

The Significance of the Incident of Pentecost in the Book of Acts for Christian Mission Today



Dieudonne Komla Nuekpe¹ 

¹ The Church of Pentecost, Seoul - South Korea.

ABSTRACT

The event of Pentecost in the book of Acts can be viewed as a continuation of the salvation drama initiated by God; it has some connection with the Jewish feast of Shavuot and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The event is generally understood as the Holy Spirit's outpouring and has great significance for the Christian mission. By means of the literary qualitative research method, this paper defines the Christian mission and traces the event of Pentecost from the Holy Spirit's missional work in the Old Testament, emphasizing the significance of the outpouring in Acts for Christian Mission in Evangelism, Leadership, Character Transformation and Cross-cultural mission. Using the church of Pentecost as an example, the paper concludes that the incident of Pentecost is most significant in the growth of Pentecostal Movements. In addition to the Holy Spirit's work, good education, proper planning and good mission strategies are recommended for effective Christian Mission.

Correspondence

Dieudonne Komla Nuekpe

Email: dniekpe15@gmail.com

Publication History

Received 30th May, 2022

Accepted 20th July, 2022

Published online 28th July, 2022

Keywords: *Pentecost, Christian Mission, Holy Spirit, Cross-cultural mission.*

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INTRODUCTION

The event of Pentecost in the book of Acts can be viewed as a continuation of the salvation drama initiated by God; it has some connection with the Jewish feast of *Shavuot* and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The event is generally understood as the Holy Spirit's outpouring and has great significance for Christian missions.

While the Festival was celebrated as a thanksgiving to God and hope for future restoration, the God of mission was gradually unfolding His divine purpose for the whole world's redemption. The seed planted by Israel, a farming community, did not perish in the soil; it burst out and produced fruit that gave an unspeakable joy to the community of Israel and formed the basis of their thanksgiving to God. Israel understood the Holy Spirit's promise in Joel 2:28 as Israel's promise of restoration. While the Spirit of God was given to specific people in the past for temporal functions as leaders, kings, prophets, etc., the giver of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost fulfilled his promise by not allowing Jesus to perish in the grave. He raised Him from the dead and, after His ascension, released His Spirit upon the celebrants of the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Power was given and a new paradigm occurred that inaugurated a new community of believers, the Church. By the Holy Spirit's work, the mission of God transcended tribal boundaries and went, and still is going, across cultures to the ends of the earth. The emergence of mission movements, including the Pentecostal movement, took advantage of the Holy Spirit's power to engage in effective mission. The Church of Pentecost, as an example

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of a classical Pentecostal denomination, experiences growth in its mission activities due to the significance of the event of Pentecost.

This paper defines Christian Mission and traces the event of Pentecost from the Holy Spirit's missional work in the Old Testament, emphasizing the significance of the outpouring in Acts for Christian Mission in Evangelism, Leadership, Character Transformation and Cross-cultural Mission. While discussing the meaning of Pentecost and its significance for the Pentecostal movement, emphasis is given to its significance for the Church of Pentecost as a Pentecostal denomination.

Christian Mission

David Bosch asserts that mission is "Missio Dei", God's mission, and it involves human participation in God's activity through the Holy Spirit to bring salvation to men.¹ Christian mission concerns God sending His people to engage with the whole world to fulfil His overarching plan for the entire universe (Acts 20:27; Eph. 1:9-10).² It is the responsibility of the entire Church going into the world to bear witness to Christ, and this involves the whole life of God's covenant people "as gathered and scattered community"³ to proclaim Christ until his second coming. The Christian mission is part of the redemptive purpose of God, which the Church – inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) as those "called out of the world and sent back into the world"⁴ – is expected to carry out unto the ends of the earth. That mission continued through the event of Pentecost in Acts and is traceable to the Old Testament feast of *Shavuot*, sometimes known as Jewish Pentecost.

Pentecost In The Old Testament

Pentecost as a Jewish Festival

Pentecost is celebrated seven weeks after Easter as an adaption of *Shavuot*, which is celebrated seven weeks after Passover. Shavuot is an Old Testament Jewish feast celebrated in thanksgiving for the first harvested crops (Exo. 34:22; Lev. 23:15-16). As a community of farmers, the Israelites celebrated Shavuot to express thanks to God for fulfilling His covenant blessing (Deut. 16:9-12) of the provision of food to the community. It was a feast of joy (Deut. 16:10-11). Different names were used to call the feast. It is usually designated as the Feast of Weeks because the date is calculated by counting seven weeks from the Sabbath day after Passover. Since it celebrates the wheat harvest, it is also called the Feast of the Harvest or the Feast of First Fruits; it was during this period that the Israelites offered the first fruits of the harvest as a sacrifice to God. John Power notes that Pentecost was one of the Jewish pilgrimage feasts that required every male child in Israel to travel to the temple in Jerusalem to give specific offerings (Lev. 23:16-21).⁵ According to Jewish tradition, Shavuot is the "season of the giving of our Torah and a second Mount Sinai experience" for Israel (Ex. 19:3-8; 19:16–20:22, 23:33; 24:1-8).⁶ The three main elements, the Theophany, the making of Covenant and the giving of the Law that characterized the event of Sinai, especially the Theophany, were later seen in the events of Pentecost in Acts (Acts 2:2-3). Joseph A. Grassi contends that Pentecost, or Shavuot after the post-exilic period, was closely associated with the commemoration of "the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai." It assumed the characteristics of a celebration of the covenant and became the most important Jewish feast in the book of Jubilees.⁷

¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 405.

² Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 24.

³ Michael W. Goheen, *A Light To The Nations: The Missional Church and The Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 219.

⁴ Goshen, *A Light to The Nations*, 219.

⁵ John Power, "Pentecost," *The Furrow* 16, no. 6 (June 1965): 328.

⁶ Mike Moore, "Pentecost and the Plan of God," *Reformed Theological Review* 72, no. 3 (Dec. 2013): 172, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://rtr.org.au/index.php/RTR/index>.

⁷ Joseph A. Grassi, "The Wedding at Cana: A Pentecostal Meditation," *Brill* 14 (Apr. 1972): 131, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1560179>.

Pentecost as a Democratized Spirituality

Pentecost became associated with the spiritual blessing of the Holy Spirit's outpouring as prophesied in the Old Testament. Moses's desire was for the democratization of the Spirit to enable all God's people to prophesy. This desire was later fulfilled in the New Testament on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The prophets in the Old Testament associated this particular work of the Holy Spirit with Israel's end-time "restoration (Isa. 44:3; 59:21; Ezek. 36:26-27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29)."⁸ For instance, Joel prophesied the fullness of the Spirit to be poured on God's covenant people and the democratization of the Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-29). At that time, all of God's children, irrespective of social restrictions, would partake in the blessing of the outpouring of the Spirit. This is in contrast to the period of the Old Testament when the Spirit of God was given to only a select few people for God's specific mission. Thus, Israel was promised a charismatic Spirit that transcends ethnic barriers and social classes.⁹ Jews in the Old Testament came to associate the celebration of *Shavuot* with their hope for restoration and looked forward to its fulfilment.¹⁰ This motif of restoration runs through Acts 2. For instance, Peter explains the event of Pentecost as the restoration of the Davidic dynasty in Jesus (Acts 2:22-36) and a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy¹¹ in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and the salvation of thousands of Jews gathered from the nations of the world (Acts 2:5, 41).

Pentecost as Empowerment for Leadership in Mission

During the Exodus, the Spirit-empowered chosen people for a determined mission. Bezalel and Oholiab were filled with God's Spirit for the artistic work on furnishings in the tabernacle of God (Ex. 31:1-11; 35:30-35). The Spirit gave them unique ability and knowledge to perform their task, which they also taught others to do. Later, in Numbers 11:25-29, it is recorded that the Spirit empowered the seventy elders of Israel, including Eldad and Medad, to prophesy. The Spirit either came upon, filled or led the leaders of Israel in specific covenant tasks, such as the high priests of Israel and the elders (2 Chron. 24:20, Num. 11:25).¹² Among the leaders filled with the Spirit of God were "Joseph (Gen. 41:38), Moses (Num. 11:17), and Joshua (Num. 27:18)."¹³ Israel's warriors also could not have carried out Yahweh's divine mandate without the Spirit. The Spirit enabled Othniel to work as a judge and prevail over Israel's enemies at war (Judges 3:10). Besides him were "Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29) and Samson (Judg. 14:6, 19; 15:14, 15)."¹⁴ The Spirit was at work during the establishment of the Hebrew monarchy, enabling David to defeat the Philistine giant, Goliath (1 Sam. 16:13; 17), and Saul (1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6). Moreover, during the time of the prophets, the Spirit of God empowered Elijah, Elisha, Azaria, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah and others to carry out their respective mission in line with God's covenant relationship with Israel (1 Kgs. 18:12; 2 Kgs. 2:15-16; 2 Chron. 15:1; Ezek. 2:2; Dan. 4:9; 5:1; 6:3; Mic. 3:8).

The Holy Spirit is significant not only as the initiator but also as a guide in choosing the leadership of the missionary enterprise. The Holy Spirit called the first leaders of the Church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-4). After revisiting all the churches he had planted (Acts 15:36, 41), Paul was directed by the Holy Spirit about where to go next, what strategy to use, and which direction to take (Acts 16:1, 6-10). It was the Holy Spirit that guided Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29),¹⁵ and it was the Holy Spirit

⁸ Craig S. Keener, "Power of Pentecost: Luke Missiology in Acts 1-2," *Asia Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12, no.1 (2009): 49.

⁹ Douglas Stuart, "*Hosea-Jonah*," WBC 31, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 260-61, Accordance Bible Software.

¹⁰ George Goldman II, "The Contribution of Joel 2-3 to the Restoration of Israel Theme in Acts: Pentecost as Restoration of Israel" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002):18-30, ProQuest.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit," in George Goldman II, "The Contribution of Joel 2-3 to the Restoration of Israel Theme in Acts: Pentecost as Restoration of Israel" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002):22, ProQuest.

¹² Harold Wilmington, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (A-M)," *The Third Person File* 6 (April 2018): 5, accessed January 9, 2021, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/third_person/6.

¹³ Wilmington, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (A-M)," 5-6.

¹⁴ Wilmington, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (A-M)," 5-6.

¹⁵ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 115.

that instructed Peter against his own wish to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:12). It was under the leading of the Holy Spirit that the Church in Jerusalem was able to accept the baptism of the Gentiles into the covenant of faith (Acts 15:8, 28). Bosch observes that the Spirit that led Jesus to mission in Galilee was the same that charged the disciples to mission, making the Holy Spirit “the catalyst, the guiding and driving force of mission.”¹⁶ Likewise, in mission today, the Holy Spirit is essential for direction (Acts 9). No matter the scientific and leadership methods available in mission enterprises, the Holy Spirit remains the grand strategist that leads to a fruitful mission.

Pentecost As Power For Mission

While the Old Testament prophets spoke of the promised Holy Spirit, Jesus also reiterates the promise at the end of his ministry (Luk. 24:49). Israel was still hoping for the fulfilment of the promise of restoration when Jesus called their attention to the source of power that would enable them to fulfil God’s mission. God had promised the father of the Jewish community, Abraham, that through him, all nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-4). Until this point, Abraham’s descendants considered God as a tribal God and their mission as a mission toward Abraham’s biological descendants. In his encounter with his disciples on the day of ascension (Acts 1:9-11), Jesus reminded the disciples about what he had said earlier about the Holy Spirit as a promise of power (Luke 24:49-53), teaching them that the Holy Spirit would enable them to bear witness “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). While the disciples looked forward to the restoration and consummation of God’s Kingdom (Acts 1:7), Jesus explained that the purpose of Pentecost was to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom through the evangelization of the nations (Acts 1:8). Pentecost is a promise of power in the Holy Spirit involving healing and exorcism (Luk. 4:36; 6:19; 8:46; Acts 4:7; 6:8; 9:32-35; 10:38; 14:3, 8-10; 28:8-10) that enables the gospel to travel from the Jews to all nations according to God’s divine purpose.¹⁷

Through the empowerment of the Spirit, Peter and John healed the lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:12). They ascribed the healing to the Author of miracles (Acts 2:22) and not to human power or godliness. Amos Yong notes that, “through the power of the Holy Spirit, many unclean spirits crying with loud shrieks came out of many who were possessed”¹⁸ in Samaria (Acts 8:7). Paul cast out evil spirits, healed the sick, and raised the dead after Pentecost (Acts 16:11-18; 19:11-12; 20:7-12; 21:8).¹⁹

Lamin Sanneh notes that the presentation of the gospel on the day of Pentecost did not come in a heavenly language but in various languages recognizable to people of different ethnicities and cultures (Acts 2).²⁰ The Holy Spirit became an agent of diffusing the gospel cross-culturally, breaking all boundaries of distinction.

Pentecost For Unified, Cross-Cultural Mission

While Jews continued their celebration of Shavuot on the day of Pentecost in the hope of restoration, a new paradigm occurred when the Holy Spirit descended on Christ’s followers: the Jewish Messiah was revealed as the Lord of all nations (Acts 2:36) and all peoples would become united in Him. Pentecost was the agent by which Christianity crossed the cultural frontier to Hellenistic pagans. Since then, it is said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Both Gentiles and Jews are now shaped by the Gospel message (Acts 8:26; 10:44-45; 11:15-17; 15:7-9) that “anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost resulted in a unified community of believers who demonstrated the love of God’s Kingdom to others. The believers in Acts shared fellowship, prayer, meals and possessions together

¹⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (2018), 115.

¹⁷ Keener, “Power of Pentecost,” 50.

¹⁸ Amos Yong, *Mission After Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019), 176.

¹⁹ Yong, *Mission After Pentecost*, 176.

²⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 214.

(Acts 2:42-46) and led unified lives that impacted others to accept the gospel (Acts 2:47).

God's mission was meant not only for one particular people but also for all nations, cultures, and languages. Luke indicates the presence of diaspora Jews on the day of Pentecost "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) who became a means of spreading the gospel.²¹ Some scholars note that Luke's list of nations from which the assembled worshipers came (Acts 2:9-11) alludes to the Bible's first list of nations (Gen. 10) prior to the event at Babel when God came down in judgment to scatter people and distribute different languages (Gen. 11:1-9). On the day of Pentecost, a reversal occurred: the Holy Spirit scattered languages to bring special unity in the Spirit, leading to a cross-cultural unity of the Church.²²

Cross-cultural unity was one of the significant activities of the Holy Spirit in mission by sending people across barriers they had been unwilling to cross. Peter, for example, was compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:19-23, 28). In Acts 6:1, when there was a conflict between the Hellenists and the Jews, the Hellenist leaders, by the Holy Spirit's infilling work (Acts 6:3, 5; 7:51, 55), set an example to the Jews by carrying the gospel beyond their barriers (Acts 8:25). The Holy Spirit baptized other Gentiles who became mission partners of the Jews (Acts 8:15-17; 10:44-46; 19:6). Pentecost ignited a paradigm shift that transformed missions from ethnocentric to Christocentric missions (Acts 2:21).

The Holy Spirit moved the Christian mission to Antioch so that Greek-speaking pagans heard the Jewish Messiah's gospel and accepted Him not only as the Jewish Messiah but as the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:19-20) whom they also expressed each according to their heritage. Jesus gave the Church the Great Commission as its mission, and the Holy Spirit provided the impetus for the Church to bear witness cross-culturally (Acts 1:8, Luke 24:49). Through the Holy Spirit, Christian witness transformed from "an external mandate to an organic part of the Church's being, an essential expression of her life."²³

On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit poured on the disciples, Peter witnessed the fact that the empowerment of the Holy Spirit was necessary for the accomplishment of the divine task and was not only available for the twelve disciples but also for all believers (Acts 2:38-39). Luke, in Acts 1:8, provided an outline for the fulfilment of that divine mission of God moving "from Jerusalem (Acts 1-7) to Judea and Samaria (8; 9:31-43) and onwards to the ends of the earth" (Acts 10-28).²⁴ Since Acts, Pentecost has continued to be significant because it has enabled the movement of the gospel from one nation to all nations, from one tribe to all tribes on earth, thus universally fulfilling God's divine mandate.

Pentecost's Significance in the Preparation for Christian Missions

Acts points to prayer as a practical way of engaging in the mission of God. The disciples of Jesus could not fulfil their mission without an effective prayer backed by the Holy Spirit. Since the outpouring of the Spirit, the early believers were seen frequently engaging in effective prayer before and during their mission activities. Because the Holy Spirit aids in effective prayer (Rom 8:26-27, Eph. 6:18), prayer within the context of mission would be ineffective without the outpouring on the day of Pentecost. The believers waited upon God in prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit before engaging in mission work and had breakthroughs in missions after prayer (Acts 1:12-14, 24-25; 2:1, 42-47; 3:1-6, 10:9-23, 13:1-3, 20:36; 21:5-6). When the disciples faced danger, they prayed and were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). Prayer is how Pentecost occurred and continues to be a conducive environment for the Holy Spirit's operation in mission (Acts 9:11; 8:15; 9:17; 10:44).

Pentecost and Gospel Proclamation

The Holy Spirit is He that gives the message in missions. He proclaims Jesus as the unique Saviour of the world and prompts men like Peter to preach that no other name is given by which man must be saved

²¹ Keener, "Power of Pentecost," 62.

²² Keener, "Power of Pentecost," 63.

²³ Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 187.

²⁴ Keener, "Power of Pentecost," 52.

(Acts 4:8-12). Without the Holy Spirit's revelation, the message of the gospel can be twisted in missions because illumination comes from the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:17-18; Acts 21:21). The gospel truth's claim of the uniqueness of Jesus is today debated even within evangelical missiological circles where such truths are expected to be fundamental to the mission enterprise. The event of Pentecost is, therefore, crucial for revealing the truth of the gospel.²⁵ Michael Pocock notes that the work of missions depends on the spiritual dynamics of Pentecost.²⁶ The early disciples of Christ did not have any other thing apart from the Holy Spirit when they engaged in missions. They were people without degrees (Acts 4:13) in missiology and mission theory but were simply empowered by the Holy Spirit as they engaged in prayer. Acts provides a road map to early mission and can be viewed as a practical manual for mission enterprise today.

Significance for the Restoration of Godly Character in Mission

Michael W. Goheen observes that mission is the "participation of God's people in God's mission to renew the whole creation and the whole lives of all its peoples and cultures."²⁷ The agent of that renewed life and character that reflects God's Kingdom principles is the Holy Spirit. "God's mission involves God's people living in God's way in the sight of the nations"²⁸ with the implication that Christian living attracts the world to Christ. It means living a remarkable life as a countercultural community, living publicly in a way that reflects God's character in Christ.²⁹ For example, in Antioch, the disciples were called 'Christians' because they abandoned their former ways and became followers of Christ's way (Acts 11:26).³⁰ Life without the Holy Spirit is a carnal or worldly life (Gal. 5:16) that drives people away from Christ instead of bringing them closer. Many moral failures in mission occur because missionaries who are not filled with the Holy Spirit can fall prey to worldly temptations, including greed, pride and sexual sin. Wolfgang Vondey was right to point out that the Holy Spirit's baptism as evidenced on the day of Pentecost is an experience necessary for effective Christian life and the transformation of a believer's character.³¹

Significance of Pentecost in the Growth of Mission Movements

Pentecostals in Mission

Pentecost led to the emergence of Pentecostal movements across the world. It has had a tremendous impact in the 21st century; Opoku Onyinah observes that the Pentecostal movement is "the fastest growing mission movement in the world."³² The Pentecostal movement considers the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as a normative experience for anyone who seeks a more profound encounter with the Spirit after conversion (Acts 2:4; 8:4-19; 10:44-48; 19:1-7). Pentecostals ascribe to the "foursquare gospel": Jesus the Saviour, Jesus the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Jesus the Healer, and Jesus the Soon-Coming King."³³ Walter Hollenweger argues that the movement's renewed force does not depend on "a new argument for heads but a new experience for hearts."³⁴

²⁵ Douglas C. McConnell, *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, Evangelical Missiological Society 5, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997), 328, Kindle.

²⁶ Michael Pocock, "Missiology and Spiritual Dynamics," in *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, Evangelical Missiological Society 5, ed. Douglas C. McConnell (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997), 10, Kindle.

²⁷ Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and Issues* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 117.

²⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 22-23.

²⁹ Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, "The Message of Mission," in Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 25.

³⁰ David Peterson, *The Apostles: PNTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 356, Accordance Bible Software.

³¹ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2017), 84.

³² Opoku Onyinah, "The Movement of the Spirit Around the World in Pentecostalism," *Transformation* 30, no. 4 (October 2013): 281, <https://www.jstor.org/10.2307/90008185>.

³³ Onyinah, "The Movement of the Spirit Around the World in Pentecostalism," 281.

³⁴ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), in Onyinah, "The Movement of the Spirit Around the World in Pentecostalism," 281.

Andrews Walls asserts that Pentecostal mission has contributed massively to Christianity in terms of the Great Century of Transformation.³⁵ Even though Pentecostals' belief in the imminent return of Christ has influenced their aggressive approach to mission, the primary factor and motivator for their growth is a strong belief in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a fulfilment of Joel 2:28. They consider themselves, based on the incident of Pentecost, as a distinguished people chosen for world evangelism. They see the world as their mission field because of the experience of *glossolalia*, (the gift of speaking in tongues. Rapid conversion and growth occur among Pentecostals mainly because they allow the Holy Spirit's manifestation in terms of healing and prophetic utterances, which are traceable to the book of Acts. Charles H. Kraft notes that people from the majority world are power-oriented people who require proof of power and not only proclamation of the gospel to turn to Christ.³⁶ Thus, the growth of Christianity in the world is attributed to Pentecostals who also rely on the Holy Spirit's demonstration of power for mission.

Significance of Pentecost in the Pentecostal Movement of 'The Church of Pentecost'

The growth and spread of mission, in an ecclesiastical sense, are always based on the Holy Spirit's work. For instance, the growth of missionary work in "The Church of Pentecost – which is the largest protestant denomination in Ghana"³⁷ and is adjudged to be one of the fastest-growing denominations in Africa³⁸ – depends on the work of the Holy Spirit in the selection of pastors and the demonstration of power in mission activities. Jehu J. Hanciles attributes the work of the Spirit in practices of healing, deliverance and personal evangelism engaged by transformed members to the fast-growing nature of this denomination, which is rooted in classical Pentecostal tradition.³⁹ This Church was birthed through Irish missionaries, Pastor James McKeown and his wife Sophia McKeown, who were sent by the Bradford Apostolic Church of the United Kingdom to Ghana in 1937.

The global statistics of the Church as at the end of December 2017 indicate that The Church of Pentecost operates in ninety-nine nations with more than 20,863 local congregations and 2,253 districts. It boasts of a worldwide membership of more than 3 million, with children constituting more than one-third of that membership. The Church of Pentecost has more than 135,000 church officers at all levels of leadership and 2,386 ordained ministers spread across "Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East."⁴⁰ As of December 2020, the Church of Pentecost operated in 109 nations with an increased membership of 3,081,862 with 23,588 local congregations in 2,648 districts. By December 2021, the membership of the COP in Ghana alone stood at 3,333,654. Compared to Ghana's 2021 Population and Housing Census of 30,832,019, the COP represents 10.81% of Ghana's population. The implication for Ghana alone is that out of every nine (9) Ghanaians, one is a member of the COP.⁴¹ According to Daniel Tetteh, the statistics Manager of the COP, comparing COP's population increase of 1,630,069 between 2010-2021 to Ghana's 6,133,785, the COP represents 26.6% which also implies that out of every four (4)

³⁵ Andrews Walls, "From Christendom to World Christianity: Mission and Demography Transformation of the Church," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 22, no. 3 (2001): 323.

³⁶ Charles H. Kraft, *Power Encounter in Spiritual Warfare* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 23.

³⁷ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, "The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology," *Cyber Journal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 10 (July 2001), accessed January 11, 2021, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj10/larbi.html>.

³⁸ Ghana Evangelism Committee, *National Church Survey: Facing the Unfinished Task of the Church in Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Evangelism Committee, 1989), 16-17.

³⁹ Jehu J. Hanciles, "African Immigrant Churches in America," in *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and The Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 351.

⁴⁰ Church of Pentecost, "International Missions Office Report, 2017" (paper presented at the 43rd session of the General Council Meetings, Gomoah Fetteh, PCC, 2018), 7.

⁴¹ Daniel Tetteh, COP's Response to Ghana 2021 PHC Report by the GSS – Areas of Opportunity, "The Church of Pentecost Statistics Department report, 2021" (paper presented at the 17th session of the Extraordinary Council Meetings, Gomoah Fetteh, PCC, 2022), 1.

Ghanaians added within this period, about one is a COP member.⁴²

As a Pentecostal denomination, leadership begins only after the baptism of the Holy Spirit with clear evidence of glossolalia. No one is appointed as a missionary or an officer of the Church who has not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Onyinah notes that the strength and growth of The Church of Pentecost in missions are because it emphasizes the laying on of hands and the Holy Spirit's work in missions.⁴³ Christine Leonard observes that the secret of James McKeown's missionary success was based on only three messages he received from the Holy Spirit: "One, Jesus Christ and him crucified. Two, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Three, the power of God to change lives and bring holiness in the Church."⁴⁴ Onyinah notes that it is the Spirit that renders believers useful for the work of missions (Acts 1:8) and "gives supernatural ability to missionaries, including the power to preach and cast out evil spirits. Thus, people baptized in the Holy Spirit are spontaneous missionaries wherever they go."⁴⁵ The Holy Spirit is the secret behind The Church of Pentecost's growth in the diaspora as members are "empowered by the Holy Spirit and see themselves as agents of the Kingdom of God" to engage in the mission of God. The Church of Pentecost considers the Holy Spirit as the central motivating factor for the mission of God and is the motivating factor in all Pentecostal denominations as reflected in Pentecostal scholars' writings such as "Russel Spittler, Menzies and McClung."⁴⁶ Russel P. Spittler notes that Pentecostal triumph in mission can be ascribed to their inclination towards personal religious experience thus "the experiential particularism involved in every Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit."⁴⁷

The periodic reporting system of The Church of Pentecost attests to the significance of the incident of Pentecost for her mission; all her functional bodies, ministries, and committees always include the number of adherents baptized in the Holy Spirit. The reports always show evidence of intentional Holy Spirit services to facilitate members' experience of glossolalia. Personal experience with the Holy Spirit constitutes the fundamental prerequisite for admission into leadership at all levels, including deacons, deaconesses, elders and pastors. The ministerial committee, which is the committee that interviews and ratifies into full-time ministry whether in Ghana or outside Ghana, confirms that the trust of calling someone into a higher ministerial position in the Church of Pentecost does not depend on one's academic background but rather on one's relationship and experience with the divine Holy Spirit. Education has only become a factor due to the complex nature of contemporary societies. The priority of leadership responsibilities is given to those in whom the Holy Spirit's influence is attested.⁴⁸

The premier indicator that influences the growth and mission agenda of the Church of Pentecost is her cherished Pentecostal experience of glossolalia. Her success story in mission hangs on the transformative experience with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's transformative influence, as evidenced in Acts, influences The Church of Pentecost's aggressive evangelism, discipleship, and practical Christian lifestyle.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that Shavuot in the Old Testament has a link with Pentecost in the book of Acts, which was very significant for mission in Acts and continues to be significant for Christian mission today. Pentecost is significant as the fulfilment of the promise, for cross-cultural missions in unity, in preparation through prayer, in the proclamation of the gospel message, in leadership in mission, and in the restoration

⁴² Tetteh, COP's Response to Ghana 2021 PHC Report by the GSS – Areas of Opportunity, "The Church of Pentecost Statistics Department report, 2021," 1.

⁴³ Opoku Onyinah, "Pentecostal Transformation in Africa: The Rise and Growth of The Church of Pentecost," *Pentecostal Journal of Theology and Mission* 1, no.1 (2016): 22.

⁴⁴ Christine Leonard, *Giant in Ghana* (England, WS: Wine, 1989), 85.

⁴⁵ Onyinah, "Pentecostal Transformation in Africa," 22.

⁴⁶ Onyinah, "Pentecostal Transformation in Africa," 23.

⁴⁷ Russel P. Spittler, "Implicit Values in Pentecostal Missions," *Missiology*, vol. xvi, no. 4 (October 1998): 413.

⁴⁸ Church of Pentecost, *Ministers' Hand Book: Core Practices* (Accra: Pentecost, 2014), 15.

⁴⁹ Amos Jimmy Markin, "Spirit and Mission: The Church of Pentecost as a Growing African Pentecostal Denomination" (PhD diss., South African Theological Seminary, 2018): 297, ProQuest.

of godly character. Pentecost has been significant for the growth of mission movements, as demonstrated through the example of The Church of Pentecost.

However, even though Pentecost is very significant for effective Christian mission today, as emphasized throughout this paper, care must be taken not to sacrifice education or good mission strategies to an exclusive focus on the Holy Spirit's work. No matter how much the Holy Spirit empowers missionaries, proper planning, education, and strategies are necessary to fulfil the Christian mission. Where there has been a lack of proper strategies and education in the history of mission, missionaries had suffered, and some have lost their lives.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Dieudonne Komla Nuekpe (PhD) is an Ordained Minister and a National Head of The Church of Pentecost currently in South Korea. He is committed to serving the church through teaching and preaching the Word of God. Dr Nuekpe obtained a diploma in Bilingual Secretaryship (French - English) from the Ghana Institute of Languages, where he also studied the German language to proficiency level. He earned a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree (BA) from Central University (Ghana) and a Master of Arts Degree in Mission and Theology from Akrofi Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture. He obtained his Master of Divinity (MDiv) from Torch Trinity Graduate University (Seoul) and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Intercultural Studies in the same institution. His research interests include Folk Muslims and Evangelism, Christian-Muslim Relations, Pentecostalism and Cross-cultural mission.