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The Holy Spirit and the Church in Africa

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THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE AFRICAN FATHERS OF THE CHURCH TO PNEUMATOLOGY

Gabriel Mendy C.S.Sp., Ph.D.

1. Introduction

Broadly understood, pneumatology is the branch of theology that studies and systematically articulates the nature, presence, mission, charisms, and function of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, creation, redemption, and the life and ministry of the Church. Pneumatology is, therefore, a wide ranging discourse on the third person of the Trinity based on Scripture, Tradition, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and the Magisterium. In this article that specifically focuses on the "Contributions of the African Fathers of the Church to Pneumatology," I will first present the preliminary questions and concerns on the Holy Spirit that were addressed by St. Irenaeus and St. Basil in the East. Secondly, I will outline three of the African Fathers' theological expositions on the Spirit in response to these questions and controversies. Different aspects of their pneumatology will be examined in this section. This will disclose the development of thought on the subject of the Holy Spirit. Finally, I will synthesize their insights and highlight their contributions that are endorsed by some Catholic theologians, in order to, determine the influence of these prominent African Fathers of the Church.

2. Preliminary Questions and Concerns on the Holy Spirit

In comparison to the nature and person of Jesus Christ that was discussed in several patristic writings and Ecumenical Councils, it is clear that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, was a subject of less debate among the Fathers of the Church. However, there were salient controversies and questions on its nature, procession, mission, and charisms that required some Church Fathers to articulate their convictions in writing and in the Council of Constantinople I in A.D 381. For some heretics and Gnostics maintained that the Spirit was different in nature from the divine persons of the Godhead. They therefore, believed that the Spirit was less than the Father and the Son. At the same time, unequal and subordinate to them. St. Irenaeus would, accordingly, affirm the divinity, as well as, the unity and equality of the three persons of the Trinity. He argued that “God did not stand in need of these [beings] ... as if he did not possess his own hands. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit by whom and in whom freely and spontaneously he made all things.”¹ From this analogical comparison of the Word and the Spirit with God’s hands, it is evident that both of them are equal; they preexisted with the Father and they share the same divine nature. The Spirit’s active role in creation is also fully established in this depiction of the three persons of the Trinity. In fact, “it is only through the gift of the Spirit of God that man ... attains ‘likeness’ to God ... [that]

¹St. Irenaeus of Lyons, “Adversus Haereses,” IV, 20.1, In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, translated by Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 487-488.

man becomes really human and realize the intention of the creator.”²

The Spirit's divinity was again questioned and rejected by the opponents of the Spirit also known as *Pneumatomachians*. For them, the Spirit was a mere creature who is subordinate to the Son just as the latter is subordinate to the Father. The Spirit cannot, therefore, be worshipped and glorified like the Father and the Son. These objections were, subsequently, addressed by St. Basil in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*. He declared that “when the Lord established the baptism of salvation, did he not clearly command his disciples to baptize all nations ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’? He did not disdain his fellowship with the Holy Spirit.”³ In this case, Basil appealed to the Scriptures and the liturgy of baptism to prove that the Spirit is equal to and, therefore, of the same nature with the Father and the Son. His opponents would also cite the doxology of the liturgy to attest that the Spirit is indeed subordinate to the divine persons of the Godhead. For what was stated in this doxology was ‘Glory be to the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit. But Basil would “finish the doxology to God the Father with the form ‘Glory to the Father with the Son, together with the Holy Spirit,’ ... [and] some of those present accused [him] of using strange and mutually contradictory terms.”⁴ He was criticized for his use of *with* instead of *in* in reference to the Spirit but it was Basil's tacit way of affirming the Spirit's

²Alasdair I.C Heron, *The Holy Spirit in the Bible, the History of Christian Thought, and recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 66.

³St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 10. 24 (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 45.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1, 3, 17.

divinity and equality with the Father and the Son even in worship.

When the sacrament of baptism was modeled on the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan, it was important for some Fathers of the Church to explain and clarify the specific role and purpose of the Spirit in both events. The reason was because some people could not understand why the Spirit descended on one who is truly the Son of God. For the adoptionist heretics, this suggests that Jesus was only a man and not truly God until the Spirit descended upon him. He was then adopted by the Father as his Son in these words: “this is my beloved Son with him I am well pleased” (Lk. 3:22). But the exact reason the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism was fully explained by St. Irenaeus. For him, the Spirit descended on “the Son of God, made the son of man, become accustomed in fellowship with him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them and renewing them from their old habits.”⁵ In addition to affirming the divine and human nature of Jesus, St. Irenaeus equally attested that it was for the benefit and sanctification of the human race that the Spirit descended on Jesus in his humanity. The same Spirit who rested on Jesus now dwells among human beings, renews and guides them towards God precisely because Jesus was human like us. This indicates that the whole of humanity was fully ‘recapitulated’ and embodied in the person of Jesus at his baptism. Each person is likewise chosen and empowered at his or her baptism as Jesus was anointed by the Spirit to proclaim the

⁵St. Irenaeus of Lyons, “Adversus Haereses,” III, 17, 1 In *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 1, 441.

Good News of the Kingdom of God, be obedient to the will of God, and accomplish his mission on earth.

Among the challenges and difficulties the Fathers of the Early Church addressed, their greatest concern was the question of the Spirit's charisms in the Church. At the same time they acknowledged the Spirit's active presence in the life of the Church and its members in light of Scripture, Tradition, and the liturgy of the Church, they equally had to respond to the movements and abuses attributed to the Spirit's charisms. One of these movements that eventually posed a serious danger to the unity of the Church and its practices and beliefs was Montanism. Basically, the members lived in the expectation of a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church. The earnest of the coming New Pentecost was the presence of prophets, male and female, within Montanism ... the movement spread from Asia Minor to Rome and North Africa of Tertullian's time. In Rome, it attracted only a small number of adherents, but in North Africa, it was to find large numbers of followers.⁶

The reason why Montanism was widespread in North Africa instead of Rome is not well established and documented. One can only conjecture that perhaps attraction to the Spirit's charismatic power was quite strong then as it is in Africa today. There was also the possibility that "the dominant motif of African Christianity [was] uncompromising rejection of an alien world ... neophytes [were] warned that they inhabit a demon-

⁶ Killian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 116-117.

possessed world ... [not] completely free of idols [because] Satan and his angels have filled the whole world.”⁷

Initially, the claims and expectations of Montanism were not completely contrary to the Church’s basic teaching that the Spirit dwells within the Church and its members. The members are, consequently endowed with charismatic gifts for the good of the Church. The Church’s position on this subject was clearly expressed by St. Irenaeus. He noted that

we ... term those persons ‘perfect’ who have received the Spirit of God, and ... do speak languages, as he used himself also to speak. In like manner, we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for general benefit the hidden things of men ... whom also the apostle term ‘spiritual,’ they being spiritual because they partake of the Spirit, and not because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away.⁸

Contrary to the suggestion that the prophetic charism was discreetly and completely abolished in the Early Church, it is clear from St. Irenaeus’ account that this charism and some other spectacular gifts of the Spirit prevailed in the Church. The Montanists’ passion for the Spirit’s charisms was not,

⁷William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 45-46.

⁸St. Irenaeus, “Adversus Haereses,” V, 6, 1 In *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 1, 531.

accordingly, the fundamental reason why the movement was eventually condemned by the Church. In fact, a rigorist like Hippolytus of Rome fully acknowledged and affirmed that "all these prophets were under the influence of the Holy Spirit and were fittingly honored by the Word himself."⁹ Rather, the real cause of their conflict and separation from the Church, as St. Irenaeus suggested, was their elitist sense of perfection and extreme mortification of the flesh. This possibly explains why Tertullian became a Montanist because "in the end he lacked the simplicity, the humility to integrate himself with the Church, to accept his weakness, to be forbearing with others and himself."¹⁰

3. Tertullian's Theological Convictions on the Spirit

In the light of these questions, controversies, and concerns I outlined above, the Church Fathers in Africa were impelled to articulate their own convictions and perspectives on the person, procession, mission, and charisms of the Spirit. In what follows, I will attempt to outline and analyze their thoughts and theology of the Spirit in response to some of these preliminary questions and concerns. First, I will discuss Tertullian's theological convictions on the Spirit before he became a member of the Montanist Movement.

⁹Hippolytus of Rome, "The Antichrist," 2, 388 In *The Faith of the Early Fathers* Vol. 1, translated. William A. Jurgens (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1970), 163.

¹⁰Pope Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, edited by Joseph T. Lienhard S.J (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 34.

3.1. The Spirit's Distinct Nature and Procession

The Spirit's distinction from the Father and the Son was implicitly attested in Irenaeus' reference to God's hands. However, it became a major concern and interest to Tertullian in the West. He affirmed their distinction from each other because of Praxeas' heresy that "the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit are the selfsame Person, thus extolling the Monarchy at the expense of the Economy."¹¹ In an attempt to safeguard God's unity in substance, Praxeas was misled to believe that the only reasonable and valid stance was to affirm that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all one person manifested in different forms. Both the Son and the Spirit's distinct personality and presence in the economic Trinity were, therefore, relegated and subsumed under the Father. This was clearly, in Tertullian's view, contrary to 'the rule of faith' that declared that the Father, Son, and Spirit are inseparable but distinct from each other. The Spirit is, therefore, inseparable but distinct from the Father and the Son. He specifically stated that

there is the Paraclete or Comforter, also, which [Jesus] promises to pray for to the Father, and to send from heaven ... is called 'another comforter,' indeed,... he shall receive of mine, says Christ, just as Christ himself received of the Father's. Thus, the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete produces three coherent persons, who

¹¹Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," 9, 1, 376 In *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 155-156.

are yet distinct one from another ... [but] are one essence, and not one person.¹²

The inseparable connection and distinction, especially, between the Son and the Spirit, as Tertullian explained, is proper and relevant in understanding the person and mission of the Spirit. Otherwise, the Spirit would apparently be independent of the Son as is sometimes taught in pneumatology and spirituality. The idea of the Spirit's autonomy from both the Father and the Son is inaccurate and misleading because it implies that the Spirit alone suffices. But it is the Spirit of the Father and the Son because it proceeds from both and is equally distinct from them.

The fact that the Spirit proceeds from both, means it "is not actually the very same as he from whom he proceeds ... [for instance] power is incidental to the Spirit, but cannot itself be the Spirit."¹³ This fully illustrates that the Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son but the terms Tertullian used to convey the Spirit's procession is somehow contentious. He noted that, he "derived the Son from no other source but from the substance of the Father ... the same remark (I wish also to be formally) made by me with respect to the third degree in the Godhead, because I believe the Spirit to proceed from no other substance than from the Father through the Son."¹⁴ Instead of stating that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son, as St. Augustine later

¹²Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," XXV, In *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Latin Christianity – Its Founder, Tertullian*, Vol. III, translated by Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 621.

¹³Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," XXVI, 622.

¹⁴Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," IV, 599.

argued, he asserted that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son. This was probably the more traditional formula but in introducing the preposition '*through*,' one wonders whether "there is a lowering of rank in the fact that, according to Tertullian, there is a passage from one person to another in the economic existence of the Trinity. Does this imply subordinationism?"¹⁵ The notion of subordinationism is precisely the extreme opposite of the autonomy of the Spirit because it subsumes and restricts the Spirit's operations. None of these extreme positions were obviously endorsed in Tertullian's understanding of the Spirit. Rather, he identified the Spirit as a distinct person of the same essence as the Father and the Son. They are, therefore, united and equal in themselves in spite of the fact that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. For the Spirit's procession concerns the immanent and not the economic existence of the Trinity.

3.2. The Action of the Spirit in God's Plan of Salvation

On account of the inseparable nature of the three persons of the Trinity, Tertullian will in turn consider the Spirit's action in God's plan of salvation. If the Father, Son, and Spirit are inseparable in nature and relation, it means their presence and actions in human history are equally inseparable from each other. Unfortunately, this is not always noted when we consider God's plan of human salvation because the focus is more on the action of the Father and the Son. Consequently, the Spirit is overlooked or assigned an inactive role in the history of salvation. Tertullian

¹⁵Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, translated by David Smith Vol., 3 (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 20.

would highlight the Spirit's active role in the conception and life of the Son through whom humanity was saved. He noted that, "the Word was formed by the Spirit and (if I may so express myself) the Spirit is the body of the Word."¹⁶ This clearly refers to the mystery of the incarnation when the Word of God became flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. What is, however, unique and insightful in Tertullian's statement is that the incarnate Word of God is the work or design of the Spirit who is in turn the body of the Word. The sense in which the Spirit is the body of the Word may be difficult to perceive but it signifies the unity of the Spirit and the Word in God's plan of salvation. In my view, it indicates that the incarnate Word of God was possessed by the Spirit in whom he lived and moved.

Tertullian did not equivocally identify the Spirit with the Son in affirming the Spirit's presence and action in the life of the latter. This was quite evident in his perception of their co-existence and relation. He argued that

the Spirit suffered nothing as the Spirit of God, since all that it suffered, it suffered in the Son ... we ourselves are unable to suffer for God, unless the Spirit of God be in us, who also utters by our instrumentality whatever pertains to our own conduct and suffering; not however, that he himself suffers in our suffering, only he bestows on us the power and capacity of suffering.¹⁷

¹⁶Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," VIII, 603.

¹⁷Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," XXIX, 626.

In this statement, Tertullian affirms the Spirit's solidarity with those who are suffering. The Spirit was mainly the one who gave the Son the capacity to suffer but it was ultimately the Son who suffered and died in the end for the salvation of humanity. This is to some extent a nuanced distinction but the way Tertullian relates it to humans is quite significant. He strongly believes that it is only when the Spirit of God is in us that we are capable of suffering without the Spirit itself suffering. Just as the Spirit accompanied, inspired, and empowered Jesus to endure his suffering, so also it enables us to endure our own trials in obedience to God's will. The Spirit's role, in this respect, was clearly depicted in his writings on the martyrs as "your trainer ... the harder their labors in the preparatory training, the stronger is the hope of victory."¹⁸

Another significant insight in Tertullian's understanding of the Spirit's action in God's plan of salvation is the dynamic and active presence of the Spirit throughout human history. The Spirit did not just act in the past; it still continues to act and transform lives in every age. He summed it up in his exhortation that "whoever magnifies, honors, and adores Jesus Christ, assuredly ought to read these examples for the edification of the Church, not less than the ancient ones, so that new virtues may testify that one and the same Holy Spirit is always operating even until now."¹⁹ As far as he was concerned, there is no reason to

¹⁸Tertullian, "Ad Martyras," III, In *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Latin Christianity – Its Founder, Tertullian*, Vol. III, translated by Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 694.

¹⁹Tertullian, "The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicity," VI, In *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. III, 705-706.

believe that the Spirit was or will ever be absent or inactive in the history of human salvation. Nor is the Spirit's operation in the past more evident and effective than its present activities. The same Spirit of God is still enabling God's people to become more heroic in virtue and Christ-like in every generation.

3.3. Rebirth in the Spirit

The Spirit is highly pronounced in Tertullian's writings on the rite and sacrament of baptism in the Church. This indicates that he fully appreciated the importance of the Spirit in baptism in view of its presence and action at the baptism of Jesus. As such, he was preoccupied with the Spirit's action in actual baptismal celebrations than questions about Jesus' baptism. The importance of the Spirit's power and effects at baptism was fully noted. He observed that

all waters, therefore, in virtue of the pristine privilege of their origin, do, after invocation of God, attain the sacramental power of sanctification for the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens and rests over the waters, sanctifying them from himself, and being thus sanctified, they imbibe at the same time the power of sanctifying.²⁰

From this statement, it is clear that the Spirit is what is first of all invoked and it is when it appears and rests on the waters that it sanctifies them. The sacramental power of sanctification at

²⁰Tertullian, "On Baptism," IV, In *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. III, 671.

baptism is ultimately attributed to the Spirit who is invoked on the waters. The Spirit is, in that sense, the one who primarily sanctifies and transforms those who are baptized. The impression that the Spirit supervenes from heaven and rests on the waters is perhaps an analogical than a corporeal conception of the Spirit. Still, it is a graphic and compelling description of the Spirit's action over the waters of baptism. For Tertullian, the water the Spirit already sanctified is likewise effective because it bears the power of sanctification. This underscores the permanent effects of the Spirit over the waters of baptism, as well as, the Church's faith in its spiritual benefits. The sanctifying effects of the Spirit at baptism cannot, therefore, be denied or revoked.

Although the whole person is sanctified and transformed by the Spirit at baptism, what is radically renewed and affected is the person's soul. The reason is because the soul was generally believed to bear the image of God's likeness until it was corrupted by sin. What the Spirit does to the human soul at baptism was well described by Tertullian. He observed that when the soul is

renewed in its second birth by water and the power from above, then the veil of its former corruption being taken away; it beholds the light in all its brightness. It is also taken up in its second birth by the Holy Spirit, just as in its first birth it is embraced by the unholy spirit. The flesh follows the soul now

welded to the Spirit, as a part of the bridal portion – no longer the servant of the soul, but of the Spirit.²¹

The above statement reveals that Tertullian perceived the sacrament of baptism as rebirth in the Spirit. The imagery of rebirth is quite significant because it highlights the total transformation and renewal that takes place at baptism as a result of the Spirit. He compared what happened to the soul at its first birth to its new state at its second birth at baptism and he concluded that in the latter, the soul is completely taken up or possessed by the Spirit. The soul is no longer controlled or dominated by the unholy passions of the flesh. Instead, it is attached to the Spirit that now directs and influences the soul's operations and desires. Baptism, therefore, marks a new beginning in one's human and spiritual life when the soul regains its lost countenance and dignity. The Spirit ultimately serves as the means or cause of one's rebirth at baptism.

3.4. The Spirit's Charisms in the Church

As a rigorist who was strict on Church discipline and lifestyle, one would assume that Tertullian was suspiciously against the charisms of the Spirit in the Church. On the contrary, he was positive like St. Irenaeus in his perception and assessment of the charisms in the Church even before he became a Montanist. In fact, he fully defended the Spirit's charisms in most of his writings, namely, *Against Praxeas*, *On Baptism*, *The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas* etc. This suggests that it

²¹Tertullian, "A Treatise on the Soul," XLI, In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. III, 221.

was not the Spirit's charisms as such that compelled him to abandon the Church and become part of the Montanist Movement. His position on the charisms in the Church was quite definite and clear. He explicitly stated that

we – who both acknowledge and reverence, even as we do the prophecies, modern visions as equally promised to us, and consider the other powers of the Holy Spirit as an agency of the Church for which also he was sent, administering all gifts in all ... so no weakness or despondency of faith may suppose that the divine grace abode only among the ancients, whether in respect of the condescension that raised up martyrs, or that gave revelations; since God always carries into effect what he has promised.²²

In addition to the well-known charisms of previous generations, Tertullian equally recognized and endorsed the existing charisms of his own day and age. He was absolutely certain of the Spirit's active and ongoing presence in the Church. The Spirit was, in his estimation, the agent of the Church that endows it with diverse gifts for its own good and gratification. The members were, therefore, expected to discover their charisms and use them at the service of the Church.

The reason Tertullian entertained and even encouraged the Spirit's charisms in the Church was because of the Spirit's presence and effects at baptism. He clearly perceived an intrinsic

²²Tertullian, "The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas," Vol. III, 699.

connection between baptism and the charisms in the Church. As far as he was concerned, the charisms were ultimately received within the liturgical celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation. Those who received these sacraments were also expected to attain the Spirit's charisms. The charisms were, therefore, not limited to only a select few who were privileged to receive the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. Rather, the Spirit's gifts were open to all members without preference. The newly baptized were, in fact, the ones Tertullian addressed on what they should do to acquire the charisms. His instruction to them was

when you ascend from that most sacred font of your new birth, and spread your hands for the first time in the house of your mother, together with your brethren, ask from the Father, ask from the Lord, that his own specialties of grace and distributions of gifts may be supplied you. 'Ask,' saith he, 'and ye shall receive.' Well, you have asked, and have received; you have knocked, and it has been opened to you. Only, pray that, when you are asking, you be mindful likewise of Tertullian the sinner.²³

What the newly baptized were required to do first and foremost immediately after baptism was to earnestly pray for the charisms or gifts of the Spirit. The reason is because the source of these charisms now dwells in them. They were assured that their prayers will be heard; that the gifts will be imparted on them not just because of the power of prayer. More importantly, the Spirit is freely generous with its charismatic gifts it distributes to all.

²³Tertullian, "On Baptism," In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. III, 679.

The charisms were, therefore, considered to be common, acceptable, and legitimate in the Church.

4. Athanasius' Exposition on The Holy Spirit

Athanasius was also preoccupied with the controversies on the Holy Spirit in his own context. His major works and writings in response to the Arian heresy were obviously on the person and nature of Jesus, the incarnate Word of God. Nonetheless, he addressed the topic of the Holy Spirit in a reasonable and persuasive fashion. In this section, I will present his theological exposition on the third person of the Trinity, in order to, highlight his own insight into the person, nature, mission, and indwelling of the Spirit in the Church.

4.1 The Divinity of the Spirit

The divine nature of the Spirit was rejected by those who maintained that it was purely a creature or an angel but not God. They did not, therefore, believe that the Spirit was equal to the Father and the Son and should likewise be worshipped and adored. The argument they advanced to support their position was

if Spirit is not a creature nor one of the angels, but proceeds from the Father, then he is himself also a son, and he and the Word are two brothers; and if he is a brother, how is the Word only-begotten? How is it then that they are not equal, but the one is named after the

Father, and the other after the Son ... if the Spirit is of the Son, then the Father is the Spirit's grandfather.²⁴

Their argument was tautological and circular in nature but it borders or touches on the Spirit's procession from the Father and the Son that needs to be understood. Otherwise, the Spirit becomes either the second son or grandson of the Father as they wrongly assumed. The divine nature, as well as, the procession of the Spirit were, therefore, explained and clarified by Athanasius to counteract their argument. He argued that if the Spirit is not consubstantial with the Father and the Son, it cannot in turn unite us to the Father or conform us to the Son. Secondly, it is by participation in the Spirit that we become sharers in the divine nature as stated in 2 Pet. 1:4. If the Spirit was indeed a creature as alleged, it would be impossible for us to enter into communion with God through the Spirit. This will be discussed in detail in the next section. Another reason he presented was "if the Spirit were a creature, he could not be ranked with the Triad. For the whole Triad is one God ... [and] nothing foreign is mixed with the Triad, it is indivisible and consistent."²⁵

The notion that the Spirit was either a son or a grandson was absolutely refuted by Athanasius. He categorically stated that "never in Scripture is the Spirit called Son, lest he might be reckoned as a brother. Nor is he called son of the Son, lest the Father might be termed a grandfather. The Son, however, is called Son of the Father, while the Spirit is called the Spirit of the

²⁴Athanasius, "Letter to Serapion of Thmus," In *Patrology: The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature*, Vol. III by Johannes Quasten (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1960), 58.

²⁵Athanasius, "Letter to Serapion of Thmus," In *Patrology*, 76.

Father.²⁶ If the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father, it means it proceeds from him so there is no doubt that Athanasius upheld the idea. What is not quite evident is whether he believed that the Spirit also proceeds from the Son. He admits that there is a co-eternal relationship between the Spirit and the Son like that of the Son and the Father. However, he did not “state explicitly that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, but ... all that he says about the procession of the Holy Spirit would make no sense if he was not convinced that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son also.”²⁷ This is an accurate observation, in my view, because if the Spirit did not also proceed from the Son, it would be difficult to affirm their distinction and relation as two divine persons. The Spirit’s procession from the Son was, therefore, presupposed in Athanasius’ writings.

4.2. The Role of the Spirit in Creation and Human Redemption

The mutual cooperation between the Word and the Spirit in creation that was depicted in Irenaeus’ image of the two hands of God was further developed by Athanasius in his writings on the Spirit. He strongly emphasized the Spirit’s active role in creation based on his understanding of the intrinsic connection between the Word and the Spirit. From his perspective, the whole of God’s creation was formed through the Word and in the Spirit so nothing exists without the Spirit. As far as he was concerned,

²⁶ Athanasius, “Letter to Serapion of Thmus,” 1,16 In *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. 1, 335.

²⁷ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* Vol. III, 77.

it is clear that the Spirit is not a creature, but takes part in the act of creation. The Father creates all things through the Word in the Spirit. For where the Word is there is the Spirit also, and the things which are created through the Word have their vital strength out of the Spirit from the Word.²⁸

If the Spirit is the one in whom all created things were formed or came into being, it means that the Spirit serves as the surrounding and enabling setting or crucible in which everything was fashioned by the Father through the Word. One might conclude that the Spirit's role in creation is passive than active but that would be a wrong assumption. For Athanasius clearly affirmed that all things created through the Word have their vital strength out of the Spirit. In other words, it is the Spirit who gives power and life to everything that exists. Whatever the Father creates through the Word is, therefore, animated, empowered, and sustained by the Spirit.

In addition to its role in creation, the Spirit also fulfills an essential part in the redemption of humanity. The Spirit is the one through whom God became human and identified with us and humanity also participated in God's divine nature and was deified. This wonderful exchange and communion between God and humanity was perfectly explained by Athanasius that

²⁸ Athanasius, "Letter to Serapion of Thmus," 3, 5 In *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* by Denis Edwards (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 41.

because of the grace of the Spirit which he has given to us, in him we come to be, and he in us; and since it is the Spirit of God, therefore, through his becoming in us, reasonably are we, as having the Spirit, considered to be in God, and thus is God in us ... but we, apart from the Spirit, are strange and distant from God, and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead; so that our being with the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit's which is in us and abides in us.²⁹

The reason humanity exists in union with God is because God has offered us the grace or gift of the Spirit. What is noteworthy in this passage is not just the Spirit's indispensable role in this communion between God and humanity. Rather, it is what becomes of us in the absence of the Spirit. Humanity simply becomes strange and distant from God because we depend on the Spirit to direct and guide us closer to God. Once the Spirit deserts us, we become isolated from God which ultimately amounts to a form of death. In Athanasius' view, this occurs when we are unwilling to repent from our wicked ways. Again, the Spirit is properly identified as the source of our human and spiritual life with God that can neither be stifled nor disregarded. We should, therefore, be receptive to the Spirit so that we will be more united with God and be deified.

²⁹ Athanasius, "Discourse III" 24 In *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, translated by Archibald Robertson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 406-407.

4.3 Reception and Indwelling of the Spirit at Baptism

The purpose of the Spirit's descent on Jesus at his Baptism in the Jordan was also addressed by Athanasius. He provided at least two reasons why the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism. The Spirit's appearance on this occasion in the form of a dove was all for the sake of the human race; for its sanctification and deification rather than Jesus' purification and adoption. The first reason seriously takes into consideration the reality and implications of the incarnation that "if for our sake he sanctifies himself, and does this when he become man, it is very plain that the Spirit's descent on him in the Jordan was a descent upon us, because of his bearing our body ... when he received the Spirit, we it was who by him were made recipients of it."³⁰ The incarnation of Jesus was basically an embodiment and personification of the whole human race. He was, in that sense, a corporate representation of humanity when he was baptized as a person and the Spirit descended on him. Consequently, the Spirit was received by every person Jesus represented. This clearly indicates that the Spirit was actually intended for everyone but it was through Jesus Christ that each person received it. The Spirit was not, therefore, sent wholly and solely to Jesus alone for his own benefit. Rather, the whole human race was offered the Spirit through Jesus Christ for its own sanctification and solace because "the Spirit is one and the same, then and now hallowing and comforting those who are his recipients."³¹

³⁰ Athanasius, "Discourse I," 47, 333.

³¹ Athanasius, "Discourse IV," 29, 444-445.

The second reason for the Spirit's descent on Jesus at his baptism was also explained by Athanasius. In this case, he highlighted Christ's divinity and relationship to the Spirit and the exact reason Christ was anointed by the Spirit at the Jordan. He affirmed that

the savior on the contrary, being God and ever ruling in the Father's Kingdom, and being himself he that supplies the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, is here said to be anointed with the Spirit, he might provide for us men, not only exaltation and resurrection, but the indwelling and intimacy of the Spirit.³²

As the Son of God who dispenses the Spirit, Jesus equally possessed the Spirit. In spite of this, he was still anointed with the Holy Spirit not because he lacked what he himself distributes. More importantly, he was anointed so that the Spirit can intimately dwell and abide in our hearts. The Spirit now abides and cultivates a bond of love with the members of Christ's Mystical Body because the same Spirit anointed Christ, the Head of the Church. The abiding presence and indwelling of the Spirit among the members of the Church was ultimately linked to Christ's anointing at his baptism. Athanasius was, consequently, convinced that since the Spirit is "established in us, the Son and the Father ... [also] make their dwelling in us. For the Trinity is indivisible, and its Godhead is one, and there is one God overall

³² Athanasius, "Discourse I," 46, 333.

and through all and in all. This is the faith of the Catholic Church.”³³

5. St. Augustine's Theology of The Holy Spirit

In his major work on *De Trinitate*, Augustine fully addressed the question of the divinity, equality, and distinctiveness of the three persons of the Trinity in response to the Arians and *Pneumatomachians*. He endeavored “to teach that according to the Scriptures the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity; and therefore there are not three gods but one God.”³⁴ Their divinity, oneness, and equality were based on the fact that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share a common substance. The specific passage Augustine duly cited to affirm the consubstantiality of the Spirit is 1Cor. 6:15-20 where Christians are reminded that their bodies are members of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church and temples of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit that dwells in our bodies as its temples must, therefore, be God because both the Temple and the service conducted in it are strictly reserved for God alone. There is no reason then for the Spirit “to be regarded as inferior in nature ... because this Trinity is one God only ... but the Father remains the Father, and the Son remains the Son, and the Holy Spirit remains the Holy Spirit, yet the Trinity is one God.”³⁵ In what follows, I will present Augustine's theology of the Spirit to

³³Athanasius, “Letter to Serapion of Thmus,” 3, 6 In *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 337.

³⁴St. Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.69, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 69.

³⁵St. Augustine, *Faith and the Creed* 9. 16, translated by Michael G. Campbell (New York: New City Press, 2005), 165-166.

enable us “understand what properly is unique to [the Spirit], what constitutes him as he is, so that we are able to state that he is neither the Father nor the Son but the Holy Spirit only.”³⁶

5.1 The Spirit Proceeds from the Father and the Son

Augustine was the first prominent theologian of the Catholic Church who persuasively argued for the double procession of the Spirit. He affirmed that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. Prior to him, the Spirit was simply known to proceed only from the Father or from the Father through the Son as Tertullian, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa proposed in their writings. Both the Tradition he inherited and the testimony of Scripture in Jn. 15:26 were at odds with his own insight that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. However, he was careful to note that ‘the Spirit proceeds principally from the Father and also the Son’ because “with reference to the Holy Spirit, they are one origin; not two origins.”³⁷ Even though the Spirit proceeds from the Son, the source from whom the Spirit principally proceeds, in his view, is clearly not the Son but the Father. This salient point is not often noted or appreciated by his critics. The reason he insisted that the Spirit also proceeds from the Son is precisely because

it is not without point that the same Spirit is called the Spirit of the Father and the Son. And I cannot see what else he intended to signify when he breathed and said *Receive the Holy Spirit* (Jn. 20:22) ... it was

³⁶St. Augustine, *Faith and the Creed* 18-19, 168.

³⁷St. Augustine, *The Trinity* V. 15, 199.

a convenient symbolic demonstration that the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father.³⁸

Augustine equated the risen Lord's communication of the Spirit with the procession of the Spirit from the Son of the Father because the former could not have taken place without the latter. His interpretation of this scripture passage was what prompted him to conclude that the Spirit equally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

In addition to Scripture, Augustine also defended the Spirit's procession from the Father and the Son because it allows the Spirit to be distinct from both of them. Otherwise, the Spirit becomes identified with the Son either as a brother or a son, that is, the grandson of the Father. As the source of all Godhead from whom the Spirit principally proceeds, the Father is the one from whom the Son receives the Spirit who in turn proceeds from the Son. This is precisely because the Father "so begot him that their common gift would proceed from him also."³⁹ Augustine seemingly related the procession of the Spirit from the Son to the fullness with which the Son was begotten by the Father. There is, consequently, an ongoing emanation of the Spirit from the Father to the Son and vice versa as their common gift. As the Father eternal gift to the Son, the Spirit proceeds timelessly and simultaneously from both. For Augustine, the Spirit's procession is timeless and simultaneous because "there are no intervals by which it could be shown, or even asked, whether the Son was first born from the Father, and afterwards the Holy Spirit

³⁸Ibid., IV. 29, 174.

³⁹St. Augustine, *The Trinity* XV. 29, 419.

proceeded from both, seeing that the Holy Scripture calls him the Spirit of them both.”⁴⁰ The Spirit is, therefore, coeternal with the Father and the Son on account of its timeless and simultaneous procession from both of them. This was clearly emphasized to refute any form of subordinationism and sequential procession. At the same time, to defend the divinity, equality, and distinctiveness of the divine persons of the Trinity.

5.2 The Common Gift and Bond of Love of the Divine Persons

For Augustine, the Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son because it is their common gift and bond of love in their relation with each other. The Spirit is the one who “is held in common by the Father and the Son, because he is the one Spirit of them both.”⁴¹ By identifying the Spirit as the common gift of the Father and the Son, Augustine was able to explain the reason the third person of the Trinity is called the Holy Spirit. He affirmed that the Spirit is “properly called what they are called in common, seeing that both the Father and Son are holy and both the Father and Son are spirit. So to signify the communion of them both by a name which applies to them both, the gift of both is called the Holy Spirit.”⁴² His perspective on the Spirit as the common gift of the Father and the Son does not only give us a good insight of who the Spirit is in the immanent Trinity, it also offers us a perfect idea of what the Spirit does among the divine

⁴⁰Ibid., 45, 430.

⁴¹St. Augustine, “Sermon 71.33,” In *Sermons III (51-94) on the New Testament*, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 267.

⁴²St. Augustine, *The Trinity* V. 12, 197.

persons. The Spirit is not simply a passive entity in the Trinity. Rather, he is a person who disposes and avails himself to the Father and the Son. For the Spirit is the personification of what they commonly share or communicate to each other. The Spirit is, therefore, the one who signifies the mutual and personal relation of love between them as their common gift.

The Spirit is also identified in Augustine's trinitarian theology as the bond of love between the Father and the Son. The divine persons are not only united in substance; they are also united in love through the Spirit. The latter is, in that sense, the unifying principle of love between the Father and the Son. For the Spirit "is something common to [them] ... their very communion [*communio*] ... call this friendship ... but a better word for it is charity ... And therefore, there are not more than three; one loving him who is from him, and one loving him from whom his is, and love itself."⁴³ This indicates that the Spirit is not just the common gift, but also the charity or love between the divine persons of the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are analogically compared, in that respect, to the lover, beloved, and love between them. For Augustine, the one who is properly "meant when we read, *Love is God* (1Jn. 4:816), is the Spirit. So it is God the Holy Spirit proceeding from God who fires man to love God and neighbor when he is given to him and he himself is love."⁴⁴ What the Spirit does in the Trinity as the bond of love is also experienced among those who are moved by the Spirit to love God and one another. The Spirit equally functions as the bond of love among the members of Christ's Body, the Church

⁴³St. Augustine, *The Trinity* VI. 7, 209.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, XV. 31, 421.

who are its Temple. The notion of the Spirit as the bond of love is central to Augustine's trinitarian theology, as well as, his ecclesiology. In fact, it is considered "a notable original contribution to the theology of the Holy Spirit,"⁴⁵ because it succinctly represents the identity and unifying role of the Spirit within the Trinity and the Church.

5.3 The Supreme Gift to All Members of the Church

Of all the gifts that are received by the members of the Church, Augustine believes that "there is no greater gift of God's than the Holy Spirit ... who is both God and from God."⁴⁶ The Spirit is, therefore, the supreme gift of the Father and the Son to the members of the Church. One cannot, in that sense, claim he or she does not have the Spirit because, in Augustine's estimation, the Spirit is not reserved to some members of the Church alone. The Spirit is ultimately received by all members because "the gift of the Holy Spirit is nothing but the Holy Spirit."⁴⁷ This means that the Spirit is fundamentally shared in common by all the members of the Church. However, there are varieties of charismatic gifts which some have that others do not possess. These varieties of gifts foster diversity among the members but they are all equal in the Spirit.

Augustine's emphasis on the Spirit's presence in the life of all members is noteworthy because it clearly indicates that no one

⁴⁵Elizabeth Dryer, *Holy Power, Holy Presence: Rediscovering Medieval Metaphors for the Holy Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 57.

⁴⁶St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, XV. 37, 424.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, XV. 36, 424.

has total monopoly of the Spirit. Those who have special charismatic gifts like prophesy, healing, and glossolalia do not necessarily possess the Spirit more than others. Secondly, it challenges the members to cooperate with the Spirit in its function as the source of unity and communion in the Church. For the Spirit's gifts are intended to serve the whole of Christ's Body, the Church. There is more emphasis then on the communal purpose of the Spirit's charismatic gifts than the personal benefits of one's gifts. The Donatists' schismatic act in breaking communion with the Catholic Church was, therefore, considered by Augustine as the sin against the Holy Spirit because it contradicts the love and unity the Spirit creates in the Church. One's charismatic gifts can surely be used to advance one's own spiritual life but it should not generate disunity at the detriment of the whole Church.

As the source of unity and communion in the Church, the Spirit is analogically compared to the soul of the human body that animates and unifies the different parts of the body. The different members of the Church are also animated and coordinated by one and the same principle of unity as in the human body. Augustine was fully convinced that

in some of the saints [the Spirit] works miracles, in others it proclaims the truth ... in others it preserves virginity ... what the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the

Church. The Spirit does in the whole Church what the soul does in all the parts of one body.⁴⁸

This statement clearly summarizes his understanding of the Spirit's indispensable function in the Church that is constituted of members with different charismatic gifts and vocations. The Church is inherently a unity in diversity precisely because the Spirit enriches its members with diverse gifts and binds them together in a bond of love. One can, therefore, argue that Augustine's ecclesiology was largely informed by his pneumatology because the Spirit is the one he identified as the source of the Church's unity with the divine persons and its diverse members. He specifically noted that it is "by this gift which they both possess as one that they wished to gather us together and make us one, that is to say, by the Holy Spirit who is God and the gift of God. By this gift we are reconciled to the Godhead, and by this gift we enjoy the Godhead."⁴⁹

5.4 The Spirit and the Sacraments of the Church

The power and effects of the Spirit in the celebration and reception of the Church's sacraments was also articulated by Augustine in his writings. He distinguished the visible signs of the sacrament, on one hand, from its invisible grace on the other. Likewise, the reception of the sacraments from its use or profit that is associated with its invisible grace, in order to, highlight

⁴⁸St. Augustine, "Sermon 267. 4," In *Sermon III/7 (230-272B) on the Liturgical Seasons*, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1993), 276.

⁴⁹St. Augustine, "Sermon 71.18," In *Sermons III (51-94) on the New Testament*, 256.

the Spirit's role in the celebration of the sacraments. He rightly observed that

the water of the sacrament is one thing and the water that signifies the Spirit of God is something else. The water of the sacrament is visible; the water of the Spirit is invisible. The former washes the body and signifies what takes place in the soul; by the latter, the Spirit, the soul itself is cleansed and nourished. This is the very Spirit of God, whom heretics and whoever cut themselves from the Church cannot have.⁵⁰

This distinction clearly shows that the effects of the sacraments are not attributed either to the visible signs or to the holiness of the minister. Rather, the effects are ascribed to the invisible grace of the sacraments that Augustine refers to as the waters of the Spirit in the case of baptism. If the Spirit is not possessed by baptized heretics and schismatics, it means that not all those who are baptized necessarily attain the Spirit. The baptism that the Donatists, for instance, received and administered to others is, therefore, ineffective and useless until they renew their communion with the Church. Their baptism remains but the Spirit is no longer in them because they are no more in communion with the Church. Even their sins, especially, their sin of schism, cannot, in Augustine's estimation be forgiven because the Spirit who forgives sins is of no profit to them. Without the Spirit's invisible grace, the sacraments of the Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance, and Ordination are also dormant and

⁵⁰St. Augustine, "Sixth Homily 11," In *Homilies on the First Epistle of John 1/14*, translated by Boniface Ramsey (New York: New City Press, 2008), 99.

effective in the lives of the recipients. For, the Spirit is the one who confers in these sacraments “the invisible unction of charity which is the peculiar property of the good.”⁵¹

Augustine’s interpretation of the two texts in the Acts of the Apostles that are often used to distinguish water baptism from Spirit baptism is quite interesting and pertinent. Both Acts 8:14-17 and 10:44-48 are regularly used to justify Spirit baptism over water baptism. From his own point of view, the Spirit was given on both occasions in these texts

to make sure that nothing here is attributed to human pride, but everything to divine grace and power. And so this distinction between reception of baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to instruct us, that we should not immediately suppose that those people, whom we cannot deny to have baptism, also thereby have the Holy Spirit. How much more those who are not only unequipped with any love of Christian unity ... because the love of God has been poured into our hearts.⁵²

His interpretation argues against Spirit baptism that is supported by those who consider it the most effective form of baptism.

⁵¹St. Augustine, “The Letters of Petilian, The Donatist II. 239,” In *St. Augustine the Writings Against the Manicheans and Against the Donatists: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. 4, translated by J. R. King, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 593.

⁵²St. Augustine, “Sermon 269. 2,” In *Sermons III/7 (230-272B) on the Liturgical Seasons*, 284.

They are clearly misguided in their understanding of the essence of baptism. For, the reception of the Spirit is part and parcel of the sacrament of baptism as it is administered in the Catholic Church. Anyone who is baptized in the Church with Christ's form of baptism formally receives the Spirit the same way Christ received the Spirit at his baptism.

6. Notable Contributions and Current Perspectives

In their own respective ways, each of the African Church Fathers I have examined above attempted to address the questions, concerns, and controversies on the person, divinity, procession, mission, and charisms of the Holy Spirit. Their theological convictions on the Spirit were respectively explored and examined, in order to, present their arguments and profound insights on the third person of the Trinity, namely, the Spirit of the Father and the Son. In this final section of the article, I will summarily highlight and synthesize the notable contributions of Tertullian, Athanasius, and Augustine to pneumatology, that is, the theological study of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, I will present some current perspectives of theologians on their contributions. This will enable us to determine the level and scope of the African Church Fathers influence on theological reflection on the Spirit's life in the Trinity and the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. For pneumatology is

something other than a simple dogmatic theology of the third Person ... [is] different from a profound analysis of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in individual souls ... Pneumatology should, I believe, describe the impact,

in the context of a vision of the Church, of the fact that the Spirit distributes his gifts as he wills and in this way builds up the Church. A study of this kind involves not simply a consideration of those gifts and charisms, but a theology of the Church.⁵³

This meaning of pneumatology is definitely more comprehensive than a limited understanding of the subject. In fact, it accurately represents the African Fathers of the Church own perception of the nature, presence, mission, and power of the Spirit among the divine persons and also in the life and ministry of the Church.

Their first major contribution to pneumatology is the emphasis on the inseparable connection between the Spirit and the Son (the Word of God). All of them affirmed the inseparable relation between the Spirit and the Son in spite of their distinction. Their argument was based on the divine persons' unity of substance and the fact that the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son from whom it also proceeds. St. Irenaeus had already compared the Spirit and the Word to the two hands of God to portray their combined role in creation. However, their inseparable relation in creation and redemption was further expounded by both Tertullian, who refers to the Spirit as the body of the Word, and Athanasius, who affirms a co-eternal relationship between them. The latter specifically noted that 'where the Word is, there is the Spirit also and the things created through the Word have their vital strength out of the Spirit from the Word.' Their affirmation of the inseparable relation between the Spirit and the Word was endorsed by Congar who strongly maintained that "there is no

⁵³Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 1, 156.

separation of the activity of the Spirit from the work of Christ in a full pneumatology.”⁵⁴ Each of them clearly indicated that the Spirit is not autonomous from the Father and the Son because it is the Spirit of both. Consequently, “the impossibility of elaborating a separate pneumatology belongs to the essence of the Spirit.”⁵⁵ Since the Spirit is the Spirit of both, it cannot be studied independently from the Father and the Son.

The second salient contribution to pneumatology is the African Fathers of the Church point of view on the divinity and distinct nature of the Holy Spirit. They all offered scriptural, doctrinal, and rational arguments to defend the divinity or consubstantiality of the Spirit. At the same time, they identified the Spirit as a distinct person in the Trinity, in order to, ensure that the Spirit is not subsumed under the Father and the Son as Praxeas taught in his heresy. However, the most cogent argument, in my view, that clearly justifies both the Spirit’s divinity and distinction is Augustine’s insight on the Spirit’s timeless and simultaneous procession from the Father and the Son. Otherwise, a sequential form of procession from the Father to the Son would be implied. This would not only raise questions on the Spirit’s eternal origin, it would likewise be criticized for diminishing the Spirit’s equality with the Father and the Son. Augustine’s standpoint on the Spirit’s timeless and simultaneous procession was fully adopted by Congar because “if [the Spirit] did not proceed from the Son, he would not be distinguished from him by that relationship which safeguards [their] divine equality and

⁵⁴Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 1, 157.

⁵⁵Pope Benedict XVI, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*, translated by Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 111.

consubstantiality.”⁵⁶ The African Fathers of the Church particularly Augustine should not, therefore, be criticized for introducing the Spirit’s subordination to the Father and the Son in the Church’s teaching and liturgy in the West. Precisely because they perfectly defended the Spirit’s divinity, equality, and distinction from the other divine persons of the Trinity.

Another significant input towards a meaningful study of the Holy Spirit is the Fathers’ affirmation of the animating and unifying function of the Spirit in the Trinity and the Church. Athanasius strongly testified that apart from the Spirit, we are strange and isolated from God. But if we participate in the Spirit, we are knit to the Godhead. In other words, it is through the Spirit that we become unified with God in such a way that we are deified. This insight inspires and challenges theologians and members of the Church to explore the Spirit’s power and relation with God’s people and be more devoted to him so that they will be more united with God. Augustine also underscored the Spirit’s function in the Trinity and the Church when he distinctively identified the Spirit as the bond of love. For him, the Spirit is the unifying principle of love among the divine persons, between the Trinity and the Church, and among the members of the Church themselves. The notion of the Spirit as the bond of love is significant because it enables us to perceive the unique nature of the Spirit and what it does in the Trinity and the Church. Secondly, it signifies that the Spirit’s function in the Church as the source of unity in diversity is modeled on its role in the Trinity. The “quest for the Spirit’s identity and nature must also

⁵⁶Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 3, 87.

include an articulation of the mission and function of the Spirit in the Church."⁵⁷

The final remarkable contribution of the African Church Fathers to pneumatology is their positive assessment and understanding of the Spirit's charisms in the Church and its members. Tertullian fully acknowledged and encouraged the manifestations of the Spirit's charisms in the Church even before he became a Montanist. He was convinced that the Spirit's charisms were still received in his own generation because God fulfills his promise to pour out his Spirit in every age. In fact, he exhorted the newly baptized to earnestly pray for such gifts because he believed that the Spirit they received at baptism was generous with its gifts. The rite of baptism was, in that case, the context in which the members of the Church received the Spirit and its charisms. The charismatic gifts of the Spirit were, therefore, not meant for only a few but for all baptized members of the Church. Tertullian's association of the Spirit's charisms with baptism is relevant "because if baptism in the Spirit as understood today usually involves the laying on of hands, a prayer for the descent of the Spirit, and some expectation that the charisms will be imparted, then the baptism in the Holy Spirit is integral to the whole rite of Christian initiation."⁵⁸ While the Spirit and its gifts are common to all baptized members, it is noteworthy that Augustine rather emphasized the importance of using one's gift for the good of the whole Church. For the Spirit is the source of unity and diversity

⁵⁷Gabriel Mendy, *Augustine's Spirit – Soul Analogy and Its Implications for Communion Ecclesiology* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Publishing Company, 2013), 64.

⁵⁸Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 115.

in the Church so one's charismatic gift should not jeopardize the life and mission of the Church.

7. Conclusion

One cannot possibly conduct a proper and holistic study of the person, nature, mission, and charisms of the Holy Spirit without reference to the African Fathers of the Church I have discussed within the limited scope of this article. The reason is because they were among the few early writers who thoroughly addressed the questions and controversies on the Spirit's divinity, role, and charisms in the Church. The insights and contributions they offered in their writings were not only persuasive and profound; they represent a remarkable development to what was previously known and taught about the Spirit. The Spirit was basically, in their estimation, the Spirit of both the Father and the Son who uniquely functions as the unifying principle of love in the Trinity and the Church. They therefore, underscored the Spirit's distinct nature, its inseparable relation to the Father, as well as, the Son, and its active presence in the life of the Church and its members. This explains why their pneumatology is fully endorsed by prominent theologians like Yves Congar and Pope Benedict XVI. The topic of this journal, namely, "The Holy Spirit and the Church in Africa" is evidently in accordance with the African Fathers' theology of the Spirit and its presence and function in the Church.