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ESSAY

Overlooked by the Spirit-filled: Womanist Pentecostalism and the case of the Hellenistic widows

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ABSTRACT

From its inception until now, Pentecostalism has thrived among Black communities, women and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation. Pentecostal theological ethicists have dealt in some ways with the themes of race, class and gender but often as single issues, meaning that Black women, who exist at the intersections, can be overlooked. Womanist ethics has a particular contribution to make to Pentecostal theology and Pentecostal studies since womanists centre the Spirit, as well as the lived experiences and faith of Black women in a world (and churches) marked indelibly by racism, sexism and classism. Given the centrality of the Bible in Black Pentecostal women's spirituality, in this article, I examine the case of the Hellenistic widows in Acts 6 which illustrates the importance of Pentecostal womanism for critiquing the problems of race, gender and class, that shape even the Spirit-filled community not only in the early church but also today.

KEYWORDS

Womanism; Pentecostalism; gender; race; class; widows

Introduction

Womanist theology emerged in the writings of Delores Williams, Katie Cannon and Jacquelyn Grant, those whom Monica Coleman refers to as 'the first wave'.[1] In the theological work of these scholars, God was discussed, as God appeared in the lives and experiences of Black women. The starting point was Black women's experiences in a world distorted by racism, sexism and classism. It is in this context, that God made Godself known, as Black women talked with and about God, and worshipped God in the midst of their struggles and their joys. The biblical text is read in this tradition, through Black women's experiences and with Black women's questions and insights leading the dialogue. In this way, interpretation of the biblical text resists the harmful inscription

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[1]Coleman, *Ain't I a Womanist, Too?*, 42.

of white (including white feminist), patriarchal and elitist hermeneutical norms. God is, in the womanist theology of this first generation, the one who sees the abused, mistreated and dehumanized Hagar, embodied in contemporary terms, in the African American enslaved woman and her descendant daughters.[2] God is embodied as 'Black women's Jesus': one who is familiar with the oppression Black women experience, under imperialistic violent structures himself.[3] Black women may draw on theological resources such as the '*imago dei*, love as grounded in justice and the irreplaceable nature of community' to sustain and nurture life in the context of struggle in public life, and also in the church.[4]

The foundation laid by these scholars has since been built upon by subsequent generations of womanists who have also broadened the scope of womanist work. Womanist theology and biblical studies now include as varied subjects as there are Black women to think of them. Yet there are certain commitments which remain at the core for all. Wilda Gafney, a womanist biblical scholar explains womanist hermeneutical approaches as:

> 1) … being regularly multidimensional; they can be interdisciplinary, collaborative and/or multicontextual. 2) They emphasise and prioritise women's experience in general and the social location of the reader/interpreter in particular. 3) A (if not the) goal of womanist discourse is the eradication of all forms of human oppression. 4) The fruit of womanist scholarship must be accessible to the wider non-specialist worshipping community.[5]

Womanist work is engaged with the task of change-making, tearing down and building up, it is *prophetic* work.[6] I engage with this womanist work, as a Jamaican-British woman, of African Caribbean heritage, descended from those kidnapped and enslaved in the Americas. Though I am not African American and did not grow up reading Alice Walker or hearing the term 'womanish'[7] (Jamaican Patois prefers the term 'force ripe') womanism is a well from which I might also draw, for the sake of critical reflection, on my own experiences and those of Black women like me, in places like mine. Womanism in the 'third wave' as described by Monica Coleman[8] gives space for Black women in the wider African diaspora to engage in critical work to reflect on and dismantle the multiple forms of injustice which shape their lives and those of human beings around the world.

In the first part of this article, I begin by exploring the interrelatedness between womanism and Pentecostalism, particularly in the thought of Yolanda Pierce and then in the UK context. I follow this by providing a

[2]Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 23
[3]Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, 6.
[4]Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 160.
[5]Gafney, "A Black Feminist Approach to Biblical Studies," 392.
[6]Smith, "This Little Light of Mine," 112–18.
[7]Alice Walker was the first to use the term 'womanist' in *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, xi–xii.
[8]Harris, *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker*, 125–38; and Coleman, *Ain't I a Womanist, Too?*, 43.

theological case for the importance of womanist Pentecostal work, by examining the treatment of the Hellenistic widows in Acts 6. This passage of scripture offers a motif for examining the place of Black women in the community of the Spirit-filled and the ongoing need for 'womanist ways'.[9]

Pentecostal and womanist

Pentecostalism from the outset has emerged and grown due to the faith and faithfulness of Black women. It is a faith that is built upon the experience of God, the Spirit in particular among 'those with their backs against the wall'.[10] Black working women of the early 1900s were not only present but also leaders among the early communities from which the Azusa Street revival would emerge.[11] Pentecostalism can be understood in part as a womanist movement, in terms of the role of Black women in its emergence. For Keri Day who emphasizes the 'Black Female Genius' which underpinned the Azusa Street revival,[12] it is the voices, labour and leadership of Black women which made the revival what it was. This is not simply in terms of their position in embracing the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through their lives, but the prophetic witness of their spirituality and ministry which resisted the capitalistic white supremacist norms of their wider social and political context.[13] This is true despite the attempts by men of all races to restrain Black women and prevent them from living and expressing themselves as people freed by the Spirit in whom they had been baptized.[14]

Yolanda Pierce has provided us with a clear framework for how we might approach Pentecostalism through a womanist lens. The question of whether Pentecostalism and womanism are compatible is superfluous for Pierce, who explains that 'these two identities have been linked together since the origins of the faith'.[15] For Pierce, the relevant question is 'When did Pentecostalism *stop* affirming a … womanist identity?'.[16] In her essay 'Womanist Ways and Pentecostalism: The Work of Recovery and Critique' she outlines four ways to reverse this trend and bring the two into dialogue:

> A womanist approach to the study of early Pentecostalism critiques the mythic egalitarian origins of Pentecostal identity … examines the various outcomes, especially for women, for a 'movement' that transitioned to an 'institution' … considers both the blessings and the costs of daring to claim a womanist identity … [and] is unafraid to examine other theological models for revelation of truth.[17]

[9]Pierce, "Womanist Ways," 24–34.
[10]Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 1.
[11]Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street*, Revised ed., 15–21; 22–36; 39–51; 96–105; 193–204.
[12]Day, *Azusa Reimagined*, 74.
[13]Ibid., 74–103.
[14]Ibid., 53–4, 88–90, 96.
[15]Pierce, "Womanist Ways," 26.
[16]Emphasis mine, ibid., 26–7.
[17]Ibid., 30–4.

There is, therefore, historical work to be done in unearthing hidden stories of Black women's place and role in Pentecostalism. In addition, it is important that we recognize and correct narratives which fail to highlight the struggles Black women faced and overcame. There is personal work for us, as scholars who are seeking to take part in the 'eradication of all forms of human oppression',[18] in the context of Pentecostal communities. In addition, Pierce encourages a posture of curiosity and innovation in the disciplines and models we use to explore these questions.

Though Pierce is focused here on the need to articulate a womanist approach to Pentecostal studies, what she offers is a tool for womanist Pentecostal approaches to reading scripture and undertaking the theological task. For Black Pentecostals and Black Pentecostal women especially, the bible has consistently functioned as an essential source for encounters with the divine and reflection on their lived experience.[19] In the words of Renita Weems:

> The bible (rather, its contents) has not been presented to African American women as one of a number of books available to her to read as she pleases. For African American (Protestant) women, the bible has been the *only* book passed down from her ancestors, and it has been presented to her as *the* medium for experiencing and knowing the will of the Christian God.[20]

Gathering around the biblical text can be complex for Black women. However, at its best, it allows Black women to recognize their divinely given power to interpret the scripture, to exert their gifts to lead and to make a case for their gifts and leadership to be received by the church.[21] The Acts of the Apostles in particular has functioned as a biblical and theological foundation for the Pentecostal movement, which has in some sense recognized itself as continuing or even recapturing the ideals of the early church recorded in Acts 2. The experience of spiritual gifts and the miraculous, missionary activity and conversions, communal support and a radical stance in relation to the wider political and cultural context are all desirable aspects of the Church's early history which Pentecostals have hoped to embody in their contemporary contexts.[22] Acts 2 has also had great significance in the Black church more broadly, as African Americans in particular have sought to argue in favour of inclusive Christian communities.[23]

In Pierce's summary of womanist ways and Pentecostalism, we are invited to welcome new approaches to studies of the Pentecostal movement. Yet, what she

[18]Gafney, "A Black Feminist Approach to Biblical Studies," 392.
[19]Harris, "Black Pentecostal Hermeneutics?" 213–14, 216–17; Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, 17–26; and Gilkes, "You've Got a Right to the Tree of Life," 154–5, 164–7.
[20]Weems, "Reading Her Way Through the Struggle," 63.
[21]Gilkes, "You've Got a Right to the Tree of Life," 153–4, 159, 161–2; Butler, "Only a Woman Would Do," 155–78; Toulis, *Believing Identity*, 139–41; and Weems, "Reading Her Way Through the Struggle," 60–72.
[22]Day, *Azusa Reimagined*, 4–5, 68–9; and Toulis, *Believing Identity*, 125. This is not only true for Pentecostals but often for Christians more generally, see Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus and Prophetic Church*, 4, 96–129.
[23]Williams, "Acts," 213–48.

describes also opens up new ways of considering all that contributes to Pentecostal identity, including the reading of core Pentecostal texts. If 'womanist ways', require us to critique the 'mythic egalitarian origins' of the Pentecostal movement, how might this apply to how Pentecostals can idealize the stories of the Spirit-baptized community in the book of Acts? If womanism requires us to examine outcomes for Black women, then surely this must also require us to look at how notions of gender as well as ethnicity (if not race) or economic status (if not class) shape the lives of those considered to offer a framework for how Pentecostals should be and think? How might the 'blessings and costs' of womanism appear as this biblical and theological work is undertaken? And what other resources might enhance a re-reading of the Spirit-baptized community of Acts, in the light of these womanist commitments?

In the UK, Maxine Howell has sought to address the questions of Black women's approaches to scripture in the construction of their identity. Through what she calls a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy (WPP) Black women gather together to reread biblical texts in light of their lived experiences. This re-reading is necessary because:

> Firstly, the content of traditional readings of the Bible conceal rather than reveal the vitality of women. Black people and the poor in the fulfilment of the gospel. Secondly, the research methods used in readings, even unconventional ones, can be rooted in positivist approaches that reflect the Eurocentric masculinist epistemology, which dominates our institutions and social processes.[24]

Howell is touching on what Pierce explores in the case of Pentecostal womanism and the need to re-examine existing knowledge or perceived knowledge in the light of Black women's experiences. Howell does not confirm the tradition of the women she works with but the 'pneumatological' label might be presumed to allude to a Pentecostal approach, especially in light of the dominance of Black Pentecostalism in Britain when compared to other denominations. At minimum, the 'pneumatological' lends itself to a Pentecostal womanist approach, by cultivating an expectation of the Spirit's presence and work in the act of reflecting on the biblical text and interpreting it in the light of Black women's lived experience.[25] Highlighting 'story linking', which in the work of Anne Wimberly is understood to allow African Americans to connect stories of their everyday lives and hope for liberation with exemplars in the biblical text and beyond,[26] Howell explains the importance of using womanist tools, which for her include:

> The centring of Black women's experience, historical memory, hermeneutic of suspicion, multi-dimensional analysis and the pursuit of socio-political wholeness {which the British Black sojourners employ). These tools … allow Black women to challenge

[24]Howell, "Towards a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy," 87.
[25]Harris, "Black Pentecostal Hermeneutics?" 202–17.
[26]Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 39.

> unjust forms of church action and thought in order to facilitate social change in a variety of ways.[27]

For Pentecostal womanist work, it is clear that critical analyses of power and exclusion are important regardless of whether the work is engaging with stories in the biblical text or the lives of Black women. The hope to transform unjust realities is also an essential element of womanist Pentecostal work, especially the belief that this transformation occurs through the coming of the Spirit upon God's people. This is the case whether the injustice is identified through the stories Black women tell alone, or with the additional help of social analysis, or the theological foundations laid out in scripture or a combination. These are the guidelines which will equip us for our re-reading of the case of the Hellenistic widows in Acts 6.

The Hellenistic widows: A case for Pentecostal womanism

Recognizing the symbiotic relationship between womanist ethics and Pentecostalism is not only significant for a deeper understanding of the sociology and history of the Pentecostal movement. Reading biblical texts with a womanist lens enables us to uncover often overlooked perspectives. To read with a womanist lens is to centre the women in the biblical text who are often unnamed, or unseen. It is to look behind and around the dominating male figures who the biblical writers have often chosen to focus on, and instead to look for the everyday women who are considered less important or inconsequential. Clarice J. Martin explains,

> The quest for holistic and inclusive translations and interpretations must also include strategies for 'amplifying the whisper' of all persons who by virtue of race, class or other anthropological referents, are assumed to be 'morally bankrupt' or of negligible theological consequence within the narrative structure of biblical traditions.[28]

In keeping with Pentecostal tradition which centres on the Lukan texts, I will consider a particular story in the Acts of the Apostles, which to my mind, brings into focus the importance of womanism for the community of the Spirit-baptized. This passage speaks to the ways in which minoritized women, within the community of faith, can experience multiple forms of marginalization and victimization, whether due to gender and culture, race or ethnicity, or class. I engage with the following text as a theologian, not a biblical scholar, who understands the centrality of the bible as an essential resource for theology and Pentecostal womanist ethics. Black Pentecostal women, as we have seen, give special authority to the scripture in their lives, and are familiar with the need to re-read biblical texts in ways which allow them to 'story link' as described by Wimberly.

[27]Howell, "Towards a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy," 92.
[28]Martin, "Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament," 55.

The Acts of the Apostles offer a foundation for Pentecostal theology and ethics primarily through the story of Pentecost and the ensuing transformation of the early church. Passages from the book of Acts have formed the basis for charismatic theologies, encouraging believers to anticipate and seek their own baptism in the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Similarly, expectations of physical healing, deliverance from demons and other supernatural occurrences also find their main impetus in this book. The pattern of the early church's life described in Acts 2:42–47 has developed into an idealized vision of this first-century gathering of believers. The text reads that 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer'. Luke's words that 'all the believers were together and had everything in common' and sold 'property and possessions to give to anyone who had need' offers a challenge to contemporary forms of Christianity impacted by and sometimes deeply intertwined with individualism and consumerism.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind Pierce's warning regarding the temptation of uncritically accepting 'mythic egalitarian origins',[29] we must examine the moments in Acts, where we detect that there is more to this vision of a perfect church. While it may seem on the surface at least that the values and practices of this new community, were completely aligned with the Gospel of the risen Jesus, we also detect signs that all was not well in this regard. In Acts 5:1–11 we read the story of Ananias and Sapphira which is often interpreted as a story of God's judgment against those who deceive. Yet it is also possible for this story to speak of the forms of social pressure that may have been generated by the ideals of the Early Church. Why did Ananias believe he had to lie about giving all of his money to the Apostles? Was he afraid of being judged? Was there a subtle indication that nothing less than total generosity to the cause would be expected, despite Peter's words: 'Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?' (Acts 5:4, NIV). Why did Sapphira suffer the same fate? Wasn't supporting her husband's lies, what was expected?[30] All is not well in the life of the early church. This unfortunate incident is followed in Chapter 6, by a brief reference to a problem that was occurring with food distribution:

> In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. (Acts 6:1, NIV)

The conflict being described here is taking place within a community that includes people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Notions of identity and belonging are not straightforward at any time, and this is true

[29]Pierce, "Womanist Ways," 30.
[30]For a womanist reading of this story see Smith, *The Literary Construction*, 102–13.

also of this ancient context. There is general agreement that the Hellenistic Jews were Greeks living in the diaspora and were Greek-speaking. Hebraic Jews were those who had remained in the area we now call Palestine, and were primarily Aramaic speakers.[31] While Craig Kenner has explained that most scholars today see the difference as primarily linguistic rather than deeply theological,[32] the differences may have gone beyond language. For Hellenistic Jews living in the diaspora, they had lived out their Jewish identity and their Christian faith in contexts where they were minorities, and separated from the wider Jewish community and its traditions. This may have impacted particular cultural nuances, such as the place of women which Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has argued may have played a role in the conflict in Acts 6.[33]

There are various perspectives on the socio-economic and political status of the widows in the story, which are important for us to bear in mind as we seek to explore this passage with attentiveness to the lives and experiences of Black women and all those whose lives are marked by race, gender and class. We might assume, based in part on the biblical narratives surrounding widows, that the women in Acts 6 are socio-economically vulnerable, but this should not be taken for granted. It is clear in Jewish tradition that widows were generally considered to be in a precarious position. This was especially the case for childless widows or those without the option of marrying a brother of their late husband to continue his line.[34] Therefore, provision is made within the Levitical law to ensure that widows are looked after and cared for along with the 'orphan' and the 'stranger'.[35] In the Gospels, we come across scriptural passages which can reinforce the image of the poor and victimized widow, such as the story of the widow's offering in Mark 12:41–44 and Luke 1:21–24. And yet we also find stories of widows demonstrating a strong sense of personal agency despite their difficult circumstances. Keenan has argued for example that

> Ancient readers would know that women, especially widows, could safely get away with complaining and even harassing authorities in ways that men could not; such demands were often their only means for securing redress against injustices. The widows here may continue in the path of earlier biblical widows who heroically and unconventionally sought their rights.[36]

[31]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 162; Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 728; and Smith, *The Literary Construction*, 114. See also Martin Hengel who argues that the influence of Hellenistic culture on Jewish Palestinian life can be traced back to 260–250 BC meaning that 'from about the middle of the third century BC *all Judaism* must really be designated as "Hellenistic Judaism" in the strict sense, and a better differentiation could be made between the Greek-speaking Judaism of the Western Diaspora and the Aramaic/Hebrew-speaking Judaism of Palestine and Babylonia'. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 103–4.
[32]Keener, *Acts*, 221.
[33]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 162, 166.
[34]Galpaz-Feller, "The Widow in the Bible," 234–7.
[35]Ibid., 232–3, 234, 238.
[36]Keener, *Acts*, 222.

Yet, F. Scott Spencer has argued for this primarily socio-economic reading of this incident as a failure of the early church to ensure that the vulnerable were cared for. He emphasizes the possibility that Hellenistic widows had been 'cut off from kinship networks in the diaspora' and now had to 'depend on local "Hebrew" (Aramaic speaking) residents for basic economic, practical, and social support' who failed to serve them adequately.[37] In light of this reading, this passage becomes an example of how the new church sides against the poor and the vulnerable and instead forms part of 'an unholy alliance with unjust judges (Luke 18:1–8), hypocritical scribes (20:45–47), and an exploitative temple system (21:1–6)'.[38]

Race was of course not a reality of ancient life, as it is today. However, the divisions of identity and belonging which shaped the multicultural world of the early church were prevalent and are important for us to consider. Mitzi Smith has argued, for example, that 'Hebrew widows were performing the daily diakonia for all widows but their service to the Hellenistic widows was less than through'.[39] This is an example of the problems of equity, belonging and justice that Love Lazarus Sechrest argues marked the early church in Acts as they do communities today:

> Luke describes the ideal family: it is a diverse family, encompassing members from all corners of the cosmos, and an intercultural one, supernaturally equipped to break boundaries of geography and culture (Acts 2:1–11) … Composed of Greek and Aramaic-speaking Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, it is a cross-cultural family that must learn to bridge differences and respect boundaries.[40]

This familial image as described by Sechrest is diverse, but with diversity of language, cultural norms or social habits can come set ideas of normativity, difference and othering. This is what we see in the story of the Hellenistic widows. Martin Hengel has noted that the influence of the Hellenists on Jewish Palestinian life is evident from almost 300 years before this incident.[41] Yet like many diasporic communities who may well have been present for a significant time, this does not always amount to welcome and belonging. There is a particular vulnerability that comes with living in the Diaspora, even when such a group finds its way to a place that has the potential to provide a home. Will they be embraced or treated with suspicion? Will those who consider themselves to be the gatekeepers of the Jewish Christian faith treat them as outsiders or consider their faith practices illegitimate? Willie James Jennings puts it this way:

[37]Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 728.
[38]Ibid., 729.
[39]Smith, *The Literary Construction*, 118.
[40]Sechrest, *Race and Rhyme*, 152.
[41]Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 6–103.

> Diaspora people are always on edge, because they know the stakes. They understand that life together as a people is not a given. It must be won again and again against those alien forces that would undermine it, drain it of life, and leave it sickly and dying. Those who came to Jerusalem were diaspora, of different tongues and cultural knowledge(s) but of same commitment against the threats to Israel's life.[42]

The vulnerability of the Hellenistic widows, whether due to gender, ethnicity or class, is not adequately recognized by the men in charge. Luke, the writer of the text, contains the plight of these women in one verse, and then moves on to explain how the governance structure of men was put in place by other men to manage the situation.[43] While it may be true that the appointing of seven men who were identifiably Greek may have set the widows' minds at ease,[44] Reid suggests that Luke himself seeks to 'squelch the controversies engendered by the widows' attempts to exercise their power'.[45] Turid Karsem Seim argues that it is obvious that gender precludes these women from being considered for leadership which is 'defined as the business of men' in keeping with Jewish patterns.[46] The Apostles respond by explaining effectively that they had better things to do than deal with such matters. While as Scott Spencer explains, 'the apostolic leaders take prompt, decisive action to remedy the crisis', they show 'disturbing traces of trivialising widows' concerns'.[47] Their focus is on their time management not the issues at hand for the widows. Smith questions the extent to which 'the group addresses the actual neglect of the widows in the daily service (*kathemerinos diakonia*)' at all.[48] Reid observes that unlike in the case of the debate about circumcision, here 'there is no consultation, no invocation of the Spirit in the process, no consensus, nor acclamation of the decision … the widows, the subjects of the controversy, remain invisible'.[49] This is a decidedly un-pentecostal way of discerning the way forward. They neglect the opportunity to be brought into new knowledge by the Spirit. They fail to recognize the potential for prophecy to inhabit the complaints of these daughters, on whom the Spirit has also been poured out 'in the last days' (Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28). In this way, these women thought part of the body of believers are, in ways common to Black women, denied access to leadership and governance within the community of the saints.

It is telling, that the Apostles have somehow imagined that discrimination against certain widows is not something they should be concerned with. The care of widows was paramount to their Jewish heritage and to the ministry of Jesus as recorded by Luke. Yet the Apostles seem to succumb to a hierarchy

[42]Jennings, *Acts*, 59.
[43]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 161; and Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 716.
[44]Keena, *Acts*, 225.
[45]Reid, "The Power of the Widows," 73.
[46]Seim, *The Double Message*, 122–123
[47]Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 729.
[48]Smith, *The Literary Construction*, 114, 118–19.
[49]Reid, "The Power of the Widows," 85.

of ministry in which the plight of the Hellenistic widows is treated as a distraction. This may be due to the busyness of their lives leading a growing community. But it is lamentable that they so quickly imagine that there are some issues, that are core to their role, while others are somewhat below them. Prayer and preaching are important tasks for these Apostles, but ensuring justice in the community of faith can, in their view, be delegated. They are exposed by Luke, as failing to blend the 'two vocations of preaching and teaching, with service at the table' which Jesus embodied.[50]

The case of the Hellenistic widows exemplifies the reality of life for Black women, and all who experience 'othering'[51] in church life, political life and even in the biblical text. Evidence of these forms of racial, gender and class inequity has been presented and clarified by Black feminist/womanist scholars over several decades. But in Acts, we find a particular account of how these issues of identity, belonging, privilege and power, can shape the life of the community of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. While Black women may exhibit a 'pained resilience' in light of their social, political and economic positioning, in Keri Day's words, this can continue rather than being relieved in the congregation of the 'sanctified'.[52] Both the story of the Hellenistic widows and Day's womanist reading of Azusa Street, remind us of the ways minoritized women living in the diaspora can find themselves neglected, overlooked and restricted in communities in which they expect to find home and belonging. Both call us to attend to the myriad of ways men of all ethnicities, when in positions of leadership, can often neglect the particularities of women's experiences and subsequently fail to respond to them adequately.

Conclusion

This text speaks to the reason why 'womanist ways', as Pierce describes, must permeate Pentecostal thought and practice. This goes beyond simply recognizing the role Black women have played in Pentecostal movements, or starting with the Black woman's encounter with God. If Pentecostalism is going to rediscover its *prophetic* identity it must be committed to the womanist call, which demands it urgently attend to the matters of power which marginalize and exclude within the very doors of the church, as well as beyond. For Black Pentecostal Women, this requires a womanist approach to biblical texts which are central to Pentecostal identity. Attending to the overlooked figures, reflecting on the ways gender, ethnicity or race and class impact upon their lives is central to the womanist biblical project. In this way,

[50]Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 729–30. For a discussion of contrasting views see Smith, *The Literary Construction*, 116–17.
[51]Smith, *The Literary Construction*, 1–10.
[52]Day, *Azusa Reimagined*, 75–83, 88–9.

Pentecostals, who are people of the Word and the Spirit, might develop a more holistic understanding of what it means to be those who continue to live in the life made possible at Pentecost.

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