

The Pneumatological Phenomenon in Acts 2:1–6: Implications for Christian Mission in Africa

Isaac Boaheng

CSUC; SATS; UFS

Abstract

The book of Acts presents an exciting story of the beginning and growth of the Christian Church amidst inner problems and outward conflict. As a book that gives an account of how the Christian gospel spread from Jerusalem to various parts of the known world of the first century, Acts provides a useful paradigm for Christian mission in every generation. Of interest to the present study is the place of the Holy Spirit in Christian mission in Africa as evident in the Pentecostal experience and its accompanying events. Thus, this article explores how contextual applications of missiological principles derived from the Pentecost experience might help improve Christian mission in contemporary Africa. The article conducts a textual analysis of Acts 2:1–6 to unravel the meaning of the text. After a critical analysis of relevant texts, the article argues that in order to fulfill its mandate,

the Church must be called back to its Pentecostal and missionary roots, and to the absolute necessity of the Spirit's empowerment for the effective participation in the mission of God. The article also notes that the missiological implications of the Pentecost experience include the importance of the use of the vernacular, or mother-tongues, in both missions and Christian life. After concluding that contemporary missionaries can only succeed if they are empowered by the Spirit, the study charges the Church to seek divine empowerment for mission, both locally and globally.

1. Introduction

The term missiology refers to the study of Christian missions, their methods, and purposes (Anderson 1998, 1). Missiology is a dynamic field which grows

Conspectus

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About the Author

Dr. Isaac Boaheng holds a Ph.D. in Theology from the University of the Free State, South Africa, an M.Th. from the South African Theological Seminary, South Africa, an M.Div. from the Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana, and a B.Sc. degree in Geomatic Engineering from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. Boaheng has over seventy publications in Systematic Theology, Ethics, Biblical Studies, Translation Studies, African Christianity, Linguistics, Pentecostalism, and Christian Mission, among others. He is an ordained minister of the Methodist Church Ghana serving the Suame circuit of the Kumasi diocese. Boaheng is married to Gloria, and they are blessed with five children: Christian, Benedict, Julia, Kalix, and Myjiloy.

revisaacboaheng@gmail.com



Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

and adapts to new, changing environments. In missiological studies, the mission of God is referred to as the *Missio Dei*, a term which was popularized by scholars like Karl Barth and Karl Hartenstein (Fubara-Manuel 2007, 5). Church structure, religious plurality, culture, and historical consideration are some of the factors that affect Christian missiology. Anderson (1998, 1) outlines six elements of the theology of mission which are summarized below.

Firstly, theology of mission must be systematized and contextualized for a given society. This is crucial in cross-cultural communication of the Christian faith where anthropological factors such as primitive religion, linguistics, cultural dynamics, and cultural change play a major role.

Secondly, theology of mission relates to the missionary nature of God. The Triune God is in mission to the world; God's mission is centered on Christ's work on the cross, and he uses the Church to reach the world. For Bosch (2009, 392), the *Missio Dei* is "primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the Church (Israel) is privileged to participate." Mission is, therefore, primarily, God's activity.

Thirdly, theology of mission relates to the missionary nature of the Bible, which contains the account of God's missionary activity. From the creation stories in Genesis to the creation of the New Jerusalem in Revelation, the Bible contains different stories which contribute to the Christian understanding of the *Missio Dei*. Though the Bible was revealed in piecemeal fashion, the overall argument of the Bible has to do with God's salvific mission for rescuing humanity from the penalty of sin. An authentic Christian mission must therefore be biblically grounded.

Fourthly, theology of mission must include the missionary nature of the Church. Mission is God's own activity; however, he has invited the Church to participate in its realization. The Church must be missionary in

its work and in its self-understanding because of the missionary nature of Christ, who serves as the foundation of the Church. Each generation of believers must therefore do all they can to expand God's kingdom and to ensure the survival of the Church in subsequent generations. A sound theology of mission must therefore facilitate an encounter between the kingdom, the Church, and the world.

Fifthly, theology of mission relates to the missionary nature of the Christian ministry. From a holistic biblical perspective, Christian ministry is not the preserve of the clergy. Christian leaders are to equip their followers to enable them to partake in God's mission. As Anderson (1998, 11) puts it, the role of the minister as an "equiper of the saints for the work of the ministry" needs to be emphasized in any theology of mission formulated for any given context. This idea is rooted in the New Testament concept of the priesthood of all believers. The Church's emphasis on the role of individual believers in mission will certainly have a multiplying effect as new converts discover their gifts and actively participate in making new disciples for Christ.

Sixthly, theology of mission and pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit) are inseparable. The pneumatological dimension of mission is prominent in Charismatic and Pentecostal theology of mission, though not entirely missing in the missiology of mainline historic churches. A correct theology of mission must emphasize the role of the Spirit "in the call, appointment, orientation, and maintenance of the missionaries" (Anderson 1998, 11). The present study focuses on the pneumatological aspect of mission with particular reference to Pentecost. In this regard, the study examines the Spirit baptism that took place at Pentecost and how this miraculous experience must inform contemporary African Christian mission.

With this brief background, the study now proceeds to the next section, where the background to the book of Acts is considered.

2. Background to the Book of Acts

Most New Testament scholars attribute the book of Acts to Luke who is also considered to be the author of the Lukan gospel (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 120). In this sense, Acts serves as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke (Acts 1:1). The use of similar vocabulary (especially medical terms) and similar style of writing in both books is used to support Lukan authorship of Luke-Acts. Luke-Acts and Hebrews are regarded as containing the most cultured Greek among the New Testament books (Gundry 2012, 333). Suggested sources for the writing of Acts include recollections from memory, notes from personal diaries, information from Paul and other Christians (in, among others, Jerusalem and Syrian Antioch), and written sources regarding the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:23–29) (Gundry 2012, 333–334).

Though there is almost consensus among scholars that Acts originated from Rome, scholars disagree widely when it comes to dating the book. The view that Acts was written in the second century (AD 115–130) is supported by the argument that the book was written to reconcile opposing early Christian groups of Jewish Christianity, represented by Peter, and Gentile Christianity, represented by Paul (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 121). The view that Acts was written between AD 80 and AD 95 is buttressed by the claim that a date later than AD 95 is not accurate for Acts because of “its optimistic attitude toward the Roman government—an attitude that would have been inconceivable after the persecution of Domitian in the middle 90s” (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 121). Another view is that Acts was written before AD 70, and this is supported by Luke’s portrayal of Judaism as legalistic, and his ignorance of the Pauline letters. Considering the debate

surrounding the date of the writing of Acts, the present author maintains that no suggested date is conclusive.

Acts was written to provide open-minded Gentiles with an historical account of the origin of Christianity (Gundry 2012, 336). In the process, the author emphasizes “religious piety, moral purity, and political innocence of believers,” and portrays Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism which is open to all who come to Jesus by faith. The book demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit in both the establishment and the expansion of the Church from Jerusalem to Rome and to other parts of the world. Acts also serves an apologetic purpose, providing a defense of the Christian faith against attacks from other religions, especially Judaism. It also shows that Christianity is a universal religion, not a religion for a particular ethnic group or class of people. Therefore, one finds the gospel being preached to Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch,¹ Cornelius (a Roman), Gentiles at Antioch, poor and wealthy, men and women, educated and uneducated (see chs. 8, 10, 13, 15). In Acts, God ensured the spread of his gospel from Jerusalem to the end of the world despite opposition from non-Christians.

3. Exposition on the Pentecost Story

This section expounds Acts 2 (particularly vv. 1–6) with the goal of appreciating the miraculous events that took place at Pentecost so as to deduce what implications this phenomenon has for mission in contemporary Christianity.

¹ The “Ethiopian eunuch” was not Ethiopian in the modern sense, as the eunuch was an official of the Nubian government at Meroë. The title “Candace” is a Latin term which could mean “Queen Regent,” “Queen Mother,” or “Royal Woman.”

When the day of Pentecost had come (v. 1). Pentecost (Greek: *pentecoste*, meaning fiftieth) was a Jewish festival that was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Passover-Sabbath before YHWH with gifts and offerings (Exod 23:14–17) (Bruce 1988, 49). It was also called the Feast of Weeks (*Shabuoth*) (Exod 34:22a; Deut 16:10) or the Day of Firstfruits (Num 28:26; cf. Exod 23:16a) because on that day people presented the first fruits of their wheat harvest to God (Exod 34:22a). Pentecost was celebrated at the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. In 2 Chron 8:13, the feast of weeks is mentioned only in the list of regular yearly feasts celebrated in the Solomonic temple.

By the time of the first Christian century, Pentecost was celebrated to commemorate the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:1 ff.) and the yearly renewal of the Mosaic covenant (Jub 6:15, 19) (Longenecker 1981, 269; Bromiley 1985, 826). The Pentecost in the year of the Lord's resurrection was the last Jewish and the first Christian Pentecost which became the spiritual harvest of the redemption from sin. In the view of Bromiley (1985, 799), Luke's use of the phrase "When the day of Pentecost had come" (lit. "In the complete filling up of the day of Pentecost," Acts 2:1) is meant to link the Christian Pentecost to salvation history. The phrase is reminiscent of Luke 9:51, where a similar momentous phrase is used. Bromiley therefore considers the Old Testament Pentecost as having gained some religious significance before the Christian Pentecost occurred.

...they were all together in one place. The expression "in one place" is further expanded in verse 2 to indicate that this refers to a particular place or the same house. Church tradition holds that the place where the gathering took place was the upper room mentioned in 1:13. However, one cannot be certain about the identity of this one place where the disciples had gathered. The gathering was in obedience to Jesus's command that the

disciples should wait in Jerusalem to be "clothed with power from on high" before departing (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4–8).

...a mighty wind...tongues as of fire (vv. 2–3). While the apostles and disciples were together waiting in prayer for the fulfillment of the promised Holy Spirit (2:1), the Pentecost event occurred. The Spirit's coming on the day of Pentecost was demonstrated by three signs. First, there was the sound of a violent rushing wind that filled the house (2:2); then, there was the visible sign of tongues of fire resting on each person (2:3); finally, there was the miraculous speaking in foreign languages unknown to the speakers (2:4). The use of "wind" and "fire" in connection with the Spirit (vv. 2–3) is significant. The word "Spirit" (Greek: *pneuma*) relates to *pnoē*, which is translated "wind" here. The nouns "spirit" and "wind" or "breath" derive from the verb *pneō* which means "to blow, to breathe" (Toussaint 1983, 357). As Jesus had earlier breathed on the eleven disciples, God was now breathing on the 120 (cf. John 20:20–22; see also Job 4:9, 33:4). The sound like the blowing of a violent wind from heaven signifies the Spirit's sovereign power reminiscent of the image of end-time, resurrection life that may be inferred in Ezek 37:9–14 and God's presence implied in John 3:8 (Toussaint 1983, 357).

The sound like a strong wind was followed by the manifestation of the Spirit in the form of a gleaming flame that neither burns nor consumes. The use of fire to symbolize God's presence is found in Old Testament passages like Gen 15:17; Exod 3:2–6; 13:21–22; 19:18; 40:38. According to Horton (1996, 31), "fire" in this context underlines "God's acceptance of the Church Body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:21, 22; 1 Cor 3:16), and then, the acceptance of the individual believers as also being temples of the Spirit (1 Cor 6:19)." The temple in the Old Testament was the place where God dwelt, but now his Spirit dwells within each believer, making the believer the temple of God. Therefore, believers would no more

be required to come to the temple in Jerusalem to meet God. They are now themselves “living temples” through whom “God would take the gospel to all nations in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8)” (Miller 2011, 41). The fire not only symbolizes the purifying, enlightening, and quickening power of the Spirit but also evokes eschatological judgment (Isa 26:11; 66:15–16, 24).

In the Old Testament, “the Spirit is considered as the manifestation of God’s actions in relation to Israel, guiding selected leaders (Moses, Num 11:16–17; Joshua, Deut 34:9; Othniel, Judg 3:10; Gideon, Judg 6:34; David, 1 Sam 16:17) and inspiring various prophets (Saul, 1 Sam 10:6; 19:23–24; Isa 42:1; 61:1; Ezek 37:1; Mic 3:8)” (Squires 2003, 1218). The Spirit gave gifts to people (Num 11:25; Prov 1:23; Dan 4:8–18) and will rest upon the eschatological Davidic leader (Isa 11:2–5). The Spirit played a key role in the lives of Jesus (Luke 4:1), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), and John’s parents (Elizabeth, Luke 1:41; Zacharias, Luke 1:67). Considering the foregoing data on the Holy Spirit together with the various prophecies given by Jesus and John the Baptist in connection with his coming, it becomes apparent that the Pentecost event “stands in continuity with God’s action in Israel” (Squires 2003, 1218).

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 4a). The Holy Spirit baptism is described in terms of filling and outpouring to signify abundance. The metaphor of being “filled with the Spirit” signifies the pervasive nature of the experience, meaning, “the Holy Spirit possessed them completely” or “the Holy Spirit came into them entirely” (Miller 2011, 42). What happened in this verse is a direct fulfillment of Jesus’s prophecy about the Spirit baptism in Acts 1:4–8 which he described as receiving “the gift my Father promised” (v. 4), being “baptized with [in] the Holy Spirit” (v. 5), and as the moment “when the Holy Spirit comes upon [them]” (v. 8).

...[they] began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (v. 4b). Speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) among the disciples became an immediate and direct effect of their being filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. 10:46; 19:6). The new spiritual life, initiated, controlled, and directed by the Spirit, manifested itself in the speaking of tongues towards God. The phenomenon of speaking in tongues that occurred this day is different from speaking in unknown languages in private, prayerlike communication with God, which Paul talks about in 1 Cor 12–14.

...from every nation under heaven (v. 5). Stott (1994, 68) asserts that “Although all the nations of the world were not present *literally*, they were *representatively*.” The expression “every nation” must therefore not be understood in an absolute sense. The table of nations presented in Acts 2:9–11 compares well with what is presented in Gen 10 and includes descendants of all three of Noah’s sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The representatives from the various nations help fulfill Jesus’s prophecy that “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

...the tongues spoken were translated to his own language (v. 6). This verse also highlights the missional purpose of Spirit baptism. The Pentecost phenomenon serves as a sign of the universality of the Christian gospel indicated by the speaking of tongues which were heard in the home language of non-Palestinian Jewish and Gentile-proselyte pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the festival. Fifteen nations are mentioned representing at least fifteen different mother-tongues. In this event the tongues spoken were translated into the language of each person, the relevance being the imminent transfer of the gospel from Jerusalem to every part of the world (Ladd 1993, 385). The phenomenon of speaking in tongues therefore facilitated the multicultural audience’s appreciation and recognition of God’s wondrous activity.

4. Missional Perspectives on Pentecost

The event that took place on the day of Pentecost has many missiological implications. This section explores missiological themes such as Pentecost and *kerygma*, Pentecost and the *ecclesia*, Pentecost and mother-tongue development, and Pentecost and the *Missio Dei*.

4.1 Pentecost and *kerygma*

A crucial theme at the heart of Acts is the Spirit empowering believers for *kerygma* (the proclamation of the gospel). The filling of the Spirit in the context of Acts (mentioned again in 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9) is usually linked with the bold, effective proclamation of the gospel message. Therefore, Peter, full of the Spirit, was empowered to proclaim the gospel to the people who had gathered at that time. Peter stood up to explain the miraculous event that had taken place in response to the allegation that the disciples were acting under the control of alcohol. Through Pentecost, the disciples were transformed from a timid clique to mighty courageous men ready for the propagation of the gospel.

Peter's reference to the crowd as "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem" (2:14) indicates that the people included Jews from Judea and others who had pilgrimed to Jerusalem for the festival. Peter begins with a rebuttal of the accusation of drunkenness by drawing his audience's attention to the fact that the third hour of the day in which the event had taken place was too early for a group of revelers to be drunk (vv. 14–15). He then makes the point that Pentecost was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28–32). This means that the occurrence at Pentecost had a strong biblical foundation and so must be considered as a divine act meant for a divine purpose.

Peter moves on to present Jesus as the Messiah that the Old Testament promised the Jews (vv. 22–32). According to him, the miracles, wonders,

and signs that characterized Jesus's life and ministry were divine proofs that Jesus is the Messiah (v. 22). He argues further that the crucifixion of Christ was not the result of a human plot but a fulfillment of God's eternal salvific purpose (v. 23a). Yet, God's foreknowledge about the crucifixion does not exonerate from guilt those who committed this evil act (v. 23b). Peter repeatedly used the pronoun "you" to draw his audience's attention to the fact that they must also bear some of the blame for Jesus's crucifixion because it was necessitated by their sins too (see Matt 27:22; Luke 23:18). He then moves to the subject of the resurrection by saying that Jesus came back to life after death because it was impossible for death to hold him captive (v. 24). For Peter, David's assertion that God would not let his soul stay in *Hades* was a Messianic prophecy referring to the resurrection of Jesus (v. 31, cf. Ps 16:10). The disciples were all aware of the resurrection (v. 32).

Peter then considers Jesus's ascension to heaven and him sitting at the right hand of God, from where he poured the Holy Spirit on his followers (v. 33). He again cites David, saying that David had not ascended into heaven, but he was able to prophesy about the ministry of the risen Lord and Savior, who has now received the seat of authority to bring all powers under subjection to God (vv. 34–35). In verse 36 he states emphatically that the crucified but risen Jesus has now been made both Lord and Christ (v. 36).

Some lessons can be drawn from Peter's sermon for Christian proclamation of the Word of God. First, Christian proclamation should be Christocentric, focusing on the person and works of Christ (vv. 22–24, 29–36). Second, it should be scripturally based. Peter's example includes Joel's prophecy (v. 17; Joel 2:28) and David's words in Psalm 16 (vv. 25–28) and Psalm 110 (v. 34). The Bible is God's revelation to humanity about his will and purpose. Therefore, an authentic Christian proclamation must be

supported by the Bible. Third, even though the Bible was written to be understood by everyone, not all people have the same level of understanding. There is the need to explain biblical texts for one's audience to enhance their understanding. The method that Peter used, which serves as a perfect model for contemporary Christianity, is expository preaching. Peter, after quoting Scripture, explicated it for contemporary relevance (see, e.g., the exposition of Ps 16 in v. 31). Fourth, since the power for effective witnessing comes from the Holy Spirit, Christian proclamation must be done by Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered disciples. Fifth, Peter's sermon highlights the need to make proclamation personal rather than making a generic reference (cf. vv. 22, 29, 36). He appealed to the conscience of individuals to make a personal, conscious decision to accept Christ. Therefore, he demanded a response from his audience comprising repentance, confession, and forgiveness (vv. 28, 38, 40–41). Christian salvation necessitates an individual response; therefore, Christian proclamation must invite the individual to make his or her own personal independent decision. That notwithstanding, it could be noted that the individual act of responding to the call was part of a broader corporate action.

4.2 Pentecost and the *ecclesia*

The word *ecclesia* (which means assembly of called-out ones) is rendered “church”² by English translators. God's plan for being glorified among the nations was to form the Church. It is not by chance that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost. God was going to transform the physical harvest associated with the Jewish Pentecost into a spiritual harvest of people at the Christian Pentecost. There exists the scholarly

² The word “church” also comes from the word *Kyriakos* (“of the Lord”).

opinion that the Church already existed from the time that Jesus called his first disciples to follow him (cf. Matt 4:18–22; 9:9; 18:17) and so the Pentecost experience was meant to empower the already-existing Church to undertake the divine mandate of taking the gospel to all parts of the world (Matt 28:19–20) (Miller 2011, 43). The disciples before Pentecost should be considered as the embryo from which the Church proper developed with equal opportunity for both Jews and Gentiles to be part. Until this time, YHWH's people consisted of Israel, along with a few Gentile proselytes. Paul refers to this inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church as a mystery, which had not been formerly revealed, although it was typified in this Jewish feast with two loaves (Eph 3:4–7). The Church, which had an initial membership of 120 grew to about 3 000 converts through the Pentecost experience and the subsequent proclamation of the gospel by Peter (2:14–41).

The unity and diversity of the *ecclesia* are signified by the appearance of something like tongues of fire dividing and resting upon each person (2:3). The Church's diversity is seen in its composition and location. Since a large number of people accepted the Christian faith at Pentecost, fellowship could probably not happen at a single place. Therefore, in addition to worship in the temple are gatherings in Christian homes (2:46; 5:42). There were many house-churches similar to Jewish synagogues (Ladd 1993, 386). The Church comprises different people of different places and different times who have all come to faith in Christ. Yet, the *ecclesia* is a unity in that all the members are part of the one body, whose head is Christ. The oneness and the universal scope of the *ecclesia* is highlighted by the *glossolalia* (Ladd 1993, 385). The Pentecostal event is designed for the whole world and is purposed to unite the diverse tongues in a new unity of the *ecclesia*. Thus, in the book of Acts one finds the growth of “one Church in diverse cultures” which looks forward to the day when a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language will stand before the Lamb (Rev 7:9).

The life of the early Christian Church was marked by two key distinctive Christian elements, the first being “the apostles’ teaching” or *didache* (2:42). The believers first continued steadfastly “persisting in or continuing in” the apostles’ teaching and fellowship (defined in terms of breaking of bread and prayer; v. 42). The specification of “the teaching of the apostles” underlines the unique authority and status they had among the early Christians. The apostles were the people who had seen Jesus personally after the resurrection and had been commissioned to proclaim the gospel. The importance of the Twelve is reiterated by the need to replace Judas with Matthias (1:26). The apostles were the major source of authority because they had received the Lord’s message through the power of the Holy Spirit (Bruce 1988, 73). While Acts gives no idea about the subjects in which the new converts were instructed, one could gather from the bits of catechetical materials scattered throughout the New Testament that teachings to new converts dealt with common topics such as the meaning of the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the second coming of Christ, new life in Christ, renunciation of pagan beliefs for Christ’s and the brethren’s sake, faith and worship, Christian virtues and responsibilities, and life in crisis periods (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 126–127; Ladd 1993, 386).

Second, the early church was devoted to fellowship. The Greek word used in Acts 2:42 for “fellowship” is *koinonia* which also means “community.” *Koinonia* was used in the Greco-Roman literature to express the mutuality and commitment characteristic of marriage. It goes beyond “friendliness” or “companionship” to include ideas such as “participation, having a share in and two-way trust” (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 128). It has to do with the sharing together of people in and with Christ. The intimacy implied in their fellowship is made explicit by the phrase “the breaking of bread,” which probably alludes to the Eucharist and a common meal (Ladd 1993, 386; Toussaint 1983, 340; see 1 Cor 11:20, 34). Fellowship among members of

the early church included prayer and worship (2:42). Prayer (both corporate and individual) was central to the communal experience of the early church. According to Bruce (1988, 73) the format of the prayer followed the Jewish prayers but with different content. Fellowship is Christian love in action. Therefore, the disciples shared a common life illustrated practically by their common ownership of material wealth (2:44–45; 4:32–5:11; cf. 11:27–30; John 13:24–25). The church had one heart and was determined to do everything in common to help reduce the plight of the poor among them.

Spirit-empowered believers love one another so much that they value one another more than they value their possessions (2:44–45). This corroborates well with the Lukan theology of transformation which involves commitment to a new Lord and to one’s neighbor. The communal aspect of the early church resonates well with the African traditional communal sense of life. This is aptly expressed by the *Ubuntu* philosophy of “I am because of who we all are.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999, 31) explained *Ubuntu* as follows: *Ubuntu* is to say “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours.... A person is a person through other persons.” *Ubuntu*, unlike the Western aphorism, “I think, therefore I am” (*Cogito, ergo sum*), says “I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.” Therefore “what dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me” (Tutu 1999, 31). The interdependence, solidarity, generosity, brotherhoodness, and interconnectedness that characterized the early church are all captured in African *Ubuntuism*. The African concept of “being self through others” must be emphasized by missionaries so that African churches can share resources to ensure the survival of the under-resourced. The purpose of such acts of sharing is not for all people to have the same number of resources, but to have everyone getting the basic necessities for existence (2 Cor 8:15).

The African communal sense of life also informs the African communal view about sin and salvation. In Africa, “To be delivered from sin into fullness

of life is to be freed and empowered to live a community-centered life. It is to be given the capacity to contribute actively to the *sensus communis* [common sense]” (Asante 2001, 362). On the Day of Pentecost, the people who confessed Christ—and were baptized— did so as a group (corporately), though to be part of that group one had to have made a personal decision to accept Christ and his salvation. While recognizing the individual responsibility in salvation, it is also important to acknowledge that humans were created as social beings to live in a community, and the Church itself is a community. About three thousand being added to the Church in one instance is surely more an example of *Ubuntu* than it is of individual action. The communal dimension of the Church is also underlined by Peter’s use of the second person plural pronoun throughout his sermon. The point then is that in as much as individual decision is important, such decisions are made as parts of a broader corporate action. Christian missions in Africa will be enhanced if the communal sense of the Christian life, the Church, sin, and salvation are developed and promoted from a Christian viewpoint.

5. Pentecost and Mother-tongue Development

One’s mother-tongue is the native language into which one is born and bred. The mandate to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19–20) implies a cross-cultural missionary task. As missionaries move from place to place, they encounter different languages. The Pentecostal experience, in which God (through the Holy Spirit) gave utterances to the apostles and then communicated the message embedded in the divine utterances to each of the hearers in their own mother-tongues (Acts 2:6–8, 11), highlights the significance of language in missions. The experience underscores the fact that Spirit-directed Christian mission must break linguistic barriers to make God’s message accessible to all people. Thus, in Christian mission, the Christian message must be brought home to its hearers in their own native

language. This is an area where the early Christian missionaries who came to Africa did exceedingly well. Realizing that their missionary enterprise could not succeed without breaking the linguistic barrier they encountered, the missionaries studied African languages and then captured them in writing. They educated the indigenes and also began to translate the Bible into African vernacular. The vernacular Bibles helped the African converts to better appreciate the message propagated by the missionaries. Africans, having discovered affinities between their own culture and Bible culture (especially in the OT), were enthusiastic to share their discoveries with others, and this eventually led to the conversion of many. According to Mojola (2014, 3),

the pioneer African readers of these texts could not avoid noticing the similarities between many of the stories of the OT and stories from their own cultures, between many OT religious practices and institutions and those of their own, in short, the OT could easily have been read as an African book without much difficulty.

On the significance of mother-tongue development and use of native language in propagating the Christian faith, Bediako (1995, 60) asserts that,

the happenings on the day of Pentecost, as recounted in the second chapter of the Acts of Apostles...give an important Biblical and theological warrant for taking seriously the vernacular languages in which people everywhere hear the wonders of God. The ability to hear in one’s own language and to express in one’s own language one’s response to the message which one receives, must lie at the heart of all religious encounter with the divine realm. Language itself becomes, then, not merely a social or a psychological phenomenon, but a theological one as well. Though every human language has its

limitations in this connection, yet it is through language, and for each person, through their mother tongue, that the Spirit of God speaks to convey divine communication at its deepest to the human community.

Christian mission can therefore not succeed without taking into consideration the linguistic context of the target audience. As Bediako has rightly argued, from the perspective of Pentecost it is apparent that language is not merely a cultural tool but a theological tool as well. Mother-tongue theologizing helps grassroots participation in theological discourses. Since Christian theology is meant for all Christians, it must not be too academic and technical to exclude the participation of the masses who lack formal theological training. The significance of mother-tongues in missions is also highlighted by Ekem (2007, 47) in his assertion that “The varied mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable material for interpretation, study Bibles and commentaries.” Mother-tongue development in Africa, for example, will promote oral theology—“the interpretation of the biblical message through sermons, teachings, prayers, discussions, songs, witnessing and any oral communication” (Gehman 1987, 28)—which Africa, being an oral society, needs to enhance public theological discourse. While many Bible translation projects have taken place since the missionary era and still many more projects are ongoing, there are many African mother-tongues into which the Bible has not been translated. This means that there are many Africans who have no linguistic access to God’s word or access to God’s word through other African vernacular with which they are familiar. The need for more translation work to be done in Africa is obvious. Christian mission must therefore take the issues of linguistic development and mother-tongue translation of the Bible seriously.

From the Pentecostal perspective, there is no superior language; all languages are accepted by God. At Babel, God judged those proud men by confusing their languages (Gen 11:1–9). At Pentecost, God turned this confusion of tongues into a miracle of miraculous speech that brought great blessing upon the people. There was therefore a reverse in the curse of Babel as people from different lands who had gathered heard the *glossolalia* spoken by the disciples in their different languages. Hence, Pentecost provides an answer to the chaos at Babel and restores humanity, the deeper significance being that “God speaks to men and women—always in the vernacular. Divine communication is never in a sacred, esoteric, hermetic language; rather it is such that ‘all of us hear...in our own languages...the wonders of God’” (Bediako 1995, 61). With the understanding that a proper comprehension of the Christian faith is rooted in the indigenous languages, Christian missionaries must employ the vernacular language as a theological and linguistic tool for any authentic Christian mission. To promote the use of mother-tongue in Christian mission, there is the need to have the Bible and other Christian literature published in the vernacular. This will also enhance mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics and theologizing. Finally, because of Pentecost, people will no longer go to Jerusalem to worship God in the Hebrew language; they are free, in the far corners of the earth, to worship God in their own languages.

6. Pentecost and Christian Mission

Pentecost founded the early church as a missionary community, in which everyone is involved in the mission by receiving the Spirit for evangelistic purpose. That Pentecost serves as the basis for (cross-cultural) mission is seen from Acts 1:8 where Jesus told the disciples that the Pentecost experience would empower them to be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the world. Earlier, Jesus had commanded his disciples to remain

in Jerusalem until they had been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). The expression “to be clothed with power” means to be fully and completely enfolded in the presence of God. The empowerment for mission comes from the Holy Spirit. The word “power” from which “empowerment” derives, according to Wright (2006, 35–36) is “the ability to do things,” “the capacity to accomplish goals, or influence the outcome of events and processes,” that is, “effective action, making a difference, influencing events, changing the way things are or will be.” Luke locates the beginning of the Christian mission in the founding gift of the Spirit, and emphasizes that the Spirit’s power not only begins the mission, but sustains it as well. Luke’s empowerment–witness motif (that is, “you will receive power” and as a result “you will be my witnesses,” cf. 1:8) is key to the understanding of Pentecost and the message of the entire book of Acts. It is important to note that each of the seven key outpourings in Acts resulted in powerful missional witness: Pentecost, the First Jerusalem outpouring (2:1–4); the Second Jerusalem outpouring (4:31); the Samaritan outpouring (8:14–17); the Damascene outpouring (9:15–18); the Caesarean outpouring (10:44–48); the Antiochian outpouring (13:1–3); the Ephesian outpouring (19:1–7) (Miller 2011, 29). The church’s geographical progress from Jerusalem to Rome (as found in Acts) was made possible because the Holy Spirit acted through the disciples.

The “sound like the blowing of a mighty wind” (Acts 2:2) also has some missional implications. Recent hurricanes have shown that wind is among the most powerful elements in the world (Miller 2011, 41). As noted earlier, Jesus once used the metaphor of wind to describe the Spirit’s redemptive power (John 3:8). From the Pentecost perspective then, “The Spirit works tirelessly throughout the world inspiring and empowering the church, revealing Christ to the lost, and drawing people unto him” (Miller 2011, 41). Stott (1994, 60) therefore rightly asserts that, “Without the Holy

Spirit, Christian [mission] would be inconceivable, even impossible.... As a body without a breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead.”

The Holy Spirit is strategist and tactical director of the broader mission of the Church (1:8; 4:29–31). He appoints missionaries, commissions them, and directs their paths. Examples abound in the book of Acts to support the fact that the Spirit empowers and directs believers for cross-cultural mission. For example, the Spirit arranged for the missionary encounter between Philip and the African official (Acts 8:29); the Spirit instructed Peter to meet the Gentile messengers of Cornelius for a missionary course (10:19); the Spirit confirmed the salvation of the Gentiles by falling on them (10:44–47; 11:15–16); the Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul out on their mission to evangelize even Gentiles (13:2–4); and the Spirit guided Paul and Silas on their cross-cultural mission (16:6–7). These examples validate Keener’s (2009, 72) assertion that “God empowers his people with the Spirit to cross cultural barriers, to worship God, and to form one new, multicultural community of worshipers committed to Christ and to one another.” Luke insists that the Church’s missional activity is to always be fully directed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit expands the Church, continually urging the believers beyond their natural boundaries. Pentecost is hence to be seen as the drive or stimulus for missionary activities.

Discussions on the missional dimension of the Pentecost cannot be complete without a word being said about efforts made by African Pentecostal churches in this regard.³ The Pentecostal movement is one of the largest Christian movements in Africa. Pentecostalism places high

³ The discussions here are not in any way meant to say that historic mission churches or other Christian movements are not doing well in mission. Historic mission churches have contributed and continue to contribute to the missionary enterprise of the Christian Church. The author has chosen to focus on Pentecostals because of the emphasis they place on the events associated with the Day of Pentecost.

emphasis on pneumatological experiences. Its members believe that the original Pentecostal experience in Acts 2 can and must be experienced by every Christian; therefore, they consciously and earnestly seek this experience (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013). The Pentecostal emphasis on pneumatological phenomena corroborates well African religious beliefs which also place emphasis on spiritual phenomena (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013). According to Kalu (2008, 125) “the rise of Pentecostalism intensified the passion for mission and enlarged the scale of missionary enterprise.” This is so because being Spirit-filled and Spirit-led gives one the enthusiasm to partake in the mission. The mission-mindedness of Pentecostals goes hand in hand with eschatological focus. Pentecostals preach a lot about the *Parousia* (or the second coming of Christ). They are “credited for the transformation of faith that has been underway in Africa since the middle of the 20th century” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015, 14). They organize large crusades in villages and cities to win souls for Christ. They also make holiness a core part of their message. Missionary endeavors cannot be successful and appropriate without converts being taught to be holy. It is important to note that the Pentecostal emphasis on holiness has reduced in recent times (Atiemo 2016, 12–13).

Furthermore, “the concept of mission and practice of mission in African Pentecostalism emerged just as much as responses to the indigenous worldviews and cultures, the contemporary experiences of communities in the face of the collapse of their economies, and their appropriation of biblical resources as they did for the surging intensity of secularism” (Kalu 2008, 125). Sanneh (2009) has argued that the gospel message must translate into every culture just as Christ incarnated into the human environment. African Pentecostals take this issue seriously and contextualize their theology to address issues related to the influence of spiritual forces on human lives.

7. Conclusion

The passage examined in this study is a pivotal section of the book of Acts, revealing the significance and purpose of the Spirit’s empowerment for global mission. From the study the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, God is in control of history; he determines what happens as well as when, where, and how it happens. This conclusion derives from the fact that the Pentecost experience was a fulfillment of God’s prophecy which he sovereignly made manifest at his own appointed time. This fact connects well with the second conclusion that God offers divine guidance to those who willingly submit to his preordained plan, making sure that everything plays out in accordance with his will and purpose. Thirdly, God’s salvific plan is not limited to a group of people; rather God is willing to save all who come to Christ through faith. This is evident from the fact that the Pentecost experience distributed the gospel message to all people who were present irrespective of their place of origin. God’s message through the disciples was heard in various languages, meaning the gospel proclamation must overcome any linguistic or cultural barrier. More so, the Church must prioritize missions. Any Christian denomination that does not make missionary activity its prime focus is not living up to expectation. For the Christian Church to fulfill its mandate, it must be called back to its Pentecostal and missionary roots, and to the absolute necessity of the Spirit’s empowering for the effective participation in the mission of God. Contemporary missionaries can only succeed if they are empowered by the Spirit. The Church must therefore seek empowerment from the Spirit for missions, both locally and globally.

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