

The Pneumatological Themes in Acts 2:1-13 With an African Contextual Application

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This paper investigates the pneumatological themes present in Acts 2:1-13, the Lukan account of Pentecost, and explores their theological implications and contextual application within the African Christian context. The Pentecost narrative portrays the Holy Spirit's agency in divine presence, empowerment for mission, universality of the Gospel, unity in diversity and revelation. These themes carry profound significance for African Christianity, particularly in its engagement with contextual theology, ecclesiology, and mission. By examining these themes through historical-critical narrative and theological lenses, this study demonstrates the relevance of Pentecost for addressing African sociocultural realities such as tribalism, linguistic diversity and spiritual vitality. The paper argues that the African church must embrace a spirit-driven and culturally relevant approach to theology and mission, rooted in biblical foundations and aimed at holistic transformation. Furthermore, the study underscores the role of African Christianity in global mission, propelled by the spirit's empowerment and guided by a vision of unity amid diversity.

Keywords: Pneumatology, African Theology, Mission, Ecclesiology, Holy Spirit

INTRODUCTION

Following his earthly ministry, Jesus assured his disciples that he would not abandon them, but would instead send the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to bear witness to the entire world (Acts 1:8). elsewhere, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the advocate who would guide and testify to the disciples about the Saviour, and the disciples, in turn, would testify to the world about the same Saviour (John 15:26-27). The prophet Joel, referenced by the apostle Peter on Pentecost, had previously foretold an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-21.

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost has become a central event in the timeline of the church. It marked the birth and continuity of the church. The Holy Spirit commissioned the disciples to do what they were at first afraid to do. This is well demonstrated in Peter's boldness in addressing the multitude that had gathered on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:1-13 describes the coming of the Holy Spirit and the astounding form in which he revealed himself – wind, fire, and tongues. As the third person of the Trinity and given the powerful depiction of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it is essential to explore the pneumatological themes in Luke's account of Pentecost. This is intended to provide a better understanding of the Holy Spirit and to foster an enhanced partnership between him and the church in Africa to accomplish the mission of God. Thus, this paper focuses on what the Holy Spirit does and reveals about God as presented by the Pentecost event as the agent of divine presence, empowerment for mission, universality for the gospel, unity in diversity, as well as revelation and understanding and what this means to the church in Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs various methods to explore the several pneumatological themes in Acts 2:1-13. These include the historical-critical method, which examines the text in its original context, taking Pentecost as a Jewish festival in Jerusalem within the early church environment. This approach will clarify the importance of the Holy Spirit's arrival for the initial audience.

Conversely, the literary or narrative analysis will centre on the storytelling elements, focusing on symbols such as 'tongues of fire,' the dramatic sound of wind, and the crowd's reaction. This method will emphasise how Luke depicts the Holy Spirit as powerful, unifying, and mission-oriented.

The study will also employ the theological systematic/biblical approach, which examines what the passage teaches about the nature and the Spirit's role. This includes empowerment, indwelling, the fulfilment of God's promises, and the Holy Spirit's role in initiating the church's mission.

Using the sociocultural method, the study will examine diverse crowds and languages to explore the theme of the reversal of Babel and the global church's mission through the Spirit.

Lastly, it will also employ a redemptive-Historical method, placing Acts 2 within the broader story of Salvation – from Old Testament promises to their fulfilment at Pentecost. This will highlight the Holy Spirit as ushering in a new phase in God's design.

Merging these approaches will provide a more comprehensive insight into the various dimensions of the Holy Spirit's function in Acts 2:1-13 by exploring the different themes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Pentecost and the Arrival of the Holy Spirit

The idea of the Holy Spirit is not exclusive to the Pentecost occasion. In his reference to Joel's prophecy, while explaining to people the meaning of what was happening, the apostle Peter looks at Pentecost as the fulfilment of what had been prophesied long ago in the Old Testament. Stott views Pentecost as a marker of Jesus' final work in his saving career: pouring the Holy Spirit upon his patient followers. Stott asserts that Jesus' events of life, death, resurrection, and ascension all led to this remarkable blessing of the Holy Spirit, which had been foretold by the prophets, and that would be acknowledged as the primary proof of the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth (J. R. W. Stott, 1990, p. 39). Christ's conclusion of his bodily work on earth opened the way for the disciples' involvement in their partnership with God to achieve his purpose of restoring man to himself. This would not be possible without the strength of the Holy Spirit, who equipped the disciples for that mission.

Similarly, the Pentecost, originally known as שָׁבֻעוֹת (Shavuot), or the feast of harvest (Exodus 23:16), or the feast of weeks (Exodus 34:22), had also been instituted long before Acts 2:1-13 in the Old Testament during the time of Moses shortly after the exodus from Egypt and occurred on the fiftieth day after the Passover (Witherington, 2009, p. 131). The New Testament Hellenistic Jews knew it as the feast of Pentecost (*pentēkostē*)(Pervo, 2009, p. 111).

Shavuot was originally an agricultural festival (Exodus 23:16, Deuteronomy 16:9-12). It was a Thanksgiving celebration of the blessing of the wheat harvest and covenant faithfulness, which required an offering of the first fruits to God. Usually, two loaves of bread made from the initial harvest of wheat were offered as first fruits (Leviticus 23:15-21) (Sanders, 2005, p. 138).

The celebration served as a time to acknowledge God's claim over the land and his benevolence in allowing the earth to yield produce. It also offered a chance to remember and express gratitude for God's powerful deeds for Israel, including their choice, his agreement with

them, and the triumphant exodus (Deuteronomy 26:1-15). Sanders notes that the Israelites had a prescribed vow to recite when the worshiper presented the first-fruit offering, as recorded in Deuteronomy 26:1-1 (Sanders, 2005, p. 154). Pao argues that the early Christians in the first century celebrated Pentecost to commemorate the proclamation of the law at Mount Sinai, which occurred during the Exodus (Pao, 2019, p. 25).

It was during the celebration of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-13 that God released His Holy Spirit upon the disciples as they waited in Jerusalem, in the upper room, as Jesus had earlier commanded. The feast saw many visitors, both Gentiles and Jews, coming to Jerusalem either for religious or trade activities. While there had been many other celebrations of the feast of Pentecost, the arrival of the Holy Spirit is what transformed the Pentecost event in Acts 2:1-13 into a significant milestone in the history of the church and Christianity.

The Theme of Divine Presence

Various scholars have consistently emphasised the coming of the holy spirit as a manifestation of divine presence among the early Christian community. They highlight that Acts 2:1-13 is a fundamentally profound theological declaration of God's abiding presence with his people. F.F. Bruce, for instance, has interpreted the phenomenon of the 'sound like a rushing mighty wind' and 'tongues as of fire' (vv2-3) as clear theophanic imagery. This intentionally echoes the Old Testament manifestations of God's presence, particularly at Mt. Sinai, where God descended in fire and power (Bruce, 2009, pp. 50–53). This text suggests a connection between Israel's historical experience of God and the fresh encounter with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Stott presents a similar argument, stating that Pentecost represents a decisive shift in salvation history, whereby God's presence is no longer localised in the Jerusalem temple but is now internalised within his people, forming a living, spiritual temple (J. Stott, 1994, pp. 61–64).

Luke demonstrates this well in his narrative when he tells of the holy spirit as filling all the disciples - ἐπλήσθησαν (they were all filled, v4). Peter would later state that this promise is for all who believe and their children (Acts 2:39), and that it is an indication of the indwelling presence of God in all who believe.

Craig Keener broadens the perspective on divine presence, emphasising that the outpouring of the Spirit in this text signified the immediate and communal presence of God. This he draws from the expectation of the Jews that God would come down to dwell among his people. In this sense, Pentecost is not merely an empowering event but rather a relational one, in that it marks God's nearness in the new covenant context (Keener, 2012, pp. 800–8001). Luke's Jewish readers, as well as the gentile converts, would have had a good grasp of the Old Testament scriptures, associating the wind and fire with God's presence as is found in such texts as Exodus 3:2, Job 38:1, Isaiah 29:6, Ezekiel 1:4, among others.

The ἦχος (sound) coming from heaven (Acts 2:2) fits the Sinai Parallell in Exodus 20:22. Craig notes that the phrase ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (from heaven) was a good Jewish and even pagan language for 'from God' though it was usually used figuratively (Keener, 2012, p. 802). Similarly, emphasising the divine presence perspective, Gordon Fee insists that the Spirit ought to be understood as God himself, actively indwelling believers and constituting them as a community of God, not merely as an impersonal force (Fee, 1994, p. 844).

Keener compares the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the words of Isaiah in Isaiah 45:14, saying that "surely God is among you," for non-believers who accept. A similar concept can be borrowed from Ezekiel 37:27, where God promises that "I will dwell among them, and they shall be my people."

Framing the event in eschatological terms, James Dunn describes the gift of the Spirit as the realisation of God's promised end-time presence with his people (Dunn, 1970, pp. 52–54). This corresponds to Jesus' promise never to leave the disciples alone and his assurance to send the promise of the Father in Luke 24:49. Max Turner adds that God's presence among the believers through the Spirit is the very foundation of the church's role in witnessing (Turner, 2015, p. 281).

The Theme of Empowerment for the Mission

One defining role of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus in Acts 1:8, was the *δύναμις* (power) that the disciples received when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. This was similar to the power Jesus exhibited, strengthened by the Holy Spirit at the beginning of his ministry, as narrated by Luke (Luke 4:14). Scholarship has interpreted Pentecost as an event of empowerment for mission.

This power was, in essence, an equipping for the early disciples for bold proclamation and global witness of the resurrected Christ. Luke further narrates this when he records Peter alluding to Jesus' anointing in the Spirit and Power (Acts 10:28). With this power, Peter stood boldly and proclaimed the gospel to the masses (Acts 2:14-41), countering those who mistook the behaviour of the disciples as being drunk with an early morning wine (Acts 2:13).

Rogers Stronstad argues that throughout Luke's narrative, the Holy Spirit has a vocational rather than a soteriological role. This means that the spirit gives believers power to serve and to pursue the prophetic mission, rather than merely initiating personal salvation, as some would insist. Stronstad emphasises that the Pentecost event transforms the disciples into a prophetic community (Stronstad & Powell, 2014, p. 64), echoing Old Testament examples in which the Spirit descended on certain individuals for a particular purpose.

Without this empowerment, however much experienced they would be, having closely walked with Jesus, the disciples were not yet ready prepared to face the soldiers who had captured, persecuted, and killed Jesus on the cross, the mockers, the Pharisees and the Sadducees who were now determined to wipe out his followers completely. The disciples needed supernatural empowerment to defeat every opposition, which could only be provided by the promised helper, the Holy Spirit.

As Graham Twelftree observes, up until the beginning of Acts, only Jesus carries the power of the Holy Spirit as narrated by Luke. However, at Pentecost, this same power would be distributed to the disciples specifically for the purpose of witnessing, as Jesus himself states in Acts 1:8, rather than being confined to an ecstatic experience (Twelftree, 2009, pp. 82–83). This is seen in how Luke portrays the empowered apostle in his account of Peter's bold speech, which bears witness to Jesus' death and resurrection (Acts 2:32).

The Acts 4:23-31 prayer clearly also illustrates that the Holy Spirit came for the mission. As an answer to the prayer of Jesus' disciples, the Holy Spirit filled and equipped them to continue boldly declaring the gospel. James Reads observes, as evidenced in Acts 2:11, that the onlookers exclaimed in amazement, seeing the bold proclamation of the gospel and the prophetic engagement in prophetic ministry by the disciples. Luke records the crowds saying, "We hear them speaking ... of the mighty deeds of God" (Read, 2009, p. 43).

As a result of this empowerment, the spirit also plays a very important role in legitimising the Gentiles' inclusion in God's eschatological people, thereby fulfilling his promise of universal salvation. This is highlighted in key moments like the conversation of the three thousand souls after Peter's bold preaching (Acts 2:41). Wonsuk Ma reiterates this, asserting that the disciples and the subsequent church were empowered to be a prophetic community, actively participating

in the mission of God to bring his kingdom to the present, addressing human suffering and working for social renewal (Ma, 2000, p. 43).

Wayne Grudem observes that while the covenant power of the Holy Spirit is first seen working in the Jesus' life when he was baptised in Luke 3:21-22) and when he was tempted in Luke 4:14, the disciples, however, did not experience the complete empowerment for ministry under the new covenant until Pentecost, as they had been instructed them to remain in Jerusalem promising them that, "you shall receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you" (Grudem, 1994, pp. 770–771). Wayne additionally emphasises that this new covenant power provided the disciples with increased efficacy in their testimony and ministry, enhanced power to triumph over sin's influence, and the ability to overcome the devil and his forces that would confront them in the future.

The Theme of the Universality of the Gospel

The Pentecost text presents the dramatic event of Pentecost, where the holy spirit descended upon the disciples and καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις (began to speak in other [different] tongues), v4. The narration is not merely a record of a miraculous occurrence but a foundational theological announcement on the Gospel's nature. Here, Luke portrays the Gospel as inherently universal, transcending ethnic, cultural, and linguistic barriers. The clearest picture of this universality is, without a doubt, the miracle of languages depicted in the multinational audience and in the Holy Spirit's role in initiating a global mission.

The gospel being meant for all people is well illustrated by the miracle of tongues in vv4-6, where the disciples speak in various γλώσσαις (tongues). The audience, on the other hand,

clearly hears the disciples' message in their own *διαλέκτω* (native dialect/language). This, in essence, signifies that the gospel is not confined to a single culture or language, unlike other religions, such as the Quran, whose Quran is confined to Arabic, requiring new converts to learn this foreign language.

The gospel is accessible to all. Craig asserts this, explaining that Spirit empowers communication across cultural and linguistic barriers (Keener, 2016, p. 125). The universality of the gospel is also rooted in the gospel message itself, as the gospel announces the reign of Jesus as king over all, as Mathew Bates argues, indicating that the message is universal in scope (Bates & McKnight, 2023, p. 70).

The Theme of Unity in Diversity

Luke's narrative of Acts 2:1-13 portrays a Spirit-enabled unity that embraces cultural and linguistic diversity, forming a new community of faith that transcends ethnic boundaries. This theme is further developed in African theology as communal belonging rooted in shared identity in Christ. As earlier discussed and observed by Craig, the miracle of speaking in various languages in vv4-11 symbolises a reversal of the Tower of Babel, where linguistic diversity once caused division but is now transformed into a means of unity through the gospel (Keener, 2012, pp. 512–517).

This transformation signals that linguistic and cultural diversity are not to be considered obstacles to gospel preaching, but rather God's instruments in his redemptive plan. Stott similarly emphasises that the unity created by the Spirit does not erase differences but integrates

them, arguing that the Pentecost miracle was a healing of division through the understanding of diverse languages (J. Stott, 1994, pp. 63–67). This perspective challenges the belief that the miracle represented a healing of Babel through a return to a single language. Instead, it emphasises a form of unity that is inclusive rather than simply uniform. Darrell Bock's interpretation supports this argument as he highlights the list of nations in verses 9-11. He observes that Luke's focus on these nations underscores the universal scope of the salvific message and the church's inclusive nature (Bock, 2009, p. 100).

From a historical perspective, the Pentecost event demonstrates God's initiative in overcoming human division, as those who had been separated by linguistic barriers are now united in hearing God's mighty works. This underscores unity as a divine act, facilitated by God rather than human effort. This understanding is further enriched by African scholarship, which frames unity in communal and contextual terms. Takesure Mahohoma, for instance, argues that the spirit creates a community where diversity is embraced within a shared spiritual identity (Mahohoma, 2018, pp. 1–5). In the same breadth, Stellamaris Mutindi observes that unity in diversity within the church reflects a family model in which differences are not erased but harmonised (Mutindi M. Lucas, 2025, pp. 12–14).

In discussing the biblical foundation for world ecumenism, Kolawole and Nnaemeka emphasise that Luke underscores the significance and efficacy of ecumenism through his account of the disciples, who spoke a unified message despite the spirit-endowed diverse languages. They assert that the variety of languages, cultural backgrounds, and tribes should not impede the unity of the Christian church (Kolawole & Nnaemeka, 2019, p. 141). Together in one place, as reflected in Acts 2:1, is a model of believers' unity, whereas the diversity of languages reflects inclusive involvement in the work of God.

The Theme of Revelation and Understanding

A critical theological theme of the role of the Holy Spirit in divine revelation and human understanding is introduced by Luke in his narration of the Pentecost event. Luke demonstrates that this revelation is no longer restricted to select individuals but is universally mediated through the Spirit, which also enables comprehension of divine truth.

First, the narrative portrays the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of divine self-disclosure. The dramatic manifestations – wind and fire – which recall the Old Testament theophanies, indicate continuity in God’s revelatory activity. Signalling the new era in salvation history, the Spirit becomes the direct mediator of God’s presence among believers. This suggests that revelation is no longer confined to prophetic figures but is now democratised (Dunn, 1970, p. 40).

Anyone, empowered by the Holy Spirit, can experience revelation and instruction from God. Stott notes that the arrival of the Holy Spirit allowed Jesus’ followers to grasp the significance of his identity and mission, emphasising that the Spirit functions as the illuminator of divine truth (J. Stott, 1994, pp. 60–64). This suggests that both the source and interpreter of revelation is the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the gift of new speech, a central element of the Pentecost narrative, was marked by intelligible speech conveying meaningful content that revealed God’s wondrous deeds. The Spirit translated divine revelation into culturally intelligible forms, effectively reversing the language confusion at Babel. Luke’s text emphasises that each listener heard the message “in his own language.” Isaac Boaheng argues that Pentecost validates indigenous languages as legitimate vehicles for divine revelation, empowered by the Holy Spirit (Boaheng, 2022, p. 6).

Thirdly, the phrase “we hear them declaring the wonders of God” as the crowd responded, indicated that revelation is accompanied by comprehension. I concur with Gordon, who emphasises that the Holy Spirit enabled the crowds to internalise and understand divine truth, transforming revelation into meaningful knowledge (Fee, 1994, pp. 25–30). This understanding would remain inaccessible without the Spirit.

Luke's narration reveals differing responses to the Holy Spirit's revelation. While some among the gathered crowd are amazed and genuinely seek understanding of what the event of Pentecost meant, others mocked the disciples, considering them as drunk (vv12-13) (Kisau, 2010, p. 1303). Clearly, this indicates that although the Spirit facilitates understanding, human response also plays a very crucial role. This is affirmed by Ben, who notes that the mixed reactions demonstrate that revelation does not automatically lead to acceptance, rather it requires openness and responsiveness to the spirit (Witherington, 2009, p. 132).

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PNEUMATOLOGICAL THEMES

IN ACTS 2:1-13

The Pentecostal text is one of the most significant passages in Christian pneumatology, describing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Beyond its narrative function, the text has deep theological significance for understanding the different functions of the Holy Spirit discussed above.

The Implication of Divine Presence

Just as the wind and fire represented God's presence in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is also significant, as Jesus assured his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit as an ever-present helper. However, rather than this presence being localised within a certain people and/or

geographical location- as it was temple-centred and only among the Israelites - the Holy Spirit marks a transition to personal and communal indwelling. The Pentecost event represented a decisive moment when the Spirit became the experienced presence of God among all believers (Dunn, 1970, p. 47). God's presence is no longer restricted.

From an African theological perspective, the concept of divine presence strongly emphasises the belief that God is actively involved in communal life. The affirmation of God's nearness and immediacy in daily life is a fundamental pillar of Christianity in Africa (Bediako, 1997, p. 98). Rather than being encountered solely in sacred spaces, God is experienced within the believing community, with the Spirit acting as the primary mediator of his divine presence.

The Implication of Empowerment for Mission

Spirit's empowering role, highlighted in Acts 2:4, is not merely experiential, as some charismatic Pentecostal adherents suggest, but primarily missional. The spirits' coming empowers the disciples to witness, which is why the disciples, starting with Peter, made bold declarations and witnessed the gospel without fear. This empowerment was not for private spirituality. It is instead an equipping for bold public testimony (Dunn, 1970, p. 52; Keener, 2012, p. 795). Thus, authentic ministry and the church's mission are spirit-initiated and spirit-sustained, without depending on human effort or wisdom.

The Pentecost experience, as emphasised by Boaheng, also calls the church back to its missionary roots and to its dependence on the Spirit. The Spirit propels the church outward, initiating the expansion narrative that follows Acts 2:1-13 (Boaheng, 2022, p. 6). Thus, it is the Spirit who ensures the global spread of the gospel, not any human strategies, however necessary these strategies are. The key driver of the mission, rather than institutional control, is the Spirit (Alamu, 2025, p. 4).

The Implication of the Universality of the Gospel

In his narration, Luke provides a thorough enumeration of individuals and nations in verses 9-11, highlighting the universal nature of salvation. Unlike the Old Covenant, which was limited to Israel, salvation is now available to all people, not just a specific nation or ethnic group. With the arrival of the Holy Spirit, barriers of language, culture, and ethnicity are transcended, fostering the formation of a global community.

All are welcome to enter the household of God and partake in His redemptive plan without any restrictions, as Pentecost establishes a foundation for an inclusive mission (Diboro, 2019, p. 103). Amos Yong describes Pentecost as the exemplary vision of a multicultural church shaped by the Spirit (Yong, 2005, p. 56). This understanding makes the church inherently universal and inclusive, ensuring that no culture or individual possesses exclusive rights to the gospel. The event of Pentecost serves as the catalyst for unity in the Spirit, harmonising diverse expressions.

The Implication of Revelation and Understanding

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues, as narrated by Luke in verses 4-11, reveals the Spirit's role in making divine truths comprehensible across various linguistic and cultural boundaries. Boaheng emphasises that Pentecost highlights the importance of vernacular expression in mission and theology, allowing individuals to experience the gospel within their own cultural contexts (Boaheng, 2022, p. 6). This indicates that revelations are both contextual and incarnational, rather than abstract.

Since the Holy Spirit affirms cultural diversity rather than erasing it, the proclamation of the gospel must be culturally relevant. As Luke illustrates in the Pentecost event, the miracle of tongues lies in its intelligibility: each person heard the message in their own language (v. 11).

AFRICAN CONTEXTUAL APPLICATION OF THE PNEUMATOLOGICAL THEMES IN ACTS 2:1-13

While the Acts 2:1-13 event is rooted in the first-century Jewish-Christian experience, its pneumatological themes, as discussed in the previous sections, carry enduring significance for contemporary contexts, particularly in Africa. Kwame Bediako, for instance, argues that African traditional religiosity has always operated within an implicitly pneumatological framework. He contends that the African primal worldview provides a pre-understanding that actually facilitates rather than impedes the reception of Christian pneumatology. For him, the event of Pentecost, alongside its emphasis on the spirit's immediate and demonstrable presence, speaks directly into this primal religious horizon (Bediako, 1992, pp. 386–390).

Similarly, Ogbu Kalu contends that African Pentecostalism's rapid growth is not a departure from African religiosity but its transformation. The Holy Spirit is recognised as the supremely powerful spirit that supersedes all ancestral and demonic spirits – a pneumatological claim that resonates directly with the Lukan portrayal of the spirit's overwhelming authority at Pentecost (Kalu, 2008, pp. 26–32).

In Africa, Christianity is characterized by its emphasis on spiritual experiences, communal identity, and contextual expressions. These provide fertile ground for applying the theology of Acts 2:1-13. This section will therefore explore how each of these themes speaks into African theological, ecclesial, and missional realities.

The Theological Realities

Significant theological applications of the pneumatological themes in Acts 2:1-13 can be deduced for African Christianity, particularly the understanding of the presence of God, revelation, and power. For instance, his tangible presence, signified by the imagery of wind and fire in vv2-3, aligns closely with African religious consciousness, which affirms the nearness of the spiritual realm. This is correctly observed by Bediako, who asserts that African Christianity flourishes because it recognises the immediacy of God's presence within the existential realities of life (Bediako, 1997, p. 98).

The phenomenon of tongues at Pentecost highlights the Spirit's role in making divine truth intelligible, presenting revelation as contextual and accessible. This aligns with Jesse Mugambi's emphasis that theology in Africa must be reconstructed within local cultural frameworks to remain meaningful (Mugambi, 1995, p. 82). Those who may ignore the importance of the local dialects may labour in vain if they do not recognise the power that these languages may have in advancing the gospel message. Unlike Agnes Ozman, who desired to supernaturally receive the power of tongues for foreign missions (Goff, 1988, pp. 66–67), deliberate efforts must be put in place to learn the languages of those we want to share the gospel with, without assuming that we will somehow utter some sounds and miraculously minister to people of other tongues.

Similarly, the empowerment of the disciples was not only experiential but also an equipping to witness. Whereas there is an emphasis in Africa for spiritual power that includes healing, deliverance, and protection from spiritual forces, this power must be grounded in sound biblical theology and mission, with transformation being key.

The Ecclesial Realities

Luke's narration of the Pentecost event also offers a background for understanding the nature and identity of the church, which has strong implications for African ecclesiology. The communal infilling of the Holy Spirit signifies that the church is fundamentally a spirit-created community. This relates very well to John S. Mbiti's popular assertion that "I am because we are." (Mbiti, 2010, p. 108). This is similar to the South African philosophy of Ubuntu and Tanzania's Ujamaa. Since the church is inherently relational and communal, the African church must desist from a Western worldview that advocates an individualistic lifestyle, which is rapidly creeping into the church in Africa.

Luke presents a diversity of languages as reflected in Acts 2:9-11, which reflects a unity without uniformity. Africa is endowed with a rich diversity. These have, to the detriment of the continent, posed challenges, especially those arising from ethnic divisions. The Pentecost event, however, challenges the African church to transcend tribalism and ethnocentrism then embracing inclusivity and reconciliation. Pentecost, as described by Yong, is a model of a multicultural and multilingual community shaped by the Spirit (Yong, 2005, p. 56) that African churches must emulate.

Furthermore, the diverse reactions to the spirit action in vv. 12-13 emphasise the necessity for discernment within the continent. The church in Africa must avoid diminishing the Holy Spirit to mere functional power devoid of theological depth (Nthakheni & Mudau, 2025, p. 3). Each claimed experience of the Holy Spirit should be assessed within biblical and communal contexts, while also fostering theological maturity alongside spiritual vitality.

The Missional Realities

Inherently missional, the pneumatological themes in Acts 2:1-13 provide a paradigm for the church's engagement with the world. The Pentecost event fulfils the promise of Acts 1:8, in

which the Spirit equips believers to serve as witnesses, marking the beginning of the church's outward mission. To be effective, a mission in Africa must depend on the Spirit rather than human strategies.

This has been evident in the shift in missionary work, whose trajectory now flows from the global south to the global north, a reversal of its initial trajectory. This is closely tied to spiritual empowerment, which has made Africa a major centre of Christian growth and mission. The Pentecost narrative provides a theological grounding for Africa's emerging role as a mission-sending continent. As noted by Boaheng, the spirit remains the source of strength for the church in Africa, motivating African Christianity to engage fully in God's redemptive mission on a global scale (Boaheng, 2022, p. 6).

Mugambi argues that African theology should progress beyond simple translation toward a more contextual reconstruction, allowing the gospel to resonate with African realities and interact with local cultures and worldviews (Mugambi, 1995, p. 84). This illustrates the diverse languages used by the disciples, empowered by the Spirit, to maintain cultural and linguistic relevance, much like the rich tapestry of languages found across Africa.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenological themes embedded in Acts 2:1-13 – divine presence, empowerment for mission, the universality of the gospel, unity in diversity, and revelation and understanding – are not relics of a distant first-century event but living theological realities with enduring significance for the church, globally and in Africa. The Pentecost story illustrates that the Holy Spirit is not just a supernatural power or an experience but rather the actual presence of God among His followers, equipping His community for witness and serving as the agent who

transcends every ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundary. As clearly observed, the African primal worldview's innate pneumatological consciousness provides a natural receptivity to the Lukan portrayal of the Spirit's power, making Pentecost not an alien theological import but a profound affirmation of what African Christianity has always instinctively known about the nearness of the spiritual realm.

The contextual application of these themes challenges the African church to move beyond a superficial or purely experiential engagement with the Holy Spirit towards a theologically grounded pneumatology that is simultaneously missional, communal, and transformative. The empowerment of the spirit is not given for private spiritual gratification but for bold public witness, as Peter's proclamation at Pentecost so powerfully demonstrates. Equally, the miracle of diverse tongues calls the African church to resist corrosive forces of tribalism and ethnocentrism that have fragmented the continent and to embrace instead a spirit-created unity that honours rather than erases diversity.

Ultimately, the Pentecost narrative positions Africa not as a passive recipient of a Western missionary enterprise but as an active spirit-empowered participant in the global mission of God. The dramatic growth of African Christianity and the continent's emerging role as a mission-sending region are themselves pneumatological realities, continuous with the outward movement of the spirit narrated in Acts. The church in Africa is therefore called to discern its unique vocation within this redemptive-historical moment- grounded in sound biblical theology, accountable to its communal heritage, and propelled by the same spirit who descended at Pentecost with the wind and fire to commission the disciples as witnesses to the farthest corners of the world.

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