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Spirit without measure, Pentecostal church with limits: A feminist and reader-response reading of Pentecost narratives in Luke–Acts

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Despite Pentecostalism's egalitarian claim rooted in Acts 2:17–18, that the Holy Spirit is poured out on 'all flesh', its traditions uphold patriarchal structures that subordinate women and perpetuate male domination. This article seeks to interrogate this disjunction by re-examining the Lukan Pentecost narratives. Here, Pentecost is not treated as a single, isolated event; rather, this article conceptualises these narratives as an interconnected network of Holy Spirit moments across the entirety of Luke–Acts. Utilising a dual methodological approach that synthesises feminist biblical interpretation with reader-response frameworks, the paper re-evaluates the text to position Pentecost events as subversive. Viewed through these critical lenses, they offer insights that resist patriarchal containment and challenge hierarchies even within Luke–Acts itself. By uncovering these liberatory impulses in the portrayal of the Spirit, an analytical critique of current Pentecostal structures is established.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: In conclusion, this analysis compels Pentecostal communities to actively engage in dismantling entrenched gender inequalities and embrace an inclusive and Spirit-centred framework.

Keywords: Luke–Acts; Pentecostalism; Pentecost; Pentecost narratives; holy spirit and pneumatology; feminist biblical interpretation; reader-response criticism; gender equality.

Introduction

Pentecostalism presents a profound paradox.[1] Although the movement prides itself on a foundational theological vision of unrestricted equality, its lived reality stands in sharp tension with this ideal. Rooted in the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost,[2] the movement originally proclaimed a message and ethos of radical inclusion based on Acts 2:17.[3] This scriptural basis implies a dissolution of boundaries linked to status, age and gender. Yet, despite this egalitarian ideal, patriarchal dynamics continue to shape Pentecostal theology, ecclesial leadership and social practices. This hypocrisy is captured by Kutty (2000:119), who observes a distinct disconnect where Pentecostalism 'preach equality but practice inequality', championing egalitarian principles in theory while reinforcing subordination in daily operations. This dichotomy is sustained by complex hermeneutical strategies. As research by Powers (2009:49), Johns (2009:174) and McClintock-Fulkerson (1994) uncovers, Pentecostal institutions frequently rely on selective focus on isolated proof texts such as those found in 1 Corinthians 13:3 and 14:34 to support gender hierarchies. This occurs even as the Pentecostal movement simultaneously affirms women's active participation in charismatic expressions such as speaking in tongues. Cox (1996:125) expands on this tension, noting that Pentecostal hermeneutical paradigms actively undermine the Holy Spirit's intended gender neutrality. By legalistically enforcing restrictive mandates, these interpretive frameworks ultimately serve to reinforce domestic and ecclesiastical male headship. This heavily curtails the authority and leadership of women (Cox 1996:125). Reflecting this reality, Hollenweger (1999:185) laments that their public ministries have been pushed to the background. This pattern is globally pervasive and mirrors trends found within

1.In this article, Pentecostals refers only to classical, neo-classical, and charismatic movements that emphasise the Holy Spirit and manifestations such as speaking in tongues. This definition excludes African Independent Churches (AICs), as they do not identify themselves as Pentecostal, and classical or neo-Pentecostal groups likewise do not recognise them as part of their tradition.

2.New Testament scholarship commonly understands Pentecost as the single, extraordinary moment in Acts 2 marking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the empowerment of the disciples and the symbolic birth of the Christian community. While I affirm these understandings, I extend Pentecost beyond that one event. I extend the phrase Pentecost narratives to include the interconnected Holy Spirit moments across Luke–Acts. These are texts that record the work, presence, anticipation, arrival, character or impact of the Holy Spirit.

3.Many scholars regard Luke and Acts as a two-volume work by the same author, unified by shared language, style and theology. I am among those who see them as inseparable, especially since both foreground the activity of the Holy Spirit.

African contexts as well. Scholars like Mate (2002:566) demonstrate that African Pentecostals replicate these patriarchal norms, deeply impacting family and marriage structures. Within these environments, the demand for female submission becomes spiritualised, rendering patriarchy resilient and making male dominance appear religiously legitimate (Mate 2002:566). As a result, biblical analysis within Pentecostalism becomes a site of contestation, acting either as a space of sustaining systems of domination or as a catalyst to unlock transformative and egalitarian spaces (Mate 2002:566).

It is within this context of tension and ambivalence that this article revisits the Pentecost passages of Luke–Acts. Central to these accounts and arguably the most famous is the Pentecost manifestation found in Acts 2:17–18. To articulate its significance, Johnson (1992:24) describes the Pentecost event as 'the manifestation of divine fidelity to promises long anticipated', revealing God's faithfulness to the promises and commitments made to Israel. Similarly, Dunn (2010:27) views Pentecost as a pivotal realisation signalling the onset of the final dispensation. This transition introduces a new phase of divine engagement that radically reconstructs the identity and calling of God's people. Expanding on this, Keener (1997) explains Pentecost as an event of empowerment, through which the Holy Spirit equips the faith community for global mission, witness and communal existence. These perspectives frame Pentecost as a multi-dimensional and complex theological phenomenon whose layered meanings remain interconnected and dynamic. Therefore, Pentecost resists reduction to a single and fixed interpretation.

While extensive Pentecostal scholarship has focused on the theological and missional significance of the primary Pentecost event in Acts 2, fewer studies have paid attention to the broader collection of Pentecost narratives across Luke–Acts. Yet, these passages expose gendered contradictions within modern Pentecostalism by depicting the Holy Spirit's work in subverting conditions that marginalise human life. To address this gap, this paper engages both the Acts 2 account and these concurrent Pentecost texts through the combined perspectives of feminist biblical interpretation and reader-response criticism, situated within a framework centred on the Holy Spirit. When the Pentecost narratives are read through these interpretive angles, their inherent liberating impulse becomes visible. As a result, these passages function as both a foundation and a normative critique, challenging modern Pentecostal communities to fully embody the inclusive promise proclaimed at the birth of the movement in Acts 2.

Reader-response criticism: Meaning is context-specific

Reader-response criticism operates on the premise that biblical texts do not function independently of their readers. Textual meaning is forged as readers bring their distinct experiences and questions to the text (Segovia 1995:8). Iser (1980:169; Fowler 1992:61), building upon the concept, emphasises that written works naturally contain 'blanks', ambiguities and omissions, moments where 'something is missing'. These literary gaps do not represent a failure of the text, but rather an invitation to the readers. Meaning is actively generated through the reader's imagination as they make connections to fill these text spaces, hence transforming any reader into an active co-creator of meaning (Iser 1980:169). For African Pentecostal women, this claim reflects the lived reality of how they encounter and embody Scripture. Many read the Bible with deep devotion, yet they must wrestle with complex hermeneutical tensions. Specifically, they navigate how the Bible has been used to justify their marginalisation within church and society (Gabaitse 2013:1). Their specific social location, shaped by intersecting factors of gender, culture, ecclesial upbringing and communal expectations, forms the lens through which Scripture is read, interpreted and lived.

A clear manifestation of how these theoretical 'blanks' intersect with marginalised social locations occurs in Acts 21. The text reports that Philip's daughters were prophets, and yet their prophetic words are not recorded. This textual silence functions as an interpretive space. For Pentecostal women and other readers, such an absence invites them to grapple with what is left unsaid, allowing them to step into a textual gap. Through this process, they recognise that Scripture can yield multiple and context-based specific meanings generated at the intersection of the Spirit, text and lived experiences of believers (Segovia 1995:8).

Consequently, while communities of faith can no longer expand the canon, they can and must continue reading the Bible in ways that respond to challenges of their time. This perspective is particularly empowering for Pentecostal women, as it allows them to reclaim Acts 2 as a living witness that speaks directly into their present contexts, affirming the dignity and legitimacy of their existence. At the same time, reader-response criticism alone does not guarantee egalitarian outcomes. When interpreters remain influenced by oppressive social norms, their readings may still reinforce gender hierarchy rather than challenge it. For this reason, reader-response criticism is complemented by feminist biblical interpretation to uproot deeply entrenched patriarchal biases.

Feminist biblical interpretation: A quest for egalitarian readings

Feminist biblical interpretation provides a critical lens for identifying androcentric assumptions embedded within both the scriptural text and its interpretation. Drawing on the work of Schüssler-Fiorenza (1983, 2001:34), this article employs a hermeneutic of suspicion to interrogate patterns of power, silence and marginalisation within Luke–Acts and Pentecostal spaces. Masenya (2005:47–59) clarifies that this suspicion is directed against both the biblical text itself and against the unexamined patriarchal assumptions that manifest through traditional readings.

When applied to the Lukan texts, these hermeneutical concerns draw attention to whose experiences are foregrounded within the story and who remains unheard. Such questions illuminate the tension between the Spirit's egalitarian promise and the patriarchal ideological constraints within which Luke–Acts was composed. One such tension concerning women identified as prophets mentioned above will be examined in detail later in this article. At this stage, the focus is on identifying the interpretive concerns that shape the reading without isolating them as separate methodological steps. Both reader-response criticism and feminist biblical interpretation are situated within a Pentecostal, Spirit-centred paradigm that understands Pentecost as inaugurating an ongoing era of the Spirit. Through this lens, the Holy Spirit is approached as an active presence who continues to challenge and expand the church's understanding of Scripture. This attentiveness to the Spirit does not override careful textual analysis; instead, it provides the theological context within which interpretation takes place. Claims about the Spirit's liberating activity emerge as theological conclusions grounded in the broader literary movement of Luke–Acts, rather than as assertions concerning authorial intention.

Integrating feminist biblical interpretation and reader-response criticism into a pneumatological approach enables a disciplined yet liberatory reading of the Lukan accounts. This dual focus honours historical context while explicitly centring the lived experiences of women. The sections that follow turn directly to Luke–Acts to examine how the Holy Spirit functions within the work and how these portrayals challenge patriarchal structures both within the text and in Pentecostal practice. By questioning patriarchal assumptions and amplifying marginalised perspectives, this analysis naturally fulfils these interpretive commitments (Feminist biblical interpretation, reader response criticism and pneumatological approach).

Luke–Acts: The foundation of the Pentecostal church

As core texts, Luke–Acts lie at the heart of Pentecostal self-definition (Khalid 1991). The volumes in Luke–Acts do not just provide historical context but also exert a prescriptive and authoritative influence that directly shapes Pentecostal existence (McGee 1994:276–277; Warrington 2008). Perhaps the greatest importance of Luke–Acts lies in how the composition intensely foregrounds the Holy Spirit. González (2001) asserts that the Holy Spirit operates as the primary protagonist, driving the story forward across both volumes. This heavy reliance on the Holy Spirit uniquely distinguishes Pentecostals from other Christian groups. This prompted Anderson (1991, 2000) to define Pentecostal believers as 'People of the Spirit', a characterisation that has gained widespread acceptance across the global movement. Because the Holy Spirit occupies a foundational place in both Lukan theology and Pentecostal life, this article prioritises a dedicated discussion of how the Spirit operates within Luke–Acts.

The discussion is essential because it demonstrates that Pentecost episodes serve as disruptive theological resources capable of unsettling patriarchal biases within both Luke–Acts and contemporary Pentecostal church environments. To explore these dynamics, the following analysis is organised into three thematic divisions: The Holy Spirit Empowers, The Holy Spirit, Salvation History and Inclusion and, lastly, The Holy Spirit and The Circumcision Debate in Acts 15.

The holy spirit empowers

Luke–Acts contains numerous Pentecost manifestations that reveal how the Holy Spirit disrupts human hierarchies to open possibilities for those existing at the margins (González 2001:8). These instances are sometimes small and appear almost incidental, yet they form a consistent pattern. In Luke 1, Mary stands as a striking example. Though she is a young woman and of low social standing, she is uniquely honoured and chosen to bear the Messiah. Her Spirit-filled song proclaims that God exalts the humble, so her elevation exemplifies the liberating work of the Spirit as an agent of empowerment. This pattern continues in Jesus' inaugural sermon, where he declares that the Spirit of the Lord has anointed him to bring good news to the impoverished, to the captives and to restore those crushed by life (Lk 4:18–19). It culminates in Acts 2 where the Spirit descends upon 'all flesh', entirely disregarding distinctions of age, gender, class and social status (Suurmond 1995:201). Throughout Luke–Acts, the recurring appearance of the Holy Spirit is consistently associated with new life, freedom, joy and empowerment (Lk 1:35; 2:38; 6:10; 10:21). People trapped in hunger, disease, debt and social exclusion are liberated in ways that manifest the Spirit's presence. This restorative work stands in contrast to the destructive influence of unclean spirits. The demoniac in Luke 8, described as naked, isolated and stripped of dignity, provides a compelling example. Hence, his restoration underscores that the Holy Spirit rebuilds whole personhood, whereas dehumanising oppressive forces actively diminish it. When read together, these stories reveal that the Spirit moves against whatever limits human flourishing. This understanding has profound implications for the contemporary Pentecostal church because a community of faith filled with the Spirit should not sustain systems of power that diminish women's personhood or restrict their authority (Yong 2005:40). Therefore, a church that invokes the Holy Spirit while maintaining rigid hierarchical structures stands in direct tension with the very liberating presence it claims to cherish.

The holy spirit, salvation history and inclusion

The concept of Salvation history pioneered by Conzelmann (1960) offers a vital paradigm for mapping the work of the Holy Spirit across the Lukan writings. Conzelmann (1960:112) argues that Luke divides history into three distinct periods:

the time of Israel and the prophets, the time of the ministry of Jesus and the present age of the Church. Within this scheme, the Holy Spirit serves as the primary agent of continuity, ensuring that the ministry of Jesus transitions seamlessly through to the early and contemporary church. While scholars may debate the rigid precision of Conzelmann's (1960) model, his insight into the centrality of the Holy Spirit remains very important. In this model, the Spirit functions as a bridge across time, anchoring the church within God's unfolding work of salvation. Beyond providing historical continuity, Spencer (2008:67) highlights that the Holy Spirit operates as an egalitarian force during this period of the church. Spencer (2008:67, 219) emphasises that the Lukan presentation depicts a Spirit who democratises divine favour by transcending traditional societal boundaries of age, gender and socioeconomic class. Consequently, marginalised individuals are included as part of God's nation.

This inclusive, Spirit-centred outlook serves as the foundation for contemporary Pentecostal identity. As Anderson (1991) notes, Pentecostalism is rooted in the conviction that modern believers inhabit this active dispensation of the Spirit. Within this period, charismatic expressions such as Spirit baptism, prophecy, speaking in tongues and divine healing are treated as present realities. This theological conviction demands the systemic dismantling of patriarchal systems that restrict women's equal participation in church and home. Because the Spirit is poured out to all, gender-based hierarchies lose all legitimacy, rendering any defence of male-only authority an ideological contradiction of core Pentecostal identity. Therefore, a church existing in the era of the Holy Spirit and guided by the same must confront any structure that opposes the Spirit's work of making people equal. Whenever Pentecostal institutions marginalise or restrict women from leadership, they not only fall short of contemporary expectations of gender justice and equality, but they, in a massive way, compromise their own vision of the Spirit. A church that genuinely embraces the active movement of the Holy Spirit must open all avenues of institutional influence and leadership to everyone. To maintain exclusionary barriers directly invalidates and contradicts both the witness of Scripture and the authenticity of lived experience.

The holy spirit and the circumcision debate in Acts 15

Another significant moment in Luke–Acts that reveals the Spirit's liberating character is the debate over whether Gentiles must be circumcised before being welcomed into the community of believers (Ac 15:1–29). This controversy threatened to fracture the early church, as some members, appealing to the Law of Moses, insisted that circumcision remained an essential marker of Jewish identity (Ac 15:5). While the early church could have easily imposed circumcision on the Gentiles since Scripture and history appeared to support their position, the intervention of the Holy Spirit became the decisive factor in the resolution of that debate. They had to let go of long-held assumptions to align themselves with the Holy Spirit's far-reaching work (Gabaitse 2013:172). It is here that Peter testified that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles 'just as he did to us', thereby 'making no distinctions between us and them' (Ac 15:8–9). This insight reveals that the Spirit recognised no boundaries where the community had previously maintained them. If the Spirit made 'no distinctions', the early community of faith was compelled to do the same, concluding: 'It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials' (Ac 15:28). This verse captures the theological core of the debate as Archer (2001:67) highlights that the Spirit leads the church beyond the perceived requirements of Scripture, reshapes communal identity, overturns traditional exclusions and refuses to burden Gentiles with legalistic demands.

This paradigm holds great significance for Pentecostal women today. Just as the early church submitted authoritative writings and traditions to the discernment of the Holy Spirit, modern Pentecostal churches must also scrutinise their own reading habits and doctrinal positions to eliminate gender divisions. There is no valid ground to enforce barriers that limit women's personhood and participation. With 2000 years of ecclesial reflection and the clear witness of Pentecost incidents, Pentecostals must acknowledge a vital truth: that where the Holy Spirit actively deconstructs structures that exclude marginalised groups, the exclusion of women becomes theologically indefensible. Because Acts 15 demonstrates unequivocally that the Spirit is not bound by cultural traditional boundaries, the Spirit instead decisively leads the church into more inclusive forms of being a community. Therefore, Pentecostalism cannot afford to resist this movement. It must faithfully honour the same Spirit who once welcomed Gentiles without circumcision and who continues to empower women without requiring conformity to patriarchal expectations (Archer 2001:67).

Reinterpreting Pentecost: Its relevance in contemporary contexts

The initial response to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, 'What does this mean?' (Ac 2:12), centred entirely on a quest for interpretation and meaning. Far from being a settled academic inquiry, this question carries urgent weight for contemporary Pentecostal women. It invites modern readers to bridge the distance between the ancient scripture and their present lived experiences, actively pulling Luke–Acts forward into the present. This shifts the understanding of texts from a static event to an active process. Treating Pentecost just as a historical monument minimises its capacity to critique contemporary institutional and social exclusions. Conversely, recognising the Holy Spirit's outpouring as a continuous phenomenon transforms the narrative from a passive record into an active interpretive schema for today's world. Hence, the following sections explore this perspective by examining three core areas: Pentecost as a present reality and Pentecost as a critique of inequality within Pentecostalism and as a critique of the unfulfilled prophecies within Luke–Acts.

Pentecost: A present reality

Viewed through the lens of Gadamer's (2004:311) concept of 'effective history', Pentecost functions as a living tradition that continues to shape believers long after its original moment. A recent example is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Asbury University in February 2023 (Flavell 2023). What began as a routine chapel service for students developed into 16 days of continual prayer and worship as participants described deep experiences of God's presence. This event bore a striking resemblance to the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2, where the Spirit's outpouring exceeded human control (Flavell 2023). The Asbury outpouring illustrates that Pentecost is not confined to the past but continues to break into the present wherever believers gather in expectancy. Of particular significance is the way the Spirit moved freely at Asbury, empowering the voices of women, men, young people and individuals without formal leadership roles. The revival revealed that the living presence of the Spirit cannot be limited by human hierarchies.

This phenomenon offers a vital lesson for Pentecostal churches because if Pentecost is a present reality, its ongoing movement will naturally clash with static institutional arrangements. Patriarchal leadership structures, restrictive biblical interpretations and rigid gender roles rely on treating church traditions as fixed. However, a church that honours Pentecost as a living reality must cultivate environments in which all human beings, regardless of gender or status, can participate fully and freely. Ultimately, Pentecost behaves much like prophecy itself; it never fades or ceases; and when it breaks the present, it exposes the illegitimacy of any human system that seeks to minimise it (Yong 2005:142).

Pentecost narratives: A critique of inequality within Pentecostalism

McClintock-Fulkerson (1994:254) conceptualises the movement of the Holy Spirit as a disruptive force, one that radically destabilises world hierarchies. Yong (2005:142) contends that Pentecost signals a decisive transformation in the relationship between God and humanity and, by extension, how human beings interact and relate with one another. Both scholars emphasise that the Spirit poured upon 'all flesh' is not a poetic flourish; it is a theological claim that reorders social relationships. This claim holds a radically different vision in a world deeply divided along lines of gender, class, race and socio-economic status (Yong 2005:142). This claim is rooted directly in Acts 2, which features a relentless emphasis on universality through the recurring use of the word *all: all* the believers were together (Ac 2:1); *all* were filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4); and the Spirit was poured out upon *all* flesh (2:17). Since this promise extended both to *all* who were present and for *all* who were far off (2:39), the language suggests that the community birthed by the Holy Spirit is intended to be radically inclusive (Gabaitse 2013:194).

For the Pentecostal church, this democratic outpouring demands more than doctrinal assent. It requires tangible restructuring of communal life and a deliberate unlearning of patterns of exclusion. This levelling presses the church to examine the everyday spaces where power is exercised – from committee rooms to pulpits to leadership teams and family structures. All dimensions of church cultures must reflect the Spirit's vision of inclusion in opposition to stratified power. As Archer (2001:37) notes, genuine Pentecostalism is revolutionary, demanding a social and communal transformation where domination is replaced by the unrestricted participation of female members. If the Holy Spirit is genuinely poured out upon *all* flesh, any practice that relegates women to the periphery is incompatible with Pentecostal identity.

When a church culturalises these exclusions, it stifles the very gifts intended to build up the community, hindering the manifestation of the power of God and distorting its own core ethos. Furthermore, denying what the Spirit freely gives grieves and wounds the Holy Spirit. While Luke–Acts does not use the phrase 'grieve the Spirit', other scriptural witnesses, such as Ephesians 4:30, affirm that the Spirit is wounded by practices that replicate models of exclusion and patriarchal dominance. True unity is impossible where equal belonging is denied. Additionally, the radical, all-inclusive nature of Acts 2 collapses under the weight of patriarchal structures. Ultimately, when the Pentecostal church resists egalitarian reconstruction, it is rejecting the very event that gave birth to its existence. For this reason, the event of Pentecost stands as both a sharp rebuke to Pentecostalism's patriarchal practices and a hopeful promise of an uncompromised inclusive community (Gabaitse 2013:192).

Pentecost narratives: A critique of unfulfilled prophecies and Luke–Acts

Schneiders (1999:160) argues that biblical texts possess the capacity to challenge and completely dismantle the entrenched male-dominated presuppositions of the worlds that generated them. Schneiders (1994:164) insists that when the Bible is read with an intention towards empowerment, it can undermine the very cultural structures that influenced its production. I contend that the Pentecost narratives do precisely this; they critique the broader male-centric mindset of Luke–Acts, which at times fails to realise the egalitarian vision it proclaims. For instance, several passages within Luke–Acts reveal an unmistakable preference for male leadership. Jesus' appointment of the 12 (Lk 6:12–16), the selection of Matthias to replace Judas (Ac 1:21–26) and the appointment of the seven (Ac 6:1–6) all assume male hegemony as the norm. These accounts do demonstrate that Luke's authorial imagination remained shaped by the androcentric biases of his world.

A concrete illustration of the above pattern appears in Acts 21:9. Luke mentions that Philip had 'four unmarried daughters who prophesied'. This description affirms their prophetic identity and a direct fulfilment of Acts 2:18–19. Yet, Luke fails to record a single word of their prophecy. The daughters

remain unnamed and defined only through their father. The silence is striking, especially when contrasted with the report of Agabus, a male prophet whose prophecy Luke–Acts records in detail shortly afterwards (Ac 21:10–11). Luke–Acts preserves Agabus' spoken words, while entirely censoring the prophetic utterances of the daughters of Philip. While the Holy Spirit clearly recognised women as prophets, Luke did not give them a textual voice. Therefore, feminist biblical interpretation helps modern readers see that this textual silence is not innocent; it represents a deliberate authorial choice. Further, feminist biblical interpretation equips us to read 'against the grain' of Luke–Acts, exposing moments where the Spirit's inclusivity is constricted by Luke's traditional worldview. While the Holy Spirit speaks, the compositional structure hinders its full and revolutionary unfolding. In this light, the very mention of these women, even in their silenced state, functions as a subversive witness. The Pentecost promise of 'all flesh', coupled with the recorded presence of Philip's daughters, serves as an internal critique within Luke–Acts itself. It also establishes a standard of equality that the work frequently reaches for, even when the characterisation occasionally falls short. Therefore, Pentecostal incidents, especially the prophecy in Acts 2:18–19, continue to stand as a haunting critique of Luke–Acts' failure to fully fulfil the promise of allowing us to see women's prophecies (Gabaitse 2013:202).

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the tension between Pentecostalism's egalitarian, Spirit-centred framework and its continued male-dominated practices through feminist and reader-response rereading of Pentecost narratives in Luke–Acts. Although Acts 2 proclaims the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon 'all flesh', this article has shown that many Pentecostal communities continue to sustain systemic gender inequality through selective and biased interpretation rather than through faithfulness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

My findings also reveal that the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts consistently disrupts exclusionary boundaries and empowers marginalised persons, even where the composition itself reflects traditional gender biases. The deliberations of the early church in Acts 15 further illustrate that entrenched traditions were reinterpreted considering the Spirit's activity. Further, the narrative silence surrounding Philip's daughters exposed the limits of Luke–Acts' cultural horizon rather than any deficiency in Spirit empowerment. I concluded that Pentecost functions not only as Pentecostalism's founding event but also as its critique. To affirm the Spirit poured out on 'all flesh', while at the same time maintaining patriarchal structures, constitutes a contradiction within Pentecostal existence. The Holy Spirit, therefore, emerges as a disruptive presence who challenges systems of domination, subverts these disparities and calls the Pentecostal church towards the full participation of women in all spheres of life and ministry. Until women are fully recognised and affirmed within church and society, the Pentecostal promise that 'your daughters shall prophesy' remains unresolved and unfulfilled.

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Rosinah M. Gabaitse: Conceptualisation, Investigation, Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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