

Spirit Hermeneutics for African Pentecostalism: A Hermeneutic for a Jubilar Mission

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Abstract

The significance of African Pentecostal churches in the global expansion of Christianity is undeniable. However, the impact of African Pentecostalism is being impaired by the problem of materialism. This ailment has come from African Traditional Religion, which promises immediate material and financial success, and also from the prosperity teachings of North America. Materialism is promoted by subjective interpretations of Scripture that downplay their objective meaning. This article aims to show that a robust Pentecostal spirituality demands a contextualized approach to Scripture that liberates African Pentecostalism from the fetters of materialism, thereby empowering African churches for a jubilar mission. A theological method of introspection, developed by J. N. K. Mugambi, is deployed. This method can examine the challenge of African

Pentecostal churches and facilitate the construction of a contextual hermeneutic that nurtures the emancipatory task of the Spirit. Such a hermeneutic can be instantiated by Spirit hermeneutics. Spirit hermeneutics equally entertains an experiential and a cognitive approach to Scripture. This hermeneutic rectifies highly subjective interpretations, engages the African context in a relevant manner, and constructs a favorable ground for the flourishing of sound Pentecostal spirituality on the continent. The significance of the article is to help African Pentecostal churches focus on the purpose of the gift of the Spirit in such a way as to sustain the impact of the Pentecostal movement in Africa.

Keywords

Spirit hermeneutics, Pentecostal, introspection, materialism, jubilar

About the author

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

1. Introduction

As Africa is located in the Global South, to which the center of gravity of Christianity has shifted, the significance of African Pentecostal churches in the global expansion of Christianity is undeniable. This is an opportunity given to the Global South that should not be taken for granted. Rather, this should be considered as an invitation to participate in the mission of God as co-workers with him (2 Cor 6:1). Thus, African churches should be mindful of practices that could hinder the goal for which it was empowered by the Holy Spirit. To maintain the momentum of the contemporary Pentecostal movement, and not quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), African churches have to be watchful of their practices and teachings.

In order to undertake the task of maintaining the work of the Spirit in Africa, one has to scrutinize the contemporary terrain of African churches. The first step is self-assessment of the African church. Such an assessment reveals that it is being infected with practices and teachings that do not serve the goal for which it was empowered by the Holy Spirit. One notices the commodification of the gifts of the Spirit for the benefit of some “apostles,” “prophets,” “pastors,” and “bishops.” Such abuse is accompanied by false teachings which justify the malpractices. At the root of such malpractices and false teaching lies a materialism legitimized by an excessive focus on the experiential and subjective interpretation of Scripture. The accentuation of subjective and experiential expressions of faith comes at the demise of objective and cognitive engagement with Scripture.

These problems highlight the need for a relevant and sound hermeneutic. This article attempts to demonstrate that the attainment of a robust Pentecostal spirituality demands a contextualized application of Scripture that aids the African Pentecostal movement to participate more

profoundly in the jubilar task of the Spirit, and so play its part in bringing freedom. In this manner, the ultimate purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit will always be before us, and the participation of African churches in the *missio Dei* will be sustained.

At a broader level, this article deploys the theological method of introspection and self-criticism developed by J. N. K. Mugambi (1995), to offer a thick description of the contextual terrain of the African Pentecostal movement. The first step focuses on African Pentecostalism. The next step elucidates the method of this study by looking at introspection as a method and the lineaments of Pentecostal hermeneutics. After that, the challenge of African Pentecostalism is outlined. Next, Spirit hermeneutics is proposed as an appropriate method of approaching Scripture. The penultimate section recontextualizes the Jubilee in Luke 4:16–30. Finally, the significance of Spirit hermeneutics for participation in the *missio Dei* for African Pentecostal churches will be discussed.

2. African Pentecostalism

2.1 Background

The contribution of the Pentecostal movement to the African church’s growth and expansion is significant. It has been noted that such expansion of Christianity in Africa is part of a larger shift in global Christianity to the Global South (Adegbile 2020, 30). Philip Jenkins (2002, 7–9) says that, despite the pessimistic assumptions of the demise of Christianity, the number of Christians in the Southern Hemisphere, notably, Latin America, Africa, and Asia, has continued to grow. This

phenomenon has been dubbed the southward movement of Christianity. The assertion of Jenkins has been affirmed by other scholars who attribute the impact of the Pentecostal movement as a significant factor for the exponential growth of Christianity in the Global South (Miller and Yamamori 2007, 1, 20). The success of the Pentecostal movement to attain such stature is ascribed to its adaptability to diverse cultural contexts. Such fruitful engagement of this movement with local contexts has yielded a multi-faceted form of Christianity with myriad shades of experiences, rituals, organizational forms, and strategies. The multiple expressions of the Pentecostal movement have rendered it difficult to define as a generalizable phenomenon (Anderson et al. 2010, 1, 4).

2.2 *Overview of Pentecostalism*

The Pentecostal movement has multiple manifestations in different contexts. Therefore, to define and study Pentecostalism, various approaches are developed that account for its variegated nature. To address the issue of this article, “the theological approach” was selected to define Pentecostalism (Anderson 2010, 25–27). This approach can be used as a method of introspection to define Pentecostalism by identifying its normative theological elements and so offer a definition. Thus, the theological approach attempts to define Pentecostalism as a group that shares some distinctive theological features with an “emphasis on the Holy Spirit” (Anderson 2010, 25). In this theological definition, one aspect that characterizes the Pentecostal movement is the emphasis on the experience of the presence of God in the lives of believers. For instance, speaking in tongues has been originally linked with baptism in the Holy Spirit which recapitulates the Pentecost event in Acts 2. Such an experience was the defining event that took place at Azusa Street at the beginning of the twentieth century, usually taken as the origin of

the contemporary Pentecostal movement. Even though the emphasis on speaking in tongues as a defining characteristic of the Pentecostal movement has been moderated over time, the experience of the gifts of the Spirit in the empowerment of believers for being effective witnesses still denotes Pentecostalism (Jacobsen 2011, 51–53).

Similarly, it is assumed that the experience of the Holy Spirit should lead to an emphasis on orthopathy (i.e., right passion) (Jacobsen 2011, 52). However, the emphasis on orthopathy does not mean the denial of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In this regard, the theological approach, which also reflects essentialist features, affirms the setting up of boundaries with respect to Pentecostal teaching (orthodoxy). Similarly, this approach devises a system of conduct for the practices in experiencing the gifts of the Spirit (orthopraxy) (Droogers 2010, 36–37). Thus, Droogers (2010, 31) posits that an essentialist feature connotes a description of “complex phenomena in a commonsense manner to a small number of stereotypical characteristics, thought to be the essence of a phenomenon.” So, consideration of the orthopathic dimension is an expression of acceptance of embodied spirituality. The appreciation of the physical or affective dimension of Spirit encounter has grown out of the holistic worldview of Pentecostalism. Here, James K. A. Smith (2010, 63) avers that Pentecostal spirituality is characterized by “a holistic affirmation of embodiment.” This holistic spirituality is derived from a staunch affirmation of the goodness of the created order and the valorization of matter in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The rejection of the dualism of a Manichean strain, which considers bodies and material elements as evil, is “one of the most underappreciated elements of a pentecostal [sic] worldview” (Smith 2010, 42).

In the same vein, the other defining trait of Pentecostal spirituality is the expectant disposition toward the unpredictable workings of the

Spirit in the lives of believers. Here, the transcendence of the Spirit necessitates expectancy. Smith (2010, 36) propounds that such openness and expectancy characterize the spontaneity that is associated with Pentecostal worship. The expectant attitude of the disciples that has been reflected at Pentecost in Acts 2 defines the openness that is exhibited in Pentecostal spirituality today. Such openness is nothing other than an invitation to experience the Spirit anew, or “openness to God doing something *differently or new*” (Smith 2010, 36; emphasis original).

3. Method

3.1 *The Theological Method of Introspection*

The theological method of introspection and self-criticism is deployed in this study. It was developed by J. N. K. Mugambi in his effort to develop a theology of social reconstruction for Africa (Mugambi 1995). Mugambi (2003, 23) avers that theological introspection and self-criticism are critical to examine the cultural footings of African theological thought. The process of building a theology of social reconstruction assumes normative theological themes like abundant life (John 10:10). Similarly, Mugambi (2003, 25) quotes at length the proclamation of Jesus from Luke 4:18–19 and Isaiah 61:1–2 as rich sources of normative theological themes that await a relevant application in the African context. Therefore, this method can be applied in this article because it has the potential for a critical self-evaluation of the African context, and also shares the theme of contextualization for a better future for Africa. However, as useful as this methodology is, this study does not agree with everything Mugambi stands for. For example, Ukachukwu Chris Manus (2003, 4) laments that Mugambi considers figures like Nehemiah and fails to reckon Jesus of Nazareth as the “*Master Reconstructor*” (emphasis original).

Following the definition of Pentecostalism offered above one can explore the lineaments that characterize Pentecostal hermeneutics. These lineaments can be deployed in a normative manner to identify alien elements that have intruded the African context.

3.2 *Lineaments of a Pentecostal Hermeneutic*

The recognition of the unpredictable workings of the Spirit in Acts 2 require a *unique* hermeneutic that responds to the surprising acts of God. Similarly, it also demands hermeneutical courage to describe what is happening as the work of the Spirit. Smith (2010, 31, 36) notes that the hermeneutical boldness exhibited by Peter affirmed that the event is the fulfillment of God’s promise (Joel 2:28–29). Peter’s interpretation of Pentecost confirms the consummation of God’s plan on that specific day. On the one hand, the explanation of Pentecost by recourse to Joel’s promise can be taken as “an *interpretation*” which is posed in terms of “this is that” (Smith 2010, 31; emphasis original). This interpretation could be taken as an affirmative hermeneutics, asserting what it *really* means. Here, Peter is affirming the empowerment of God and his immanent presence, which was being experienced audibly and visibly (Stibbe 1998, 184).

On the other hand, Peter’s correction of the crowd’s interpretation of the noise—that it was due to drunkenness—could be taken as a “*counterinterpretation*” (Smith 2010, 31; emphasis original). Such counter-interpretation can be reckoned as a negative hermeneutic. Here, the interpretation attests to what is not meant. Thus, it is not enough to limit interpretation only in the affirmative modality by asserting “this is that.” The other competing interpretation should be challenged by a head-on repudiation of “this is *not* that.” Overall, Pentecost marks a shift in time to the last days (Acts 2:17). The long-awaited promise

has been inaugurated “*today*” in the immanent dimension (Smith 2010, 31; emphasis original). The transcendent Spirit has come down to be experienced by the expectant disciples. In this manner, the tension between transcendence and immanence is kept in balance.

Therefore, Smith (2010, 31) calls for a hermeneutic that rings in tune with the above characteristics of Pentecostal spirituality. In the postmodern context where “conflict of interpretations” is the rule, the call for such a hermeneutic is warranted to present a sound Pentecostal interpretation of Scripture and events (31). As noted above, a Pentecostal hermeneutic should be capable of accomplishing two criteria. First, it must discern the move of God and explain it in terms of an affirmative mode (this *is* that). Second, it must disavow aberrant explanations in a counter-interpretive pose (this is *not* that). Within this framework, such a hermeneutic equilibrates orthopathy as well as orthodoxy and orthopraxy. It valorizes embodiment with its affective dimensions without subduing cognitive aspects, balances transcendence and immanence (Yong 2011, 163), and poses a sense of eagerness and expectancy to encounter God. Thus, the search for scholarship that could fulfill such a hermeneutical capability is warranted. Craig S. Keener’s *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (2016) is appropriate for such an engagement.

Before delving into the details of how Spirit hermeneutics proposed by Keener is valid for contemporary African Pentecostalism, one must examine the terrain of the African Pentecostal churches to sort out the major challenge that impedes the impact and growth of the Pentecostal movement. To this end, the method of introspection is applied below.

4. The Challenge of African Pentecostalism

The growth of the Pentecostal movement across the world takes different trajectories as it encounters different cultures, so its nature is variegated rather than homogenous. Pentecostalism has such a great variety of expressions and each one has its own version of Pentecostal hermeneutics (Martin 2018, 7). This variety in nature does not necessarily pose a threat to the essential nature of the movement. However, when one introspectively scrutinizes the terrain of African churches, one encounters certain questionable practices and teachings appearing under the guise of the Pentecostal movement. Scholars are increasingly expressing concern regarding the mutation that African Pentecostalism is undergoing as it evolves into its contemporary form (Boaheng, Amoako, and Boahen 2023, 1357). Particularly concerning is the intrusion of materialism, which is tarnishing the African churches and vitiating the impact of the Pentecostal movement on the continent.

A closer examination reveals two Trojan horses that have facilitated the entry of materialism into the heart of the African Pentecostal movement. The first Trojan horse comes from African Traditional Religions (ATR). In ATR the gods and ancestors are believed to secure material blessings (riches, health, good harvest, and fertility) alongside spiritual bliss (Wariboko 2012, 41). Moreover, the existential threat posed by the evil spiritual powers has contributed to the emergence of a new version of Pentecostalism, labeled neo-Pentecostalism. In this version, it is not the Spirit of Christ who is at the center but a “prophet” who is anointed and uses anointed objects as tokens of protection against bad spirits *à la* ATR. This influence of ATR arose because Christians were not content with mainstream Christianity which failed to meet the existential threats of believers (Banda 2018, 61).

The other source of materialism that is ravaging African Pentecostalism comes from North America (Orogun and Pillay 2021, 8–9). The glimmering scepter of materialism carried by prosperity teachers of North America is aided by a subjective reading of Scripture. Such readings lead to applications that cater to emotions at the expense of a cognitive approach to Scripture. The prosperity teachings appear in various stripes. For instance, the faith teachings derived from Kenneth E. Hagin that focus on material success and wealth have devastated the modern Pentecostal movement (Boaheng, Amoako, and Boahen 2023, 1357). Similarly, the influence of word-of-faith teachings by Kenneth Copeland and Oral Roberts in contemporary African Pentecostalism is immense.

The teaching of *seed faith* holds that sowing seed money leads to a harvest of material, physical, and spiritual prosperity. Such giving, which enriches the ministers and impoverishes the members, is rightly critiqued as “transactional” (Asamoah-Gyadu, Anderson, and Wariboko 2013, 79; Gbote and Kgatla 2014, 7). Financial or other material gifts to the ministers attain a quasi-magical nature. Only the minister is advantaged and there is no benefit to society (Wariboko 2012, 37). The paradoxical co-existence of rich ministers and poor members has been underlined in the assessment given by the Theology Working Group of the Lausanne Movement. It states that “[Prosperity teaching] vastly enriches those who preach it, but leaves multitudes no better off than before, with the added burden of disappointed hopes” (Theology Working Group 2010).

Classical Pentecostalism emphasizes personal holiness, warns against the dangers of materialism, and has an expectant attitude toward the imminent coming of Christ as the ultimate judge. However, in the neo-Pentecostal version, purity and morality are not sufficiently emphasized. Rather, God is depicted as a mere deliverer of material wealth and bodily health. Eschatological expectancy is replaced by an existential

focus on the here and now (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015, 108–109). The over-emphasis on the experience of complete health and material prosperity in this world attests to the unbalanced eschatological understanding of prosperity teachers. Such a myopic focus on the immanent dimension has failed to envision the transcendental horizon of the operation of the Spirit—the unbalanced eschatology of prosperity teachings suffers from vertigo that tends to fall toward an over-realized eschatology (Boaheng, Amoako, and Boahen 2023, 1364). In this regard, the hermeneutic deployed in the prosperity-focused neo-Pentecostalism tones down the already-not-yet thrust of the biblical horizon. Hence, the fixation on the *already* dimension results from a flattened and literal interpretation of biblical texts. Thus, the Bible is reduced to a document that only speaks of personal promises of material success. Therefore, the immanent aspect is elevated at the demise of the eschatological horizon and the Bible is reduced to a collection of personalized covenantal commitments to be fulfilled “*now*” (Gifford 2008, 206; emphasis original).

More specifically, the basic tenet of the “prosperity gospel” is that “God rewards faithful Christians with good health, financial success, and material wealth” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 202). Material wealth will increase if one has enough faith, confesses prosperity, and offers gifts to ministries (Asamoah 2013, 198). Christianity is characterized by success in material or financial aspects. If such success is not realized it is said to be due to a lack faith or the presence of spiritual forces that necessitate deliverance, which has to be performed by the minister (Gifford 2004, 172).

Prosperity teachings deploy a subjective interpretation of texts that address only the emotional aspect of individuals. Such an approach precludes a rigorous cognitive approach that attempts to comprehend the text with due attention to the contextual, historical, and cultural

elements. To attain success, prosperity teachers recklessly employ verses in declarations that are reminiscent of the speech-act theory of J. L. Austin (1975). In this theory, an authoritative personality can deploy words to bring to effect what is said. Such authority is exclusively held by a prophet or an anointed person who can declare God's promises into the lives of believers, thereby effecting a performative act that brings out the realization of the proclaimed words (Gifford 2008, 206). This power can only be released by the anointed person when they "call for God's power to descend on the believer" (Banda 2018, 57).

These teachers select random texts and take them out of their context to find favorable applications. They do not take time to savor the rich cultural tapestry, linguistic artistry, and historical circumstance of the text in question. Such hermeneutics do violence to the biblical texts and do not lead to accurate applications in the present context. It is a univocal reading that undermines the cultural, literary, and historical context of texts (Keener 2016, 147). Literal readings predominate the practice of prosperity teaching because of the hegemony of the reader's interest. The horizon of the author is subdued to render a meaning distorted by the prism of the present reader's context. This is in concert with the postmodern reader-centered approach of hermeneutics. In this approach, a reader can construct an interpretive system that extorts meaning out of a text that serves their self-interest (Keener 2016, 147).

Although the affirmation of emotional experience is part and parcel of the holistic worldview of Pentecostal hermeneutics, the overemphasis on affective elements could lead to unbalanced sensationalism. Historically, the Pentecostal movement has gained dominance as a reaction to the dry intellectualism that merely subscribes to orthodoxy (Goldingay 1996, 179–180). Pentecostalism has rectified the excesses of cognitive appeal that do not address the emotional dimension.

Pentecostal spirituality has exchanged the apathetic nature of orthodoxy for an affective nature that affirms experiential practices. However, the over-affirmation of the experiential dimension displayed by prosperity teachings tends to stifle cognitive expression of faith. Such an anti-intellectual bent results from installing emotional experience as the sole arbiter for adjudicating spiritual truth (Gifford 1987, 82).

Therefore, the disdain for critical thinking and textual study "as too cerebral and non-experiential" (Nel 2023, 2) allows "an adrenaline rush" that caters to a hermeneutics of prosperity which bypasses the labors of exegesis (Keener 2016, 147). In this regard, one expression of emotional excess that is evident in the biblical interpretations of prosperity teachings is the formulaic declaration, "Name it, claim it" (Mashau and Kgatle 2019, 2–3). Such an approach depicts the interpretive framework usually associated with prosperity teachings. In this approach, one's experience and personal pre-understanding determine the meaning of the respective texts. As noted earlier, there is no need to understand the cultural, historical, and semantic context of the horizon of the author. Rather, an immediate acquisition of meaning is deployed at the cost of grammatical-historical exegesis (White and Aikins 2021, 273). This proof-texting approach could be described as a type of *eisegesis*, reading into texts what one wants to read (Barron 2022, 94).

Recently, the formulaic declaration has been upgraded to the form "name it, claim it, grab it!" This is an adaptation from Bishop Dag Heward-Mills who wrote a book entitled *Name It, Claim It, Take It* (Heward-Mills 2008). Bishop Heward-Mill's method of interpretation is focused on "faith," the exercise of which guarantees the reception of material, financial, physical, and spiritual breakthroughs. The faith that unlocks such prosperity is more important than "a holy, sanctified, and

righteous life” (White and Aikins 2021, 279). Here, one can notice that the hermeneutical grid of faith is depicted in an abstract and impersonal manner that is devoid of a personal relationship with God. Such abstraction has dissociated holiness, which determines our relationship with God, from faith. Similarly, God is reduced to be a mechanical deliverer to the demands of the “name it, claim it, take it” declarations that are offered in faith. The more aggressive form (grab it) seems to add a sense of urgency, immediacy, and violence to the demands of faith. Thus, such formulas betray emotive dimensions which easily manipulate the interpretative process by displacing a cogent and responsible reading of texts.

From the above introspective examination and thick description of the contemporary African Pentecostal church, one can note that the major factor for the subtle derailment of the African Pentecostal movement from its trajectory is the intrusion of materialism. To this end, what is critically needed is, first, a hermeneutic that frees the African Pentecostal movement from the materialism that is fixated on the immanent. Such liberating hermeneutics restores the already-not-yet paradigm of the Bible that balances realized eschatology with consummate eschatology. Second, such a hermeneutic should unfetter the church from the grip of subjective interpretation and offer a reading that is anchored in the cultural, linguistic, and historical study of texts. Third, such a hermeneutic should free the church from materialism, which has been instrumentalized by prosperity preachers when they use experiential and affective interpretations of Scripture to serve their agenda.

So far, the introspective method has allowed an examination of the African Pentecostal movement to expose the major problem. To facilitate the flourishing of the Pentecostal movement in Africa, a contextual and emancipatory hermeneutic that is both relevant and potent should be

applied. Thus, one can employ Spirit hermeneutics, as it rings in tune with the method at hand. This is dealt with in the next section.

5. Spirit Hermeneutics for African Pentecostal Churches

The prosperity teachings associated with the newer version of Pentecostalism are disfiguring African Pentecostal spirituality and the problem is predominantly a hermeneutical issue. A hermeneutic that rectifies the imbalances of prosperity teachings can be found in Spirit Hermeneutics propounded by Craig Keener (2016). Any hermeneutic that takes Pentecost as a springboard qualifies as “Pentecostal Hermeneutics.” However, Keener has chosen the title *Spirit Hermeneutics*. On the one hand, “the elements that characterize a good ‘Pentecostal’ hermeneutic are elements that should characterize any truly Christian and Spirit-led hermeneutic” (3). In the same vein, Keener posits that the scope of Spirit Hermeneutics is not delimited to giving attention to a charismatic reading of Scripture. Interpreting Scripture “in the light of Pentecost” is the duty and responsibility of all professing Christians (285). However, in terms of history, the emphasis on the role of the Spirit in interpretation predates the experience of the Pentecostal movement (287). Regarding emphasis, Keener (2016, 281) posits that the spread of Pentecostalism is ascribed more to the “core emphasis on the Spirit than because of its distinctive emphasis on tongues.” Spirit hermeneutics has a wider Christian scope than Pentecostal hermeneutics. In this regard, Spirit hermeneutics can be said to be “a *Christian* hermeneutic” (288, emphasis added) as it displays an ecumenical and global scope because it includes all who have gifts of the Spirit in the body of Christ (285).

Moreover, Keener (2016, 7) follows an epistemological approach that undergirds a Spirit hermeneutic. He claims that such an epistemology

is “suggested by and pointing toward the voice of Scripture.” The unique aspect of Spirit hermeneutics lies “on reading that moves beyond” the horizon of the author or original text. This does not mean that the ancient text is de-emphasized. Rather, it remains an authoritative foundation for interpretation (19). In elaborating on the characteristics of Spirit hermeneutics, Keener offers three features that characterize it. It is experiential, missional, and eschatological (286). However, his emphasis lies on the experiential reading of texts.

An experiential reading is defined as a reading that is characterized by “believing to the depths of our being what we find in the text.” Hence, it is an engagement that caters to the encouragement, exhortation, or other demands of the text (25). Experiential reading depends on a sense of expectancy cognizant of the fact that God does not perform his plans in a formulaic manner. An experiential approach reckons that God works in unexpected and surprising ways (204). This goes in concert with the characteristic of Pentecostal spirituality which displays an attitude of openness to God’s new operations in the present, immanent context. Such openness facilitates an entry into the world of the text to encounter God, to allow ourselves to be challenged or comforted in a manner that corresponds to the way the text was communicated in the first context (151).

Such experiential reading is founded on an epistemology of faith or trust. This is contrary to a hermeneutic of suspicion, which is marked by skepticism and unbelief (171). An epistemology of faith is derived from a trusting relationship that obeys God’s demands (287). Therefore, a reading based on an epistemology of faith entails an “expectation [that] God who is active in the narrative world of the text” is capable of talking to us now (172). In this regard, faith is regarded as “an epistemic commitment” in that it invokes a decision (162).

A responsible experiential reading of Scripture does not succumb to unbridled or pure subjectivity during an interpretative process. Such subjective reading looks for “a particular ‘feeling’ about a text or some ‘deep’ meaning unrelated to the less ‘spiritual’ surface meaning” (25). The intrusion of pure subjectivity in the experiential reading of Scripture is liable for abuse of emotional indulgences as could be seen from past and contemporary Pentecostal experiences. This necessitates a return to Scripture to understand the meaning of the text in its original context and form (121). This means that, to control an untrammelled subjective experiential interpretation, “an objective standard” or “a canon” that serves as a comparison is needed (112). Thus, Scripture has an “epistemic primacy,” which means that it possesses the capacity to adjudicate over tradition or other subjective spiritual experiences. In other words, Scripture is endowed with an epistemic priority to verify or falsify any subjective claims (104).

Similarly, the canonicity of Scripture as a measuring stick does not mean that one can select verses that accord with their experiences. This practice is a process of justification of our experiences, not a subjection of our experience against the measuring standard (115). This leads us to the necessity of anchoring subjective experience with an objective study of Scripture (269). However, the text of Scripture is presented to us in a cultural, linguistic, and historical framework (68). Therefore, an exegetical study of texts demands the study of history, culture, and language. To accomplish an exegetical study, Keener recapitulates the basic principles of conventional exegesis in such a way as to comprehend the voice of the original meaning (117). He claims that delineating “the designed sense” of the ancient meaning is a critical objective of a hermeneutical task. The designed sense is defined as “the sense projected by the ideal author or at least the ancient cultural sense” (99). Despite the difficulty of accessing

the authors' thought processes, Keener avers that it is possible to search for the purposes that the ancient texts seek to attain. This is done by inferring from the texts. Recognizing the design of the text directs us toward the relevance of the texts in their application in the present context (100, 139).

In this regard, the attention given to the relevance of ancient texts in our context—contextualization—is considered a distinctive element in Spirit hermeneutics. Keener (2016, 150–151) propounds a “both-and” approach to complete his hermeneutical cycle. Here, the examination of the text's original meaning is not the final step. Rather, Spirit hermeneutics is concerned with the meaning communicated in today's new settings or its recontextualization for the present context. To ascertain a relevant application in the new contexts, Keener deploys relevance theory, where texts are approached as a function of communication with due regard to the cultural milieu that imparts meaning to them (69).

In this theory, an effective communication process entails inference of information that has been left implicit from the context of the cultural milieu that is shared by the communicator and initial audience. Such inference is critical in “secondary communication,” a situation in which one is not the original audience or addressee of the texts, and the texts do not envisage one's socio-linguistic contexts. Recontextualization to the present context is possible in a situation where “adequate contextual effects” are met (145). A better understanding of the original sense or design of the ancient text allows a sound application to new contexts. Thus, according to Keener (2016, 247), the original communication can be received with respect, and its authority can be recognized to its full extent. This completes the circle of Spirit hermeneutics.

Therefore, the approach of “both-and” maintains the tension between the horizon of the text in undergoing exegesis and the horizon of the reader in sorting out appropriate recontextualizations, without slackening or over-emphasizing either one or the other. An emphasis on the exegetical process offers information without an application. Obsession on the present horizon leads to a free ride over texts resulting in unrelated and irrelevant contextualizations. Moreover, Keener (2016, 258) asserts that the role of the Spirit is critical in the exploration of both horizons and in linking the gap between them. This is “the new dynamic” that results from the holistic “both-and” approach of Spirit hermeneutics. In this new dynamic, the Spirit's involvement in the inspiration of the original authors is acknowledged. Hence, the textual process of exegesis is not undermined. Similarly, the role of the Spirit in the illumination of readers is asserted and the importance of the Spirit in the guidance of an analogous application is affirmed (117, 286).

Within the framework of this new dynamic, an excursion between subjectivity and objectivity is also maintained. An emphasis on the side of subjective guidance of the Spirit needs to be put to the test of an objective standard (118), whereas objective guidance should be balanced with new experiential encounters with God (288). As the tenor of Spirit hermeneutics lies in the subjective guidance of the Spirit in recontextualization, since “the Spirit has already inspired texts in their ancient form,” (Keener 2016, 142) more emphasis is given to an experiential reading of Scripture (286).

As noted above, alongside the experiential reading, the thrust of Keener's Spirit Hermeneutics involves missional and eschatological readings. These readings seem to have a marginal role in Keener. However, by employing the epistemological grid installed in Spirit hermeneutics, one can undertake a full-fledged experiential, missional,

and eschatological reading of one of the programmatic texts from Luke. A specific text is Luke 4:16–30, which Keener refers to while describing a missional reading.

6. A Recontextualization of Jubilee in Luke 4:16–30

Keener (2016, 43) lists the programmatic texts from the Lucan corpus (Luke 4:18–19, 24:45–49, Acts 1:8, 2:16–17; see also Luke 3:4–6) that show the empowerment of the Spirit for missions. These are taken as examples of missional readings alongside other texts. My selection of this text among others is, first, owing to the preponderance of its utilization in the Global South to emphasize the theme of physical and spiritual deliverance (e.g., Jenkins 2006, 105). These are the themes that are emphasized in the prosperity teachings that need to be addressed. Second, it is the text that Mugambi (2003, 25) has selected in demanding a relevant articulation in the African context within the frame of theological introspection. A recontextualized application of this text as a model of a jubilar mission is a response to Mugambi’s call for a new theological motif for a new African context (Mugambi 1995, 39).

An assessment of this Lukan pericope reveals that it connects to the preceding narratives. Starting from the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus (3:22) to the inauguration of his mission (4:18), the activity of the Spirit serves as a link to connect the narratives. After the descent of the Spirit during baptism, the Spirit is active before and after Jesus’s temptation (4:1, 4:14). The event of the descent of the Spirit, which connects with the beginning of the mission, finds its parallel in the wider Lukan corpus of Luke-Acts. At the end of Luke (24:46–49), and the beginning of Acts (1:8), the theme of descent and the beginning of the mission of the disciples

is recapitulated. The activity of the Spirit in the life of Jesus and the disciples is associated with empowerment for mission. The effectiveness of this Spirit empowerment is evident in the aftermath of Pentecost (Tannehill 1986, 58). Hence, one can see how the pericope in Luke 4:16–30 is immediately linked with preceding narratives and with the wider Lukan narrative framework that follows in Acts. The glue of the links is the theme of the Spirit who empowers for mission.

The way the power of the Spirit is utilized by Jesus can be seen in the preceding narrative of temptation. Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” (4:1 NRSV) when he was guided by the Spirit into temptation. The inauguration of the mission of Jesus commenced after the narrative of temptation. This could imply that the temptation is a means of clarification on the purpose of Spirit empowerment. Jesus was tempted in three ways to instrumentalize the power at his disposal: fulfillment of the desires of the flesh (hunger), search for a self-aggrandizing and this-worldly authority and dominion (offer of kingdoms), and craving for self-gratifying, celebrity-styled attention from people (test of invulnerability) (Tannehill 1986, 59). Hence, the passage through this temptation could be taken as a test of proving the correct employment of the power of the Spirit for the mission that follows. Hence, Jesus was fit to pursue the mission of God, which is directed toward the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed (4:18).

The specific nature in which this empowerment is enacted is found in the quotation in 4:18–19. The quotation is taken from Isaiah 61:1–2. A closer look at the composition of the quoted text reveals that it is a “mix-text” (Green 1997, 209). The majority of the quotation in Luke 4:18–19 comes from Isaiah 61:1–2. The recontextualized text from Isaiah 61:1–2 has undergone two differences that should be noted. The first is the omission of “the day of vengeance of our God” (Isa 61:2 NRSV). This

omission downplays the negative connotation of the Isaian message that awaits future fulfillment. The second is an addition from Isaiah 58:6 which says, “to send forth the oppressed in release” (NRSV). This is meant to emphasize the special significance of the word *release*, as a unique feature of the mission of Jesus (Green 1997, 210). Hence, it sheds light on the purpose of empowerment by the Spirit.

In this regard, the double reference to release (Isa 61:2, 58:6) has theological significance in the Gospel of Luke and Acts. Joel B. Green (1997, 211) notes that release has been applied in different ways. First, it is denoted as forgiveness as can be seen in “release from sins” or “forgiveness from sins” (Luke 1:77, 3:3, 24:47; Acts 2:38, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18). The second meaning of release refers to the deliverance from the spiritual and physical captivity of Satan (Luke 13:10–17, Acts 10:38). Here, release denotes a holistic deliverance from diabolic incarceration that inflicts physical and social restriction. According to Green (1997, 212), the last meaning of release is related to “release from debts” (Luke 11:4). This meaning of release is related to the jubilee theme by the emphatic double usage of release in Luke 4:18 as noted earlier.

In this regard, James A. Sanders (1982, 151) posits that a jubilar link is realized by using the word release. The word release in Greek is ἀφῆσις, which is the Septuagint equivalent of שְׁמִטָּה in Deuteronomy 15:9 and דְּרוֹר in Leviticus 15:10 in the Masoretic Text. These two passages legislate the terms and conditions for the Jubilee year. Green (1997, 212) affirms that the jubilar connection is affected by the use of “year of release” in Leviticus 25:10 and the phrase “the year of the Lord’s favor” taken from Isaiah 61:2. These jubilar themes are signals of the consummate, eschatological release that God offers through the mission of Jesus. Hence, the redemption inaugurated by Jesus is not a literal application of jubilee legislation, but it is a deliverance that unfolds God’s ultimate,

eschatological plan of redemption from the root causes of captivity from sin and Satan (Green 1997, 212). This interpretation is an instantiation of a recontextualized deployment of the jubilee theme of release.

An instance of an enactment of the eschatological fulfillment of the jubilee theme of release is vividly seen in the healing of the daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10–17). The scene of healing captures attention because of the dispute with the synagogue official who opposed healing on the Sabbath. But Jesus’s response to this opposition implies that the healing is an enactment of the true Sabbath rest. According to Smith (2018, 152), this rest signifies a release from oppression and injustice that recapitulates the redemption from Egyptian bondage that undergirds the institution of the weekly Sabbath (Deut 5:15).

In this regard, G. B. Caird (1963, 171) asserts that Jesus’s answer emphasizes the necessity for the healing to take place on the Sabbath. The necessity is shown by the word δεῖ, which is translated as “ought” or “necessary” and is also used for the necessity of the cross in Luke 9:22 (Caird 1963, 171). From this, Caird (1963, 171) propounds that the healing on the Sabbath is not the *wrong* day, but rather the best day to do this work which accords with the obligation of release. The liberation of the “weekly release from the bondage of labour” is an immanent experience that awaits its consummation in the eschatological release from all bondages. Therefore, the healing and liberation mission of Jesus the enactments the purposes of the Sabbath rather than profaning its principles (Caird 1963, 171).

A further reading of the Lukan text (4:20–30) reveals the rejection (4:24) of the declaration of “the year of the Lord’s favor” (4:19 NRSV). Green (1997, 217) suggests that there is an irony between the proclamation of the Lord’s favor (4:19) which is not reciprocated with the favor of the people of his town (4:24). Such non-acceptance of the

proclamation is due to the myopic interpretation of the text and the circumscribed messianic expectation, which will unfold when the full-fledged enactment of the message is accomplished (Green 1997, 216). The audience is preoccupied with the release from the burden of Roman oppression. They interpreted the Isaian passage with themselves as the sole recipients of the promised blessings and expected that God would destroy the enemies of Israel. The omission of the theme of vengeance from the Isaiah text may not agree with their expectations. Sanders (1982, 152–154) emphasizes that the phrase “year of the Lord’s favor” is understood to mean “a year acceptable to Israel” by a later Jewish interpretation. The non-acceptability of Jesus’s sermon results from their theological assumptions that God is regarded as “a God of the Jews.” What Jesus has exposed is a “boxed up and domesticated” conception of God. This shows that the mission of Jesus, the blessing of the jubilar release, is not parochially fixed to the here and now, but it incorporates strangers and presumed enemies in God’s own eschatological plan, which cannot be manipulated by human interference.

In the same vein, the summary of the enactment of the jubilee theme of release in Luke 7:21–23 is a clarification of the way it is accomplished. John the Baptist seems to be trapped within the same fixation on the immediate displayed by the people of Nazareth. For John, the power of the Spirit is not yet manifested in the overthrowing of earthly kingdoms and establishing God’s kingdom on earth. John seems to assume that vengeance against the enemies must be accomplished now. However, the fulfillment of the proclamation programmatically inaugurated is executed in a manner unforeseen by John. The theme of release as a liberation from spiritual and physical bondage into wholeness is recapitulated for John (7:21–22). The power of vengeance is not within the precincts of

the present horizon, as Jesus’s reading of the Isaiah text shows. It will be accomplished as per the schedule of God’s eschatological time (Acts 1:7).

Therefore, a contextual, linguistic, and historical study of the Lukan pericope reveals allusions to the jubilee theme of release that has been eschatologically recontextualized in a new context. A missional reading tells us that the power of the Spirit in the life of Jesus is power for the mission of an eschatological, jubilar liberation from sin, Satan, and physical bondage. The possibility of abuse of Spirit empowerment is envisaged in the temptation of Jesus. There is a need for continual vigilance and precaution against the abuse of the gifts of the Spirit for material accumulation and self-aggrandizement. Our experiential and subjective passion has to be in tune not only with the power but also with the passion of the Spirit. In this manner, orthopathy is affirmed. An experiential reading recalls the necessity for a radical openness for a new recontextualization that is anchored by the jubilar operation of the Spirit. Whenever the Spirit is working, there will be freedom from bondage from sin and demons. One can say “this is that” when the Spirit affects his jubilar function of rest and freedom. Subjectivity must be balanced by an objective anchorage of textual study. An eschatological reading remedies our myopic fixation on the immediate and realized eschatology to envisage the transcendental and consummate eschatology that only God fulfills. This was the failure of the people of Nazareth and John the Baptist. The immediate operation of the Spirit must be balanced with an eschatological horizon that awaits ultimate fulfillment, within the bounds of the already-not-yet time frame (Acts 1:7).

Such textual engagement not only leads to emancipation from materialism but also fosters a Pentecostal spirituality for participation in the jubilar nature of the *missio Dei*.

7. Spirit Hermeneutics for Participation in a Jubilar Mission

The empowerment of the Spirit for effective mission is critically needed. One can witness the theme of empowerment of the Spirit in the life of Jesus in his infant narratives, baptism, temptation, and the commencement of his mission. In this regard, Keener (2019, 29) asserts that if Christ, while being God in the flesh, needed the Spirit to carry out his mission, how much more must believers depend on the Spirit to accomplish the task handed to them? Acts 10:38, one of the verses that portray the jubilar ministry of Jesus, shows that missions involve the trinity's participation.

Although it has morphed over time, today one can define *missio Dei* as “a call for the Christian community to worship God as he is.” It is also related to the identity of God who endeavors “from and to all eternity to come to us in creation, reconciliation and redemption” (Flett 2014, 75). Primarily, this definition calls attention to a call for the worship of God. Secondly, this worship is a kind of participation in God's work in history. The above definition is qualified in specific terms as a mission of “God the Father (*missio*) sending God the Son and God the Father and Son sending God the Spirit to accomplish the divine acts of salvation in the world.” Thus, *missio Dei* is essentially *missio Trinitatis* (Thinane 2023, 2). In light of the preceding discussion, one can say that one way of participating in *missio Dei* is by continuing the work of God in a jubilar modality. This entails delivering a jubilar rest from physical infirmity, freedom from the bondage of sin, and demonic enslavement.

The evolving African context demands an emancipatory and contextual hermeneutic that can liberate African churches from the grip of materialism and provide a contextual niche for African Pentecostalism to flourish. This liberation should be done, first, within the bounds of the

excursion of the Spirit that does not hinder a new encounter with God. Second, the experiential dimension of Pentecostal spirituality must be objectively anchored in Scripture, which is the inspired word of God. So, a hermeneutic that discerns authentic experiential and interpretive praxis by offering a valid interpretation is a part of the emancipatory endeavor. Such a hermeneutic should also defy counterfeit teachings and practices that hinder the work of the Spirit in Africa and beyond.

In this regard, Spirit hermeneutics can be applied in the process of liberating African Pentecostalism from the shackles of materialism that impede the growth of Pentecostalism. Similarly, it also helps us to foster a Pentecostal spirituality that facilitates our participation in the emancipatory, jubilar mission of God. This should be done by keeping the tension between subjective and object, and affective and cognitive approaches. The tension should also be kept between the immanence and transcendence of God's activity and the realized and consummate elements of eschatology. Spirit hermeneutics sketches the contours of the precinct within which one can participate in the liberating mission of God.

But how does Spirit hermeneutics facilitate participation in the jubilar mission of God in practical terms? One can mention three areas where such a jubilar mission can be applied. First, as the jubilar proclamation of release has destroyed the fixation on the immediate gratification of the demands of Jesus's audiences and John the Baptist, African churches should be cautious of the pressure from contextual influences of ATR and prosperity teachings from abroad with their offer of immediate material prosperity. In this regard, the already-not-yet time frame should be upheld to challenge the quick-fix material success that is encroaching on the African Pentecostal movement. Hence, a resetting of the expectations of Africans from the Pentecostal movement should be tailored in alignment with God's eschatological horizon. Even if it is God's

will to bless us with material success, the church of Africa must pose the question: “Is this a time to accept money and to accept clothing?” (2 Kgs 5:26 NRSV).

Second, it is high time that the church of Africa nurtures the minds of Africans to develop a critical and cognitive hermeneutical capacity. Such capacity is not antithetical to the operations of the Spirit. Spirit hermeneutics can equip African churches with an objective interpretation of Scripture that prevents manipulation by appeal to emotions. The liberating impulse of Spirit hermeneutics should be revealed in the emancipation from the bondage of excessive subjective and experience-based spirituality by the application of sound and rigorous cognitive engagement with Scripture. The African Pentecostal movement should be accompanied by discipleship programs that facilitate a critical examination of Scripture. Experiential dimensions must be checked against Scripture (Acts 17:11).

Last, the African Pentecostal churches should work in tandem with the jubilar mission of the Spirit by participating in the same passion and power that Jesus has practiced. As God has allowed the Global South to partake of the gifts and the power of the Spirit, the African churches should make sure that the same passions of the Spirit that were in Jesus are the *modus operandi* of the ministry of our churches. This precludes a mechanical operation of mission which is dissociated from the *passio Dei*. A jubilar participation in the *missio Dei* demands participation in the compassionate heart of God (Louw 2017, 348). This heart is different from the practitioners of ATR, or their counterparts of prosperity teachers who offer immediate material, financial, or physical benefits that destroy the sense of expectancy of Pentecostal spirituality. The jubilar practice of Jesus that has continued in the Acts of the Apostles in offering deliverance from sin, infirmity, and demonic captivity should inspire

African churches to do the same with the same passions of Jesus. The coupling of the power of jubilar emancipation with the passions of God could contribute greatly to liberating Africans from their existential threat of captivity to demonic forces or other threats. *Missio Dei* requires a *passio Dei* to maintain the flourishing of African Pentecostalism.

8. Conclusion

Spirit hermeneutics fosters Pentecostal spirituality as it affords relevant applications after making sound historical, contextual, and linguistic textual studies of canonical texts. It balances subjective and object, and affective and cognitive approaches. It keeps the tension between the immanence and transcendence of God’s activity and the realized and consummate elements of eschatology. These features allow it to discern and liberate African churches from the spirit of materialism that lurks in the teachings and practices of Pentecostal movements. The distinctive mark of Spirit hermeneutics provides a relevant application in the present context after comprehending the meaning inherent in the original context. A recontextualized application is instantiated in the reading Jesus has undertaken at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:14–30), where he has recontextualized an Isaian text to announce and enact a jubilar release with the power of the Spirit. With the continual emergence of new contexts, relevant applications that have firm Scriptural anchorage must be made. Such a hermeneutical endeavor nurtures a way of participation in the mission of God, the focus of which is jubilar emancipation that offers rest. Such a task aids African churches to guard the Pentecostal movement from the dangers of materialism by facilitating synchronization with God’s eschatological framework of time, nurturing a critical cognitive capacity, and participating in the same passion that Jesus has possessed.

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