

## **Luke's Understanding of Baptism in the Holy Spirit A Pentecostal Perspective**

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*The article endeavours to offer a fresh Pentecostal perspective at Luke's two-volume work, specifically with regard to Luke's understanding of Spirit baptism and its significance for Pentecostal theology. By looking at the how the Reformed tradition has understood the New Testament metaphor of baptism in the Spirit, and tracing the manner in which Luke uses this term, it is argued, that there is a distinct Lukan perspective on spirit baptism, which must be placed alongside the soteriological dimension so prominent in the writings of Paul. In consequence, both dimensions of spirit baptism must be upheld by Pentecostal theology, the reception of the life-giving and indwelling Spirit by every Christian and the baptism in the Spirit as distinct from conversion, which serves as an anointing for service and mission.*

Not long ago a Chinese house church leader commented, "When Chinese believers read the book of Acts, we see in it our *own experience*; when foreign Christians read the book of Acts, they see in it *inspiring stories*." My Chinese friend's point was clear: their experience of opposition and persecution impacts how they read Luke's narrative. Chinese believers tend to read Luke-Acts with a sense of urgency and desperation, a sense of hunger generated by their need. So, they easily identify with the struggles of Peter and John, of Stephen and Paul. And so also they readily accept the promise of the Spirit's enabling to persevere and bear bold witness to Jesus in the face of opposition. Implicit in my friend's comment was also the belief that Christians in a stable and affluent West, living in contexts where the Christian church has a long and storied history, may have a difficult time reading the book of Acts in this way. He was suggesting that we in the West may find it hard to identify with the struggles and needs of the early disciples, and thus we do not read with the same sense of solidarity or with the same sense of urgency.

I believe that this conversation touches on perhaps the greatest contribution the Pentecostal movement is making to the larger church world: The Pentecostal movement is calling the church universal to take a fresh look at Luke's two-volume work. And in the process, it is encouraging the church to consider once again its own understanding and its own need of the Holy Spirit's power. It is precisely here, in Luke-Acts, where we find the central and distinctive message of the Pentecostal movement. From the earliest days of the modern Pentecostal revival, Pentecostals have proclaimed that all Christians may, and indeed should, experience a baptism in the Holy Spirit "distinct from and subsequent to the experience of new birth" (General Council of the Assemblies of God 1991:129) This understanding of Spirit baptism flows naturally from the conviction that the Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2), not as the source of new covenant existence, but rather as the source of power for effective witness. This understanding of Spirit baptism has given the modern Pentecostal movement its identity, its unifying experience, and its missiological focus.

The rapid growth of Pentecostal churches around the world, particularly in the Two-Thirds World, makes it difficult for churches in the West to ignore this movement and its theology. Indeed, Pentecostal churches around the world are growing with such rapidity that one scholar recently suggested the Pentecostal movement should be identified as "the most successful social movement of the past century" (Jenkins 2002:8). So, today, let us heed the call and turn once again to the pages of Luke-Acts. More specifically, let us examine Luke's understanding of Spirit baptism and its significance for Pentecostal theology. We will begin by looking at the manner in which the Reformed tradition has understood this New Testament metaphor, baptism in the Spirit. We shall then trace the distinctive manner in which Luke uses this term. Finally, we shall draw out the implications of our study for the contemporary church.

## **RETHINKING PAST ASSUMPTIONS**

The Pentecostal understanding of Spirit baptism as an empowering for service distinct from conversion has not been accepted by many from various traditions within the Christian

church, including the majority of Reformed scholars. John Calvin does not treat Spirit baptism in an intentional or focused way. However, when he does refer to baptism in the Spirit, he associates it with the regenerating work of the Spirit. Calvin declares, “he baptises us in the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16)” so that we are brought into “the light of faith in his gospel...so regenerating us that we become new creatures” (Institutes 3.1.4).<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere Calvin speaks of the Holy Spirit as the “secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits” (Institutes 3.1.1). He also describes the Spirit as “the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself” (Institutes 3.1.1). In the context of Calvin’s writing and thought, it would appear that this redemptive work of the Spirit is inaugurated with Spirit baptism.

Calvin does not give much attention to the empowering dimension of the Spirit’s work. Although Calvin speaks frequently of the Holy Spirit as the “inward teacher,” (Institutes 4.14.9) the power that illuminates the mind and opens the heart of the one who *hears* the gospel, he does not highlight the Spirit’s role in empowering the one who *proclaims* the message. Perhaps this is partly due to his emphasis on the Spirit as making the sacraments effectual on the one hand and to his polemic against confirmation as a sacrament on the other. Calvin strongly objected to the notion that confirmation, a rite subsequent to water baptism, was a true sacrament. Some asserted that while the Spirit was conferred in water baptism for regeneration, in confirmation the Spirit was granted in order to equip the believer “for battle.” Calvin, arguing that this practice lacked biblical support, concludes: “We see the oil – the gross and greasy liquid – nothing else” (Institutes 4.19.5).

It is interesting to note that in the context of his rebuttal of confirmation, Calvin discusses the bestowal of the Spirit on previously baptised believers recorded in Acts 8:16. He states that Luke here does not deny that “they who believe in Christ with their hearts and confess him with their mouth are endowed with any gift of the Spirit (Romans 10:10),” rather Luke has “in mind the receiving of the Spirit, by which manifest powers and visible graces were received” (Institutes 4.19.8). Calvin maintains, however, “those miraculous powers and manifest workings, which were dispensed by the laying on of hands, have ceased; and they have rightly lasted only for a time.” (Institutes 4.19.6)

Other scholars in the Reformed tradition may place the accent in slightly different places. Karl Barth, for example, separates more clearly Spirit baptism from water baptism (see Macchia 2004:164-76).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless most of the scholars in the Reformed tradition define Spirit baptism in essentially the same manner: God's miraculous transformation of the believer. Of the prominent Reformed scholars, Hendrikus Berkhof comes the closest to acknowledging a positive contribution on the part of Pentecostals. He views Spirit baptism in terms of regeneration, but he sees this consisting of three elements: justification, sanctification, and calling or vocation (Berkhof 1976:46-56). Berkhof credits Pentecostals with highlighting the vocational dimension of Spirit baptism and faults Calvin for largely ignoring it. But Berkhof also chides Pentecostals for defining Spirit baptism solely in vocational terms.

The common thread that ties together the perspectives of these Reformed theologians is the assumption that the New Testament presents a relatively unified picture concerning the work of the Spirit in general and baptism in the Spirit in particular. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul clearly speaks of Spirit baptism as the means by which one is initiated into the body of Christ: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."<sup>3</sup> And Paul, writing from an early stage in the life of the church, offers a rich and full account of the Spirit's work. Paul speaks of the Spirit as the source of cleansing (1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 15:16), righteousness (Gal. 5:5; Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 5:16-26), intimate fellowship with (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:14-17) and knowledge of God (1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Cor. 3:3-18). He even describes that ultimate transformation, the resurrection, as a work of the Spirit (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:42-49; Gal. 6:8). All of this suggests that from the very earliest days, the early church had a unified and highly developed pneumatology. Paul, Luke, and John speak with one voice: the Spirit is the very source of Christian existence. How, then, could Spirit baptism be anything less than the miraculous transformation of the believer?

Yet, there are good reasons to question this reading of the New Testament data and the theological conclusions based upon it. I have argued elsewhere that a thorough study of Luke-Acts and the Pauline literature reveals that there was a process of development in the early church's understanding of the Spirit's work (Menzies 1991).<sup>4</sup> This, of course, is not a

novel thesis and many scholars from Hermann Gunkel to Gonzalo Haya-Prats have reached similar conclusions (Gunkel 1979; Haya-Prats 1975).<sup>5</sup> My own study of the evidence, particularly in Luke-Acts,<sup>6</sup> led me to conclude that Paul was the first Christian to attribute soteriological functions to the Spirit and that his distinctive insights did not impact the non-Pauline sectors of the early church until after the writing of Luke-Acts (approximately 70 A.D.). The key point for our study is the affirmation that Luke's theology of the Spirit is *different* from that of Paul. Unlike Paul, who frequently speaks of the soteriological dimension of the Spirit's work, Luke consistently portrays the Spirit as a charismatic or, more precisely, a prophetic gift, the source of power for service.

The important implications of this conclusion cannot be missed. If this is indeed the case, then the charismatic dimension of the Spirit to which Luke bears witness must be placed alongside the soteriological dimension so prominent in the writings of Paul. Certainly a theology of the Spirit that is truly biblical must do justice to the pneumatology of *each* biblical author.

Additionally, by placing the Pentecost account within the framework of Luke's distinctive theology of the Spirit, we can argue with considerable force that the Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost, not as the source of new covenant existence, but rather as the source of power for effective witness – which, incidentally, is exactly what Luke states in Acts 1:8. Since this Pentecostal gift, this baptism in the Spirit, is charismatic rather than soteriological in character, it must be distinguished from the gift of the Spirit – and even the baptism in the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:13 – that Paul so clearly associates with conversion and regeneration. Here, then, is a strong argument for the Pentecostal understanding of baptism in the Spirit – that is, that Spirit baptism in the Lukan sense is logically distinct from conversion. This distinction and uniquely missiological purpose is a reflection of Luke's distinctive theology of the Spirit.

This recognition that Luke's theology of the Spirit is *different* from that of Paul is then crucial for a Pentecostal understanding of Spirit baptism. As we have seen, some Reformed theologians would agree that Luke emphasizes the Spirit's role in equipping the church for its mission. Berkhof speaks of the “vocational” dimension of the Spirit's work. Calvin refers to the bestowal of “manifest powers” and “visible graces.” But at the same time, they still

maintain that Luke, in a manner similar to Paul, relates Spirit baptism to salvation. This vocational or charismatic dimension of baptism in the Spirit is merely a reflection of Luke's *emphasis*. In this way Reformed theologians can speak of the gift of the Spirit received at Pentecost as the essential element of conversion, the means whereby the disciples experience the blessings of the new covenant (i.e., cleansing, justification, moral transformation), even though they might also acknowledge that divine enabling is prominent in Luke's narrative. But, if our summary of Luke's pneumatology above is correct, this will not do. As we have stated, Luke views the gift of the Spirit *exclusively* in charismatic terms. His narrative reflects more than a special *emphasis*; it bears witness to a *distinctive theology* of the Spirit. Consequently, the charismatic character of Luke's baptism in the Spirit cannot be questioned, and Luke's unique and Pentecostal contribution to biblical pneumatology must be given its due.

As I have stated, the evidence suggests that Luke's theology of the Spirit is indeed *different* from that of Paul – ultimately complementary, but different. Luke not only fails to refer to soteriological aspects of the Spirit's work, his narrative presupposes a pneumatology that does not include this dimension (e.g., Luke 11:13; Acts 8:4-25; 18:24-19:7).<sup>7</sup> Of course a detailed examination of Luke's two-volume work is required to defend this assertion. I have provided this elsewhere (Menzies 1991; Menzies 1994). Today, however, I believe I can make my point by focusing on three key passages associated with the term, baptism in the Holy Spirit: John the Baptist's prophecy (Luke 3:16-17); Jesus' sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:17-19); and references to the promise of the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33; 2:39).

## **LUKE'S DISTINCTIVE PERSPECTIVE**

Throughout his two-volume work, Luke consistently portrays the gift of the Spirit as a prophetic enabling. Whether it is John in his mother's womb, Jesus at the Jordan, or the disciples at Pentecost, the Spirit comes upon them all as the source of prophetic inspiration, granting special insight and inspiring speech. This should not surprise us since the literature of intertestamental Judaism also identifies the Spirit with prophetic inspiration.<sup>8</sup> This

pneumatological perspective shapes the key Lukan texts that speak of baptism in the Holy Spirit. To these texts we now turn.

### John the Baptist's Prophecy

John the Baptist's prophecy concerning the one who will baptise in Spirit and fire, recorded in Luke 3:16-17, is particularly important for our study:

John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"(Luke 3:16-17).

The interpretation of this prophecy - specifically, the functions it attributes to the Spirit - is crucial, for Luke clearly sees this prophecy at least partially fulfilled at Pentecost in the disciples' baptism in the Spirit (Acts 1.4-5). James Dunn speaks for many when he states that the prophecy presents that Spirit as "purgative and refining for those who had repented, destructive...for those who remained impenitent" (Dunn 1970:13). However, I believe this interpretation must be rejected in light of the Jewish background, the immediate context with its winnowing metaphor, and the larger context of Luke-Acts.

The Jewish background is particularly instructive. There are no pre-Christian references to a messianic bestowal of the Spirit that purifies and transforms *the individual*. However, there are a wealth of passages that describe the Messiah as charismatically endowed with the Spirit of God so that he may rule and judge (e.g. 1 En. 49:3; 62:2). Isaiah 4:4 refers to the Spirit of God as the means by which the nation of Israel (not individuals!) shall be sifted with the righteous being separated from the wicked and the nation thus cleansed. Several texts tie these two concepts together. Perhaps most striking is Psalms of Solomon 17:26-37, a passage which describes how the Messiah, "powerful in the Holy Spirit" (17:37), shall purify Israel by ejecting all aliens and sinners from the nation. Isaiah 11:2-4 declares that the Spirit-empowered Messiah will slay the wicked "with the breath [*ruach*] of his lips."<sup>9</sup> Against this background it is not difficult to envision the Spirit of God as an instrument employed by the

Messiah to sift and cleanse the nation. Indeed, these texts suggest that when John referred in metaphorical language to the messianic deluge of the Spirit, he had in mind Spirit-inspired oracles of judgement uttered by the Messiah (cf. Isa. 11:4), blasts of the Spirit that would separate the wheat from the chaff.

Luke, writing in light of Pentecost, sees the fuller picture and applies the prophecy to the Spirit-inspired witness of the early church (Acts 1:4-5). Through their witness, the wheat is separated from the chaff (Luke 3:17). This interpretation is reinforced by the winnowing metaphor, which portrays the wind as the source of sifting. Since the term translated “wind” in Greek (*pneuma*) and Hebrew (*ruach*) is also used to refer to “the Spirit,” the symbolism is particularly striking. This Spirit-inspired witness and its impact is foreshadowed by Simeon’s prophecy in Luke 2:34. Simeon, with reference to Jesus, declares: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.”

In short, John described the Spirit’s work, not as cleansing repentant individuals, but rather as a blast of the “breath” of God that would sift the nation. Luke sees this prophecy, at least with reference to the sifting work of the Spirit, fulfilled in the Spirit-inspired mission of the church. The essential point for our purpose is that Luke presents the Spirit here, not as the source of cleansing for the individual, but rather as the animating force behind the church’s witness.

### Jesus and the Spirit

Luke declares that the coming Spirit-baptiser was himself anointed with the Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:18; Acts 10:38). This leads us to another question of central importance: what significance does Luke attach to Jesus’ pneumatic anointing? How does Luke understand and present this important event?

The description of Jesus’ pneumatic anointing accounts for only two sentences in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 3:21-22). Fortunately, Luke has provided an extended commentary on the significance of this event. This commentary is found in Luke’s account of Jesus’ sermon at



Nazareth. This account is recorded in Luke 4:16-30, but I shall only quote the portion critical for our task, vss. 17-19:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to release the oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:17-19)

The significance of this passage is underscored by a comparison with Mark's Gospel. Luke normally follows Mark's chronology of Jesus' ministry very closely. But here, Luke takes an event – Jesus' ministry in Nazareth – which occurs in the middle of Mark's Gospel (Mk 6:1-6) and places it at the forefront of his description of Jesus' ministry. Of course Luke's account of the Nazareth event is much fuller than Mark's and includes details important for Luke's purposes. That these purposes include helping the reader understand the significance of Jesus' reception of the Spirit is confirmed, not only by the content of the quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2 which we have just read (Luke 4:17-19), but also by the references to the Spirit in Luke's narrative which link the accounts of Jesus anointing (Luke 3:21-22) with his sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). Luke reminds us in Luke 4:1 that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" as he entered into the desert of temptation. And he also affirms that Jesus departed this desert experience "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). With this "redactional bridge," Luke highlights the connection between Jesus' pneumatic anointing and his sermon at Nazareth. So, the sermon at Nazareth is important because it calls us *to look back* – to look back and understand more fully the significance of Jesus' reception of the Spirit.

However, this passage also calls us *to look forward*. Luke crafts his narrative so that the parallels between Jesus' experience of the Spirit (Luke 3-4) and that of the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1-2) cannot be missed. Both accounts:

1. Are placed at the outset of Luke's gospel on the one hand, and the book of Acts on the other.

2. Associate the reception of the Spirit with prayer.
3. Record visible and audible manifestations.
4. Offer explanations of the event in the form of a sermon that alludes to the fulfilment of OT prophecy.

In this way, Luke presents Jesus' reception of the Spirit as a model for that of the disciples in Acts and future generations of believers, including his own (see Luke 11:13 and Acts 2:17).

It is evident, then, that this passage is crucial for understanding the significance of Jesus' reception of the Spirit and that of the disciples in Acts. It thus also provides important definition for Luke's understanding of Spirit baptism. With this mind, let us address the question at hand: What significance does Luke attach to Jesus' pneumatic anointing? Luke's answer is unequivocal. The quotation from Isaiah, which plays such a prominent role in the narrative, answers our question with precision: Jesus' reception of the Spirit at the Jordan was the means by which he was equipped to carry out his messianic mission. Furthermore, the verbs in the text – “he has anointed me *to preach* good news to the poor...He has sent me *to proclaim* freedom for the prisoners...*to proclaim* the year of the Lord's favor” – highlight *proclamation*, inspired speech, as the primary product of Jesus' anointing. In short, Luke presents Jesus' reception of the Spirit at the Jordan as a prophetic anointing, the means by which he was equipped to carry out his divinely appointed task.

## The Promise of the Father

Luke refers to “the promise” of the Spirit four times in close proximity (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33; 2:39). “The promise” is identified with the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit (2:33) and explicitly defined: reception of “the promise” will result in the disciples being “clothed with power from on high” and enable them to be effective “witnesses” (Luke 24:48-49; Acts 1:8). Furthermore, for Luke “the promise” with reference to the Spirit refers to the gift of the Spirit of prophecy promised in Joel 2:28-32. This is made clear through Luke’s citation of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21, and further emphasized in his redactional introduction of the citation.

This introduction includes the phrase “God says” (Acts 2:17) and thus identifies the prophecy of Joel as “the promise of the Father” - the full description of “the promise” in three of the four Lukan references (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33). In Joel’s prophecy the Spirit comes as the source of prophetic inspiration, a point that Luke highlights by inserting the phrase “and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:18) into the Greek text of Joel. Another alteration, Luke’s transformation of Joel’s “slaves” into “servants of God” - accomplished by his double insertion of “my” into Acts 2:18 - highlights what is implicit in the Joel text: the gift of the Spirit is given only to those who are members of the community of salvation. Thus Luke’s explicit definitions (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8) and his use of the Joel citation indicate that the “promise” of the Spirit, initially fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), enables the disciples to take up their prophetic vocation to the world.

Although the Lukan “promise” of the Spirit must be interpreted in light of Joel’s promise concerning the restoration of the Spirit of prophecy, Acts 2:39 does include an additional element. The passage reads:

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:38-39)

In Acts 2:39 Luke extends the range of the promise envisioned to include the promise of salvation offered in Joel 2:32 (as well as the promise of the Spirit of prophecy in Joel 2:28). Acts 2:39 echoes the language of Joel 2:32/Acts 2:21: “everyone who calls on the name of the

Lord will be saved.” In Acts 2:39 Luke extends the range of “the promise” to include this salvific dimension because the audience addressed now includes non-believers.

Yet we must not miss the fact that “the promise” of Acts 2:39 embraces more than the experience of conversion. Consistent with the other references to “the promise” (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4, and 2:33), the promised gift of the Spirit in Acts 2:39 refers to the promise of Joel 2:28, and thus it is a promise of prophetic enabling granted to the repentant. The promise of Acts 2:39, like the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:8, points beyond the restoration of the faithful of Israel: salvation is offered (Joel 2:32), but the promise includes the renewal of Israel’s prophetic vocation to be a light to the nations (Joel 2:28; cf. Isaiah 49:6 and Acts 1:8).

Some have criticized this approach, suggesting that we should read Luke’s earlier references to the promise of the Spirit in light of the promise of salvation offered in Acts 2:39 (Dunn 1993:12, 21). Yet, as we have seen, Acts 2:39 does not indicate that the Spirit comes as the source of new covenant existence. Rather it simply reminds us that the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 includes two elements: the gift of the Spirit of prophecy (v. 28) and the offer of salvation to those who call upon the name of the Lord (v. 32). Acts 2:39 refers to both, but does not suggest the two are identical. Indeed, this sort of equation runs counter to Luke’s explicit statements in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4-8, his use and redaction of the Joel citation in Acts 2:17-18, and the broader context of his two-volume work. In particular, Luke’s description of baptised believers (Acts 8:16) and disciples (Acts 19:2), all without the Spirit, raises insurmountable problems for this position.

Of course it is possible to argue that Luke’s understanding of the promise of the Spirit - clearly shaped by Joel 2:28-32 - was also informed by a number of other OT prophecies regarding the Spirit’s eschatological role, especially Isaiah 44:3-5 and Ezekiel 36:26-27. Yet this approach fails to examine how these Old Testament texts were interpreted in the Judaism that gave rise to the Christianity Luke knew. We see, for example, that the transformation of the heart referred to in Ezekiel 36:26-27 was viewed as a *prerequisite* for the eschatological bestowal of the Spirit and that the rabbis interpreted Isaiah 44:3 as a reference to the outpouring of the Spirit of prophecy on Israel. Rather than simply reading our own agenda and exegesis into the first century setting, surely it is better to ask how those Jews closest in

time to the early Christians understood the relevant texts and what significance they attached to them.

This is particularly important at this point, for the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit was generally interpreted in light of Joel 2:28-29 as a restoration of the Spirit of prophecy. By way of contrast, Ezekiel 36:26-27 was usually interpreted as a prophecy concerning the end-time removal of the evil “impulse,” and most frequently without reference to the activity of the Spirit. Indeed, the eradication of the evil “impulse” was presented as a prerequisite for the end-time bestowal of the Spirit of prophecy.<sup>10</sup> This means that calls for us to interpret the promise of the Spirit in light of a plethora of Old Testament texts conflict with the evidence from early Jewish sources and Luke’s own hand. Luke, unlike Paul and John, cites none of these other Old Testament texts. There simply is no evidence to support the notion that by referring to Joel 2:28-32, Luke intended his readers to think of some commonly expected, all-embracing soteriological bestowal of the Spirit.

Should the collocation of repentance, baptism, and reception of the Spirit in Acts 2:38 cause us to reconsider these conclusions? I think not, for it tells us little about the nature of the gift of the Spirit. While the collocation may indicate that for Luke the rite of water baptism is normally accompanied by the bestowal of the Spirit, Luke’s usage elsewhere suggests that even this conclusion may be overstating the case. There is certainly nothing in the text which would suggest that the Spirit is presented here as the source of new covenant existence. If it could be established that the text presupposes an inextricable bond between water baptism and forgiveness of sins on the one hand and reception of the Spirit on the other, then we would need to reconsider our position. However, this conclusion is clearly unwarranted. Since Luke fails to develop a strong link between water baptism and the bestowal of the Spirit elsewhere, and regularly separates the rite from the gift (Luke 3:21-22; Acts 8:12-17; 9:17-18; 10:44; 18:24-25), the phrase “and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38 should be interpreted as a promise that the Spirit shall be “imparted to those who are already converted and baptized” (Schweitzer 1968:412). In any case, the most that can be gleaned from the text is that repentance and water baptism are the normal prerequisites for reception of the Spirit, which is promised to every believer.

In short, I believe it is prudent to interpret Acts 2:38-39 in the light of Luke's explicit testimony concerning the promise of the Spirit recorded in 24:49; Acts 1:4; and 2:17-18 - all of which describe the pneumatic gift as a prophetic enabling for the missionary task. This reading also fits nicely with Luke's usage elsewhere, especially his otherwise problematic description of baptised believers who have not received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:4-17; cf. 18:24-19:7). Additionally, calls for us to interpret the promise of the Spirit against the backdrop of a plethora of Old Testament texts, none of which are mentioned by Luke or linked in the suggested manner with the Joel text by contemporary Jewish thinkers, must be rejected. Again, wisdom dictates that we understand the promise of the Spirit against the backdrop of the text which Luke does cite, Joel 2:28-32, and contemporary Jewish expectations.

## Summary

I have argued that Luke interprets the sifting and separating activity of the Spirit of which John prophesied (Luke 3:16-17) to be accomplished in the Spirit-empowered mission of the church. Thus, for Luke, John's prophecy is initially fulfilled in the Pentecostal bestowal of the Spirit. At Pentecost, the disciples are baptised in the Holy Spirit and thereby enabled to bear bold witness for Jesus (Acts 1:8). In a broader sense, through the disciples' Spirit-inspired preaching, the entire nation is baptised in the Holy Spirit; for, through the preaching of Jesus the people are sifted like the wind sifts the chaff from the grain (cf. Luke 2:34).

I have also asserted that the Spirit came upon Jesus at the Jordan in order to equip him for his messianic task (Luke 3:22; 4:18-19). This is the unambiguous message of Jesus' dramatic sermon at Nazareth. The striking parallels between Jesus' pneumatic anointing at the Jordan and that of the disciples at Pentecost suggest that Luke interpreted the latter event in light of the former: Pentecost was for the disciples what the Jordan was for Jesus. The logical corollary is that at Pentecost the Spirit came upon the disciples in order to enable them to fulfil their divinely appointed task.

Finally, I have affirmed that for Luke the “promise” with reference to the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 2:33, 38-39) refers to the gift of the Spirit of prophecy promised by Joel. This “promise,” initially fulfilled at Pentecost, enables the disciples to take up their prophetic vocation to the world (Acts 1:8). The message is repeated for emphasis - it comes at the end of his gospel (Luke 24:49) and at the beginning of his record of the mission of the early church (Acts 1:4) – to insure that we will not miss it.

Indeed, the message that emerges from each of these texts is unified and clear. According to Luke, the Spirit, understood to be the source of prophetic activity, came upon the disciples at Pentecost in order to equip them for their prophetic vocation (i.e. for their role as “witnesses”). This “baptism in the Holy Spirit” does not cleanse the disciples nor grant them a new ability to keep the law; rather, this “baptism in the Holy Spirit” drives them forward in the face of opposition and enables them to bear bold witness for Christ.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH TODAY**

We are now able to draw out some of the implications for the contemporary church that arise from Luke’s distinctive understanding of Spirit baptism. Let us begin by affirming what Pentecostals and the Reformed tradition hold in common.

We can all agree that Calvin and the other great Reformed theologians have read Paul well. Calvin correctly highlights the role of the Spirit in regeneration, in making the sacraments effectual, in justification. The Holy Spirit is the great “inner teacher” who bears witness in our hearts to the truth of the gospel. So, together, we affirm that every Christian receives the life-giving and indwelling Spirit. There is no Christian without the Spirit; there is no Christian existence apart from the Spirit’s work in our lives. Furthermore, we can also agree that, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul clearly refers to this salvific work of the Spirit as a baptism in the Holy Spirit.

However, Pentecostals raise another important question: What is Luke’s contribution to this discussion? Or, to put it another way, what is Luke’s understanding of baptism in the

Holy Spirit? Pentecostals believe that there is more to be said on this matter than that which is contained in the Pauline epistles. We affirm that Luke has a unique and special contribution to make to a holistic biblical theology of the Spirit. We also believe that the clarity and vigour of Luke's contribution is lost when his narrative is read through Pauline lenses. Luke has a distinctive voice and it is a voice the church needs to hear.

Luke's understanding of baptism in the Holy Spirit, I have argued, is different from that of Paul. It is missiological rather soteriological in nature. The Spirit of Pentecost is, in reality, the Spirit for others - the Spirit that compels and empowers the church to bring the "good news" of Jesus to a lost and dying world. It is this Lukan, missiological perspective that shapes a Pentecostal understanding of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Of course Pentecostals recognize that we must do justice to Paul's soteriological contribution by emphasizing the Spirit's role in conversion, regeneration, and sanctification. Yet Pentecostals feel justified in speaking of a baptism in the Spirit that is distinct from conversion, an anointing for service, for we see this as accurately reflecting Luke's terminology and theology.

Pentecostals, then, recognize that the New Testament speaks of two baptisms in the Spirit – one that is soteriological and initiates the believer into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and one that is missiological and empowers the believer for service (Acts 1:8). However, Pentecostals feel that it is particularly appropriate to adopt Luke's language and speak of the Pentecostal gift as a "baptism in the Holy Spirit." After all, this baptism in the Holy Spirit is promised to every believer, to all of the servants of God (Acts 2:18). And Luke uses the phrase on three occasions, Paul only once. Pentecostals also fear that if Paul's language is employed and the gift of the Spirit received at conversion is designated "the baptism in the Holy Spirit," then a proper understanding of the Pentecostal gift will be lost.

The tendency in Protestant churches has been to read Luke in the light of Paul. Paul addresses pastoral concerns in the church; Luke writes a missionary manifesto. Perhaps this explains why Protestant discussions of the Spirit have centred more on his work in the Word and sacraments, the "inner witness" of the Spirit, and less on his mission to the world. As we have noted, Reformed theologians tend to associate the Pentecostal gift with conversion and regeneration, which effectively blunts the sharpness of Luke's message. When the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit is understood in soteriological terms, Luke's missiological focus and our



expectation of it is lost. For it is always possible to argue, as many do, that while all experience the soteriological dimension of the Pentecostal gift at conversion, only a select few receive gifts of missiological power. Yet Luke calls us to remember that the church (every member, not just the clergy!), by virtue of its reception of the Pentecostal gift, is a prophetic community empowered for a missionary task.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude by noting one important link to the Pentecostal understanding of Spirit baptism within the Reformed tradition. It is found in the writings of the first great Reformed theologian, Ulrich Zwingli. In his *Commentary on True and False Religion*, Zwingli refers to two baptisms of the Holy Spirit. Zwingli writes:

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, then, is twofold. First, there is the baptism by which all are flooded within who trust in Christ....Second, there is the external baptism of the Holy Spirit, just as there is the baptism of water. Drenched with this, pious men once began at once to speak in foreign tongues [Acts 2:4-11]....this latter baptism of the Holy Spirit is not necessary, but the former is so very necessary that no one can be saved without it....Now we are not all imbued with the sign of tongues, but all of us who are pious have been made faithful by the enlightenment and drawing of the Holy Spirit (Zwingli 1981:187-188).

Zwingli did not elaborate further on his understanding of two baptisms of the Spirit, but his perspective on Pentecost appears to be quite similar to what I have already outlined.

The Reformed tradition has made great contributions to the modern Pentecostal movement. Chief among them is its call to recognize the progressive nature of the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. Reformed theologians have correctly encouraged Pentecostals to acknowledge that power and purity are not necessarily linked. Reception of Pentecostal power is no guarantee of spiritual maturity. Regrettably, we Pentecostals often have been slow to acknowledge this truth. But this important legacy of the Reformed tradition is there, nonetheless. Perhaps by stimulating Reformed scholars to take a fresh look at Zwingli and Luke's writings, the Pentecostal movement can pay back a bit of the enormous debt it owes.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All references to Calvin's Institutes are from Calvin 1960. See also *Institutes*, 4.16.25.
- <sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Frank Macchia for his helpful comments on Barth and H. Berkhof.
- <sup>3</sup> All quotations from the Bible are taken from the NIV unless otherwise stated.
- <sup>4</sup> I also argue that John's Gospel supports my development thesis. See Menzies 2004:41-52.
- <sup>5</sup> See also the sources cited in Menzies 1991:18-28.
- <sup>6</sup> See Menzies 1991 and the slightly revised version Menzies 1994. See also Menzies/Menzies 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> I have also observed that the traditions of the primitive church utilized by Paul fail to attribute soteriological functions to the Spirit. See Menzies 1991:282-315.
- <sup>8</sup> This is the dominant perspective. The only exceptions are found in sapiential writings and exceedingly rare.
- <sup>9</sup> This passage is echoed in 1 *Enoch* 62:2 and 1QSb 5:24-25.
- <sup>10</sup> For further discussion of these points and the relevant Jewish texts see Menzies 1991:52-112, esp. 104-11.

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In this response to Robert Menzies article "Luke's Understanding of Baptism in the Holy Spirit. A Pentecostal Perspective" (PentecostStudies 2007/2) it is argued that that the distinction between a soteriological and a charismatic understanding of the work of the Spirit should be integrated in Reformed theology. At the same the claim is criticized that the prophetic gifts are available for every member of the new community. In opposition to this view it is emphasized that it is more biblically founded to defend and to teach a theology that begins with the sovereignty and freedom of God. Download The Pentecostal understanding of Spirit baptism as an empowering for service distinct from conversion has not been accepted by many from various traditions within the Christian church, including the majority of Reformed scholars. John Calvin does not treat Spirit baptism in an intentional or focused way. However, when he does refer to baptism in the Spirit, he associates it with the regenerating work of the Spirit. Calvin declares, "he baptizes us in the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16)" so that we are brought into "the light of faith in his gospel" so regenerating us that we become new creat the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts. After having established common ground between Pentecostal and. Evangelical scholarship in the field, it is argued that for the PentecostStudies, vol. 6, no. 2, 2007, p. 127-149 Arie W. Zwiep, Luke's Understanding of Baptism in the Holy Spirit ISSN 1871-777691. Dialogue I understand as an open conversation in which opinions are freely exchanged, leading to a better understanding of the drives and concerns of the conversation partners involved and aiming at a certain common understanding, if not consensus. This is only possible, of course, if there is a mutual willingness to give up one's own opinions for better ones.