made her a mother. So, "when God visits his people, it means that he is present in a special way." In his encounter with the widow of Nain, the people spoke these words: "God has visited us." The Bishop of Rome explained that God visits "first of all with his presence, with his closeness." In the passage from Luke, "it is written that Jesus went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him." In essence, "he was close to the people: a close God who is able to understand the heart of the people, the heart of his people." According to Luke's account, "he sees that procession and draws near." Thus "God visits his people," he is "in the midst of his people he draws near." Hence, closeness is God's way." Again, the Scripture says: "The Lord was moved by great compassion" (Mt. 9:36). And it is that "same compassion which moved him when he saw so many people like sheep without a shepherd." So, it is a fact that "when God visits his people he is close to them, he draws near and feels compassion; he is moved; deeply moved as when he came in front of Lazarus' tomb; moved like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, when he saw his son from afar returning home." The Pontiff said

“closeness and compassion: this is how the Lord visits his people.”<sup>580</sup> Adding to his closeness and compassion, St Luke writes “And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother.” Thus “when God visits his people, he restores hope to them” In this regard, Pope Francis pointed out that “one can preach the word of God brilliantly,” and “there have been great preachers: but if these preachers do not manage to sow hope their preaching is useless. It is in vain.”<sup>581</sup> When members of the Renewal go out to evangelize and bring people to their fold, what ‘type’ of Christ do they give them? Is it the Christ they are not ready to come to Mass to encounter or the Christ they are not ready to spend time with at the adoration of the Blessed Eucharist or ‘another Christ’ apart from the Christ in the Blessed Eucharist?

We need to understand what it means to say that God visits his people. The question that should agitate our mind is, ‘How does God visit his people?’ The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that the whole Christ is present in the Eucharistic elements, but ‘in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ’ (CCC 1377). The exposition of the Blessed Eucharist in the monstrance or in the chapel of the perpetual adoration is simply God visiting his people. It is God being present to his people. It is in that “silence” shrouding Jesus in the tabernacle, Jesus exposed in the monstrance in the sanctuary or in the chapel of perpetual adoration that God speaks to our heart, in the silence of our heart, he speaks so loudly that even the deaf hears him. It is in that silence in his presence in the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament that God comes visiting his people with the gifts of peace, closeness, compassion, hope and the resurrection. It is in that silence of the worship of the exposed Blessed Eucharist that the Lord calls, educates, empowers and sends us out on mission. It is in

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<sup>580</sup> Pope Francis, Morning Homilies IV, In the Chapel of St. Martha’s Guest House, July 7 – November 27, New York, USA, Orbis Books, 2014, pp. 34-35.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36.

the adoration of the Blessed Eucharist that Lord schools for the ministry of evangelization.

Also God visits his people in the liturgy of the Mass. In the Eucharistic celebration we encounter the Lord.

It is unfortunate that some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal snub the adoration of the Lord in parish exposition of the Blessed Eucharist. And at the same time, it is interesting that they engage in the work of evangelization. In actual fact, it is fascinating to see how powerfully they preach the word of Christ. Pope Francis, in his homily in the church of St. Martha on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2014, remarked how the Scribes and the Pharisees preached powerfully which was acknowledged by Jesus Christ himself. The Pontiff also pointed out that “there have been many great preachers ...” The question that keeps coming to my mind is, ‘these Catholic members, who ignore the worship or adoration of the Blessed Eucharist when it is exposed for the community of believers, what message of Christ do they preach to people, when they refused to be schooled by Christ exposed in the monstrance?’ Like the members of the Catholic Renewal who preach so powerfully (as the Scribes and the Pharisees did to which Jesus acknowledged), if they are not schooled by Jesus, who is God who visits his people in the Blessed Eucharist, how can they be the bearers of God’s visit to his people? How can they be the bearers of God’s closeness and compassion to his people? How can their “message” of Christ sow hope of the resurrection in the people of God? As a pastor of souls, I beg you in the name of Christ; do not dismiss these questions bordering on our Christian living faith. Our Catholic theology does say that people can have the message, the knowledge and the power of God without getting it from Christ who is God living amongst us, and who says: ‘I am the way, the truth and the life’ (John 14:6). The Pharisees and the Scribes who refused to accept Jesus and eventually succeeded in killing him lacked God’s closeness and compassion and never brought anybody to God. Jesus is God’s gift and revelation to

humanity. And the Catholic Christians who refuse to go through the school of Jesus may not be able to bring souls to God since they do not have God's "closeness, compassion and hope" which Jesus gives. They may bring people to their painted up 'God' which is a 'false' God. Unfortunately, so many people are presented with 'distorted' God. So preaching the word of God "brilliantly" and "powerfully" may not be enough to sow the seed of hope in the hearts of men and women. To paraphrase my Canon Law 'Professor', Late Rev. Fr. Dr. Emmanuel Asuquo Akpan, in my theology class: 'They can be singing well but, they are singing outside the choir.' Some Charismatic Renewal members believe in the power of preaching, making plenty use of the Scriptures to convince and convert people to God. But we may listen to St. Paul: 'As for me, brothers, when I came to you, it was not with any show of oratory, but simply to tell you what God had guaranteed. The only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the crucified Christ. Far from relying on any power of my own when I spoke to you. My speeches and sermons were none of the arguments that belong to philosophy; only a demonstration of the power of the Spirit. St. Paul did this so that our faith should not depend on human philosophy but on the power of God' (1 Cor. 2:1 – 5). The Lord said to his disciples and says to us: "You did not choose me; it was I who chose you and sent you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (John 15:16). And so we not ignore the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The Lord in the tabernacle or exposed in the Blessed Sacrament is the School of Evangelization. The Lord says, "I am the vine and you are the branches. As long as you remain in me and I in you, you bear much fruit; but apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Each of us should consider how he is joined to Jesus through faith, prayer and keeping his word. Jesus is right THERE in the tabernacle or exposed in the monstrance, waiting for us, and talking to us. Each of us has to bear fruit. Jesus does not specify what these fruits should be: whether service, understanding, action for social justice, forgiveness, preaching Jesus in the family or along the streets or a life silently offered to God. Rather he



insists that these fruits should come from the Spirit and bear his seal. This is because the Scribes and the Pharisees could not be doing the work of God by planning to kill Lazarus raised from the dead by Jesus because they thought “it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus” (John 12:11). Their sense of jealousy was so deadly that they killed Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:10). Their evil works could not come from the Holy Spirit. They didn’t have the seal of the Spirit. There is a tendency of being able to preach wonderfully as well as engage in other works of evangelization and yet lack the seal of Christ. May we not be among those Jesus referred to as saying: “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not speak in your name? Did we not cast out devils and perform many miracles in your name’” (Matthew 7:22)?

The believing community are different. They are planted from the selected stock, cared for by Jesus and should produce fruits of justice (Mark 12:1). Christ is the tree from which the branches sprout, that is to say, all of us who live by him. What matters most is the collective conduct of the community of believers as one body of Christ. There is a necessary order in building the Christian life to which Jesus refers to all the time: the new commandment of love. Love, not just of the brother and the sister or the neighbour but of all even, of the perceived enemy. Jesus says: “But this I tell you: love your enemies; and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). This is a new commandment because Jesus enlightens our mind by asking us to model the love of our neighbour on universal love of God the Father. We only need to interiorize the thinking of Jesus so as to realize that there is a place for everyone in the present world and that God directs everything for the benefit of all. We can then see things as God does and are perfect as the Father is perfect. This is the gift of Jesus because we are members of the body of Jesus which Jesus builds and cares for.

They are members of the body of Jesus, the Church, where Jesus resides in the Blessed Eucharist. Jesus visits the members of the Church in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Pope Francis, at Mass in the church of St. Martha on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2014, reflecting on the gospel of Luke (9:18 – 22) on the theme of ‘True Identity’, “But who do people say that I am?” and “Who do you say that I am?” These two questions bring us back to the true Christian identity which consists in being willing to die with Jesus in order to be raised with him. But, is it enough to be Christian? Are we part of the believing community, the body of Christ? Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples answered: “John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah; and others, one of the old prophets who has risen.” The confusion of Herod the Tetrarch with regards to the identity of Jesus comes to mind (Luke 9:7). The disciples gave the same response. And now, the Lord directs the question to his disciples: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answers for all of them: “The Christ of God. You are the Messiah! You are the anointed one, the one we have been waiting for!” Even at this, Jesus “charged and commanded them to tell this to no one.” Yet, Jesus wants to “protect his identity.” This is because he wants to give to his disciples a catechesis on his true identity. He says to them “the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and Scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.” Jesus begins to open the mystery of his identity, confiding in them: “Yes, I am the Son of God. But this is my journey: I must take this path of suffering.”<sup>582</sup> We need to understand the identity of Christ in order to have his seal of ownership and authority over us.

It is interesting that as Pope Francis observes that “the pedagogy of Jesus, even with us, is like this: step by step he prepares us to understand him well.” And “he also prepares us to accompany him with our crosses on the path toward redemption.” In essence, “he prepares us

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48.

to be Cyrenes in order to help him carry the cross.” Such that, “without this, our Christian life is not Christian.” It is only “a spiritual, good life”; and Jesus himself becomes only “the great prophet.” Reality is different: Jesus has saved us all by making us take “the same path” that he chose. It is a worry when some members of the charismatic group decide not to come for Mass and not to participate in the parish adoration of the Blessed Sacrament or any spiritual or social programme of the parish community. It is in these parish spiritual/social activities that Jesus visits us and reveals his identity to us. Jesus reveals his identity to the community, to those who accept his invitation to be his disciples. And also, Jesus visits and lives in the community of his disciples. The Church accepts the charismatic renewal and authorises it. But now, some charismatic members insist that they cannot join the Church members in any parish gathering because they have their own “Jesus.” They are very bold to answer the almighty question: “Who do people say that I am?” To this question, the disciples gave different answers of who people thought Jesus was. But step by step, Jesus revealed his identity to them. It is very interesting that the charismatic renewal members are convinced that through their numerous spiritual activities such like prayer meetings, teaching ministry, healing ministry, bible studies, speaking in tongues, miracles, singing ministry, preaching, counselling, works of evangelization and so on and so forth, they can boldly answer correctly the questions of “Who do people say that I am?” and “Who do you say that I am?” But if they are singing from the same page with the parish community, they will never abandon the parish family in the Mass and in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament where Jesus is, visits and reveals his identity to his followers. It is wonderful that some charismatic members authorized by the Church sincerely believe that on their own, without the Magisterium, they can correctly diagnose the interior movements of the spirits and know the Spirit of God; and can also be saved without the sacraments of the Church. They believe that without being loyal to the Church and the sacraments, the Spirit of God guides their lively prayer meetings,

powerful prayer over people, powerful preaching and evangelization; healings, testimonies of miracles, prophesies from amongst them, and praying and singing in tongues. The exuberance in their spiritual activities is undeniable, and so, they have the spiritual confidence that it is the Spirit of God leading them through. They are visibly so joyous in the Holy Spirit! They are swimming in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they troop in and out and energetically engage in all their numerous spiritual activities which are always lively, and yet, have completely nothing to do with parish activities. They believe so much in the power of their prayer and so without the church, they can weather any spiritual storm. They are conspicuously absent in parish family programmes. And it is observable that majority of them live a life of special “brotherhood” and “sisterhood” amongst their members, and diplomatically avoid the friendship of other members of the parish family. It will not take a long for a visiting member of other religious belief or a non-believer to know that the Catholic Charismatic Group is a “special” group in the Catholic Church. A visiting non-Catholic friend when I was the parish priest of St Gabriel Bariga Lagos remarked to me that if he were to become a Catholic, it is that “group” (the charismatic group), that he would belong to. This is because he observed that they were upbeat in the spirit – a lot singing, melodious songs and prayers and testimonies of God’s healings, a lot of exciting spiritual activities. For those who are attracted to the things of the Spirit, the charismatic group will be attractive. I am only trying to encourage them to join their spiritual resources with the mainstream parish family, the body of Christ.

According to Pope Francis, “Jesus condemns people with good manners but bad habits,” because it is one thing to “appear good and beautiful,” but inner truth is something else. If brotherhood and sisterhood in the Lord is only practised in the midst of Renewal members without happily and generously extending this divine friendship and love to non-members in

the parish family then, there is division in the parish family. I will like them to extend this friendship and enthusiasm amongst them to other members of the parish family. They appear to exclusively live this utopian love-life amongst themselves by themselves. They appear to prefer to live by themselves in the parish community which attitude marks them out from the rest of the parish family. They practise spiritual exclusiveness in the parish community. They create a spiritual space only for themselves. Will God be so happy to save this “special group” without the rest of his children in the worshipping community? They grow so suspicious and defensive if any non-member wants to break into their “safe” enclave. Even their parish priest, an authority figure, who does not dance to their tune, becomes an “enemy” who “polices” them because they believe he “hates” them. They think he is now breaking into their save space. They forget that the parish priest authorizes them and gives account of them to the Bishop. They are simply more powerful than the priest who they constantly blackmail when he tries to take responsibility for their pastoral wellbeing and for the pastoral wellbeing of the whole parish community. They behave like the Pharisees “who are so concerned with the outside appearance, but inside are filled with plunder and evil” (Luke 11:39). The outsiders profess how lovely and brotherly they appear to each other in their “special” group but so “far away” and “strange” towards the rest of the parish community. Matthew in his Gospel describes the Scribes and the Pharisees to “whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). Jesus firmly condemns the Scribes and the Pharisees in their self-confidence in “having fulfilled the law.” Pope Francis condemned “this cosmetic spirituality.” The Pontiff said that the Pharisees “believed they were good because they did all that the law commanded should be done. But law, “alone does not save.” Law saves “when it leads you to the source of salvation, when it prepares your heart to receive the true salvation that comes from faith.” St. Paul warned the Galatians of being “too attached to the law” and “frightened of the faith”

and so had “returned to the prescriptions of the law” in regard to circumcision (Galatians 5:1 – 6). If the heart doesn’t change, appearance counts for nothing. We need to ask ourselves constantly, ‘how are my faith and my Christian life?’ Is it a Christian life of cosmetics, of appearance or of conversion to what Christ wants of his Church? Each of us can examine our conscience “before God.”<sup>583</sup> And it is good for us to do so daily.

There is this attitude: ‘we know it more than the Church.’ This brings to mind the homily of Pope Francis titled ‘Salvation Our Way’ on October 3, 2014, during Mass in the church of St. Martha’s. The Pontiff was reflecting on the Gospel of Luke (10:13 – 16). He said that man experiences within himself “the tragedy of not accepting God’s salvation” because he would prefer “to be saved in his own way.” This is exactly what some of the members of the Renewal are doing, consciously or unconsciously. Jesus even reaches the point of tears over man’s “resistance” and repeatedly offers his mercy and his forgiveness. The Pope said, we cannot say “save us Lord, but” do it “our way!” He remarked that Jesus was tracing the whole history of salvation: “it has been tragedy of man not wanting to be saved; it has been the tragedy of not accepting the salvation of God.”<sup>584</sup> It is observable in the Renewal members being too busy with their numerous religious activities and practically not wanting to do anything with the sacraments of the Church and her programmes. Did Jesus not recall many times that “these people rejected the prophets; they stoned those who had been sent to them because they were a bit troublesome.” This idea is always the same: “We want salvation, but we want it our way! Not how the Lord wants it.” According to the Pontiff, we could be facing the “tragedy of resisting being saved.” It is “a legacy that we have all received,” because “in our hearts too, there is this seed of resistance to being saved the way the Lord wants to save

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<sup>583</sup> Ibid., pp. 74-77.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

us.”<sup>585</sup> Of course the Renewal members believe in their prayer meetings, night vigils, novenas, reading and praying the bible, testimonies of miracles and healings, prayer warriors, and these and other spiritual activities sustain their confidence and give them enormous spiritual powers. Many of them have always assumed that they are more intelligent than the church. They believe that they can use their logic to dislodge the teachings of the Church. The Lord said: “You have always resisted the Holy Spirit, just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51). He also said: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). The Pope remarked that it is firstly “a tragedy of the people” because “our forefathers rebelled many times in the desert.” According to the Pope, “it is actually the ruling class that closes the doors to the way that God wants to save us.” They “argued with Jesus, put him to the test, laid traps to see if he could fall into them,” because they had “resistance to being saved.” Jesus described them to be like children sitting in the marketplace, about whom their companions complain, “We piped you a tune and you wouldn’t dance; we sang funeral songs and you wouldn’t cry” (Luke 7:32). Then what do you want? According to Pope Francis, the answer is: “We want salvation to be done our way.” The modern man and woman are exactly that way. We do exactly that. Do we not? We want to contradict the laws of God. We reproach John for his austerity and Jesus for his lack of austerity. We are rebellious all the time. According to Prophet Isaiah, “These are a rebellious people, their children deceitful. They do not listen to Yahweh’s advice” (Isaiah 30:9). As far as we insist on serving God our own way, the Gospel is not being taken seriously. There is no doubt that the leaders of the Renewal put in place alternative “laws” and “regulations” members keep feverishly which their “biblical knowledge” and “inspirational powers” have created. They appear to air of power from their numerous spiritual activities which make them feel deeply confident in the Lord. As far as they obey their leaders and follow their laid-

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid., pp. 59-60.

down regulations, they feel covered by the blood of Jesus. What matters for them are what their leaders say not the guidelines and the teachings of the Magisterium. Some of them don't even greet the parish priest on one to one basis talk less of listening to his instructions. Their parish priest appears to be their "enemy." If he steps in to instil some orderliness then, he is accused of hating the charismatic members. And through that way, he incites parishioners to hate them. So, that is why they keep to themselves because the parish priest and the parishioners hate them. The first thing you notice is that they generally keep to themselves and so avoid interacting with other parishioners, and never participate in parish activities. And they are confident that they are covered by the blood of Jesus.

We may be sabotaging God's plan for our salvation in so many ways, and yet think and believe that we are serving the living God. The history of salvation is full of leaders who have led their subjects through the nose to massage their ego, status and pride. They are only interested in safeguarding their power and position. The Scribe and the Pharisees were afraid of losing their power and influence to Jesus and so decided to get rid of him and also to kill Lazarus because he was a witness to the "life" Jesus was bringing. That is exactly the "tragedy of resistance to salvation" which could even lead some Renewal members not to believe in the "mercy and forgiveness" of Christ but in the sacrifices of prayers, vigils and reading the bible, and "feeling" saved. We must note that this is "a tragedy" that is hidden in each of us. It is part of the wounded nature of humanity. Humanity has rebellious blood running through its veins. It is important for each person to ask himself: "How do I want to be saved? Is it my own way? It is good to always confront that irrational self that keeps on rebelling within me. Definitely, some charismatic members want to be saved through their own spirituality that is so good, lively, exciting and uplifting and that is what they are spiritually comfortable with; and any other thing the parish is doing is not for them. They are



comfortable in their own skin. This is exactly the tragedy of resistance which makes Jesus to weep. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus; he also cried over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41 – 44). Definitely, Jesus is weeping over those who think that they are spiritually safe and, so have no need of the Church and the sacraments. Jesus weeps for them because the Church is the body of Jesus. We can understand why Jesus is concerned and each of us should be concerned because what touches one touches all. Jesus weeps over the tragedy of not accepting his salvation as the Father wants it. Pope Francis urges us to “consider that this tragedy is in our heart,” and ask that each of us ask ourselves: “What do I think the path of my salvation is like: that of Jesus or another? Am I free to accept salvation or do I confuse freedom with autonomy, wanting my salvation, the one that I believe is fair? Do I believe that Jesus is the master who teaches us salvation or do I go everywhere to hire a guru who teaches us about another one?” Do I take “a more reliable path or do I seek refuge under the roof of rules and of many man-made commandments? And do I feel confident this way, and with – this is a bit hard to say – in this confidence, do I buy my salvation, which Jesus bestows gratuitously, with the gratuitousness of God?” If we ask ourselves these questions, they will do us a lot of good and, they will bring us to Pope Francis’ concluding challenging question: “Am I resistant to the salvation of Jesus?”<sup>586</sup> Or am I “afraid of God’s gratuitousness?” Pope Francis said that God’s gratuitousness could be so great that it frightens us. Man is a fractured being. The Bishop of Rome recalled the incident of the two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They said to each other, “We had hope that he was the one to liberate Israel.” So, “the gift was so great that we were disappointed. And we are afraid.” Thomas also fell into the same trap when he told about the Risen Lord. He “was afraid of God’s gratuitousness.” The popular saying comes to mind: “When the offer is so great, even the holy are suspicious.” We all have this hidden fear in us. According to the Pope, we are Catholics but not too

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<sup>586</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

Catholic, “confidence in the Lord, but not too much.” And this “not too much,” in the end, “diminishes” us.<sup>587</sup> Could it be that God is using this Corona virus to “compel” us to come back to him with a broken heart not our clothing torn, and to know that there is graciousness in him? We have all sinned and fallen short of God’s grace (Rom. 3:23). For those who believe in God, this Corona virus pandemic could be an opportunity to remind them that God’s gift “is free, that salvation cannot be bought.” Jesus told a story of a man who gave a feast. When the time was ready, he told his servant to tell those invited to come for them to have a meal but; all of them gave excuses (Luke 14:16 – 18). What would be the reasons behind their rejection of an invitation to a feast? What comes to my mind is that, they seemed to be important persons who were conscious of their importance. They were also selfish. They were self-centred individuals who would not like to compromise their personal egos. They would like to be at the centre of everything because of their self-consciousness and importance. They would not want to go into a crowd who would not recognize their personal worth. They would not want to be swallowed up in a crowd of people who were not up to their own level of importance and dignity. Also, we may be unconsciously afraid of God who offers us such a banquet. At times, we are afraid of God’s mercy without knowing it. God seems to be too demanding. If he forgives us then, he expects too much from us. And so, it is better to remain where we are. This type of unconscious attitude could be driving us. We are indeed “more certain in our sins, within our limits,” because nevertheless we “feel at home” in our sinful condition. God seems to be “too demanding.” We do not want anything to disturb our conscience. If we come “too close” to God we “feel too disturbed” by our sins. We are Catholic. We feel at home with that. We don’t need to be “too Catholic.”

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-107.

On the other hand, let us not think that we can make holiness with doing things. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal members are ever busy with numerous religious activities of “their own” within the parish community. They simply do a lot on their own and for their chosen ministries with no connection with the parish administration. The things they do could be outwardly wonderful apostolate. Their leadership is artfully leading the Renewal members without involving the parish priest and his council and they are renowned for that. They are popularly acclaimed. The Renewal members are so fascinated by the wonderful leadership quality of their leaders. That is why the parish priest could be seen as “evil” in trying to break into the Renewal to exercise his parochial leadership and initiate coordination in all parish ministries. He is tagged “a hater” of Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement. They appear aggressive, defensive and feel defiled when their parish tries to break into their group. They hate any external force except their leaders. The parish priest who is judged not “charismatic” is encroaching and annoying them. It is just like breaking into a secret cult and the members fight like a wounded lion. But we all need to learn according to Catholic teaching that, “salvation is free.” It is a free gift from God – a gratuitous gift for that matter. We do not earn God’s salvation by our wonderful religious activities. Neither do we pay for salvation. We can only accept it with gratitude as a free gift from God by serving the brothers and sisters. St Paul in his Letter to the Philippians recalls that God’s gift “is free, because Jesus Christ, despite being in the form of God, did not retain the privilege, but ‘emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant. He humbled himself by being obedient, to death, death on the cross’” (Phil. 2:5 – 8). As Catholic tradition teaches us, Jesus Christ is the founder of the Catholic Church as we profess in the Creed and, with his Great Commission entrusted it to Saint Peter and the other Apostles to extend and rule it (Matt. 16:18 – 19; 28:18 – 20; CCC 816). It all means that if we obey the Bishop who administers the parish through his co-worker, the parish and his assistant; we are actually obeying the Lord Jesus the founder of the Church. So

our wonderful works for God may not mean so much if we ignore those God put in-charge of his vineyard. In the Kingdom of God, there is orderliness (James 3:11 -12). It is Jesus who “paid for the feast, for the gift, with his humiliation to the point of death, death on the cross.” This is the “great graciousness” of God which is too much for many of us to fathom hence, we prefer to reject the invitation to the feast; we prefer to remain in our sinful situation; which has become our “comfort” zone. And so the invitation from Jesus makes us uncomfortable.

According to Pope Francis, “the crucifix is the entrance to the celebration.” With faith and trust, we can say, yes, Lord, I am a sinner, I have many things, a lot of burden, but I look at you and I respond to the invitation and go to the Father’s feast. I trust. I won’t be disappointed, because you have paid for everything. Thus, “the Church asks us not to fear the graciousness of God,” because it can seem “folly.” But St Paul says that the cross of Christ is nonsense for the world but, for those who are being saved, it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). It is Christ who has paid for everything and so, for us, it is free.<sup>588</sup>

The Eucharist is equally free. Jesus gives for free his body and blood for our spiritual nourishment. We need the Eucharist for our earthly journey to heaven our permanent home. For us in this spiritual journey to heaven, it is important not optional to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice and worship. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal affirms that the People of God come together for worship “in the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God’s own possession and a royal priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him, and so that they may learn to offer their very selves.” This affirms the sacred and holy character of the worshipping community. The Lord does not

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

want Catholic Christians to be divided in their worship to God. In fact, the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. The General Instruction also indicates that charity is rooted in the gathering of the faithful in worship who “should, moreover, take care to show this by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration.” It is extremely important that members of the Charismatic Renewal are encouraged to participate in the Eucharist as part of their Catholic faith and identity, and this will help them to extend their life of charity with the rest of the parish community. And to preserve Christian charity every effort should be made to avoid any appearance or suggestion of singularity or division. Do we not pray the Lord’s Prayer each day? If we practice what we profess, and pray Our Father each day and since we have only one Father in heaven it follows then that, we are all brothers and sisters one to the other. Anything less than Christian unity is lips service and such falsehood is what we want to stamp out from amongst us.

St Benedict readily pointed out that discipleship helps preserve charity. It also ensures harmony and enhances the dignity of the individual and the assembly. Such a community can be seen “to form one body, whether in hearing the word of God or in taking part in the prayers and in the singing, or above all by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by a participating together at the Lord’s Table” (GIRM 96). The leaders of the Charismatic Renewal are indebted to the Church and to God to channel the mind and heart and the spiritual energies of the members to the service of the parish and the Church as a whole. However, respecting the unity of the worshipping community does not rule out the legitimate diversity of character that can be found in any gathering of the faithful (GIRM 24). We cannot deny that the members of the Legion of Mary are different in expressing their spirituality to the members of the Charismatic Renewal. Those who shout their prayers and make a joyful noise unto the Lord and those who are contemplative in their prayers like the

Blessed Virgin Mary are all the same children of one Father-God. When we gather together in the Liturgy, it is an affirmation of Christ's presence in our midst. Where two or three of you are gathered in my name, I am in their midst (Matt. 18:20). "In the celebration of Mass, in which the Sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated Christ is really present in the very assembly gathered in his name" (GIRM 27). Hence, for many years, Pope Benedict XVI has written and taught that the "Liturgy is not our 'making' but God's action upon and with us ... Liturgy is a sharing in the Trinitarian dialogue between Father, Son and Holy Spirit." We must not forget, continues the Holy Father, "that the Liturgy is supposed to be God's work, in which he himself acts first, and we become the redeemed precisely because he is at work. The group that celebrates itself celebrates absolutely nothing, because the group is not a reason for celebrating" (Pope Benedict XVI). The Renewal members are so joyful on their own and generally avoid parish programmes, I must say categorically that their attitude is very worrying and spiritually "endangers" the souls of the many members. Even though, they are spiritually vibrant in their activities but, it is on their own terms, and on their own, without involving the rest of the parishioners; how can the Angels be "clapping hands" and "smiling" at them for their wonderful spirituality? God is celebrated and worshipped by the whole community, not just by a group in the believing community. This is to avoid the danger of a group celebrating themselves in the place of celebrating God. Of course, we avoid being pharisaic in our prayers and worship of God. The Pharisee who came into the temple to pray and rather, prayed to himself and said: "I thank you, God, that I am not like other people, grasping, crooked, adulterous, or even like this tax collector" (Luke 18:11). I am not in any way suggesting that the Renewal members blocks others from joining them in their prayer sessions but, they become suspicious and apprehensive of other parishioners and rather see them as spies who bring bad reports about them to the parish priest. The Renewal members appear enclosed unto themselves and distrustful. Pope Saint Pius X in his **Motu proprio** of

1903 promoted active participation in liturgical worship, encouraging the singing of Gregorian chant. The choruses and praises of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are spiritually lively and uplifting. We are so desperate to have them in our Masses especially their services in Sunday Masses and holy days of obligations. Our Sunday singing at Mass should be glorious and soul-lifting. We even find St Paul exhorting the faithful to sing psalms, hymns, and canticles of praise (Col. 3:16). There is a saying in praise of singing: “One who sings well prays twice.” We all mourn the disappearance of many parish choirs in our modern parishes, especially in European nations than in African countries. And we can only conclude that this phenomenon is a great impoverishment to the liturgical life of the Church. There is still the consolation of parish choirs in Nigerian parishes. The only downside is that those old traditional vernacular Catholic hymns are being replaced by newly composed “choruses” that are traced from Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement or Pentecostal churches. It would be a serious blow to lose those traditional melodious vernacular songs that are more theological than the new “choruses” type of singing. It is also interesting that the instruments that accompany our singing in our city and local parish choirs are modern like guitar and other sophisticated musical instruments replacing locally made ones. Musicians have a ministerial role in the liturgy of the Mass. Music is not just an aesthetic addition to the Liturgy but contributes to the communication of the word of God and the preaching of the good news of salvation.<sup>589</sup> Pope Pius XII took up the baton of promoting singing in the liturgy of the Mass when in his encyclical **Mediator Dei**:

“so that the faithful take a more active part in divine worship ... it is very necessary that the faithful attend the sacred ceremonies not as if they were outsiders or mute onlookers, but let them fully appreciate the beauty of the Liturgy and take part in the sacred ceremonies, alternating their voices with the priest and the choir, according to the prescribed norms. If, please God, this is done, it will not happen that the congregation hardly ever or only in a low murmur answer the prayers in Latin or in the vernacular. A congregation that is devoutly present at the sacrifice, in which our Saviour together with his children redeemed with His

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<sup>589</sup> Dom Cuthbert Johnson OSB, *Participating in the Mass, Celebrating the Liturgy with dignity & beauty*, Living the Liturgy, Harleyford, London, CTS, 2011, P. 55.

sacred blood sings the nuptial hymn of His immense love, cannot keep silent, for – song befits the lover – and, as the ancient saying has it, ‘He who sings well prays twice’ (MD 192).

Active participation defines more of our identity as members of God’s family. Coming together to pray and worship as a believing community is a way of fulfilling our baptismal promises, whereby we become members of the people of God, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, sharers of divine life, a redeemed people (cf. 1 Peter 2:9; *Lumen gentium*, nn 9-17). The different devotional groups in Catholic Church ought to have that stamp of unity which the sacrament of Baptism gives us as well as demonstrate it in their peculiar ministry in the Church. For this unity that is characteristic of the Catholic Church to be practised all the time, there should be continuous formation of the clergy and the faithful. The prayer of Our Lord Jesus that “they may be one” cannot be frustrated by his followers (John 17:21). Pope Benedict XVI said: “I urge everyone to do their best to take care, also through special liturgical groups, of the preparation and celebration of the Eucharist, so that all who take part in it may encounter the Lord.” Pope Pius XII before Pope Benedict, recognised this and wrote in his encyclical **Mediator Dei**: “Try in every way, with the means and helps that your prudence deems best, that the clergy and people become one in mind and heart, and that the Christian people take such an active part in the Liturgy that it becomes a truly sacred action of due worship to the eternal Lord in which the priest, chiefly responsible for the souls of his parish, and the ordinary faithful are united together” (MD 199).

It is important to note that when we come to Mass, the One who invites us, gathers us together, presides over us, teaches, nourishes and blesses us, is Christ himself. The priest presiding at the Eucharist does not replace an absent Christ. He is the instrument of the presence of Christ who is the Priest. The priesthood is a gift from God to the priest who shares in the ministerial priesthood of his Son Jesus. Christ is the Priest at Mass who presides



in a special way through the visible priest. It is then an ideal that the priest himself should be a good sign and instrument of Christ, the High Priest. However, we need to note that it is Jesus celebrating the Mass through the visible priest. The Mass is efficacious not because of the holiness, goodness or intelligence of the priest but because of the grace of Christ, the High Priest. The Mass is efficacious because of the passion, the death, the resurrection and the ascension of Christ. The Risen Lord is the celebrating Priest inviting us to be part of his community, to play our part in the celebration, to listen to his Word, to share in his saving sacrifice, to receive the gift of himself, to be sent forth into the world in his name. This is because Christ is there amongst the worshipping community, powerfully at work. However, there could be changes in the way we celebrate Mass but, note that, the substance of the Eucharist can never change (CCC 1345 – 7, 1356).

How can those who refuse to come to Mass, who refuse to receive the Body and the Blood of Jesus, and refuse to adore the Lord in the Blessed Eucharist be ‘genuine’ Catholics? There may be a serious lapse in the catechetical formation of the faithful! I say this because it is incredible that some part of the faithful engage in the evangelical activity of the parish outside the parish and yet, they are not eager to join the rest of the parish family in adoring the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament nor in attending the parish liturgical celebration of the Eucharist. There is a serious gap in the spiritual life of the parish family. Something is not right in the family of God. This poses a lot of questions begging for answers.

As Catholics, we believe the teaching of the Council of Trent which is that, at Mass, the sacrifice of Calvary is repeated. On the Cross, he redeemed the human family and so, he is the one true Mediator between God and the estranged humanity (Hebrews 9: 24). That is why, as Catholics, we believe that the Cross of Christ is the Tree of life (1 Corinthians 1: 18 –

31). We venerate the Cross. But it is important that some members of the Renewal who frown at the veneration of the Cross are to be taught about the redemption of humanity by Christ on the Cross because, to dismiss the Cross is to dismiss the death and the resurrection of Christ by which our salvation was wrought. It is to dismiss Christianity as a religion founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ. For us Christians, especially Catholics, the Cross has a deep meaning for us. In the Christian liturgical calendar, there are several different **Feasts of the Cross**. These feasts commemorate the Cross used in the crucifixion of Jesus. There is the celebration of the Good Friday Liturgy during which there is the holy ceremony of venerating the cross, first instituted in Jerusalem, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Owing to the pious zeal of the Empress St. Helena, the True Cross had then been recently discovered, to the immense joy of the whole Church. The faithful, as might be expected, were desirous of seeing this precious relic, and accordingly it was exposed every Good Friday as well as venerated. This, of course, brought a very huge number of pilgrims to Jerusalem. It was about the 7<sup>th</sup> century, that the practice of publicly venerating the cross on Good Friday was introduced into other churches. True, it was but an image of the True Cross that these other churches could show to the people; but as the respect is paid to the true Cross refers to Christ Himself, the faithful could offer Him a likewise homage of adoration, even though not having present before their eyes the sacred wood which had been consecrated by the Blood of Jesus.<sup>590</sup>

There is also another teaching embodied in this ceremony of the holy Cross of Jesus. On Good Friday ceremony, the gradual unveiling of the cross expresses to us the contrast of the Jewish and Christian view of the holy Cross. The one finds nothing in Christ crucified but shame and ignominy; the other discovers in Him the power and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23 - 24). Honour, then, and veneration be to His cross, now that the veil is removed by our

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<sup>590</sup> Gueranger, The Good Friday Veneration of the Cross.  
<https://www.salvemariaregina.info/Reference/Good%20Friday.html> Accessed on April 15, 2020.

faith! Unveiled let it be upon our altar, for Him that died upon it is soon to triumph by a glorious Resurrection! Yes, let every crucifix in our churches be unveiled, and every altar beam once more with the vision of the glorious standard! Mother Church is not satisfied with showing her children the cross that has saved them; she would have them approach it with great reverence, and kiss it.<sup>591</sup> But, we need to note that veneration of an image or representation of Christ's cross does not mean that we actually adore the material image but rather, what it represents. So in kneeling before the crucifix and kissing it we are paying the highest honour to Our Lord's cross as the instrument of our salvation. Because the Cross is inseparable from His sacrifice, in reverencing His Cross we, in effect, adore Christ. Thus we affirm: 'We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee because by Thy Holy Cross Thou has redeemed the World.'

The Good Friday veneration of the Cross involves the faithful recognizing the humiliations heaped upon Jesus, their Lord; and mother Church invites her children to a solemn act of reparation which consists in venerating that Cross which their Divine Lord borne to the summit of Calvary, and to which He is to be fastened with nails. So the importance of the cross cannot be over-emphasized for Catholic Christians. According to the Scripture, the Cross is a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23). But, the Cross is the power and wisdom of God for those called by God (1 Cor. 1:24). Also, history has it in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that, various Christian leaders began to criticize the practice of venerating the Cross. These leaders spearheaded the Reformation, a religious reform movement which swept across Western Europe giving birth to Protestant Christianity. It has happened that, in general, Protestants abandoned the veneration of the Cross while Roman Catholics have since maintained the holy practice. Yet, it beats my

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

imagination that there are some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal who kick against the veneration of the Cross on which Our Lord Jesus died for the redemption of the whole world despite the rich theology behind the feast. This is part of the reason why many Catholics abhor Catholic Renewal members having root in Protestantism. However, I must point out without mincing words that, members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal should not, in the name of ecumenism, welcome hook, line, and sinker any ‘theological rubbish and fallacy’, they hear from their interaction with the Protestants and other Pentecostal churches and bring it into their Catholic practice. It is not everything that is practised in Protestant and Pentecostal churches they must force down the throat of naïve Catholic Renewal members. The Church’s “opening of the widows to the world” does not mean that we should let in Satan, the Prince of the world because he knows how to quote the Bible. We have known since the encounter of Jesus and Satan in the desert that Satan is very versatile with the Scriptures (Luke 4:9 – 11). We know that many Renewal members approach various Protestant ministers, laity and prayer groups for prayers and bible studies in the name of ecumenism and, in the process; they come back confused and are filled with contradictory stuff. It is obvious that these Protestant and Pentecostal ministers know how gullible our Catholic members are, and so, take maximum advantage of that. Any Catholic member who questions the Cross of Christ cannot be a follower of Jesus Christ who died on the Cross to save mankind. To dismiss the Cross of Christ in the Catholic Church is to punch below the belt. It is simply unacceptable because it is a dismissal of the death and the Resurrection of Christ. It is an anathema in the Catholic Church.

Another great feast of the Cross of Christ is celebrated every year on September 14 known as the **The Exaltation of the Holy Cross**. This feast recalls three events: the finding of the True Cross by Saint Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, during her

pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the dedication of churches built by Constantine on the site of the Holy Sepulchre and Mount Calvary; and the restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem in AD 629 by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius after it had fallen into the hands of the Persian emperor Chosroes II in the AD 614 Sasanian conquest of Jerusalem.<sup>592</sup> So the Cross remains worthy of the deepest veneration for Catholic Christians because of the honour conferred upon it by Jesus the Son of God: He consecrated it by His own Blood. He worked out our salvation by its means. So for Catholic Christians it is most appropriate that they pay such humble tribute to the Cross of Christ, his humiliation and suffering during his Passion for their redemption. The Christians try to appreciate at what cost Christ has won their redemption. We honour Christ and the Saints when we pray before the crucifix, relics, and sacred images because we honour the persons they represent; we adore Christ and venerate the Saints.

It is very important that the members of the charismatic Renewal are thoroughly educated on why Catholics venerate the Virgin Mother of God and the Saints. The whole Catholic world honours and gives devotion to Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ the Son of God. At the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth proclaimed her ‘the mother of my Lord’ (Luke 1: 43; John 2: 1; 19: 25; Matthew 13: 55). The One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit was the Father’s eternal Son; hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly ‘Mother of God’ (Theotokos: Greek – God- Bearer).<sup>593</sup> Why do some Renewal members think that it is wrong to honour and venerate Mary the Mother of God and offer our prayers to God through her, when at Cana, she silently interceded for the spouses (John 2: 1- 11). Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI says of Mary: “Those who look to you, All Holy Mother, never lose their

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<sup>592</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feastofthecross> Accessed on April 15, 2020.

<sup>593</sup>CCC 495; Council of Ephesus 431.

serenity, no matter what the hardships of life.”<sup>594</sup> Again, the Pontiff in his Encyclical Letter on Christian Love prays to Mary, the Mother of God:

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, you have given the world its true light, Jesus, your Son – the Son of God. You abandoned yourself completely to God’s call and thus became a wellspring of the goodness which flows forth from him. Show us Jesus. Lead us to him. Teach us to know and love him, so that we too can become capable of true love and be fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world.”<sup>595</sup>

If God could honour Mary by sending his angel Gabriel to her, who are we not to honour the Mother of God (Luke 1: 27)? The angel Gabriel addressed Mary saying: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1: 28). She was conceived without sin.<sup>596</sup> It is the all important pastoral duty of the parish priest to enlighten the faithful, in particular, the members of the charismatic prayer group to join this generation in fulfilling the prophesy of the Blessed Virgin Mary during her visit to St. Elizabeth – “Behold henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” (Luke 1: 48).

Pope St. John Paul II in his encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* said that the Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation, for “when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:4 – 6). These Scriptural texts express the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of Christ and her active and exemplary presence in the life of the Church. They also celebrate the love of God the Father, the mission of the Son, the gift of the Spirit, the role of the woman from whom the Redeemer was born,

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<sup>594</sup>Benedict XVI, *Mary, Spiritual Thoughts Series*, United Kingdom: St. Paul’s Publishing, 2010, p. 79. Hereafter as Benedict XVI, *Mary*.

<sup>595</sup>Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter, On Christian Love, Deus Caritas Est*, 2005, no. 42.

<sup>596</sup>CCC 722

and our divine filiation, in the mystery of the “fullness of time.”<sup>597</sup> The Pontiff said that the “fullness” designates the hidden beginning of the Church’s journey. In the liturgy the Church salutes Mary of Nazareth as the Church’s own beginning.<sup>598</sup> In the Incarnation, the Church encounters Christ and Mary indissolubly joined: he who is the Church’s Lord and Head and she who, uttering the first fiat of the New Covenant, prefigures the Church’s condition as spouse and mother (RM 1). The Church in its journeys to meet the Lord, who comes, proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary who, “advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally preserved in her union with her Son unto the cross.”<sup>599</sup> Pope John Paul II used the Second Vatican Council Document, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* to demonstrate how the Church bases its doctrine on the Mother of Christ, whom she venerates as her beloved Mother and as her model in faith, hope and charity. It becomes all the harder for the charismatic Renewal members to dismiss the doctrine of the Church. It cannot be true that the members of the Renewal are more knowledgeable than the Holy Spirit who is the source of the Incarnation and who honoured the Blessed Virgin Mary first.

Pope John Paul II pointed out that his predecessor Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical Epistle *Christi Matri* and subsequently in the Apostolic Exhortations *Signum Magnum* and *Marialis*

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<sup>597</sup> The expression “fullness of time” (*pleroma tou chronou*) is parallel with similar expressions of Judaism, both Biblical (cf. Gen. 29:21; 1 Sam. 7:12; Tob. 14:5) and extra-Biblical, and specially of the New Testament (cf. Mk. 1:15; Jn. 7:8; Eph. 1:10). From the point of view of form, it means not only the conclusion of a chronological process but also and specially the coming to maturity or completion of a particularly important period, one directed towards the fulfilment of an expectation, a coming to completion which thus takes on an eschatological dimension. According to Gal. 4:4 and its context, it is the coming of the Son of God that reveals that time has, so to speak, reached its limit. That is to say, the period marked by the promise made to Abraham and by the Law mediated by Moses has now reached its climax, in the sense that Christ fulfils the divine promise and supersedes the old law.

<sup>598</sup> Cf. Roman Missal, Preface of 8 December, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Saint Ambrose, *De Institutione Virginis*, XV, 93-94; PL 16, 342; Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68.

<sup>599</sup> LG 58.

Cultus,<sup>600</sup> he expounded the foundations and criteria of the special veneration which the Mother of Christ receives in the Church, as well as the various forms of Marian devotion-liturgical, popular and private which respond to the spirit of faith. It is only in the mystery of Christ that the mystery of Mary is made fully clear. The Council of Ephesus (431) clarified this to the joy of all Christians by solemnly declaring the truth of the divine motherhood of Mary as a doctrine of the Catholic faith. Mary is the Mother of God since by the power of the Holy Spirit she conceived in her virginal womb and brought into the world Jesus Christ, who is of one being with the Father.<sup>601</sup> Thus through the mystery of Christ, on the horizon of the Church's faith, there shines in its fullness the mystery of his Mother Mary. There is also the "twofold bond" which unites the Mother of God with Christ and with the Church. The Church looks up to Mary as who "has gone before," becoming "a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ."<sup>602</sup> The Second Vatican Council says that the Mother of God is already the eschatological fulfilment of the Church: "In the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached the perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph. 5:27"; and at the same time the Council says that "the followers of Christ still strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin, and so they raise their eyes to Mary, who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as a model of the virtues."<sup>603</sup> It is true that Mary has crossed the threshold between faith and that vision which is "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12), but yet, she does not cease to be the "Star of the Sea" (Maris Stella),<sup>604</sup> for all those

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<sup>600</sup> Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Epistle *Christi Matri* (15 September 1966): AAS 58 (1966) 745-749, Apostolic Exhortation *Signum Magnum* (13 May 1967): AAS 59 (1967) 465:475; Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974): AAS 66 (1974) 11-168.

<sup>601</sup> Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, 41-44; 59-61: DS 250-264; cf. Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, o. c. 84-87: DS 300-303.

<sup>602</sup> LG 63, cf. Saint Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. Sec. Lucam II*, 7:CSEL 32/4, 45; *De Institutione Virginis*, XIV, 88-89: PL 16, 341.

<sup>603</sup> LG 65.

<sup>604</sup> "Take away this star of the sea which illuminates the world: where does the day go? Take away Mary, this star of the sea, of the great and boundless sea: what is left but a vast obscurity and the shadow of death and deepest darkness?" Saint Bernard, In *Navitate B. Mariae Sermo-De aquaeductu 6*: S. Bernardi Opera, V, 1968, 279; cf. In *laudibus Virginis Matris Homilia II*, 17: ed. Cit., IV, 1966, 34f.



who are still on the journey of faith. Definitely, “in the birth and development” of the brothers and sisters of Our Lord Jesus Christ, “she cooperates with a maternal love.”<sup>605</sup> What group or who can rightly claim that they have the fullness of the Holy Spirit and so, can earn salvation by bypassing the Mary, the Daughter and the Spouse of the Holy Spirit? How can anyone say that the “woman” who is the Mother of him to whom the Father has entrusted the work of salvation would not have a special place and role in the salvation of mankind? How can the Mother of God, who was greeted by Elizabeth as “blessed among women” (cf. Lk. 1:42) not deserve honour from the children of God? Would anybody prove that the Angel made a mistake to greet Mary as “full of grace?” (Luke. 1:28) If God chooses to honour Mary as “full of grace”, who can dishonour her by not giving her due respect? Grace is God’s loving kindness and favour toward human beings which are free, totally unexpected and undeserved. It is all about God’s desire to save man and woman through a sharing of his own life (2 Pt. 1:4) in Christ: it is salvation through a sharing in supernatural life. In the mystery of Christ, Mary was present even “before the creation of the world,” as the one whom the Father “has chosen” as Mother of his Son in the Incarnation. Would we be surprised that she was “full of grace”; entrusted to the Spirit in holiness? So the greeting and the name “full of grace”, in the context of the angel’s encounter with her, refer first of all to the election of Mary as Mother of the Son of God. But at the same time the “fullness of grace” all the supernatural generosity from which Mary benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ. And this election is fundamental for the accomplishment of God’s salvific designs for humanity, so also, the eternal choice in Christ and the vocation to the dignity of adopted children is destined for everyone hence; the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. So it is the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ (RM 9). So Mary is “full of grace” because it is precisely in her that the combination of divine and human natures in

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<sup>605</sup> LG 63.

the single person of Christ is accomplished and fulfilled. The Council says that Mary is “the Mother of the Son of God. As a result, she is also the favourite daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace, she far surpasses all other creatures, both in heaven and on earth” (LG 53). No man or woman can undo the designs of God for Mary the Mother of Son Christ.

It is also important to note that from the moment of her conception, in view of the merits of Jesus, Mary was preserved from all stain of original sin. She was preserved from being infected by original sin at the moment of her conception in the womb of Ann, her mother. She was conceived immaculate by her mother, that is, free from sin in anticipation of her being the Mother of Jesus, the Son of God. This preservation of Mary from inheriting the state of Original Sin by the power of the Holy Spirit is commonly called her Immaculate Conception. Of course, sin in Mary would have opposed her to God who would not be associated with any shadow of darkness (1 John 1:5). So the absence of sin in Mary meant holiness in which she grew steadily as she treasured the words of God in her heart throughout her earthly life (Luke 2:19, 51). That was why the Angel Gabriel saluted her as “full of grace” (Luke 1:28) and Elizabeth, her cousin, saluted her as “blessed among women” (Luke 1:42). She was simply God’s beloved and favoured. In other words, God gave her another name, which is, “full of grace.” Today, it is the name of Mary. Mary was in God’s mind from the beginning. She came into existence because she was to be the Mother of God. And so, God chose her to be the Mother of his Son, gave her grace, blessedness and holiness that made her worthy to that dignity. It is not that God needed a woman to make a human body, but he wanted to have a mother for his Son; and for Mary to really be that mother, it was necessary that God looked upon her with greater love than he had for any other creature. Thus, Mary is called full of grace. Mary is really full of grace because Jesus was of her as he is born of the Father. This is

why the Church believes that Mary has a unique role in the work of our salvation. She is the marvel that God achieved at the outset of transforming humanity into his image. We should live a life of perpetual gratitude to God for elevating one of our own kind to such unimaginable height in holiness. It can only solidify our hope and trust in God who is ever faithful to his promises.

Again, the liturgy does not hesitate to call her “Mother of her Creator”<sup>606</sup> and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of St. Bernard: “daughter of your Son.”<sup>607</sup> It is her Son “who will crush the head of the serpent” (Gen. 3:15). Mary is placed at the centre of that “enmity”, that struggle which accompanies the history of humanity on earth and the history of salvation itself. The consolation is that she bears that “glory of grace” which the Father “has bestowed on us in his beloved Son,” and this grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty of her whole being. Mary remains the unchangeable and inviolable sign of God’s election, spoken of in Paul’s Letter: “in Christ ... he chose us ... before the foundation of the world, he destined us ... to be his sons and daughters” (Eph. 1:4 – 5). It is true that we experience evil and sin, and all that “enmity” which marks the history of man and woman. However, all hope is not lost because, in this unhappy history of mankind, Mary remains a sign of sure hope. The Blessed Mother Mary “shines forth on earth ... as a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God,” it gives great joy and comfort to this most holy Synod and among the divided brethren, too, there are those who live due honour to the Mother of our Lord and Saviour. This is especially so among the Orthodox Christians.”<sup>608</sup>

I am not sure the amount of argument that can be put forward to convince that portion of the

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<sup>606</sup> Liturgy of the Hours of 15 August, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Hymn First and Second Vespers; Saint Peter Damian, *Carmina et preces*, XLVII: PL 145, 934.

<sup>607</sup> *Divina Commedia*, Paradiso, XXXIII, 1: cf. Liturgy of the Hours, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, Hymn II in the Office of Readings.

<sup>608</sup> LG 68, 69. On Mary Most Holy, promoter of Christian unity, and on the cult of Mary in the Easter, cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Adiutricem Populi* (5 September 1885): *Acta Leonis XV*, 300-312.

Catholic Charismatic Renewal Members that we ought to recognize, respect, honour and love Mary the Mother of God and the mother of our souls.

### **Mary and the Church**

When we reflect on the personality of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Son of God, we will come to realize that everything in the Catholic religion exists for the single purpose that was most clearly and perfectly fulfilled in her: to conform us to the image of her Son, to make humanity Christ-like.<sup>609</sup> Mary remains a showcase of what God can make out of people and how humanity can rise to the highest possibility under the grace of God. Mary thus shows us her brothers and sisters, who we are; for what God did for her, he wants to do for us. God has indicated his plans to us: “You ... must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Do we really want to relate to God as Mary did in her earthly life? Mary has shown us that it is within our reach to live for God as she did. God has equally shown us that his grace is enough for us to live for him as our spiritual mother Mary lived. The Blessed Virgin Mary remains our exemplary. God has called all of us to be saints (Romans 1:6). To be a saint, we need to live a life of holiness. And the Church is there as a sacrament of Christ to help us. The Church is a sacrament of Christ because it is a visible reality which Christ has formed in this world as a sacred sign of his presence. It is a means Christ uses to give us holiness because he is really present in it. It is a means God wants to encounter each of us.

And holiness consists in living a Christ-like life. The Lord himself asserted unequivocally “unless you change and become like little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). The human capacity for holiness can only be satisfied when one approaches

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<sup>609</sup> Peter J. Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity, A complete Catechism of Catholic Beliefs based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, San Francisco, USA, Ignatius Press, 2001, p. 404. (Henceforth Peter J. Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity*).

God as a child accepts the loving overtures of its father. Another way one can attain holiness of life is for one to have a strong love for the Holy Eucharist which is the Holy Trinity. St Cardinal John Henry Newman, in his autobiographical novel, *Loss and Gain*, said:

“To me nothing is so consoling, so piercing, so thrilling, so overcoming, as the Mass ... I could attend Masses forever and not be tired. It is not a mere form of words, - it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth. It is, not the invocation merely, but, if I dare use the word, the evocation of the Eternal. He becomes present on the altar in flesh and blood, before whom angels bow and devils tremble.”

Another great Saint of the Eucharist, Saint Jose Maria Escriva asserts: “A very important characteristic of the apostolic man is his love for the Mass.” We are allowed to eavesdrop on a conversation between him and one of his spiritual directees: “The Mass is long,’ and I reply, ‘Because your love is short.’” So, what shall our reply be when some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal fail to give the reverence and adoration due to the Sacrament in which is contained the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? I have a deep ‘spiritual sympathy’ for them!

Can we truly talk of Eucharistic worship of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament without as well recognizing the devotion the Church accords to Mary, the Blessed Mother of Christ? It is most unfortunate that some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal who look down on the Adoration of the Blessed Eucharist equally have issues with devotion to the Blessed Mother of Christ. We may read from the Catechism of the Catholic Church which says: ‘This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside the saving office, but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix’ (CCC 969).

We can become holy by attending the ordinary things of life in an extraordinary way. The Saint of “The Little Way” achieved sanctity precisely by attending to the details of daily existence with perfection and devotion, no matter how common they are. She did everything with verve, deliberateness and conviction. She believed that “God is in the details,” and that attending to such details led one along the road to perfection. The Little Way teaches us that God offers each of us opportunities to achieve sanctity in the world of business, in academia, in the family, in the public service, in the recreation arena, and in fact, in every aspect of life. St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta calls it: ‘Doing an ordinary thing with extraordinary love.’ Saint Jose Maria Escriva asks a question and quickly answers it: “Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment: Do what you ought and put yourself into what you are doing.” He encourages someone who longs to do great things for God: “Persevere in the exact fulfilment of the obligations of the moment. That work – humble, monotonous, and small – is prayer expressed in action, which prepares you to receive the grace of that other work – great and broad and deep – of which you dream.” Saint Jose Maria makes a charming observation: “Didn’t you see the light in Jesus’ eyes when the poor widow left her little offering in the Temple? Give him what you can: The merit is not in whether it is big or small, but in the intention with which you give it.” The Little Flower summarizes it all rather excellently: “Nothing is an obstacle to holiness. Different temperaments, situations in which we find ourselves, duties in our state in life, can become material for sanctity.”

Another way we can grow in holiness is to accept the sufferings that come our way. The modern people may see acceptance of suffering as neurotic at best and psychotic at worst. But as Christians, we see it differently. The first we need to note is that, the believer does not suffer alone – he suffers in union with Christ, which suffering is redemptive for the one suffering and for any for whom he offers his sufferings. We may now recall what Saint Paul

told the Colossians: “At present, I rejoice when I suffer for you; I complete, in my own flesh, what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of his body, which is, the Church” (Col. 1:24). After Christ’s death something would be lacking in the salvation of the world, if Jesus’ followers and apostles did not, in their turn, meet with trials and sufferings. Working for the Church means suffering for the Church; to work for the rule of justice is to suffer for the sake of justice. The only thing that could be lacking to the sufferings of the God-Man would be our participation. As Christ the Head of the Mystical Body which is the Church suffered such much, the Body which is the Church is called to suffer as well. I am not in any way suggesting that Christians are lovers of suffering. Christians do not go out of their way to seek out crosses to carry in order to please our Lord Jesus or to make God happy. The reality is that, whether we are followers of Jesus or an agnostic or an atheist, no human being can avoid suffering completely. To cap this point, Christians should not go out searching for crosses but, when they come, they should offer it to God in prayer for the ability to deal with them lovingly in union with Christ. This way, they will grow in human dignity, in love for God and humanity and, in the holiness of life and in the glory of heaven.

To grow in holiness consists in the desire to please God. When we think of it God is a loving Father Whom we should never wish to displease. Since God is all good and all loving, and he has our best interest at heart; we should desire to please him in all things. We note that St. Augustine says that, God is closer to us than we are to our self. Nietzsche, the ardent opponent of Christianity made a sarcastic remark against Christians: “If Christians wanted me to believe in their God, they would have to look more redeemed!” If for no other reason may be at least, for this statement, we ought to take Nietzsche serious for once. If God is truly more close to us than we are to our self, why would we not always look as happy as the redeemed in heaven? We are commissioned to be messengers of the Gospel, that is, “good

news”, and so, we ought to be happy Christians. Saint Philip Neri was a practical jokester. Saint Teresa of Avila was another humorous holy woman who often asked God to deliver her from would-be saints who made a career out of looking miserable. It is true that contentment, calmness, gentleness and acceptance of God’s will in one’s life would make one a joyful Christian. Saint Therese set the goal of becoming a saint from her childhood as she often mentioned: “I have always wished that I could be a saint.” She said, “Believe me, and don’t wait until tomorrow to begin becoming a saint.” As Pope Benedict XIV said, it is “a journey that lasts a lifetime,” but why do we not begin the journey today. Why wait until tomorrow? Saint Catherine of Siena put it very clearly: “All the way to heaven is heaven.” Our heavenly joy should start from our journey to the joy of heaven. Lloyd-Jones Martyn wrote: ‘A depressed Christian is a contradiction in terms, and he is a very poor recommendation for the gospel... Nothing is more important, therefore, than that we should be delivered from a condition which gives other people, looking at us, the impression that to be a Christian means to be unhappy, to be sad, to be morbid, and that the Christian is one who “scorns delights and lives laborious days.”’<sup>610</sup>

Pope Francis in his Encyclical, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete Et Exsultate*, On The Call To Holiness In The World says that, St Paul in his Letter to the Hebrews, invites us to realize that “a great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1) impels us to advance constantly towards the goal that is set before us. The Pontiff interestingly reminds us that these witnesses may include our own mothers, grandmothers or other loved ones (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5). The Holy Father says they are the Saints “Next Door.” Pope Francis says that, “Their lives may not always have been perfect, yet even amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord” (n. 3). Does this not come down to the simple spirituality of St Therese of

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<sup>610</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, *Spiritual Depression – Its Causes and its Cures*, 1965, p.11. Used by permission from Elizabeth Catherwood (daughter).



Lisieux, known as the Little Flower or the Little Way, who taught us that every aspect of our daily life could constitute a material for sanctity? We can infer from her teaching that in the bid to make whatever we do, even in the church, to appear fantastic, we may even end up complicating what God has actually made simple, as a result, miss the opportunity which the Lord offers each one of us to achieve sanctity. In simplicity of life and gentleness, we can achieve sanctity. Even some parishes, especially in big cities in Nigeria, consciously or unconsciously, appear to be competing with each other in the gigantic building projects they embark on in the parish to outdo or out shine the other, and consequently fail enormously to invest in the spiritual growth of parishioners. It is all about when the pursuit for physical beauty and demonstration of wealth overtake the spiritual care of the soul. Underneath of all this is VAIN GLORY! It does not work out well when we serve God and Mammon at the same time. What is your thought when the parish priest leaves the parish and, for three weeks or more visit all the big cities in Nigeria, hunting for money, dignitaries, celebrities who will attend the harvest and bazaar celebrations of his parish? It is more interesting that those parishioners who are starved of spiritual nourishment sing to the highest heavens the praises of their parish priests for bringing such august guests to their annual harvest and bazaar celebrations. The success of the priest is judged by the number of dignitaries and the amount of money they donate during the harvest and bazaar activities. The priest is so respected because of the powerful people and the very rich people who are his friends, and he is able to bring them to annual harvest and bazaar of the parish. It turns out to be more or less to massage his ego and outshine others. The social aspect has overtaken the spiritual aspect which is the goal of our calling. The priest is so popular by the building projects he accomplishes in the parish. The amount of energy, financial and physical resources employed in executing these harvest and bazaar and project Sundays are unparalleled. The time employed every year in preparing the harvest and a bazaar activity is amazing. The building of the

visible “kingdom” completely overshadows the heavenly Kingdom. The religious/parish priority seems to be completely misplaced. Some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal always complain that is all about ‘making money’ with no spiritual benefit from it and as such refuse to participate in it. There could be some truth in their complaint. We cannot rule out the social aspect of our Catholic faith but the parish life must always be balanced out. We may not be able to excuse the parish priest who leaves his parish for weeks travelling to all the big cities in Nigeria in hunt of rich men and women to attend his annual parish harvest and bazaar while the spiritual life and nourishment of parishioners is completely neglected. That we are not challenged or summoned to give account of our pastoral responsibility does not make it right. The Bishop may be too busy to take note and no one is courageous enough to ask questions but, however, we must grow to take personal responsibility.

Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Gaudete Et Exsultate* mentions of the holiness present in the patience of God’s people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence. We might call them “the middle class of holiness.”<sup>611</sup> How then can we quantify the amount of commitment, dedication and selflessness of health personnel in the United Kingdom and many other nations who put themselves on the frontline to fight this battle against Corona virus pandemic even as death toll grows on daily basis? We continue to hear heroic stories of even retired health workers who come out of retirement to help the already over-stretched crew of health personnel and

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<sup>611</sup> Cf. Joseph Malegue, *Pierres noires. Less Moyennes du Salut*, Paris 1958.

end up contracting the deadly virus and dying. Yet this daunting news does not deter others trooping out into the frontline to give their selfless services in spite of the death rate and the discouraging crippling lack of medical equipment they all face. It is heartening to see the best of humanity. In Catholic understanding, if they are not ‘martyrs’, what are they? Are they not unsung heroes? Those of us who go to Church and claim to be Christians must be open to learn from these selfless men and women, who may not necessarily belong to any religious group that, the genuine and practical Christianity only begins when the reverend father says “Go in peace the Mass is ended.” The “Good News” is put into practice not only in the church but outside the church in our family, neighbourhood, in the country and in the world at large. The worship of God, first of all, begins in the family, in the neighbourhood even before we get to the church. Our health workers have taught us that we do not only become saints when we belong to a religious group but, (apologies to the Little Way), we can become a saint even when it is our paid job to clean the public toilet, and we do it so conscientiously, for the physical well-being of the general public. Late Mazi Daniel Onyetube of Umuehim Utuh in Nnewi South of Anambra State in Nigeria always said that “Some Catholic Christians spend their time and energy carrying about big and long rosary beads and people who see them may refer to them as people with staunch faith” but in actual fact, true and genuine Christians demonstrate their faith in works of charity (not in going about with big and long rosary beads). (Okpokpo chaplet, obu okpokpo okwukwe?) Are big chaplet/rosary beads, big faith? If we spend our life carrying about big rosary beads; those in the streets and country sides who spend their life doing works of charity and saving lives may enter into the Kingdom of God before us. Did Jesus not say, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21)? That is why Pope Francis quoting his predecessor, Pope St John Paul II, says that, even outside the Catholic Church and in very different contexts, the Holy Spirit raises up “signs of

his presence which help Christ's followers."<sup>612</sup> Saint John Paul II reminded us that "the witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants,"<sup>613</sup> and those I may call "anonymous Christians" especially those who surrender their life in the service of corona virus patients, and even die trying to save others. They may not belong to any church but they value the lives of others more than theirs and that is what we mean by martyrdom in the Catholic Church – one surrendering one's life for the well-being of others. The Holy Father in the moving ecumenical commemoration held in the Colosseum during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, said that the martyrs are "a heritage which speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division."<sup>614</sup> We may be surprised to see strange faces in heaven when we die and see God face to face – faces that we never saw in our churches. Those who know Christ and worship God can never thank God enough for the gift of his beloved Son Jesus. However, I strongly believe that God knows how to save his people – those who serve in spirit and in truth. We are in a generation where majority of people claim that there is no need to belong or to come to church yet, their selfless service to humanity equals or overtakes what we profess and practice in and outside the church. If our preaching and actions are not enough to attract them to church, they are what I call "anonymous" Christians, a description, they may disagree with. But it is only the heavens that will eventually prove to them that, all along, we are all saying and doing the same thing in different ways. After death, they can never go to a different place except to where those who loved and served humanity selflessly would unfailingly go to. We may be happily surprised to see each other converging and transformed to the same permanent state of life of happiness.

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<sup>612</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001); 56: AAS 93 (2001), 307.

<sup>613</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (1994), 37: AAS 87 (1975), 29.

<sup>614</sup> Homily for the Ecumenical Commemoration of Witness to the Faith in the Twentieth Century (2000), 5: AAS 92 (2000), 680-681.

The thirst of every Christian is to see God face to face after our earthly life. This is because God has created us for himself. The Scripture says “Be holy for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). If he did not want us to be holy, he would not have created in his own image. The thirst to see God as he is flows in our system since he created us for himself. God created man in his own image so that man may mirror the glory of God. Let your light so shine among men that they see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31) since it is the purpose of your being. So his purpose for creating humanity and the world is for his glory. I am not saying that God created us so that we might make him to be more glorious. That would be unthinkable that God would become more perfectly God by making something that is not God, when God has always existed as perfection itself. And also, everything which exists which is not God is from his fullness and can never add to him which did not come from him, nor subtract from him who is perfection per excellence.

The glory of God is the beauty and excellence of his manifold perfections. That is God’s infinite and overflowing fullness of all that is good. Also, he created the world and governs it so that he is glorified. And he is glorified by his creation. The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the work of his hands (Ps. 19:2). So also, God created human beings so that his glory might be known and praised (Isaiah 43:7). What we have to do is to align with this eternal goal in our hearts and actions for our peace and happy living. This is how we can attain our primary purpose of existence which is to glorify him. If he has created us for himself then, it all means that he created us to share his glory with us. St. Augustine said, “He created us for himself and our heart may not know peace until we rest in the Lord.” The Scripture puts it clearly, “... those whom God predestined, he called; and those whom he called, he makes righteous; and to those whom he makes righteous, he will give his glory”

(Rm. 8:30). The Scripture also says: “The Spirit assures our spirit, that we are sons and daughters of God. If we are children, we are heirs, too. Ours will be the inheritance of God, and we will share it with Christ; for, if we now suffer with him, we will also share his glory with him” (Matt. 8:16 – 17).

### **Mary Our Blessed Mother is the symbol of the Church**

In her Magnificat, the Song of Mary to God, the Blessed Mother said, “My soul glorifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.” From the very beginning, the Church Fathers have always seen Mary as both a symbol and an embodiment of “Holy Mother Church”, for the reasons that: she is mother and because she is holy. Firstly, like “Mother Church”, she is the place where Christ comes to the world. She, as mother, gives birth to Christ and gives Christ to the world. She is something like a sacrament, effecting what she signifies, actually sharing with us, by her intercession, the grace of the Christ she constantly points to. Secondly, she is holy. Holiness is one of the “four marks of the Church.” Pope Francis says that, “Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church.” It is the Church’s primary business. Everything else in the Church leads to that end. Even the teaching authority of the Church is but a means to the greater end of her holiness. I mean the holiness of the members of the Church. The Church is holy because God is holy, and Jesus Christ the second person of the Blessed Trinity is the Head of the Church. The Church is holy because of the Holy Spirit who is the soul of the Church. It is holy because of the holiness of the teachings of Jesus, because of the holiness of the sacraments, because of the heroic and extraordinary holiness of the Saints, because of the ordinary and everyday holiness of her members and because of the sanctifying influence of the Church in the world upon individuals.

Again, “in the most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle,” but “the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. And so they turn their eyes to Mary’:<sup>615</sup> in her, the Church is already the ‘all-holy.’”<sup>616</sup> Mary bore the word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, we are ever confident in looking up to Mary. More so, Mary is one of us who shines forth to the whole community of believers as the model of virtues. Since she has the Word made man, we cherish her because she brings us to Christ her Son. We can now meditate on her in the light of the Word made flesh so as to enter more deeply into the great mystery of the Incarnation and become more and more like Christ. And since Mary has the word of God which gives life if we welcome it, we are attracted to her. She conscientiously brings the faithful to her Son, to his sacrifice and to the love of the Father (LG 65). The love of the Father refreshes and consoles us and, makes us more and more like Mary, who remains our own, making us to grow in faith, hope and charity; seeking and doing the will of God in all things as she did. As members of the Church, in our apostolic work, we rightly look up to Mary who gave birth to Christ, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit so that through the Church he could be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful. Mary remains a model of that motherly love with which all who engage in the Church’s apostolic mission for the regeneration of mankind may be animated and sustained (LG 65). Is it a surprise for us that Mary goes before all of us in the order of holiness (CCC 773)? Don’t forget that she is the bride without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27). We may note that the ‘Marian’ dimension of the Church precedes the ‘Petrine.’<sup>617</sup> And so any group in the Catholic Church that belittles and ignores Marian devotion should take time not cut off their feet from the Catholic ground on which they are standing. May they not

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<sup>615</sup> LG 65; cf. Eph 5:26 – 27.

<sup>616</sup> CCC 829.

<sup>617</sup> Cf. John Paul II, MD 27.

bite the finger that feeds them. To do away with the Blessed Mother Mary is to do away Jesus Christ her Son and to do away with the Church whose head he is and whose mother she is.

It is said that the Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is intrinsic to Christian worship.<sup>618</sup> The Church's honour to the Blessed Mother is "home grown"<sup>619</sup> not an artificial addition. It is authentically Christian and incarnational. The Church honours her with a special devotion. The faithful fly to her protection in their time of dangers and needs. However, we need to note that this devotion given to Mary differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit.<sup>620</sup> The Catholic Church has many liturgical feasts dedicated to Mary the Mother of God as well as Marian prayers, the greatest of which is the holy rosary – all express devotion to the Virgin Mother.<sup>621</sup> It is important to note that devotion to Mary fosters and purifies our adoration to God rather than polluting it. Devotion to saints fosters adoration to God who made them holy. A Saint is like a stained-glass window that makes us more aware and appreciative of the divine light. Devotion to Our Blessed Mother Mary, who is more blessed than any creature greatly, fosters this adoration to God more than any other created being (LG 66).

### **The faithful address prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary**

The Church addresses prayers to the Blessed Mother Mary especially the Hail Mary and its "string of roses" in the holy Rosary. The "Hail Mary" is the greeting of the angel Gabriel in which God himself through his intermediary, the angel, greets Mary encouraging her to rejoice (CCC 2676). It is the greeting of the angel Gabriel which opens this prayer to Mary.

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<sup>618</sup> Luke 1:48; Paul VI, MC 56; CCC 971.

<sup>619</sup> Peter J. Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity*, no. 10. p. 414.

<sup>620</sup> LG 66; CCC 971.

<sup>621</sup> Cf. Paul VI, MC 42; SC 103.



The angel Gabriel addressed her saying you are “full of grace, the Lord is with thee” (Luke 1:26). The Angel says that Mary is fully of grace because Christ the Lord himself is with her wholly in her soul and womb. The two phrases of the Angel shed light on one another. Mary is full of grace because the Lord is with her. The grace with which Mary is filled is the presence of him who is the source of all grace. ‘Rejoice ... O Daughter of Jerusalem ... the Lord your God is in your midst’ (Zeph. 3:14, 17a). Mary, O Daughter of Jerusalem, the Lord, your God, is equally happy for you. The Lord your God celebrates seeing you, O Daughter of Jerusalem (Zeph. 3:17b). Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the Ark of the Covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells (CCC 2676). The Lord himself rejoices and smiles at her. And the whole world is filled with her glory, and this is especially true of Christian peoples, who have chosen her as guardian and protectress of kingdoms, dioceses, and towns. Many cathedrals are consecrated to God in her name. There is no Catholic Church without an altar dedicated to her, no country or region without at least one of her miraculous images where all kinds of afflictions are cured and all sorts of benefits received. Many are the confraternities and associations honouring her as patron; many are orders under her name and protection; many are members of sodalities and religious of all congregations who voice her praises and make known her compassion. There is not a child who does not praise her by lisping a Hail Mary. There is scarcely a sinner, however hardened, who does not possess some spark of confidence in her. The very devils in hell, while fearing her, show her respect.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth greeted her cousin Mary on her arrival to her home: “Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus” (Luke 1:42). As we adopt Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary as our prayer and say to Mary, “blessed are you”, it is actually God that we bless, for he is the one who blessed her. And as soon as we

bless her, we immediately turn to Christ: "... and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus."

"The name of Jesus is at the heart of Christian prayer ... The Hail Mary reaches its high point in the words 'blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.'" Many Christians, such as St Joan of Arc, have died with the one word 'Jesus' on their lips (CCC 435). For us Christians, Jesus is the Saviour of our souls, the only true source of our salvation. Jesus himself says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). From this we know that Jesus is the only way to salvation. There are some people who think that they can find their way to God through achievement, knowledge or personal holiness but now, we know that it is only through Jesus. Scripture tells us that it is by grace that we are saved, through faith which is God's gift (Eph. 2:8). If the Mother of Jesus is not able to lead us to Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life, I wonder, who else will? Mary is uniquely and perfectly the house of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, for she housed Jesus for nine months in her womb. Her heart is heaven in a unique powerful way, for she is the spouse of the Holy Spirit. So, if our goal is to enter the Kingdom of God, then we need to follow God's plan of salvation and not deviate from it, so we need Mary to be our model to emulate and we need to understand what Mary's role was in the God's plan of salvation. "Committing herself whole-heartedly and impeded by no sin to God's saving will (Mary) devoted herself totally ... to the person and work of her Son, under and with Him, serving the mystery of redemption ... (LG 56)" Pope John Paul II has noted Mary's exceptional pilgrimage of faith as a constant point of reference for the Church, for individuals and communities (Redemptoris Mater, 6).

As we emulate Mary in her part in God's plan for salvation of mankind, we move from her self-forgetful praise of God the Father to ask for our own needs, through her intercession. By entrusting ourselves to her prayer, we abandon ourselves to the will of God together with her. Our reason for entrusting ourselves to her prayer is because we can abandon ourselves to the

will of God together with her: 'Thy will be done.' Also, it is because she gives us Jesus, her Son; and again, she is the Mother of God and our mother as well. It is also because she prays for us as she prays for herself: 'Let it be done to me according to your word'<sup>622</sup> (CCC 2677). This is a prayer of humble abandonment of Mary who loves God without measure. There is no saint whose love for God can match that of Mary. So also, there is no one, after God, who loves as much as Mary does. After all, we are her children by love. Fr Nieremberg says that the love all mothers have ever experienced for their children is but a shadow alongside the love Mary has for each of us. It is fascinating to hear that Mary loves us more than all the angels and Saints together. The reason why Mary loves us so much may not be farfetched. Do not forget that for Mary to obtain the life of grace for us, had to offer her beloved Son Jesus to an ignominious Death, and watched him die before her eyes in cruel and unexampled torments on the cross. Thus, as it is that God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son (Jn. 3:16), so also we can say of Mary that she so loved the world that she gave her only-begotten Son (St. Bonaventure). She gave him to us when she might have pleaded with the judges for his life. But Mary didn't say a word in favour of her Son, lest she prevent that Death on which our salvation depended. Again, she gave her to us by standing at the foot of his Cross for three hours of agony and sorrow when he was lovingly offering his life for our eternal salvation. Also her overwhelming love for us is because she sees in us something which was purchased by the death of her Son Jesus. That is why Catholics who seek to conquer sin and grow in holiness turn to Mary who shines forth to the Church as the model of virtues. She displays that motherly love which all, who join in the Church's mission to humanity, should embrace and display. After all, she is mother to us in the order of grace who helps to restore supernatural life to our souls (LG 60, 61, 65).

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<sup>622</sup> Luke 1:43.

Another reason why we ask for the intercession of Mary is because she is “holy Mary”; she is spiritually closest to God more than anyone else; and because she is “Mother of God.” She is physically closest to God. She carried Jesus the Son of God in her womb! She is full of the Holy Spirit. If she is closest to God than any other human being, is it likely that God will refuse her Mother anything? We go to her for her intercession because the law of wisdom and clemency is on her tongue (Proverbs 31:26). Every prayer of hers is like an established law for our Lord, obliging him to be merciful to everyone for whom she intercedes. Hence, St Bernard asks why the Church calls Mary the Queen of Mercy. And his answer is: “Because we believe that she throws open the abyss of God’s mercies to anyone she pleases, when she pleases, and as she pleases. More so, the Blessed Virgin knows that we are a fallen race. And God, in his goodness, has given us guides to take us to Jesus Christ, the light of the nations. Catholics, since the time of the Apostles, have found in Mary a sure guide. Moreover, the relationship between the believer and Mary is more than that of a pilgrim and a guide. The relationship is maternal. Mary is our spiritual Mother, the Mother of our souls. And this is the source of the richness of Marian devotion in the Church. And members of the Legion of Mary are ever ready and happy to share with anyone the richness and joy of Mary’s motherhood of souls. Testimonies abound about the Blessed Mother working through Legionaries. The Legion of Mary in every Catholic parish in Nigeria is the presence of Our Blessed Lady. There is no parish in Nigeria without the Legion of Mary otherwise; the parish will be a parish with a “single parent” parish, with a ‘father’ but without a ‘mother.’ We may not rule out the maternal protection of Our Blessed Lady over Nigerian church and Christians against the unparallel and unabated onslaught on Christians and their churches in Nigeria by Bokoharam and other numerous Islamic terrorists even as the world turns their face the other way. It is incredible that Nigeria Christians are continuously slaughtered with no attempt to defend neither themselves nor the government. The Christians don’t use gun; they don’t even

defend themselves nor does the government defend them. What a strange spirituality Nigerian Christians demonstrate! This God and these Christians must be strange! They don't defend themselves and no one defends them!

In our prayer to Mary we ask her to pray for us: "sinners, at the hour of our death." As sinners, what have we to boast of except our sinfulness and emptiness? If we are sincere, our prayer should be that of the publican, not the Pharisee. We pray for mercy not justice. This should also reflect our attitude at the confessional. At the confessional, most of us adopt the attitude of mentioning our sinners and at the same time excusing ourselves for our sins or inadvertently denying the same sins. 'I committed this sin ... because my husband/wife or children or brother/sister ... did this or that to me.' We forget that at the confessional, we do not mention the accomplice; and we own/accept our sins without excusing ourselves. This is because there is no one or power/authority on earth or in heaven that can force us to commit sin. Sin is always a personal choice for which we must accept full responsibility.

As we acknowledge our sins all the time, we ask Mary to "pray for us sinners" always. The Church will always remain a hospital for sinners. Our sin makes us sick both in soul and body. Sin is the leprosy of the soul. We can liken our sinful condition to the leprosy which was a scourge in Israel during the time of Elisha (Luke 4:27). Leprosy in Scripture is a vivid picture of sin and its miserable consequences. God brought leprosy on Miriam as judgment for speaking against Moses (Num 12:10). Oh, let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away (Num 12:12). Christ promised to keep his Church on earth free from error (infallible), but not her members free from sin. Her doctrine is pure, but her members' lives are not. It is true that the human nature is weak due to the Original Sin of Adam and Eve which humanity inherited by each person with the tendency to evil. The consolation is that

our human nature is not permanently destroyed by the sin of Adam and Eve. We are saved from condemnation to sin and death by the death and resurrection of Christ. In other words, we can avoid serious sin if we stick to the grace of the death and resurrection of Christ. Again, the Blessed Virgin Mary is the new Eve. Mary is our model. If we stick to Marian humility then, we will avoid pride which is a deadly sin, and the root of all evil. We can also avoid the sin of greed for wealth and embrace the poverty of Mary's stable. Again, society has been so sexualized that sexual-immoral-freedom has even entered the sanctuary; when lust amongst clergy and laity has caused unprecedented scandal and the church is bleeding to death. Society deifies sex and worships it as god and goddess. Some Catholics have no different opinion from non-Catholics on issues of sexual morality such as abortion, adultery, divorce, fornication, homosexual sex, same sex marriage and so forth. The Church has the teaching of Christ on the issue of sexuality but the media and some modern elites and politicians have assumed the moral authority and teaching authority even on moral and religious issues and snuff out the voice of the Church. Today, in human sexuality, it is everything goes. Some have sex with dogs and want to be permitted to marry dogs. But sexuality is indeed a two-edged sword which can also evoke dark powers. Over-sexualized society and the misuse of sexuality in our culture are the clearest indication of this. Sex has become a consumer article and a means to power.<sup>623</sup> Some powerful elites who have been licentious are now caught up with dark powers of the gods of sex and some of them may spend the rest of their earthly life in prison. Sex has become a dark power that gives momentary pleasure but, without mercy, sends its clients to eternal hell that starts from earthly life. Even those in the sanctuary and those within and outside the church have fallen into this dark hole that sends the offenders into hell that begins on earth. The dark power of sex has even been silently more calamitous than the corona virus that has no respect for

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<sup>623</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face, A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*, New York, USA, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990, p. 251.

anybody of any category: nation, race, social standing or religion. Since religious authorities seem to have lost their moral authority over sexual morality, now the media and public opinion have allotted themselves the moral authority to dictate and rule human conscience. Religious authority and morality has been dismissed by the media and public opinion. The media has also become the new “god” people “worship” and listen to. The media has taken over the religious authority and morality. Many European and North American governments have deified freedom so that in the name of marriage and sexuality modern people are free to do whatever their conscience allows them to do. Many of these first world governments are redefining marriage which pre-exists them. Our consolation is Mary as Virgin Mother and our model who is a radically countercultural figure to a culture that worships sex and denigrates motherhood and the dignity of womanhood. To counteract this licentiousness, the Church continues to deepen her appreciation of Marian theology and morality to repudiate these anti-Marian behaviours, human sexuality and sins.

The very act of asking Mary to pray for us expresses our sincere and humble acknowledgement that we are weak in our prayers, in need of her stronger help, maternal mercy, like infants in need of a big sister for protection and reassurance. We further express our weakness by confessing who we are: sinners, though not despairing but hoping and trusting God’s mercy. In choosing Mary, the humblest of saints, as our intercessor, we express our humble realization that we lack her humility. And also, Mary as our intercessor gives us some sense of confidence that we will never be lost in the Kingdom of love and mercy in heaven. I declare with the other saints: Mary is the earthly paradise of Jesus Christ the new Adam, where he became man by the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to accomplish in her wonders beyond our understanding. She is the vast and divine world of God where unutterable marvels and beauties are to be found. She is the magnificence of the Almighty

where he hid his only Son, as in his own bosom, and with him everything that is most excellent and precious. What great and hidden things the all-powerful God has done for this wonderful creature, as she herself had to confess in spite of her great humility, “The Almighty has done great things for me.” The world does not know these things because it is incapable and unworthy of knowing them.

In our prayer to Mary, we are always conscious of her intercession “now and at the hour of our death.” It is true that Christ has conquered for us the power of sin, death and hell; yet, we are constantly threatened by the fear of dying. I don’t think many of us have reached the height of the spirituality of Paul who said: “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). When shall we have such spiritual confidence to taunt death like Saint Paul? For many of us death remains our greatest enemy. Hence, we surrender ‘the hour of our death’ entirely to Mary’s maternal care. Our unwavering hope and prayer is that she may be there for us as she was at her son’s death on the cross. We pray that she may welcome us as our mother at the hour our passing from this earthly city (cf. John 19:27) to lead us to her Son, in paradise. We sincerely believe that we are poor sinners and so we address ourselves to the ‘Mother of Mercy’, the All-Holy One of God (CCC 2677). We also ask this in the prayer Hail, Holy Queen: “And after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus.” What is it that she will do more willingly than that? No one can comfort us more at the hour of our death than our heavenly Mother. No one can be a better “matchmaker” between us and Christ, for no one else is closer to Christ and no one else is closer to us, or loves us more than Mary our Mother. Because she is Christ’s Mother as well as ours, she makes him brother to us. Like all mothers, she longs for her children to be close to each other.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> Peter J. Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity*, p. 417.



So, we are encouraged to invoke her intercession since Mary is our “Advocate.” It is important for us to know that there is no kind of grace she cannot ask God for and mediate; and so doing she is the “Mediatrice of All Graces.” It is encouraging to know that even in heaven, Mary still cooperates with God’s will and work of redemption as she did when she was on earth. She cooperates with God by her faith and submission. So she still prays to her Son to come to us with his saving grace, and in this way she is “Co-redemptrix.” I am not saying she is now equal with Christ but “helps” as a humble handmaid helps a great Lord – a Lord who exalts his handmaids rather than keeping them passive and inactive. Mary is associated so closely with the work of her Son Christ. We must note that Mary’s function does not in any way obscure or diminish the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin’s salutary influence on men and women ... flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it, and draws all its power from it (LG 60). ‘No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source’ (LG 62; CCC 970). Hence, St. Paul says “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ” (1 Tim 2:5); but “one” here means “first”, not “only.” Just as we share Christ’s sonship by participation (John 1:12), we share his work (cooperation) of salvation (Phil 2:12). Mary does this too, in a preeminent way. We may not forget that all Christians share in the work of cooperating with God (1 Cor. 3:9), mediating his grace, being instruments of his work of salvation, and being advocates for others by effective intercessory prayer (Jas 5:16). We can do all these things and the Blessed Mother does it more than any of us, for “She

uttered her ‘yes’ in the name of all human nature” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, 30, 1). In this way, she is our spiritual “mother.” She cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and ardent charity in the Saviour’s work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace (LG 61; CCC 968). “This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation ... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix (LG 62; CCC 969).

### **Catholics venerate the Saints**

We may also note that we honour and reverence the Saints as we do for Mary the Virgin Mother of God. Catholics are interested in the life of Saints because they were human beings like us who lived a life of allegiance to Jesus. It is much more easy to relate to them and learn from them because they went through what we go through now in our daily life. The Saints were normal human beings prone to temptation like us. The Saints had to fight to overcome temptations through prayer, fasting, penance and acts of charity. This is the reason Jesus allows his followers, the Saints, to teach and help us. We can easily learn from the trials and errors in the lives of the Saints how we can also rely on God’s mercy and grace to improve our lives as St. Augustine, St. Paul, and St. Peter and a host of others did. It is encouraging to learn the life of saints and such will help us to know that saints were not super-spiritual human beings who were specially created by God to become saints. This will help us to know that in whatever situation we are in, we can become saint if we focus all our life on Christ. We can learn from their life that through our trials and mistakes, we can easily learn how we

too can rely on God's mercy and grace in order to improve our life and live completely for Christ and become saint. As Catholics, from the stories of the life of saints we may begin to experience God's love and mercy in our own life. This experience can help us to answer the call to life of holiness. The Saints in heaven do not cease to be our brothers and sisters. Ursula said when I die, do not let them put 'May she rest in peace' on my tombstone. 'I have no intention of resting in peace.' I want to be with people who are crossing from this stage of life to the next.' St Theresa of Lisieux when she was about to die said: 'I feel ... that my mission is about to begin. I can't rest as long as there are souls to be saved.' The dead are like shy guests at a party: they will not intrude and easily go unnoticed. If, however, we give them attention, we can become increasingly aware of their comforting presence. Those who have died remain alive in God in whom all creation has its being. They also remain alive in our memories, heart and love for God and for them. Our soul is immortal and so as long as we continue to thirst for God, we continue to thirst for them and relate to them in our prayer and desire to reunite with them.

### **Communion of the Saints**

The communion of saints is the spiritual solidarity which binds together the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the same mystical body of Christ who is its head. We are referring to believers in the past, believers in the present, and believers in the years to come sharing a common salvation in our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have passed from this world into the presence of Christ at the death of their body have the same salvation as believers who are alive today. Those who will come after us will have the same salvation as we have. The participants in that solidarity are called saints by reason of their destination and of their partaking of the fruits of the Redemption (1 Cor. 1:2). The damned are thus excluded from the communion of saints. The living, even if

they do not belong to the body of the true Church, share in it according to the measure of their union with Christ and with the soul of the Church. St. Thomas teaches (III: 8:4) that the angels, though not redeemed, enter the communion of saints because they come under Christ's power and receive of his *gratia capitis*. The solidarity itself implies a variety of inter-relations: within the Church Militant, not only the participation in the same faith, sacraments, and government, but also a mutual exchange of examples, prayers, merits, and satisfactions; between the Church on earth on the one hand, and purgatory and heaven on the other, suffrages, invocation, intercession, veneration. The communion of saints is what each one of us has in common with all other believers. We have been forgiven through his death and saved by his life (Rom 5:10), set free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2), and passed from spiritual death to eternal life (1 John 3:16). We have all been permanently adopted as children of God by the will of God (John 1:12 – 13). We have become God's handiwork to do good works that he has prepared for us (Eph 2:10), and we have all been given an eternal home in the New Jerusalem in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Lamb, our Temple, and our Light (Rev 21:22 – 27). These are only but a few of the blessings we have in common with other believers.

So communion of saints means more commonly a communion of "holy ones," both the living and the dead. Hence, in Invitation to Prayer, in a funeral service for a deceased Christian, the Catholic priest says: "My brothers and sisters, we believe that all the ties of friendship and affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death. Confident that God always remembers the good we have done and forgives our sins, let us pray, asking God to gather (brother/sister) to himself." "... One day we shall joyfully greet him/her again when the love of Christ, which conquers all things, destroys even death itself." In these two prayers, there is expression of communion and reunion of all believers in the Kingdom of Love of

Christ in heaven. In other words, in the Catholic Church, as contained in the Creed, communion of saints extends to what it calls the Church's "constituent parts, one gone before, the other following every day"; in the broad principle it enunciates thus: "every pious and holy action done by one belongs and is profitable to all, through charity which seeks not her own." All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with each other in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man (Chapter 26 of the Communion of Saints Section 1).

Saint Paul sums up the Communion of the Saints in Romans. He said,

"See, the body is one, even if formed by many members, but not all of them with the same function. The same with us; being many, we are one body in Christ, depending on one another. Let each one of us, therefore, serve, according to our different gifts. Are you a prophet? Then give the insights of faith. Let the minister fulfil his office; let the teacher teach, the one who encourages, convince. You must, likewise, give, with an open hand, preside with dedication, and be cheerful in your works of charity. Let love be sincere. Hate what is evil and hold to whatever is good. Love one another and be considerate. Outdo one another, in mutual respect. Be zealous in fulfilling your duties. Be fervent in the spirit, and serve God. Have hope and be cheerful. Be patient in trials and pray constantly. Share with other Christians in need. With those passing by, be ready to receive them." (Rom 12:4 – 13).

Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offered opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus (Chapter 26 of Communion of Saints Section 2)? The communion of the saints is carried out through the assembling of the saints in the Church assembly, where, we have unity with God, teach God's Word in truth,

and look out for the needs and interests of each other. If we say that we have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:6 – 7).

Again, we may not forget that in the New Testament, “saints” means not canonized saints (a much later development), but rather all the people of God. Paul began one of his letters, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi” (Phil. 1:1). It is rather interesting that some scholars argue that communion of saints even encompasses not only believers in Christ, but, all those of truth and love, in whom the Spirit is at work. This includes those on earth, those still journeying to God in the purification process Catholics call purgatory, and those who now abide in God. Together they all make up the Church, the Body of Christ. The best thing about the communion of saints is that it connects us all – because we are one body of Christ. Hence, when we celebrate the Eucharist, we pray with all those who have gone before us. We who are living pray for the dead, “the holy souls in purgatory,” who need prayers and works of charity and penance for their journey to God. Also, the multitude in heaven pray for the rest of us, inspire us by their example, and remain present to us in ways of which we may not know. St Therese of Lisieux said before her death, “I will spend my heaven doing good on earth.”

We have mentioned that in the Eucharist, “communion of saints” unites all believers in Christ. It also refers to those who live in Christ who “died for all,” so that what each one does or suffers in and for Christ bears fruit for all. It follows that those men and women who lived virtuously on earth enjoy the fruits of their labour in heaven. Hence, the Church teaches that Communion of Saints is made up of the Church in heaven, the Church on earth, and the

Church in purgatory. The Church Triumphant (those in heaven) prays for the Church Militant (the Church on earth) and for the Church Suffering (those in purgatory), since all are bound together in ties of charity.

We cannot over-emphasize that Communion of Saints is a real treasure of the Church. Is it not heartening that our invisible friends in heaven are there interceding for us in all sorts of circumstances? They are close to Our Lord Jesus Christ and Our Lady and so can bring our needs to them on our behalf. It is also advisable to call on one's own patron saint often and ask for protection, blessing and guidance. It is important to study the Lives of the Saints: they are like "living gospels" and we should follow their examples. Some Saints are associated with different needs, such as Anthony, for finding lost articles and Saints Rita and Jude are reputed for impossible cases and Archangel Michael for protection. It is good to make them our friends and, call upon them always for spiritual blessings and graces. Their earthly life was a shiny example for us to emulate. They all have a commonality which is their great love for God, their pursuit of holiness and their humility, albeit manifested in different ways and by different paths. This is why they are now in heaven and remain powerful intercessors for all as we strive to become saints ourselves. This is the calling for all of us. Hence, it is very important to study and know the Saints and become their intimate friends and, this will help us to appreciate that we, in our present situation, can become saints since it is our calling.

As Church Militant striving to answer the call to holiness, we need to know that there exists a communion of goods in the Church. All the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others. The riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the sacraments.<sup>625</sup> And the sacraments unite the faithful with one another and bind

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<sup>625</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, Symb. 10.

them to Christ. The Church is governed by one and the same Spirit; all the goods she has received necessarily become a common fund<sup>626</sup> (CCC 947). The term ‘communion of saints’ therefore has two closely linked meanings: communion ‘in holy things,’ and ‘among holy persons.’ The faithful are fed by Christ’s holy body and blood to grow in the communion of the Holy Spirit and to communicate it to the world (CCC 948). Faith is a treasure of life which is enriched by being shared (CCC 949). It is characteristic of members of communion of saints to share their faith and love of Christ. The communion of saints must be understood as the communion of the sacraments. The sacraments can be referred to as “communion” for they unite us to God ... But this name is better suited to the Eucharist than to any other, because it is primarily the Eucharist that brings this communion about<sup>627</sup> (CCC 950). As we partake in the Eucharistic table of the Lord, every gift we have is regarded as a good possessed in common with everyone else. A Christian is a steward of the goods of the Lord (Luke 16:1, 3) ready and eager to come to the help of the needy ... and of their neighbour in want. It is also more so because none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself (Rom 14:7). If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor. 12:26 – 27). As far as we have his Spirit we are of Christ; we form one Church and we cleave together in him. We are equally in that union of the wayfarers with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ which is in no way interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the constant faith of the Church, this union is reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods (LG 49; CCC 955). Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness ... they do not cease to intercede with the Father for the Church Militant. And so by their fraternal concern our weakness is greatly helped (LG 49; cf. 1 Tim 2:5). Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more

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<sup>626</sup> Roman Catechism 1, 18, 24.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.; 1, 10, 24.



effectively than during my life (St. Dominic, dying, to his brothers). We strongly believe that by our devotion to our brothers and sisters in heaven, the fraternal charity of the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened. Just as Christian communion among fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints join us to Christ, from whom as from its fountain and head issues all grace, and the life of the people of God itself (LG 50; Eph 4:1 – 6). Our fervent prayer is that we may become companions and fellow disciples of martyrs and saints of God in heaven. It is our faith that our prayer is capable not only of helping the faithful, but also of making their intercession for us Church Militant effective (CCC 958). This is because we believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and saints is always attentive to our prayers (Paul VI, CPG 30).

### **Catholics do not adore Our Lady or the Saints but God**

The critics of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement trace the beginning of this prayer group from Pentecostalism founded by John Wesley who was also the founder of Methodist church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was an ex-Anglican minister who grew up trying to “spiritualize” the still-too-“Catholic” Anglican religion. John Wesley felt an overwhelming manifestation of the “Spirit” and felt “empowered,” and baptized in the Holy Spirit, having received his “second blessing” as he called it, he was able to go out to win cold-hearted Anglican masses to a deeper sense of God’s presence through his Methodist “prayer meetings.” John Wesley eventually broke away with this prayer group without renouncing his Anglican “priesthood.” He started his own church and with his prayer meetings attracted many Catholics who wanted to experience the surge and power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>628</sup> As quoted in William Whalen, *Minority Religions in America*, Staten Island: Alba House, 1971, p. 179.

Again, according to the critics, modern Pentecostalism began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Revivalist movement, which spawned, among others, the sect of one Charles Parham in the year 1900. Catholic Charismatic Renewal traces the beginning of the “outpouring of the Spirit” in modern times to this set. Charles F Parham, a holiness preacher, rented a mansion and started a Bible school with about 40 students, with an intensive study of scriptures and came to the conclusion that speaking in tongues was the one sign that a Christian had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. On New Year’s Eve in 1900, one of the students, Miss Agnes N. Ozmen began to speak in tongues and within few days this phenomenon spread like wild fire. Charles F Parham spent the next five years as an itinerant preacher before opening another Bible school in Houston. They organized a three-year-long revival in California which attracted people from all over USA, and these people planted Pentecostalism in USA as well as in many European nations.<sup>629</sup>

There is no doubt that the Second Vatican Council’s positive policy of “opening the windows of the Church to the world” encouraged many Catholics to interact with different Pentecostal churches. The idea of “speaking in tongues” and “baptism in the spirit” was the dominant factor in these Pentecostal churches which influenced the mind and thought of many Catholics. And so in search of spiritual experience, Catholic professors from Duquesne Catholic University in Pittsburgh in USA, attended the Congress of the Cursillo movement in August 1966 where they were introduced to the book titled **The Cross and the Switchblade**, which emphasized the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s charisms. They were so overtaken by this book that it became the focus of their studies and further led them to pursue to have an experience of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

In January 1967, professors Ralph Keifer and Patrick Bourgeois attended a prayer meeting where they ultimately received the **baptism in the Holy Spirit**. The following week, Professor Keifer laid hands on other professors, and they too had an experience with the Holy Spirit. Then, in February, during a gathering at Duquesne University, more people asked professor Keifer to pray over them. This led to the event at the chapel where they too received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, as well as many other students who were present in the chapel.<sup>630</sup> Professor Keifer sent the news of this event to the University of Notre Dame, where a similar event later occurred, and the Renewal began to spread globally like the West African Harmattan wild fire.

The very important point I want to make is that the unsupervised interaction of the members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal with different Pentecostal churches has corrupted many Catholic minds and thoughts. There is no denying the fact that this has resulted to many Catholic Charismatic members “being united in spiritual marriage” with Pentecostal and Protestant churches started attacking the doctrines and teachings of the Catholic Church in relation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, honouring the Saints, respecting their statues and pictures, venerating the Cross of Christ and so forth, because the Protestant reformation rejected these doctrines and teachings of the Catholic Church. So Catholic recognition and veneration of Saints, their images and icons remain the sticking point where Protestants and Pentecostal churches disagree with Catholics to date. Some Catholic Charismatic Renewal members now join members of Pentecostal and Protestant churches in accusing Catholic members of worshipping the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints. They see the veneration of the Cross of Christ and respecting of the holy images and pictures of the Saints as

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<sup>630</sup> Laurentin, Rene (1977). Catholic Pentecostalism. New York: Doubleday & Company. pp. 23-24. ISBN 0385121296.

worshipping idols. The most dangerous enemy is the one in the “family.” The Nigerian Ibos have a proverb which says that: ‘It is the rat in the house that tells the rat in the bush that there is plenty of meat in the basket hanging on the ceiling in the house in the kitchen.’ There is no way the rat in the bush would have known that there was so much meat in the house if the rat in the house had not revealed the secret. Some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have become “dangerous flies that patch on the sockets of the eyes.” If you leave them, they will bite off your eyes and blind you. If you try to try to kill them, you may destroy your own eyes and suffer blindness. But if the Church continues to ignore them as she has done for ages, they will continue to confuse the vulnerable Catholics and will never lead them to the power of the Holy Spirit they always “brag” about. The “spirit” that is intoxicating them is **NOT** the Spirit of Christ who promises to be with the Church to which he is the Head until the end of time. I don’t understand how the Catholic Charismatic Renewal members would expect serious Catholic members to take them serious after contradicting the Holy Spirit who first of all honoured and made the Virgin Mother holy and instructed us to give her reverence and honour. How would they dismiss the teachings of the Holy Spirit on Our Blessed Mother and the Saints by claiming to be wiser than the Holy Spirit and at the same time presume to be filled by the Holy Spirit, and expect us to clap hands for them? Are they not wallowing in contradiction? When you carefully study the theology of the Church on the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, you will certainly understand that to contradict the reverence, honour and respect the Church accords to the Mother of God and the Saints is to disregard the teaching and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic Church acknowledges the use of religious images by her adherents such as the crucifix, the cross, and the holy pictures, statues, medals and icons of saints in their prayer life, liturgies and meetings. As Catholics, we venerate religious images and liturgical objects

by kissing, bowing and making the sign of the cross. The New Code of Canon Law published by the authority of Pope John Paul II in 1983, reveals that the Church very much considers sacred relics to be important and significant in the life of the Church (cf. Canons 1186-90). A relic is a piece of the body of a saint, an item owned or used by the saint, or an object which has been touched to the tomb of a saint. Dom Bernardo Cignitti, O.S.B., once wrote, ‘In a religion as spiritually cantered as Christianity, the remains of certain dead are surrounded with special care and veneration. This is because the mortal remains of the deceased are associated in some manner with holiness of their souls which await reunion with their bodies in the resurrection. It is well-known that altars at the time of consecration by the Bishop were to be inserted with a relic of a saint, preferably a martyr, which was kissed by the priest as he began to offer the holy sacrifice of the Mass. It is still recommended that every altar possess a relic of one of the saints.

The Council of Trent (16<sup>th</sup> century) responded to the Reformers who claimed that the veneration of the saints and their relics was contrary to Sacred Scripture by teaching that: “Also the holy bodies of the holy martyrs and of the others who dwell with Christ ... are to be honoured by the faithful.” Of course, there are several scriptural passages that support the veneration of relics. For example, the Israelites took Joseph’s bones with them when they departed Egypt (Exodus 13:19). The bones of Elisha came in contact with a dead person who then was raised to life (2 Kings 13:21). The same Elisha took the mantle of Elijah and performed a miracle with it (2 Kings 2:13 – 14). The Christians of Ephesus used the handkerchiefs and cloths which touched the skin of Paul and effected the healing of the sick with them (Acts 19:12).

We can now understand why Catholics are interested in the life of saints as they are normal human beings who lived a life in allegiance to Christ. Of course, it is much easier to relate to the life of a saint or learn from them as they are like you and me who strive to follow Jesus. It is the conversion story of the lives of saints that causes an enormous impact on us. Hence, we are encouraged to always study the lives of saints. It is very important to teach children about God's love through the life of saints. Children ought to learn that saints were normal human beings prone to temptation like us. Yet, in their desire to live a good life, they fought temptation through prayer, works of penance and acts of charity. Was our Lord not tempted too? We always say that Jesus could resist temptation because he was divine. But then saints resisted temptation too, by gaining strength through prayer, fasting and penance. So we can equally overcome temptation by God's grace and by our determination and hard work. God helps those who help themselves. Grace builds on nature. Grace works when we make efforts by cooperating with it.

It is Jesus who allows his followers, the saints to teach us and help us on our journey to holiness. If we learn the story of their lives then, we also learn how we can rely on God's grace and mercy to improve our life as they did. St Paul and St Augustine are two excellent examples from whom we can learn, emulate and confidently march on focussing on Jesus our Saviour. The life of Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, as wife and mother is an inspiration to all wives and mothers and Christian families. If we take time and study the story of the life of saints then, we will be able to appreciate why we should happily honour and emulate them for their exemplary life and ask them to pray for us; because we are all called to holiness. Definitely their conversion story causes deep impact on lives of those who seek to know and love God on a daily basis. Christians very much appreciate and are inspired

by what the saints did in their desire to live for God, that is, in their desire to live good life; life that cherishes and loves God and humanity.

The beauty of being a Catholic is that we inherit our ancestors in faith, who are now in heaven who had experienced life before us. From them, we inherit many shared and cherished values and life stories that shape our present living. Those of us who are from traditional Christian family, even from childhood on, our parents, aunts, uncles and cousins relate to us their faith journeys and life experiences that impact deeply on our own journey of faith and everyday living. We learn from our family elders in faith how to bring God to the happenings in our life and how to involve him in our endeavours in every aspect of our life. There is a saying that the family that prays together stays together. The family that prays together are united in the spirit of Christ feeding the members of the family in Christian values. Children of Christian family inherit their faith from their family members and religious traditions. As Catholics, we are always conscious that our saints lived their lives in exceptional ways and some saints are specially associated to our family. However, is there any way we can relate to the life of some saints to the faith-life of some of our family members? Can we say the life of some of our family members is influenced by the life of some saints? But there is more a tendency in despising the virtuous life of some of our family members because familiarity breeds contempt. Jesus himself said: “A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his relatives and in his own family” (Mark 6:4). After living with a family member or a fellow villager so long and treating him like anyone else, how can we suddenly show respect and have faith in him? The familiar neighbours of holy family of Nazareth found themselves in peculiar situation and remarked: ‘Who is he but the carpenter?’ What kind of wisdom has been given to him, that he also performs such miracles (Mark 6:2)?

It is true that the importance of Christian family unit cannot be overemphasized. If we cast our mind back to our salvation history, we remember that Jesus received his human learning from Mary his mother and Joseph his foster father, and his Nazareth neighbours. He acquired his wisdom from Scriptures and the culture of his people. Yet his Father gave him his Spirit to judge as God does and to recognize God in all things. For Jesus (as for us now) what was important was not to accumulate data and experiences but to be able to appreciate all that occurred. But it is obvious that Jesus was inspired by the Spirit and so saw all the realities of life in a different way: this was divine Wisdom. And going through the life story of saints, we can easily notice that each of them, in every step of the way, conscientiously, set out to imitate every step of Jesus their Lord and Master. The life of each saint reveals that, in their desire and efforts to imitate Jesus, the Spirit became their educator and Sustainers. Actually, the God who called them wanted them to share in the mission of his Son Jesus Christ. It is important to note that the saints in their earthly life were conscious of God's mission and the power of Christ in their journey of faith. They trusted in the Father's Providence.

Like the holy family of Nazareth, it is incumbent on parents and grandparents to start from their childhood to give their children/grandchildren the good memory of the past from which they come, in particular the many gifts of faith, family/human values and traditions that have been handed down from previous generations of the family. They should help the young members of the family to discover the living richness of the past, to treasure its memory and to make use of it for their choices and opportunities, is a genuine act of love towards them, for the sake of their growth and the decisions they are called to make (FD 35). The word of God encourages us to remain close to the elderly, so that we can benefit from their experience: "Stand in the assembly of the elders. Who is wise? Cling to him ... If you see an intelligent man, visit him; let your foot wear out his doorstep" (Sir 6:34, 36). In every case,



the long years they lived and all they have experienced in life should make us look to them with respect: “You shall rise up before the hoary head” (Lev 19:32). For “the glory of young men is their strength, but the beauty of old men is their grey hair” (Proverb 20:29). It is very important to inculcate into the young ones the spirit of respect and loyalty from their earliest age so they can grow to learn from the wisdom of God and their elders in the faith. Again, the Bible tells us: “Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (Proverb 23:22). The commandment to honour our father and mother “is the first commandment to carry a promise with it” (Eph. 6:2, cf. Ex. 20:12; Deut 5:16; Lev 19:3), and that promise is: “that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:3). If the commandment of God encourages us to honour our parents, it follows that God wants us to honour and respect every human being since each of us could be a father or mother to others, biologically or spiritually. Is it not logical that we should honour and respect each other since we are all created in God’s image and likeness?

If we are created in his image, it then follows that; we should reflect him in the way we think and act. Our mission is to reflect to the world who God really is. Jesus Christ is the best example of how to live life in a way that reflects God. The Lord said to his disciples: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). This can only be possible if we begin to see things as God sees them. Though, it can be overwhelming for us to imagine that we can be as perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. It sounds beyond our human reach. However, I believe that God will be happy with us if we strive daily without being discouraged, and he actually expects us to become more like him; even if we fail to reach his perfection. Of course God expects us to work hard to overcome temptation and sin and to thrive to live in the glory of his Word. Living like Jesus does not only help us to build a strong relationship with God, but enables us to reach out to others so they can also experience the awesomeness of God. We

can be a light in the darkness of this world if only we choose to live out the beauty of who God created us to be. What it takes is only for us to believe that we are indeed created in his image. Yes, we are of great value and purpose. We actually mirror God's divinity if we appreciate the unique qualities with which we have been endowed by God. I mean the qualities that differentiate us from all other creatures such as our rational ability, our complete centeredness, our creative freedom, our possibility for self-actualization, and the ability for self-transcendence. We think deeply, with gratitude, of those special qualities with which God endows us and yet, allow God to be made manifest in human beings. Since we are conscious that we are made in the image of God then, it all means that we are the creatures through whom God's plans and his purposes can be made known and actualized and, in this way, we can be seen as co-creators with God. It is a wonderful gift that we have the ability for self-actualization and the possibility of participation in a sacred reality. Such conscientious participation in a sacred reality helps us to realize the image of God in our life which is in fact, a realization of our wholeness. Hence, we must continually pursue holiness, striving to grow in conformity to God our Father in thoughts, words and actions. That is how the likeness of God would be seen in us.

Christ who has invited us to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy is not asking us to do what is beyond our human ability. God will never allow us to carry a burden beyond our ability. This is because God knows our frame. He knows how we were formed. He remembers that we are but dust. The Scripture reminds us that "No trial greater than human endurance has overcome you. God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond your strength. He will give you, together with the temptation, the strength to escape and to resist" (1 Cor. 10:13). He knows us because he is our Creator. God knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust (Psalm 103:14). He has infinite knowledge of us and our weaknesses. It is heartening

that God has this full knowledge of us and yet completely accepts us. These scriptural texts remind us that God's compassion, care, love, and ultimate forgiveness – does not depend on our strength, righteousness or ability. Just like a parent loves their three-year old not because of the impressive shores he/she does in the house; so also, God loves his children not because they are righteous or impeccable. This reminds us that it was God's acceptance of his Son's self-sacrifice on the cross that made it possible for us to understand and experience God's Fatherly love, redemption and mercy for humanity (Gal. 4:4 – 6). We can appreciate this by striving to live like children of God. And as a father has compassion on his children, so does Yahweh pity those who fear him (Psalm 103:13).

We can appreciate our heavenly Father by imitating his love and compassion. Firstly, God appreciates our gratitude. The Lord asked “Were they not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? (Luke 17:17). However, can we even recount all his blessings? They are so numerous. But we can offer him a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Praise Yahweh, my soul; all my being, praise his holy name! Praise Yahweh, my soul, and do not forget all his kindness (Psalm 103:1 – 2). We cannot afford to forget God's kindness and mercy by imitating him in his wonderful deeds. Peter encourages us “Be just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15 – 16). God calls us to be just like himself. This is because he created us in his image (Gen. 1:27). However, at the fall, that image was marred, though not destroyed, which is a consolation for us. Notwithstanding, this great fall of Adam and Eve bears a deep negative impact on the rest of humanity. That is why we always think that the divine call to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy is beyond our reach. We think that it is an exaggeration to imagine that we can be holy as God is holy. We dismiss that idea as an impossible task for humanity. But it is true that the farther we remove the possibility of becoming as holy as God from our focus, the more distorted our

self-view becomes and far remote it becomes for us to make efforts towards that. We must become one with God who holds the formula to all that makes us be. The key to realizing and actualizing who we are and what we are is God. Should we still have identity crisis if we knew and understood that we are gods (Psalm 82:6; John 10:34) made in the image and likeness of God? Most of us readily reject the notion of ourselves as gods because we are more overwhelmed by our human limitations than by our limitless divinity. Defined by our limitations, we are so preoccupied being brainwashed by our mindset and by others that we fail to gain spiritual consciousness of who we are. We rather envision God who is within us, beyond our grasp. We forget that when we receive the sacrament of baptism, we receive the Spirit of God who lives in us and we live in him. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might have a new life (Romans 6:4). And so, the more we image our lives after the likeness of our Creator and Sustainer, the more we will discover the attributes of God within that enable us to receive bountiful blessings and perform miracles. By concentrating on our God-given power and authority, we will “reach the unreachable stars” (Man of La Mancha/Lyrics by Joe Darion). Since, “God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4), then that which has been created in God’s image and after God’s likeness must be one with God.

Again, in the Word of God those who put their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord are called saints, and another word used in describing those who are holy. As saints, as holy ones, they are supposed to represent the Holy One who has called them out of the world and set them apart for himself for his own design and purpose (Rom. 8:28). This is apparently God’s action in believers through his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called holy because that is what he is, and his purpose is taking up residence in us to make us holy too. But while God wants and

requires us to be holy, he realizes our weakness and inability. He knows that without him we can never be what he desires for us to be or do what he wants us to do. That is why he sent his Spirit (the Comforter, the Counsellor, the Helper, and the Advocate) to help us fulfil his design and purpose for us. In other words, in his ascension, Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us, and that the Holy Spirit has been sent to prepare us for that place. We may begin to ask ourselves serious questions. In what ways do we cooperate with the Holy Spirit? Do we allow him to do what he wants to do in our life to bring us in line with God's design for us? We may not forget that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son. We should always remember that it is God's will that we should be holy because he created us for himself; and without life of holiness, we may not see God face to face. So we should desire holiness with all our heart, mind, will and strength. So, we should be conscious in cooperating with the Holy Spirit who works in us day after day to make us holy.

In fact, the providence of the Father covers all the events of our lives. God the Father definitely has personal attention for each of us. God knows us in Christ from the beginning of the world: children known before they are born, but also destined for a unique place in creation. Nothing happens in the world, in our family, in our lives merely by chance. So through his providence, God is completely in charge of our life and every event in the created order. In other words, we are able to perceive meaning in life despite all the shortcomings therein. God is patiently waiting for our response. His invitation: 'To be holy as our heavenly Father is holy' is an open-ended invitation. Conscious of our human weakness as a consequence of the fall of Adam and Eve, God constantly works at our transformation back into his image. The Spirit of God at our baptism continually works at our transformation "to put on the new, which is being renewed, and is to reach perfect knowledge and the likeness of

its creator” (Col. 3:10). God is daily renewing believers back into his perfect image (2 Cor.3:18). As believers, we only need to be conscious of God’s action in us and in the world.

Again God shows us his presence through our fellow human beings who are extraordinary in works of charity and faith. We may not take for granted people who are in close proximity with us who serve God and humanity quietly. They are constantly in the church praying and joyfully and selflessly doing things for God and for humanity. There are faceless ordinary Christians who quietly and privately come to the church very early and unnoticed to prepare for parish Mass and other liturgical and parish programmes. There are parishioners who stay back to clean up the church after each service. There are always parishioners who come into the church to clean it and whenever you enter the church, it is all tidied up. Apart from parish Mass and other community spiritual exercises, there are always Christians who come into the church privately to pray before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle and pursue other private devotions. There are always Christians who are all the time in the church having some private conversation with God, talking to God and listening to God speak to them. If we are spiritually awake and attuned, I believe that God put these “religious” people around us to manifest his presence to us and incite us to his call to holiness. These people silently bear witness to Christ. The problem we have is that these ordinary men and women are not noticed and so we take them for granted. They have no voice but in actual fact God is speaking loudly through them to us. They are the voice of the silence. It is true that “God shows to men, in a vivid way, his presence and his face in the lives of those companions of ours in the human condition who are more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). He speaks to us in them, and offers us a sign of his Kingdom, to which we are powerfully attracted, so great a cloud of witnesses is there given (cf. Heb. 12:1) and such a witness of the truth of the Gospel” (LG 50). In this passage from Lumen Gentium we discover the profound

reason for devotion to the Blessed and the Saints. There is no doubt that there are saintly people around us even within our family members. The problem is that they are too common to us. In our local African villages these spiritual heroes and heroines die and no one pursues their canonization. There are many brothers and sisters around us who live holy lives, lives of courageous witness to Christ. They live a daily life of sacrifice to God and humanity. They die as saints but not pronounced so by the Church. Many of our village men and women are saints in heaven, our family members and people from our villages and towns. They are with God because they see him face to face. When I see these men and women who spend their time and energy for God and humanity, I feel encouraged and perceive them as living saints and angels amongst us. They are not declared saints when they die but I believe they are appreciated by God and by the rest of mankind. They do not live and die in vain. I believe they receive their reward in heaven. Their life teaches me that everything about God is real. Their service to God and humanity is real and so they show me that God is real. They make God real for me. They make God present and loving to me. They truly show me that God is kind and full of mercy.

The Spirit of God is moving amongst us. I feel that God lives in people. Despite the presence of evil within us, in the world and around us, there are truly and genuinely many good and friendly people around us. They are not only in the church but outside the church as well. I believe that the presence of good and friendly people is a sign of the Holy Spirit. It means that God lives in people and amongst us. Their presence shows me that holiness is accessible to all and that holiness can be imitated. Here the Church is a great help because she nurtures them as her spiritual children. The Church remains the universal sacrament of salvation as she acts as a sign and symbol which is filled by the reality of the God-man continuing presence and work in the world. The Church continually carries out her mission as the instrument of

holiness through evangelization, the sacraments and the practice of charity. Through this way the Church gives “birth” to many saints through the power of the Holy Spirit. The life of the saints helps people to experience the Gospel and the new life in Christ. As far as God will never abandon the Church, there is the certainty that the saints will continue to accompany people in their journey of faith towards the God of life. There are multitudes of ways God works to save his people. We only need to be conscious that God is always with us.

The heroic way of the Christian living of the common and often times uneducated Christians confirms to us that holiness knows no bounds and that in the Church of our modern times it is alive and thriving. Many modern people think that the call to holiness belonged to archaic Christianity not to the present computer age. They are wrong because the call to holiness continues to be vitally up to this scientific age. It is no doubt that the world is changing on a daily basis, yet the saints, while changing with the times, always represent the same living face of Christ. The call to holiness is a call to every human being in every generation. It is not for some specific people. It is not for superhuman beings “specially” created by God for a life of holiness. So the call to be a saint can be recognized from bottom to the top in all categories of human beings. It doesn’t depend on the social status of the person. The “odour of holiness” can be perceived even by the ordinary Christians by an intuition of faith. Even the common local Christians by the intuition of faith are able to point out to the Church authority candidates for canonization. The Christians themselves recognize and appreciate life of holiness from amongst them. They recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in members of the Church. This is wonderful to know. The Holy Spirit works in the brothers and sisters in the worshipping community of believers. It is wonderful and encouraging to perceive the signs of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community. It is the Holy Spirit who singles out saints in the Christian community and members of the worshipping community know them and appreciate



them. The advent of Christianity into my town in Utuh is a very interesting one and my pagan ancestors who welcomed the Gospel and converted to Christ would not have imagined their “child” would be the first Bishop of Nnewi diocese in the person of the amiable “Nna Ora” Most Rev. Dr. Hilary Paul Odili Okeke. They are in heaven smiling on their sons and daughters and on their grandchildren in faith. May we never underrate the faith and practice of our ordinary local Christians. It is really true that the Spirit breathes wherever he wills (John 3:8). We may need to accept this reality. I believe that even the common Christians know this fact very well. They are convinced that they work for God even when no one takes notice or praises them. They know that God takes note. The Spirit recognizes and rewards men and women of goodwill. The Spirit recognizes and appreciates every effort we make whoever we are and wherever we are. It may be surprising that the modern elites do not recognize the presence and power of the Holy Spirit but the local uneducated village Christians do appreciate the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life and in their local living.

I don't know how knowledgeable the uneducated Christians are of the fact that the Gospel has spread to every part of the world and to every social class. Consciously or unconsciously, the canonized saints and the living saints in the believing community are an authentic and constant means of evangelization and teaching to Christians in the worshipping community. The exemplary Christians live a daily life of truth and of the Gospel values in the worshipping community and outside the church wherever they are. We may not be surprised that even in our present age of such immense presence of evil that there are yet great number of beatifications and canonizations because the Gospel is so widespread in the world and its message has sunk such deep roots in all cultures and historical backgrounds in every nook and corner of the globe. This phenomenon reflects the action of the Holy Spirit and the vitality flowing from him in the Church and in the world at large. Pope John Paul II reflected

this idea when he wrote: “In recent years the number of canonizations and beatifications has increased. These show the vitality of the local Churches, which are much more numerous today than in the first centuries and in the first millennium. The greatest homage which all the Churches can give to Christ on the threshold of the third millennium will be to manifest the Redeemer’s all-powerful presence through the fruits of faith, hope and charity, present in men and women of many different tongues and races who have followed Christ in the various forms of the Christian vocation” (Tertio Millennio Adveniente, n. 37). Again, in the Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, the Pontiff also notes: “The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life” (Novo Millennio Ineunte, n. 31). Can we not say without fear of contradiction that all these beatifications and canonizations are also a sign of the ability of inculturation in the life of the Christian faith and of the Church?

It has turned out to be that in an age of the collapse of collective utopias, of indifference and the lack of appetite for all that is theoretical and ideological, it becomes all interesting that new attention is being paid to the saints. Hence the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II on several occasions has stressed that the heritage of the saints “must not be lost; we should always be thankful for it and we should renew our resolve to imitate it” (Novo Millennio Ineunte, n. 7). The saints are like beacons; they show men and women the possibilities open to human beings. Pope John Paul II who is now Saint John Paul II is a modern saint, some of those who would read this book may have met him in person but now, he sees God face to face in heaven, and it would be for our own spiritual benefit to ask him to intercede on our behalf. Those of us who knew him when he was alive see him as our practical example that it is

within our God-given possibility to live a holy life and become a saint. There are numerous similar examples of men and women who lived heroic lives of virtue who are now saints in heaven. Another handy example familiar to many of us is Saint Teresa of Calcutta – another recent modern Saint. The Church cannot overemphasize that a life of holiness is within the grasp of each and every one of us. These are people who lived within our own generation and some of us related with them and now they are in heaven. Does it not sound real enough for us? Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta lived the simplest life one could ever imagine. She lived with and served the poorest of the poor in India. A great 19<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher, Henri Bergson, observed that “the greatest historical figures are not the conquerors but the saints.” We also note that Jean Delumeau, a historian who specialized in 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholicism, invited his readers to note that the great revivals of Christian history were marked by a return to the sources, that is, to the life of holiness of the Gospel, brought about by the saints and by movements of holiness in the Church. We must be attracted to these Saints whose earthly lives are familiar to us. They are not far-fetched to us. They give us some special consolation and sense of belonging and courage in our daily journey of faith in these difficult times. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, quite correctly asserted that: “It is not the sporadic majorities which form in the Church here and there that determine the path she and we will take. The saints are the true, crucial majority, and it is from them that we take our bearings. Let us stick to them! They express the divine in the human, the eternal in time.”

We can only express profound delight at the revival of attention being paid to the saints of God because they belong to everyone. The saints are a heritage to humanity that has achieved so much in scientific development while honouring man, also feels it deem to give glory to God because as St Irenaeus would say “the glory of God is man alive.” We are truly alive

when we recognize God as our Creator and worship him and give him all the glory, praise and honour due to him because whatever we achieve is from what he has created and given to the whole of humanity. May we always declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). Even our eagerness to glorify God the Father is part of our service to his call to us to the life of holiness. We are truly alive when we make efforts to live life of holiness. We are alive when we honour the saints in heaven because they practiced great life of virtue when they were on earth and because in honouring those who are the chosen friends of God we honour God himself who made them his saints. And to honour them is to aspire to be saints ourselves. Part of honouring them is to meditate on their outstanding practice of virtues which inspires us to imitate their noble qualities and good life. Some parents read lives of the saints to their children and tell them wonderful stories about these saints especially their own patron saints. It is invaluable to reflect on the lives of the saints. It is possible that the stories about the lives of these saints will stick in the memory of their children as they grow up. These stories would become useful to them when they face life challenges. We cannot go through life without challenges that come to us from different angles, and to be conscious of these heavenly friends is heartening. If we constantly seek their heavenly assistance, we will never be overwhelmed by the difficulties we encounter in life on a daily basis. At times, life becomes like a warfare and without the help of our heavenly friends we will be crunched by the burdens of life. Even when our problems are not relieved, conscious of saint-friends, we go through problems without being crunched by them. That is why the Scripture says that the grace of God is always enough for us; and his strength is revealed in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

We honour saints and have communion with them because they live in the presence of God. And when we pray to God, we are in communion with him and with the saints as well. There

is always a spiritual communion between the saints and all those who believe in God. This is also why we ask the saints to pray for us. It is like asking our fellow Christians who live a holy life to remember us in their prayer to God. We always ask the brothers and sisters in the community of believers to pray for us for our various needs. It is the same thing with asking a saint in heaven to pray for us. It is very appropriate and necessary for us to ask the saints to pray for us because they are always in the presence of God in heaven. To ask them to pray for us is to honour them. We also honour them by imitating their holy lives and by showing respect to their relics and images. Saint Paul encouraged the Christians to be: “united in imitating me, and to look at those who walk in our way of life” (Phil. 3:17).

### **Adoration**

It is a common phenomenon to see tracks or leaflets from some sections of the Protestant churches or Pentecostal and Evangelical churches devoted mainly on attacking the Catholic Church in relation to their teachings, doctrines and practices with regards to the Blessed Mary, the Mother of God, the Saints and their pictures, statues, medals and icons. It is always about accusing the Catholic Church of adoring and worshipping the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints. There is no amount of explanation and education that will ever make them, if for nothing else, but for God’s sake to spend some time to pray, meditate and study the numerous explanations, answers and education given to help them to understand what the Catholic position is about on these topical issues of our Catholic faith. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that even some foxes in the New Forest Area of Southampton and Bournemouth in the UK would have been convinced of what Catholics have consistently been saying, after all these years. Even all the fish in the ‘Isi-Iyi’ stream in my town Utuh have accepted the Gospel the Reverend Fathers at St Peter Claver’s Catholic Church and St Stephen’s Catholic Church Utuh have been preaching and still preach to date, and so there is harmony between

them and the indigenes of Uduh-town. And if animals could listen to the preaching of St Francis of Assisi and became his friends, why would Christians not give the Holy Spirit the chance to educate them on the very important subject of Blessed Mother Mary and the Saints? On the other hand, St George has no one to blame but himself if the dragon refused to believe him. I believe the Holy Spirit will teach anyone who is open and ready to learn the truth not only about religion but also about politics, history, economics, and any field of human life including sporting events. I have experience of some people who are out not to learn but to attack religion or religious practice that are contrary to their own religious belief or unbelief. Is that what Christianity is all about? Is it about argument to determine the winners and losers? Are we arguing to win souls for God or to massage our ego? Does God want us to fight amongst ourselves for him? Does he even want us to make arguments for him? Is it even a matter of argument? If it is a matter of argument, the more intelligent fellow will definitely win the argument. God and religion is not a matter of rational argument. But if you insist, you may win the argument and lose the soul. That is why St Paul said: 'I have not come to you with a show of eloquence or human wisdom or philosophy but to reveal to you the mystery of God's plan for you' (1 Cor. 2:1). As Catholics, our apologetic is share our experience of God love and mercy through Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah with those who are willing to listen. Even Jesus knew from the very beginning that there would be other sheep which would be of a different fold (John 10:16). Do they need to attack each other in order to prove that they love Jesus more than the other? No, rather, they love each other so that the world would know that they are members of the family of God.

I want to state categorically that all the publications about Catholics worshipping and adoring the Blessed Mary and the Saints are simply gross calumny and misrepresentations of the Catholic belief and teaching. It is quite surprising that in Nigeria the preaching of most

Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches in their Sunday services and on the streets is attacks on the Catholic Church. I wonder how such constant acrimonious attacks in the name of preaching the Good News constitute the message of salvation from the God of love, mercy and life. Their theology and liturgy are two-pronged: Angry attack on the Catholic Church and the prosperity gospel. It is as if the more they are serious in their attack on the Catholic Church, the more they are esteemed as wonderful preachers and pastors. I would rather wish they are desirous to learn and understand the true teachings, doctrines and practice of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church always explains her position but attacks on her have become the success story and the meaning of the existence of some of her separated brethren. The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives a compendious, but clear explanation of her belief, practice and teachings. The Code of Canon Law, the two volumes of the Second Vatican Two Documents, the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church, the constant Encyclical Letters of the Pope(s) and the Magisterium constantly explain clearly and boldly the teachings and the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Despite all this, for whatever reasons, some of our separated brethren believe that the best way to propagate Christianity and also counteract the vicious continued determined attacks and total attempts to destroy Christianity by hard-core Islamic nations and extremist groups in Nigeria like the Boko Haram and its counterpart ISIS is to mount continuous attack on the Catholic Church. My Nigerian Ibos have a saying that the house is ablaze with fire burning to ashes while an adult is at home chasing rat for edible. Our separated brethren believe that the best way to stop Islamic extremists from destroying Christianity in Nigerian is to mount incessant attacks on the Catholic Church. Their greatest headache is not that Islamic extremists are desperately trying to eliminate Christianity but that Catholics are worshipping and adoring the Blessed Virgin and the Saints. Destruction of innocent Christian lives and churches does not bother them but what agitates them is that Catholics are idol worshippers.

I cannot overemphasize the fact that the Catholic position, teachings and doctrines are fairly, openly stated and documented. I am sure that Catholic authority and individual enlightened Catholics and groups are ever ready and willing to give reasons for their faith, hope and belief in God with love and respect at any point in time (1 Peter 3:15). However, our separated brethren should know that attack on Catholics is not the way to propagate Christianity. And extremist religious groups should know that Catholics are never expected by God to take up arms to defend him and his teachings. As Catholics, we believe that God is strong enough to defend himself and his Church. Rather, Catholics preach love, reconciliation with evangelical spirit to share their belief and experience of God's love and mercy with whoever is willing to listen and learn. The teachings of Jesus and his divine mandate to us his disciples have taught us that religious story should be told because it helps as part of what is needed to root democracy and respect for human rights.

Do Catholics need to defend themselves from attacks from our separated brethren? The answer is no. This will help us to avoid name calling and throwing of insults at fellow Christians. The Scripture says: "Do not return evil for evil, but let everyone see your good will. Do your best to live in peace with everybody. Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12: 17 – 19). I offered my back to those who strike me, my cheeks to those who pulled at my beard; neither did I shield my face from blows, spittle and disgrace (Isaiah 50:6). Andre Gide says: "It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for what you are not." And we ought to remember that unjust criticism is often a disguised compliment. We don't need to bother about what people say as long as we know in our heart that we are right. Even when we do what we know that is right we will still be criticized. So why should we be bothered when we are attacked or insulted that we honour Mary the



Mother of God when the Holy Spirit honoured her first nor shy away from honouring the Saints when it is the Holy Spirit who raised them to the state of sanctity. The bitterness with which the Catholic Church is constantly attacked gives me the sense that some people secure a sense of savage satisfaction out of denouncing those who are better and more successful than they are. Have you not experienced how bitter some former Catholic members were against Catholics when they encountered them as members of Pentecostal church? Most members of the Pentecostal and Evangelical churches were former Catholic members but now they claim to be in light because they were in the dark as Catholic members. They claim that Catholics worship idol. The best available example is Martin Luther who rejected the veneration of relics and honour the Church accorded to Mary and the Saints and reliance on their intercessory power. He also denied the supreme authority of the Papacy. One can now begin to imagine the deep negative impact the interaction with Protestants, Pentecostals, Anglicans and Lutherans do have on the members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal members when some of these separated Brethren strongly object to honouring the Mother of God and the Saints. And in the Catholic Church it is only some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal who deny honour to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints and veneration of relics. The Nigerian Ibos say that the thing that makes the he-goat to smell is in the body of the he-goat. But if we begin to pick out all the things that stick on the loin-cloth of the old man we will end up striping him naked. The dog in the house could be better than the lion in the wild. So we are still brothers and sisters in the Lord and let us believe that the Holy Spirit will enlighten our minds and hearts to the truth of God.

As Catholics, we **DO NOT** adore the Saints but adore and worship God. We honour the Saints for their exemplary life and ask them to intercede for us.<sup>631</sup> Even charismatic members pray over each other during their prayer meetings and ask of each other's prayers, and so, why do some of them find it difficult to accept that we can ask the Saints to intercede for us? Protestant roots of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal may not be denied since Wesley broke away from the Anglican hierarchy with his Methodist "prayer meeting" Movement and started his own church under his own authority. Among his new members was a number of apostate Catholics. There was one Protestant Charismatic church which made up of almost entirely of apostate Catholics. The Pentecostal Revivalist Movement of 19<sup>th</sup> century was massive. Catholic Charismatics trace the beginning of the "outpouring of the Spirit" in modern times to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Revivalist movement of the sect of Charles Parham in Topeka, Kansas in USA, in the year 1900. Parham and his Student W.J Seymore carried the "full-message" to Houston and Los Angeles respectively which attracted people from all over USA. They as well planted Pentecostalism in most major cities in the USA as well as in many European nations.<sup>632</sup>

It is important to note that Christian ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue started in 20<sup>th</sup> century which was born as part of the growing process of globalization. It has positive impact because it opened up the closed world of Christian spirituality. The Catholic Church joined ecumenism in 1960's after the Vatican II Council which has done a lot of good to the Church which continues to carry out the divine mandate of Jesus Christ who said: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The Catholic Church with the gift of the Second Vatican Council "opened the windows to the world." The Vatican II Council mapped out a document on how the Church would engage with the world known

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<sup>631</sup>Why are Catholics interested in Saints? <http://www.family-prayer.org/life-of-saints.html>. Accessed on July 7, 2018.

<sup>632</sup> As quoted in William Whalen, *Minority Religions in America*, Staten Island: Aiba House, 1971, p. 179.

as the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, **Gaudium et Spes**. With this document the Church adopts a pastoral approach on how to touch the lives of men and women of every nation in the modern world. Now the Church does not only “open the windows to the world”, the Church goes to the world in her New Evangelization strategy.

There have been modern men and women who demonstrated the mind of the Church in recent years such as Thomas Merton (1915 – 1968), a Cistercian monk-priest, who cultivated ecumenical friendship especially with Anglicans. He also contributed to Christian-Buddhist dialogue and did so much on the issues of social justice and world peace. Another example was late Brother Roger Schutz (1915 – 2005), reformed Protestant who founded the monastic Taize Community in 1940, Burgundy France, initially pan-Protestant, but kept an open door, where a wide range of Christian traditions come to live together to worship God and spread the Good News. The Taize Community has more than hundred members from Catholic and Protestant traditions. The very important point I want to make is that this ecumenical community accepted the first Roman Catholic member in 1969. The ecumenical community seeks to be an image of what a future reconciled Church and humanity might be like. Today thousands of Catholics both laity and clergy go to Taize Community on pilgrimage year in year out. In this ecumenical community, the community’s church, the Church of Reconciliation was inaugurated in 1962. And it is interesting to note that after the death of Brother Roger Schutz, the founder; it was a Catholic, Brother Alois, who became the prior of the ecumenical community which continues to develop broader religious global perspective.

The ecumenical spirit in the Catholic Church as an aftermath of the Second Vatican Council cannot be overemphasized. It was at the Second Vatican Council that the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian unity was created. Before that time, the Catholic Church didn’t show to other Christian denominations good example in bringing about Christian unity for which

Jesus Christ earnestly desired and prayed (John 17:21). For example, in Nigeria, ecumenism began initially among Protestant missionaries while the Roman Catholics appeared indifferent to the idea. But with the encouragement drawn from the Vatican II Council, the Catholic Church joined the ecumenical movement. Ecumenism aims at promoting cooperation and unity among Christians. It is a move to bring back every Christian church to return to the unity which has been broken. So it wouldn't be something bad for some Catholic members to join their Protestant friends in their "prayer meetings" from which the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was introduced into the Catholic Church. But we need to note that the Catholic hierarchy has always advised that such a move must be monitored by the Catholic parish priest to avoid compromising and making mockery of the Catholic teachings and doctrines. There is no doubt that the Catholic Church has always warned her children to stay away from heretical "worship" and every "unhealthy" association with separated brethren who mock our sacraments, and our teachings and doctrines such as honouring the Saints and venerating our sacred icons and relics. Our Catholic Charismatic Renewal members have not allowed the Catholic authority to monitor their interaction with their Protestant counterparts and now, the result is that they come back to tell us that we are worshipping Mary and the Saints and, that our veneration of the sacred icons and relics constitutes an idol worship. This is the "good news" they learn from their interaction with Protestantism and, so they want to reform the Catholic Church. How do we solve this problem? It is come to the dilemma of confronting the fox (let me not use your baby as an example otherwise, I sound outrageous) and your poppy! You decide whether you will allow the fox to kill your poppy in order not get into trouble with Queen Elizabeth II or with the law or you kill the fox in order to save your pet-poppy and face the British law.

What we are talking about is the unity of all believers in Christ. To be able to preserve this unity, we must remember that there is one body and one Spirit. The work we do as disciples of Christ is to build up the body of Christ. At our baptism we receive his Spirit and so we are one with him, for he is our head and we are his body. We are Christ in the sense that he is the Son of man because of us, and we are the children of God because of him. This is the gift of the sacrament of baptism which unites Christians of different denominations as one body in Christ. So if Catholic charismatics and Evangelical, Pentecostal and other non-Pentecostal Christians accept each other's faith and belief in Christ and come together in prayer, it sounds good and there is a good foundation for ecumenism. For Catholics such ecumenical interaction should be made known to the Catholic parish priest. There is no doubt that such mutual recognition of the fact that faith in Jesus Christ and baptism makes us brothers and sisters in Christ and members of his body; and such is fundamental in building relationships of mutual trust, respect, and friendship. There is obviously a direct relationship between such a foundation, of solid personal relationships, and the success of any ecumenical enterprise.<sup>633</sup> Such encounter between Catholic Charismatic members and other Protestant sects meet for prayer is encouraging. But such encounter is not advisable for Catholics when it becomes a forum to catechise vulnerable Catholics by Protestants who in terms of belief, practice and teaching do not believe in Tradition as a source of Revelation but only in Scripture as the sole infallible source of authority for Christian faith and practice. Contrarily Catholics accept both Scripture and Tradition as sources of Revelation and all their teachings, practice and doctrines take their roots from those sources.

Another enormous difference is that Protestants believe that individuals can give their relative interpretation of the Scripture and that is why they come up with different interpretations of

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<sup>633</sup> Kevin Ranaghan, "Ecumenism and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Today," ICCRS: Palazzo della Cancelleria, Vatican City, July August 1996.

the Bible and “truths” and multiplicity of denominations of Protestant sects; beliefs and practice. There is a huge difference between memorizing passages and thinking biblically with the “thoughts of God” (1 Cor. 2:11). On the other hand, Catholics know that the interpretation of Sacred Scripture belongs exclusively to the Church – which is truly led by the Holy Spirit – and not the individual reader talking as he/she feels. The Council of Trent clearly explains:

Furthermore, in order to curb impudent clever persons, the synod decrees that no one who relies on his own judgment in matters of faith and morals, which pertain to the building up of Christian doctrine, and that no one who distorts the Sacred Scripture according to his own opinions shall dare to interpret the said Sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which is held by Holy Mother Church, whose duty it is to judge regarding the true sense and interpretation of holy Scriptures, or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers, even though interpretations of this kind were never intended to be brought to light. Let those who shall oppose this be reported to their ordinaries and be punished with the penalties prescribed by law.<sup>634</sup>

There are no ways the Protestants, the Evangelicals and Pentecostal members with whom our Catholic Charismatic members converge for praises and worships and prayer meetings will ever encourage these unknowledgeable Catholics to continue to honour the Mother of God and the Saints, and venerate the holy Cross of Christ, pictures, medals and icons of Saints they use as virtual aids to prayer and devotion. So we know where the faulty spirituality and erroneous belief of the Catholic Charismatic members is coming from. It is becoming a serious headache for the Catholic hierarchy to re-educate and correct this fundamental error within the circles of the Catholic Charismatic group. To question and object to the respect, honour and love Catholics accord to the Mother of God and the Saints is to hurt the soul of the Catholic Church! We need to note that the Devil consciously stays very active even when children of God gather together to pray and praise God. The Devil is a smart spirit who is maliciously crafty. Satan sows in people’s mind the seed of opposition. So our Catholic Charismatic members find it more attractive to accept faulty catechesis of their Protestant,

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<sup>634</sup> As quoted in Denziger, op. cit., +786.

Evangelical and Pentecostal members against Catholic teaching on the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints. These Catholic Charismatic members are in fierce defiance against the teaching and authority of the Church and believe they serve the true God and the rest of us are idol worshippers. Despite the fact that Catholics engage in ecumenism, we may not be oblivious of the dangers lurking behind interfaith activity which is not overseen by Catholic authority. Hence, Pope Pius XI warned "... It is clear that the Apostolic See can by no means take part in these assemblies, nor is it in any way lawful for Catholics to give such enterprises their encouragement or support. If they did so, they would be giving countenance to a false Christianity, quite alien to the one Church of Christ."<sup>635</sup> It is simply clear from the Church's point of view that any Catholic or Catholic group that wants to engage in religious activity with any other Christian denomination has to do so under the auspices of the Catholic hierarchy.

There is no doubt that the Catholic hierarchy has accepted the Catholic Charismatic Group as one of the prayer groups in the Catholic Church. From the outset to the present day, successive Pontiffs, from Pope Leo XIII with his interaction with Sister Elena Guerra (1835-1914), have always consecrated the Church and invoked the Holy Spirit over all Christians. For our information Sister Elena Guerra founded the Oblate Sisters of the Holy Spirit; over a period of eight years wrote 13 letters to Pope Leo XIII, urging him to establish an institutional devotion to the Holy Spirit which prompted the Pontiff to call the faithful to a novena in preparation to the feast of Pentecost in 1895. With such mounting pressure from Sister Elena on Pope Leo XIII to promote devotion to the Holy Spirit, the Pontiff wrote two documents consecutively titled **Provida Matris Charitate** and **Divinum Illud Munus** to kick-start devotion to the Holy Spirit which would be public and permanent. But these didn't spark off

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<sup>635</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos*, On Fostering True Religious Unity, January 6, 1928.

the fire at all. It seemed that the bishops weren't keen to take the Pontiff's instruction to heart. In her sixth letter to Pope Leo XIII she wrote, "It is true that right after the publication of the encyclical, which I believe was dictated by the Holy Spirit, many bishops thanked Your Holiness ... And this was good. But wouldn't it have been better to obey ...?" Sister Elena wrote more letters and Pope Leo XIII took more steps to initiate public spirituality to the Holy Spirit. It was a consoling step for Pope Leo XIII to stand in St Peter's Basilica on January 1, 1901, to chant **Veni Creator Spiritus**, invoking the Holy Spirit over all Christians – again, at Sister Elena's suggestion. In a letter dated October 15, 1900 she wrote: "May the new century begins with Veni Creator Spiritus ... sung either at the beginning of the Midnight Mass, or before the first Mass to be celebrated in every Church on the first day of the year."<sup>636</sup>

The conscientious and tireless efforts of these two people of God to establish public and permanent devotion to the Holy Spirit cannot be overemphasized. Last but not the least as his pontificate drew to an end, Pope Leo XII, in 1902, sent once again his copy of 1897 Encyclical Letter to bishops, with a cover letter entitled **Ad fovendum in cristiano populo** as a reminder of the perpetual and obligatory nature of the Pentecostal novena to the Holy Spirit, again insisting it be prayed for the unity of all Christians. However, despite Pope Leo and Sister Elena's efforts, the devotion to the Holy Spirit died down in the Catholic Church, which was then facing troubled times. Nevertheless, to the glory of God, this devotion to the Holy Spirit was carried on by the Order of the Oblate Sisters of the Holy Spirit, founded by Blessed Elena Guerra.<sup>637</sup> However, the wisdom saying that God's time is the best proved to be true eventually. The Holy Spirit blows wherever and whenever he wills. Definitely the

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<sup>636</sup> Alessandra Nucci (2013), *The Charismatic Renewal and the Catholic Church, A look at the history and future of the sometimes-controversial movement*, <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/2013/05/18/the-charismatic-renewal-and-the-catholic-church>. Accessed February 4, 2018.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*



seed to devotion to the Holy Spirit was sown by these two spiritual giants, Pope Leo XIII and Blessed Elena Guerra germinated in God's favourable time. Would it then be any wonder that, the action of the Holy Spirit, at Pope Leo's invocation and Blessed Elena's inspiration, gave rise to an immense tide of prayer and devotion, not in Rome but on the other side of the Atlantic and even in the heartland of Protestantism? The wind blows where it pleases; and that is how the Holy Spirit moves and works (John 3:8). Does it really matter if the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group started with encounter with some Protestant church members? The Nigerian Yoruba proverb says that there is nothing wrong with a man seeing a dangerous snake and asking his wife or girl friend to kill it. If he is afraid, the most important thing is that the poisonous snake is killed so that it doesn't bite somebody to death. If he is ashamed of asking his wife or girl friend to kill it, it may bite his mother to death. It is better for him to swallow his pride and save life. I don't need to waste my time arguing whether our Catholic Charismatic is pro-Protestantism or not but I will not agree with them if they come back to tell us that we should abandon our devotion to the Blessed Mother of God and the Saints. Rather, we will gently re-catechise them with the gentle spirit of Jesus. Definitely if they disagree with our love and respect to the Blessed Mother Mary and the Saints then, they contradict the same Holy Spirit they claim to direct and guide them. We may not forget that Holy Spirit is the Spouse of the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit who influences them in their encounter with members of the Protestant churches is not different from the Holy Spirit they received during their baptism in the Catholic Church Whom we worship and adore in the same Catholic Church. It is also in the same Holy Spirit they were confirmed when they received the sacrament of Confirmation in the Catholic Church. It is not different from the Spirit Pope Leo XIII and Blessed Elena Guerra struggled for many years during their earthly life to help Catholics and Christians of other denominations to recognize and adore and worship years even before the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group was introduced

into the Catholic Church. The Catholic Charismatic members centre their spirituality on the Holy Spirit. So, the heart and soul of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is the Holy Spirit. And now some of their claims are contrary to the teachings of the Holy Spirit!

This history of the modern attempt to recognize the personality of the Holy Spirit in public worship is of utmost importance to us as we continue to trace the advent of Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group into the Catholic Church and to make sure that they are Catholics not only in profession but in spirit and in truth. St James says that it is not enough to claim to have faith but we need to put our faith in works of charity and penance.

It is interesting to note that this Lady Founder of the Oblate Sisters of the Holy Spirit, Sister Elena Guerra, was beatified by Pope John XXIII in 1959 who gave her the title “Apostle of the Holy Spirit.” Even before young Agnes Ozman started speaking in tongues in Topeka, Pope Leo XIII had ushered in the New Century (January 1, 1901) by solemnly invoking the Holy Spirit over all Christendom. Popes Paul VI, John XXIII, John Paul II, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI to our present Pontiff, Pope Francis have all supported the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group enormously. It was actually Pope Paul VI who officially welcomed the Catholic charismatic group as one of the societies into the Catholic Church in 1975. Before this bold move by Pope Paul VI, the reaction of the Church hierarchy towards the charismatic members was cautiously supportive. We may not forget that the origin of the Catholic Charismatic was controversial as it was alleged that the praying group was influenced by some teachings of Protestantism and Pentecostalism. So the Catholic hierarchy was initially reticent about these developments such as being accused of misinterpreting, or in some cases violating Church teachings on worship and liturgy. They were being accused of

shifting the focus of worship away from reverent communion with Christ in the Eucharist and towards individual emotions and non-liturgical experiences as a substitute.

Again, the over-indulgency of the Catholic charismatic members with Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical members was interpreted by those who tolerated them as being harbingers of ecumenism. They were excused on the ground that they would bring about greater unity of Gospel witness among the different Christian traditions. It was thought that these practices would draw the Catholic Church and Protestant communities together in a truly spiritual ecumenism. But now, we need to take some time and count the content of our basket and see if this “extra-ordinary” union has yield any spiritual dividend. The yielded fruit seems to be sour in the mouth. So if this interaction must continue, it needs some readjustment, deep spiritual reflection and hierarchical monitoring and supervising. If our spiritual children come back home from their spiritual interaction with our separated brethren and start to tell us that we should now disregard our heavenly Mother and our brothers and sisters in heaven because Jesus is the only Saviour and Redeemer of mankind then; we should think of how to send them back to the catechism classes to teach them that to honour the Virgin Mary and the Saints is to glorify the Holy Spirit who made them holy and to recognize Jesus who is the true and only Saviour of the world. The Church as our spiritual mother and teacher will never be tired of educating, guiding and directing her children. The Church as our mother gives us life in Christ and helps us to live with all the other brothers and sisters in the communion of the Holy Spirit. The Pope and bishops are the authentic teachers who have Christ’s authority. By the ordinary and universal Magisterium they teach people the truths to believe, the charity to practice, and the eternal life to hope for (CCC 2034). The Pope and bishops, by infallibility share in Christ’s authority. This infallibility extends to the entire deposit of God’s revelation and to those doctrines which are needed to preserve and explain the divine teachings (CCC

2035). The Catholic Charismatic members may not be more knowledgeable than the Pope and universal Magisterium on matters of faith, moral and doctrine in relation to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints. The he-goat with his mouth and nose stuck out, claims that he has gone to London and come back and so now, he is more knowledgeable than everybody in his hometown. The Catholic Charismatic members are now more knowledgeable than the whole Catholic which is guided by the Holy Spirit because they feel that they are now overflowing with the same Holy Spirit. They are now more filled with the Holy Spirit than the Church. Now that they are overflowing with the Holy Spirit they can now educate the Church on morals, doctrines and practice of faith.

The Church as mother will never regret the support she gives her children in their journey of faith. It is remarkable how each of the four Popes acknowledged and supported the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in their pontificate. Pope Paul VI in acknowledging the Renewal in 1971 and reaffirming it in the 1975 said that it had brought vitality and joy to the Church but also cautioned that people should be discerning of the spirits.<sup>638</sup> On the occasion of the first International Leader's Conference on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1973 at Grottaferrata, Rome, the Pontiff said: "We rejoice with you, dear friends, at the renewal of the spiritual life manifested in the Church today, in different forms and in various environments. [...] In all that, we can recognize the mysterious and hidden work of the Spirit, who is the soul of the Church." Again Pope Paul VI in his address to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal on the occasion of the Second International Leaders Conference in Rome on May 19<sup>th</sup> 1975 said:

"How then could this "spiritual renewal" not be "a chance" for the Church and for the world? And how, in this case, could one not take all the means to ensure that it remains so? [...] Nothing is more necessary for such a world, more and more secularized, than the testimony of this "spiritual renewal", which we see the Holy Spirit bring about today in the most diverse regions and environments. Its manifestations are varied: deep communion of souls, close contact with God in faithfulness to commitments undertaken at Baptism, in prayer that is often

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<sup>638</sup> Laurentin Rene (1977), *Catholic Pentecostalism*, New York: Doubleday & Company. pp. 23-24.

community prayer, in which each one, expressing himself freely, helps, and supports and nourishes the prayer of others, and, at the basis of everything, a personal conviction. This conviction has its source not only in instruction received by faith but also in a certain experience of real life, namely, that without God, man can do nothing, that with him, on the contrary, everything becomes possible.”

Also Pope John Paul II was not lacking in any way in his support for the Renewal. In his Private audience with the ICCRO Council in Rome on 11 December 1979, the Pontiff said: “I am convinced that this movement is a sign of His action (of the Spirit). The world is much in need of this action of the Holy Spirit, and it needs many instruments for this action. [...] Now I see this movement, this activity everywhere.” Again, the Pontiff, in his first audience with the Italian Renewal in Rome on 23 November 1980, he said:

“This morning I have the joy of meeting this assembly of yours, in which I see young people, adults, old people, men and women, united in the profession of the same faith, sustained by longing for the same hope, bound together by bonds of that charity which “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). To this effusion of the Spirit we know we owe a deeper and deeper experience of the presence of Christ, thanks to which we can grow daily in loving knowledge of the Father. Rightly, therefore, your movement pays particular attention to the action, mysterious but real, that the third person of the Holy Trinity plays in the Christian’s life.”

Even Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, acknowledged good aspects of the Renewal while urging caution, pointing out that members must maintain their Catholic identity and communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>639</sup> This cautionary statement from the Pope Emeritus must have been informed from the general suspicion of traditional Catholics towards the Renewal members as a result of their connection with Protestantism and Pentecostalism. This interaction with the separated brethren had negatively influenced their attitude to Catholic worship and liturgy. And the traditional Catholics did not mince words in voicing out their reservations and suspicion.

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<sup>639</sup> Hispanics and the Future of the Catholic Church in the United States (PDF) Retrieved May 1, 2015.

The present Pope Francis is not left behind in support for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. He has spoken encouragingly about the Renewal on many occasions. On June 8<sup>th</sup> 2019, he encouraged everyone in Charismatic Renewal “to share baptism in the Holy Spirit with everyone in the Church.”<sup>640</sup> From inception, support the Church hierarchy has continued to give Catholic Charismatic Renewal is massive and encouraging. On November 30, 1990, the Pontifical Council for the Laity promulgated the decree which inaugurated the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships. Brian Smith who was elected President of the Executive of the Fraternity, called the declaration the most significant event in the history of the Charismatic Renewal since the 1975 Holy Year International Conference and acknowledgement it received from Pope Paul VI at that time. He said: “It is the first time that the Renewal has had formal, canonical recognition by the Vatican.”<sup>641</sup> In March 1992, Pope John Paul II stated, “At this moment in the Church’s history, the Charismatic Renewal can play a significant role in promoting the much-needed defence of Christian life in societies where secularism and materialism have weakened many people’s ability to respond to the Spirit and to discern God’s loving call. Your contribution to the re-evangelization of society will be made in the first place by personal witness to the indwelling Spirit and by showing forth his presence through works of holiness and solidarity.”<sup>642</sup> You can imagine the amount of confidence the Church has always reposed in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. You can also think of how much the heart of the Church bleeds when she receives anything less than gratitude and love the members of the Renewal. Think of what parents go through in bringing up a child only for their beloved child to grow up to begin to question their right over him. There is no doubt that the Church has invested so much in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal for the Renewal to stand on her feet to poke the church in the

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<sup>640</sup> Pope Francis, (2019) To Participants in the Conference of Leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service – Charis.

<sup>641</sup> Fraternity of Covenant Communities: November 30, 1990.

<sup>642</sup> Address of Pope John Paul II to ICCRO Council, March 12, 1992.

eye by questioning the legitimacy of having devotion to Mary, the Saints and the Cross of Christ which has been the traditional spirituality of Catholics for centuries.

### **Continued Catechesis**

Christ gave to the Church the command to announce the Gospel to all peoples because she is entrusted with the deposit of faith and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, she is able to guard the revealed truth and can faithfully proclaim and expound it (Canon 747 #1). The faithful have a right to be instructed in the ways of the Lord who is their hope and salvation. Since they are called by baptism to lead a life in keeping with the teaching of the gospel, the Christian faithful have the right to a Christian education by which they are to be instructed properly to strive for the maturity of the human person and at the same time to know and live the mystery of salvation (Canon 217). We have no doubt that the Pope and bishops are the authentic teachers with the authority of Christ yet; the Holy Spirit is never confined in a box. The Holy Spirit like the wind moves as he wills. The Holy Spirit is free without restrictions to use anyone to teach and apply Christian morality, be they pastors, theologians and every dedicated Christians. This said that does not give us the permission not to listen and obey the Magisterium of the Church. We must be humble enough not only to accept the Church as our mother but also as our teacher. To accept the Church as teacher entails accepting the supremacy of the Pope and the teaching and guiding authority of the bishops and priests of the Church. It must be made clear that the teaching and guiding authority of the clergy over the faithful which actually derives from the sacraments of the holy Order is completely a form of service. And of course, the Pope as teacher of the whole Church has the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church in her teaching of morals and doctrine is infallible. This means that what she teaches officially will not be wrong since it is always true to Jesus' original unchangeable teaching. Also this infallibility resides in the bishops who teach in union with

the Pope. It is not enough for Renewal members to interact with the Protestants and the Pentecostals who actually originated from the Catholic tradition and come back to the Catholic Church and change the teachings she receives from the Holy Spirit.

The parish priest should also educate the members of the Renewal on why as Catholics we have pictures, statues, medals and icons of Saints in our church, homes, offices, business centres, recreational centres and around our neck, wrist, on our finger and so forth. It is normal human nature to hold and cherish photographs, memorabilia and legacies of people we love. People hold their loved ones in great honour. It is no exception in the Catholic family. People who knew Saints John Paul II and Mother Teresa of Calcutta when they were alive saw them as heroic people who were honoured and respected not only by Catholics, but by the Hindus, Muslims and people of other faiths around the world, and even people who have no faith. It is human to love honour and imitate men and women who lived a heroic life for God.<sup>643</sup> They did a lot to uplift human dignity, right and life. Catholics honour relics because they are the bodies of the Saints or objects connected with the Saints or with our Lord. The Saints practised great virtue when they were on earth and now they are with God in heaven, and by honouring them, we honour God who has chosen them to be his special friends. And we honour the Saints by first, imitating their holy lives; second, by praying to them; third, by showing respect to their relics and images.<sup>644</sup> Their heroic life is a reminder to us that it is possible to live for God and for humanity at the same time and to make heaven by God's grace.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

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<sup>643</sup>Why are Catholics interested in Saints? <http://www.family-prayer.org/life-of-saints.html>. Accessed July 7, 2018.g

<sup>644</sup>Why Do We Honour Relics? <https://www.catholicity.com/baltimore-catechism/lesson17.html>. Accessed on July 7, 2018.



There is observable lack of catechesis for Catholic Christians. The Catholic Church needs ongoing formation in the faith and morals for all the Catholic faithful. The Magisterium needs to acknowledge that there is serious lack of basic Catholic teaching, the doctrine and the meaning of the Magisterium and its running and the general structure and the running of the Catholic Church. The level of ignorance amongst the Catholic Christians with regard to basic Catholic teaching has reached alarming proportions, and it is culpable on the part of the Church hierarchy and educated faithful. The general Catholic body should be made to understand that as Catholics, we are culpable if we lack the basic knowledge of the catholic faith because even as citizens of this earthly city, there are basic survival tactics we endeavour to acquire for our personal safety and happiness, otherwise we not responsible and mature human beings. We instinctively work hard to secure those basics for our personal safety and freedom but obviously and consciously ignore our divine destiny as Catholics because there is no external pressure applied to us and we are not held accountable for such ignorance.

It is important to note that Charismatic Renewal is recognized and supported by the Magisterium as Catholic, and so, it is imperative that the clergy have to rise up to the occasion and learn the basics about this new and dynamic movement and support it as a Catholic entity. The clergy have to develop a positive attitude towards the Renewal, and not just allow them to wander about like sheep without a shepherd. This is because it is the pastoral responsibility of the clergy to guide and lead it to follow Catholic principles, teachings and tradition and sell it to the whole faithful as a Catholic spiritual movement. It cannot be over-emphasized that to ignore the Renewal without parish supervision is detrimental to the Church and to both members and non-charismatic parishioners. Such negligence will cause the Church spiritual 'haemorrhage' as we have lost and continue to lose a good number of Catholics to other Christian denominations, as well as causing

mushrooming of Christian denominations or sects.<sup>645</sup> If the clergy continue to ignore their teaching role in the Church then, the poison of a free interpretation of the teachings of the Church will continue to spread and to divide us and to encourage deeper disunity in Christianity. If the Church hierarchy fails to take the mantle of leadership in the teaching mission of the Church, the growing divergences in the teaching and practice of Church life will get worse not better.

## **Chapter VI**

### **6.1. The Renewal as an important organ for New Evangelization**

Despite drawbacks and problems evident in some parishes in relation to Parish charismatic Renewal groups, apparently, there are advantages and benefits that the Renewal can bring to the Nigerian Catholic Church and the society in general.

Saint John Paul II in his audience with the National Service Committee of the Italian

“Renewal in the Spirit” in Rome in Italy in 1998, said:

“The Catholic charismatic movement is one of the many fruits of the Second Vatican Council, which, like a new Pentecost, led to an extraordinary flourishing in the Church’s life of groups and movements particularly sensitive to the action of the Spirit. How can we not give thanks for the precious spiritual fruits that the Renewal has produced in the life of the Church and in the lives of so many people? How many lay faithful – men, women, young people, adults and elderly – have been able to experience in their own lives the amazing power of the Spirit and his gifts! How many people have discovered faith, the joy of prayer, the power and beauty of the Word of God, translating all this into generous service in the Church’s mission! How many lives have been profoundly changed! For all this today, together with you, I wish to praise and thank the Holy Spirit.”<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>645</sup>Pastor Lazarus Muoka, a former Catholic and member of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Lagos Nigeria. He is the founder of The Lord’s Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement in Ilasamaja, Mushin Lagos, Nigeria. [Another one is Bishop Dr. Adol Paul Obinwaogu, a former Catholic, of St. Peter Claver’s Catholic Church, Utuh, in Nnewi Diocese, Nigeria. Bishop Dr. Paul is from Utuh Town in Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra State in Nigeria. He left the Catholic Church and founded Redeemed Pillar of Fire Praying Mission in Nigeria in 1995].

<sup>646</sup>Saint John Paul II, Audience with the National Service Committee of the Italian “Renewal in the Spirit”, Rome, Italy, 1998, International Catholic Renewal Services, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, What is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? <http://www.iccrs.org/en/the-ccr/>. Accessed on July 16, 2018.

Is it not wonderful that the Pontiff is able to recognise and praise God for the blessings he showers on the Church, the Renewal and the individual members of the Church? The basis of the Renewal is to adore God. The Renewal receives its strength and power from God through its adoration of God. The more sincere and intense their adoration is the greater their capacity is to renew the Church, the charismatic group and the hearts of the people of God. The flow of the renewing grace can only come from God. The one thing perceivable from sincere charismatic members is their conversion to the love of Jesus which changes one's life and makes the Christian a witness of the love of God. Love for Jesus and for fellow members is visible amongst charismatic members and it is obvious that they have many ministries that take care of the pastoral, spiritual and material care of their members. They live a visible communal life, the Renewal members often do many things in common which was characteristic of the ancient Christians (Acts 2: 46 – 47). They show us how to live out our faith in a communal dimension. The Lord said: "I give you a new commandment: Love one another! Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13: 14 – 15). It is true that Nigerian traditional society tends to be communal by nature. Anyone or any group that moves and acts in isolation are looked at as suspicious and potentially 'dangerous.' And so, life in Nigeria is familial and communal oriented. This Nigerian traditional way of life is easily carried into church-life. Professor Gabriel Afolabi Ojo is able to capture it for us when he says that, the local Church readily absorbs some of the tenable cultural practices of the Nigerian society. According to him this is essentially an aspect of acculturation process affecting the Church.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>647</sup>Gabriel Afolabi Ojo, *Catholic Laity in Nigeria, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Daily Graphics Nigeria Limited, 2004, p. 54. Hereafter as Gabriel Afolabi Ojo, *Catholic Laity in Nigeria*.

The members of the Renewal, always conscious of the Holy Spirit, believe that he unites them, and so demonstrate responsibility for one another. They recognize that this bonding is the gift of the Holy Spirit. When people are bonded one to another, they make up one family, one people and one flock and that is why they believe that God has chosen and called them together in a covenant of love and mutual caring. Community is for people and their growth. They are called together to share their beautiful gifts and to receive the gifts of others, and to discover the height and the depth, the width and the breadth of the wisdom, the beauty and the love of our God. They believe that God has chosen them to renew the face of the earth through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>648</sup> How can they relate this to and become one with the whole parish family? How can the parish priest and parish church council help them integrate these gifts into the parish family?

The Renewal Prayer Groups are so knitted together in charity and brotherhood/sisterhood and it is as if one must become a member for one to share in their communal love/living. This love is only seen practiced within their circle and is denied to non-members. I don't know how much they know this but it is observed by non-members. This is felt by non-charismatic members because ordinarily, Christian love wide open to every human being, just like Jesus hanging on the cross with hands widely stretched ready to embrace anyone. It is no surprise because he died for the whole of mankind of every generation.

However, the general Catholic faithful can learn from the Renewal that community is above all a place of communion which Renewal members amongst themselves demonstrate in true practice. Their prayer meetings and celebrations encourage communion. It can be equally wonderful if they can join in parish activities with such communal spirit and enthusiasm. A

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<sup>648</sup>Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, Revised Edition, Wandsworth, Great Britain: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1979, pp. 18 – 20. Hereafter as Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*.

close look at the Renewal shows that through their experience of grace of Baptism in the Spirit, they are able to go out to evangelize along the streets, announcing the Gospel, and this apostolate reminds the Church that she was born out of the Pentecost event (Acts 2: 14 – 36). It is also obvious that the members of the Renewal are ecumenical in spirit and practice since they are able to preach boldly outside the Catholic Church compound and to share the good news with those brothers and sisters of other Christian communities that believe in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. In this way, they place themselves at God's service for the service of the brothers and sisters for the glory of God. This is Christian Catholic spirit in response to the Lord's mandate which says: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The Renewal members lead the way in their bold proclamation of the Good News in the streets, in public arenas and conventions to Christians and non-Christians and anyone who cares to listen. It is also worthy of note that even before the advent of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal that the Legion of Mary, the Block Rosary Crusade and the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary Association have also been indulging in outside ministries for Christians and for humanity in general. They are the prominent foot-soldiers for Christ in the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church believes that the Charismatic Renewal is a spiritual flow that is born of the impulse of the Holy Spirit, the Church flowing from the Pentecost experience of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ (Acts 2). Pope Francis in his address to Charismatic Renewal at the 37<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the "Renewal in the Holy Spirit" at Olympic Stadium in Rome, Italy on June 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, said:

"Yes, the Charismatic Renewal has received a great gift from the Lord. Your movement's birth was willed by the Holy Spirit to be 'a current of grace in the Church and for the Church.' This is your identity: to be a current of grace. [...] You have received the great gift of diversity of charisms, the diversity which becomes the harmony in the Holy Spirit, and in

service to the Church. [...] The Charismatic Renewal is a great force meant to serve the preaching of the Gospel in the joy of the Holy Spirit. [...] You, the people of God, the people of the Charismatic Renewal, must be careful not to lose the freedom which the Holy Spirit has given you! [...] I expect you to share with everyone in the Church the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit (a phrase we find in the Acts of the Apostles).”<sup>649</sup>

The Charismatic Renewal flows from the expectation of the present-day Pentecost, as a response, among many, to the action of the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit is the founder of the Charismatic Renewal. Hence, the ecclesiastical authority recognizes it as a personal association of the laity which is under the jurisdiction of the Church Magisterium. The good news is that the Renewal is subject to the shepherding and discernment of the Catholic Church, and it is distinguished by the docile listening of the Holy Spirit and its obedience to the Church authority.<sup>650</sup> The reality is different in many prayer groups of the Renewal. Unfortunately it has not always been a pleasant result in many of the prayer groups.

The Renewal members in their prayer meetings express joy in the Holy Spirit and a personal experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, and a joyful and communal response to the Christian life.<sup>651</sup> They exhibit total commitment and faithfulness in coming together in their prayer meetings to praise and give thanks to God for his blessings. They are known for making a joyful noise unto the Lord (Psalms 98; 100). In some parishes, the prayer groups are an obvious prayer resource for parishioners. They demonstrate joy and enthusiasm in praying the Bible and encountering Jesus in the Scriptures. The Spirit of Jesus they encounter in the Bible empowers them to proclaim the Good News along the streets as well as evangelize in public arenas with spiritual boldness and joyfulness and it is noticeable that the members of the

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<sup>649</sup>Pope Francis’, (2014), Address to Charismatic Renewal at the 37<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the “Renewal in the Holy Spirit”, Olympic Stadium, Rome, Italy. International Catholic Renewal Services, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, What is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? <http://www.iccrs.org/en/the-ccr/>. Accessed on July 16, 2018.

<sup>650</sup>Archbishop Jose Gomez, (2015), Guidelines for Parish Prayer Groups of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Archdiocese of Los Angeles, USA, Veni Creator Spiritus, Los Angeles, Transcription of the Letter of Approval of these Guidelines, On Behalf of the Archbishop, PDF.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid.

charismatic Renewal carry along in their hands the Bible on the bus, in the train, even along the streets and in the markets, offices and in their private and public businesses. They are very courageous in bearing public witness to Christ. Parishioners go to them and as well as invite them for prayers in their homes and business centres. They boldly demonstrate the power of prayers – the power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles of healing. They are a powerful tool for the parish in their endeavour for the New Evangelization. The parish can train, encourage and work with them as effective evangelizers. The members of the Renewal demonstrate as ‘foot soldiers’ for Christ. They appear to be happy ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5: 20). They are a demonstration of ongoing conversion. In their prayer meetings they learn as well as teach parishioners and other Christians how to develop a relationship with their God by way of personal and communal prayer. The prayer groups can be at the service of the parish unconditionally in a wide field for apostolate and ministry.<sup>652</sup>

In their private and communal prayers, in particular, their use of the scriptures can be a positive challenge to the members of the clergy who may learn from members of the Renewal to be more conversant with their Bible. Some priests may learn from them how to preach with Christian courage and enthusiasm and joy in the Holy Spirit.

## **6.2. Conclusion**

It is important to note that the Popes have recognized and supported the Charismatic Renewal from inception to date (Popes Blessed Paul VI, Saint John Paul II, Emeritus Benedict XVI and the present Pontiff, Francis). Saint John Paul II said that Charismatic Renewal was one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council, an amazing power and gift of the Holy Spirit which

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<sup>652</sup>Ibid.

has produced great fruits in the life of the Church and in the lives of the people of God. This is because through the grace of the Renewal many lives have been profoundly changed. It is great news that many have discovered faith, joy of prayer, the power and beauty of the Word of God and the joy of being in personal relationship to Christ in the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit translate to generous service in the mission of the Church. And at the same time a service rendered with joy and personal fulfilment in the service of the Lord.

More so, there is flourishing of adoration of God which renews the Church and the hearts of the people of God. Amongst members of the Renewal, there is growing love for Jesus and more consciousness of the Holy Spirit. There is a growing personal relationship with Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit many charismatic members are able to go out into the streets and other public arenas to preach the good news as well as bear witness to Jesus in many other ways.

## **Chapter VII**

### **7.1. Work yet to be done**

First of all, it is important to teach the charismatic members to know that their association exists in the parish due to the permission of the parish priest who is the co-worker of the Archbishop, the chief shepherd of the Arch/diocese. Hence, they are to be taught that if they fail to comply with Catholic teaching and the leadership of their parish priest, he can suppress them with the permission of the Archdiocesan director of the Renewal. This is very important because the Renewal appears to be ignorant of that fact. A religious association authorized by the Church cannot grow more powerful than the Church which authorizes it. As the Nigerian Igbo proverb says that the 'okro'-vegetable plant cannot be bigger than the person who planted it. More work should be carried out to help the Renewal to be completely Catholic in



all its activities in order to be relevant to their members and other parishioners by training the prayer group to develop a close and cordial dependence with their parish priest, especially with reference to the teachings and morals of the Catholic faith and tradition.

Pastoral theologians should develop a strategy to help the parish priest to recognize his pastoral obligation to organize ongoing formation for Renewal members for their spiritual, doctrinal, pastoral and human formation to grow into the fullness of Christ. Spiritual formation for them will help them grow into the life of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Future researchers should work out a programme that should be incorporated into the guideline for the Renewal members to learn to live mature Christian lives through the sacramental life of the Church. Further work should emphasize the fact that the Renewal should be educated on the Arch/diocesan, national and International guidelines because they seem to be functioning according to their whims, believing that they are guided by the power of the Holy Spirit and so feel independent of their parish priest. As far as they know how to read the Bible and how to pray they believe they are being guided by the Holy Spirit and whoever fails to follow whatever they are doing whether it is a clergy or not is fighting against the Holy Spirit. They are ever more than sure that the Spirit is guiding and prompting them.

The Arch/diocesan pastoral team may have to study how to incorporate into the Arch/diocesan guideline of the Renewal to oblige the parish priest to oversee and permit the financial sources of the Renewal, their financial position and financial activities. A percentage of the financial offering of the Renewal should be remitted to the parish purse to help with the running of the parish. This is because in some parishes, the offering of the Renewal surpasses the offertory of the whole parish. This will help to forestall financial malpractices by some leaders of the Renewal. They have a big number of members and their financial weight and

power can be substantial. Their parish priest must supervise their financial activities because financial intoxication corrupts life of the spirit.

Future students should research on how the pastor should work closely with the leaders of the Renewal to be able to harness the individual and collective talents of the prayer group for the spiritual wellbeing and the building up of the parish family. This type of collaboration between the parish pastoral team and the different ministries/servers in the Renewal will help most of the parishioners to learn how to participate confidently in the new evangelization and public witness to Christ. It will help parishioners to be joyous and enthusiastic in the things of God. Again, on the other hand, it will help members of the Renewal to imbibe Catholic spirit, tradition and loyalty as well as giving them a deeper sense of belonging to the parish family. It is within the pastoral care of the pastor to give the Renewal such orientation. It will help the Renewal to integrate within the parish family so that Christian friendship will flow between parishioners who belong to different devotional societies in the parish family.

Further studies should be made on how to help the parish priest to train the Renewal to be a prayer power-house for the whole parish community. In this way, the prayer group will help to serve the spiritual need of the whole parish family. This will help the Renewal to have meaning in the parish, for the parish, and as well as partake in the mission of the parish. The pastor has to train the leaders of the Renewal to communicate to him about the life and activities of the prayer group through regularly scheduled meetings and the presentation of oral and written reports. By such friendly and pastoral interaction, the coordinators of the Renewal will begin to develop the spirit of docility and humility towards the parish priest. There should be a good working-relationship between the parish priest and leaders of the parish Renewal. It is the pastor who will teach the prayer groups that they are parish groups

with the spirit of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the inner life of the parish.<sup>653</sup> Children of the same parents are of different temperaments and are permitted to be different and at the same time bonded by love. They are not forced to be the same otherwise their different gifts will be stiffened and their individual and collective growth retarded. This is also applicable to parish family.

Again, through this pastoral collaboration between the pastor and the Renewal, the parish priest will be able to educate the coordinators of the Renewal to channel their members and other parishioners who come to them for healing and counselling to their parish priest who alone can administer the sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the sick. This will eliminate the potential tension between the parish priest and the Renewal members who pray for their ‘spiritual clients’ and make them feel psychologically satisfied for that moment while in actual fact, what they need are the sacraments of the Church which only the priest can administer. This is because some members of the Renewal deliberately or inadvertently ‘usurp’ the office of the parish priest at the expense of the vulnerable Christians who come to them in their spiritual desperation. Through the sacraments of the Church, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit come into contact with the Christian. There are no way the powerful prayers and ministrations of the leaders and ministers in the Renewal will supersede the sacraments of the Church which only the priest can administer.

The Arch/diocesan Pastoral Team should work out how to educate the Catholic faithful, and in particular, members of the Renewal, on the healing ministry and power of the Spirit within the Church. The Gospel according to St. Luke and the Acts of the Apostles show what God began in the power of the Spirit through the ministry of Jesus, he continues through the same

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<sup>653</sup>Ibid.

Spirit in the name of Jesus in the ministry of the priest in the Church. The members of the Renewal should be taught that all ministries are in the name of Jesus and in the ministry of the Church.<sup>654</sup> Jesus, by sending out the 72 disciples to preach and overcome the power of the Enemy, gave the Church authority over evil spirits and sicknesses (Luke 10: 17 – 20). The members of the Renewal may be conscious of the power of the Holy Spirit in them; however, they may not ignore the ministry of the Church which is under the jurisdiction of the parish priest. The members of the Renewal in their prayer sessions for healing may not ignore the healing ministry and power within the Church under the jurisdiction of the parish priest.

It is extremely important that members of the charismatic Renewal are thoroughly led through continual education on the Church's belief in the supremacy of the liturgy so that they do not think that Catholicism begins and ends in 'prayer meetings, life in the Spirit and speaking in tongues and healing ministry.' In his well-known Allocution to the Assisi Congress of Pastoral Liturgy in 1956 Pope Pius XII said: "It would be very difficult to find one truth of the Christian faith which is not expressed in some way in the liturgy. In the liturgy the Church communicates abundantly the treasures of the deposit of faith, of the truth of Christ."<sup>655</sup> The Church in the sacred moment of liturgical worship, prays to the Father in the name of Jesus for health of mind and body, for deliverance from evil, and for joys in sorrow, demonstrates her belief in the divine healing, as well as believes that she makes this request in accordance with God's will.<sup>656</sup> This will teach members of the Renewal to always join in parish liturgies and other religious and social programmes of the parish family.

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<sup>654</sup>Jim McManus, *The Healing Power of the Sacraments*, Indiana, United States of America: Ave Maria Press, 1984, p. 33. Hereafter as Jim MacManus, *The Healing Power of the Sacraments*.

<sup>655</sup>Pope Pius XII, Allocution to the Assisi Congress of Pastoral Liturgy in 1956.

<sup>656</sup>Jim McManus, *The Healing Power of the Sacraments*, p. 40.



## Chapter VIII

### 8.1. Conclusion

One of the most important achievements the author has made is to establish who the Holy Spirit is. This is because most Catholic Christians would be able to say that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who saves mankind from eternal damnation (John 5: 8 – 18), but would be confounded to explain in fairly enough who the Holy Spirit is, what the Church says about him and why we need the Holy Spirit in the Church and as individual Christians. It has been possible to establish that the Holy Spirit is the Third Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity who proceeds from the Father and the Son and at the same time is equal to them in every respect.<sup>657</sup> The Church refers to God the Father as Creator, God the Son as redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier; and he is the Sanctifier because the essence of sanctity is **LOVE** and he is the personified love that exists mutually between the Father and the Son. Therefore, to say that there is fullness of Personhood in the Holy Spirit means to say the Holy Spirit is God and as such equal to God the Father and God the Son and with God the Father and God the Son, the Holy Spirit is to be adored and glorified.<sup>658</sup> God is one (1 Timothy 2: 5) and he is love (1 John 4: 8). And so, the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5: 3 – 4), since he is the love between God the Father and God the Son. Jesus recommending love for his disciples says to them: “I give you a new commandment: Love one another! Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another” (John 13: 34). He also said to them: “And I will ask the Father, and he will send you another Advocate to be with you forever” (John 14: 16). So, the Holy Spirit is the Gift of the Father and the Son to us who in his relationship to us makes us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17). God lives in us and we live in because we love one another and his Spirit lives in us (1 John 4:12 -13).

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<sup>657</sup>CCC 685.

<sup>658</sup>The Nicene Creed, First Council of Nicaea, 325.

We are a new creation through our baptism in Christ through whom we receive the spirit of adoption and now we are happy and confident to call God our Father (Galatians 4: 6). Since the Holy Spirit is relational we may be open to his presence always who prays in us with sighs too deep for words (Romans 8: 26). Now, conscious of our human weaknesses, we are sure that the Spirit of Christ in us is our strength in our “weak” prayers and daily trials in our journey of faith. We are not alone. The Spirit of God the Father and God the Son abides in us (1 John 3: 24). We have come to know that the Holy Spirit is not only the driving force behind the Church but in the life and activity of the individual believer as well as lead us to all truth (John 16: 13).

We learn that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is not founded by anybody or a group of people but it is born of the impulse of the Holy Spirit. The Charismatic Renewal is rather the Church on the journey. The Catholic Renewal has been given abundant support by the Popes since its inception (Blessed Paul VI, Saint John Paul II, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and the present Pontiff Francis). And so, we accept that the Charismatic Renewal is Catholic. The Catholic Renewal is integrated in the Church and is subject to the shepherding and discernment of the Catholic Church. The Renewal is part of the Church listening to the Holy Spirit; and some members experiencing a personal encounter with Jesus Christ which is manifested in a joyful and communal response to the Christian life. Hence, members of the Renewal should be encouraged to always participate actively and fervently in the Eucharistic celebration which is the centre and summit of all Christian life. Through this, they would be truly Catholic and produce more abundant fruits in the Spirit. It is also argued that the charismatic members should participate in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The members of the Renewal are to appreciate the sacrament of Reconciliation which heals and purifies the soul from all sin and promotes conversion of the heart and the true love of Jesus

and the Father of mercies. The charismatic members are encouraged to appreciate fervent devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of God and praying the holy Rosary as well as honouring the Saints who are special friends of God; the essence of the Renewal is to help Christians have their lives renewed.

It is true that the Catholic Church authenticates and supports the Charismatic Renewal. At the same time, we may not deny that the Renewal is still controversial and remains potentially divisive in many Catholic quarters. That is why it is plausible to insist that it can be 'spiritually harmful' to the Church and, in particular, to the members of the Renewal, if the Church authority neglects to provide adequate supervision for the Renewal due to its potentiality for schism. However, even though, the Renewal has been recognized by the Magisterium, it is probable that the Church authority has not done enough to adequately put measures on the ground to educate, supervise and guide the powerful and ever growing Charismatic Renewal as well as the general Catholic faithful with regard to the nature, aim and meaning of the Renewal as a Catholic entity. It is the duty of the Catholic hierarchy to educate the Catholic faithful to accept and support the charismatic Renewal as a very important part of the evangelical strategy of the Church's efforts in the New Evangelization programme. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is obviously evangelical in orientation and so, the Church can train and incorporate them into the parish Evangelization/Pastoral Team. And of course the Renewal can only be Catholic when they operate under the jurisdiction of the parish priest, the Arch/bishop and the Magisterium. But then, the clergy have the pastoral responsibility to affirm the Renewal and guide and lead them to follow the Catholic principles, tradition and teaching, and help the whole faithful to accept the group as part of Catholic spirituality which is open to all Catholic faithful. It is a challenge for members of the clergy to rise to the occasion to learn the aims and purposes of this new and dynamic spiritual



movement and harness the gifts and spiritual energy of the members of the Renewal for the building up of the family of God and the evangelization of the peoples. It is very important that the clergy develop positive attitude towards the Renewal in order to draw out the best out of them for the service of God's Kingdom.

The Magisterium may have to appreciate the magnitude of the level of ignorance amongst the members of the charismatic Renewal with regard to the basic Catholic teaching, the doctrine, the meaning of the teaching authority of the Church and its running and the general structure and the running of the Catholic Church founded through the death and resurrection of Christ. The Renewal members have to know that they are under the pastoral care of the local bishop who can lay down particular procedures or guidelines for them. They should know that it is within the authority of the local bishop to grant them juridical status which specifies their structure, offices, and mission in accordance with the Canon Law. The different parish, diocesan, regional and national coordinators of the Renewal should learn that they only exist as part of the structures put in place to facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit, and not there to follow their own ideas or to reformulate the teachings and the doctrines of the Church and re-educate the Catholic Church on the issues of the liturgy, the sacraments and practice. They are not there as a set of Catholic members to build their own kingdoms. And their parish priest is their spiritual director who oversees all aspects of their life and activity within and outside the parish environment.

Last but not the least, we may not deny that the Renewal is visibly full of young and old Catholics who are enthusiastic, energetic and joyful ambassadors of Christ. This is part of the reasons why Saint John Paul II said that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council. It is fascinating that the members of the Renewal are

encouragingly interested in praying and reading the Bible. It is hard to deny that through the grace of the Renewal that many lives of both old and young have been profoundly transformed in the Holy Spirit. It is simply encouraging that amongst members of the Renewal there is a growing love for Jesus and a powerful sense of community and charity. Amongst members of the Renewal one can easily perceive that there is power in love for Jesus and for one another. There is a sense of the joy of the Kingdom amongst the children of God. The members of the Renewal should be constantly reminded that they are to enter into a living relationship with Jesus and so always put this relationship under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We all need the filling and refilling of the Holy Spirit all the time as Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Ephesians 5: 18 which says “Be filled with the Spirit.” This reminds us that we are constantly being filled with the Spirit in our Christian life. The important thing the Renewal needs is fatherly care, guidance, education and blessing of the clergy and the Church authority in general.

## Researcher's Recommendations as Conclusions

From the findings, discussions, studies and analysis, the researcher recommends as his conclusions that:

### Conclusions

- We understand the Holy Spirit as the third divine Person of the Blessed Trinity who is the Spirit and the Gift of God the Father and God the Son to humanity, who is their Helper and the Creator of all human, animal and plant life, and the whole universe.
- We can understand the Holy Spirit more if we continually study the thoughts and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church and how he impacted their lives of faith as well as reading and praying the Scriptures, which definitely help us to understand what the Church teaches about the Holy Spirit.
- The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a religious movement founded and guided by the Holy Spirit for the renewal of the Church and its individual members.
- The problem associated with some members of the Renewal is mainly due to the enormous ignorance with regard to the basic teachings of the Catholic Church, morals, doctrine and the general running of the Church.
- The cause of this ignorance is largely due to the fact the Church authorities have not taken adequate care of the catechesis of the faithful under their care.
- Some members of the clergy lack basic knowledge about the Renewal.
- The successive Popes, including the current Pontiff recognize and support the Renewal.
- The Renewal may bring tremendous blessing to the Church and society as well as be an organ for the New Evangelization.
- The Renewal is neither a rival nor a parallel church but a spiritual movement in the Catholic Church which is under the jurisdiction of the Church authority.
- The Holy Spirit is alive in the life of the Church and individual members.
- The Holy Spirit is the Truth which leads us to all truth.
- The Spirit needs to be discerned.
- Some teachings and actions of some members of the Renewal may be seen to be confrontational or contradictory to Church authorities and teachings.
- There may be some elements of pride in some leaders and members of the Renewal.
- ✓ Some members of the Renewal may appear to be disrespectful and disobedient to the parish priest and the local Bishop.

- ✓ There are some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal who disregard the Church liturgy.
- ✓ The claims of some members of the Renewal to exclusive possession of the Holy Spirit may arouse suspicion and controversy towards them from non-members.
- ✓ Some practices of the Renewal clash with some Catholic traditions and practices (for example some members of the Renewal disregard reverence and honour to the Virgin Mary and the Saints; some disregard the holy Rosary, and joining parish programs etc).
- ✓ Some principal teachings of the Church conflict with some of those of the Renewal (for example some charismatic members do not appreciate the sacraments of the Mass, Reconciliation and others!).
- ✓ Some members of the Renewal claim superior powers to work miracles of various kinds which may constitute a source of arrogance and pride within the ranks of the members as well as being a cause of conflict between the Renewal and the non-member parishioners.
- ✓ Some members of the Renewal refuse to accept and acknowledge that the Renewal is under the direct authority and supervision of the local parish priest.
- ✓ The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is part of the parish organ for the New Evangelization.
- Many members of the Renewal are courageous Gospel preachers and witnesses to Jesus in public arenas and within their prayer meetings.
- The Renewal may be an “external” grace through which believers can have personal encounter with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- The Renewal can be an opportunity for individual believers to discover their gifts and talents through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- The Renewal is a reminder that God is ready and happy to heal our spiritual, psychological and physical wounds.

**Based on the studies, findings and discussions the researcher is able to make the following recommendations.**

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ The Church authorities need to work hard to let the Catholic world know and accept that the Renewal is Catholic and to nurture and train its members to become enthusiastic ‘foot’ soldiers for Christ and effective organs for New Evangelization.
- ❖ It is imperative that the Church authority should constantly educate members of the Renewal to understand that the Renewal is not above the Catholic Church but within it and under its jurisdiction and guidance. The leaders of the Renewal should be

open to the parish priest with regards to the programs and activities of the Renewal to make sure they all fall within the tradition and practice of the Catholic Church.

❖ The members of the Renewal should be trained to cultivate the virtue of humility and avoid the presumptuous holier-than-thou attitude reminiscent of pride which is a deadly sin.

❖ The members of the Renewal should be trained to take interest in parish programs and activities in order to be part of the parish family and not a different entity in the parish family and life.

❖ It is extremely important that the leadership of the Renewal should be held answerable to the parish priest and the local Bishop especially in financial practices and accountability.

❖ The leadership of the Renewal should be taught to be humble, loyal and obedient to Church authorities especially in matters of faith and morals since they easily secure the allegiance of the members more than the Church hierarchy.

❖ It is imperative on Church authorities to investigate why great numbers of members of the Renewal leave the Catholic Church so as to stem such high tide of loss of members.

❖ The researcher recommends that the Church authorities should brace up actions to close the gaps he has identified as areas and sources of conflicts between the Renewal and the Church.

❖ The Church authorities should take note of many areas that need urgent investigation which the researcher has pointed out.

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"Field Notes." Mr Peter Umeh, a friend and former parishioner, came to see me on August 10, 2014, when I was on holiday in Nigeria from my mission in the UK. I spent five days at St. Paul's Missionary Seminary's Spiritual Year Formation House at Iperu- Remo, Ogun State in Nigeria, where Mr Peter Umeh came to see me, and told me about his experience when he was aspiring to become a member of the Charismatic Prayer Group at his parish at St. Paul's Catholic Parish Ebute- Emeta, Lagos Archdiocese. Mr Peter ended up not becoming a member of the Renewal because he thought that they were over-dramatizing their spiritual experiences. He told me he could not fit into such spirituality.

"Field Notes:" Fr. Gerry Onyejuluwa met with the Charismatic Leaders of St. Gabriel's Catholic Parish, Bariga, Lagos, Nigeria on March 16, 1999, in the parish office.

Field Notes:” Pastor Martin Anigbogu, Wounded Messiah Prophetic Ministry, Umueze Utuh, 2003. Pastor Martin was Catholic and a member of St. Stephen’s Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Utuh parish in Nnewi Diocese in Nigeria where Fr Sebastian Umunnah was the parish priest. Fr. Umunnah tried to bring Mr Martin to comply with the Catholic tradition and practice, but he disobeyed and abandoned the Catholic faith to form his own church and prayer group attracting some Catholic charismatic sympathizers who joined his group. This is one of the hundreds of cases.

Pastor Lazarus Muoka, a former Catholic and member of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Lagos Nigeria. He is the founder of The Lord’s Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement in Ilasamaja, Mushin Lagos, Nigeria. [Another one is Bishop Dr. Adol Paul Obinwaogu, a former Catholic, of St. Peter Claver’s Catholic Church, Utuh, in Nnewi Diocese, Nigeria. Bishop Dr. Adol Paul Obinwaogu is from Utuh Town in Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra State in Nigeria. He left the Catholic Church and founded Redeemed Pillar of Fire Praying Mission in Nigeria in 1995].

Fr Gerry Onyejuluwa and Desmond Ezeh, Email and Telephone Conversations, (Coordinator, Catholic Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group, Saint Gabriel’s Catholic Parish, Archdiocese of Lagos, Nigeria), 2018.

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