

The Wonders of God

A Reformed Perspective on Luke’s Baptism in the Holy Spirit

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In this response to Robert Menzies article “Luke’s Understanding of Baptism in the Holy Spirit. A Pentecostal Perspective” (PentecoStudies 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.

INTRODUCTION

In this response, I give my comments on the paper of Robert Menzies, “Luke’s Understanding of Baptism in the Holy Spirit. A Pentecostal Perspective”, and also, more widely, on the book *Spirit and Power* (written with W. W. Menzies);¹ this *is* presented as the main contribution of the Pentecostal movement to Christian theology. For several reasons, I consider it to be a great honour and a magnificent opportunity to discuss this contribution at the VU University in Amsterdam in relation to the centennial of Azusa Street.

It brings me joy to observe that in many ways there is something occurring that appears to be a rapprochement between the Reformed, Charismatic, and Pentecostal traditions. Nationally and internationally, we are delighted that a place can be found at this university where the encounter and debate can happen.

Theologically, the constellation has changed considerably in the last century. In Reformed and Roman Catholic theology, the old dispensationalist view that the gifts of the Spirit were only meant

for and restricted to the beginning of the church has lost most of its supporters. In this respect, we have changed our mind from John Calvin's views. The Reformed family of churches and Reformed theology has definitely learned from the Pentecostal churches and the Pentecostal experience. However, it might be better to state that Reformed theology is still in the process of being taught by Pentecostal and Charismatic spirituality. The first period of debate lies behind us, in which a wide gap between Reformed and Pentecostal seemed to be inescapable. A sign, however, that we, by God's grace, have made some progress is that the Charismatic Renewal has become established within the mainline churches. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the Charismatic Renewal has had its influence in these churches. Of course, it is a slow process. The churches are cautious—sometimes suspicious—but nevertheless, there is progress. The attention to the work of the Spirit, the gifts, and the fruits of the Spirit is growing (Welker 1993; Alston/Welker 2003). Characteristic of the Charismatic Movement in the Netherlands is that it attempts to be integrated and firmly rooted in the broad ecumenical and even Roman Catholic tradition.²

The frontiers between Evangelical and Pentecostal have also changed considerably in the last 30 years. Whereas older Evangelicalism opposed the main teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the newer Evangelicalism acknowledges that Pentecostalism has an essential contribution to make to the Christian community. The concept of a Third Wave stems from Peter Wagner (Wagner 1988). In his view the first two waves are the Classical Pentecostal Movement and the Charismatic Movement. The Third Wave he identified particularly with John Wimber, who stimulated a new emphasis on renewal in the established churches throughout the English-speaking world (Anderson 2004:158). This metaphor, however, is not completely clear in itself. What does it mean? Does it mean that the waves come behind each other? Does it mean that one wave vanishes and another one rises in the sea? Alternatively, should we not push the metaphor too far? Nevertheless, for the Dutch situation this so-called 'Third Wave' has recently gained quite an influence in the smaller Reformed churches in the Netherlands, particularly through the Wimber-inspired 'New Wine' movement in England. In some Dutch churches, on the right of the Reformed spectrum, 'New Wine' attracts many ministers and other people who are interested in Charismatic Renewal. Of course, this raises the question once again about to what degree the theology that is lurking behind this kind of renewal can be integrated and combined in the confessional tradition that so deeply shaped the Reformed tradition and spirituality (van der Kooi 2006; de Boer 2007). Two examples may suffice to show that it may not be easily. First, there is the unmistakable preference for the immediate work of the Holy Spirit above the mediated work of the Spirit. Second, there is the view that the gifts or

charisms are available for all believers. It might be correct to state that in the theological framework of John Wimber's thought and practice a consequent democratization has taken place. Wimber, however, did not create this idea, he found it in the bosom of Pentecostalism.

Moreover, today we can also observe this democratization in the thought of Robert Menzies. On this very point I will later make an objection. Let me first briefly formulate my question and objection. In his view of charismata, and particularly in his view of the baptism with the Spirit as it surfaces in the Gospel of Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles, the Pentecostal approach of Robert Menzies seems to me to be highly anthropocentric and subject-orientated. In opposition to this view, I would like to emphasize that it seems to be more biblically founded to defend and to teach a theology that begins with the sovereignty of God and the freedom of God. To put it briefly, I would propagate a more theocentric and eschatological theology.

BIBLE AND SOUND DOCTRINE

It is of great importance that in contemporary Pentecostal theology the difference between biblical studies and dogmatic theology is considered. Christian doctrine does not come into being by putting together a group of verses and sayings from the Scriptures. Christian doctrine slowly developed and still develops in a continued debate with contemporary questions and needs. It listens in obedience to what the tradition or *paradosis* has transferred, and it appropriates what seems to be essential and worthwhile to proclaim. In addition, if it is acknowledged that the Bible in itself can be characterized as a choir of different voices, then it becomes possible to distinguish between the writings and their intrinsic theological aims and particularities. It is typical that contemporary Evangelical and Reformed theology attempts to get rid of the older biblicism or even fundamentalism. The older approach—essential for Dutch neo-Calvinism, but also for Reformed theologians like Hodge and Warfield—was a response to modernism in the second half of the nineteenth century. This modernism, in the name of modern culture and scientific knowledge, behaved very critically towards orthodox beliefs. What has changed is that today in Evangelical and Reformed theology there is a further acknowledgment and insight into the fact that God by way of the Holy Spirit made use of ordinary people, their culture, and communities. The humanity of the Holy Scripture must be taken fully into account. In his turning towards humanity, God made use of

human beings as a medium. This means that we, in turn, have to take notice of the fact that it was God's good will that decided to enter part of human history and reality. We should avoid the docetism that is lurking in the background of Christian theology—not only in Christology, but also as to the Bible as the Word of God.

These insights have also a bearing on systematic theology. We cannot take it for granted that the verses and sayings of the Bible are like bricks to be used to build a house of Christian learning and doctrine. In their discourse and narrative, the authors of the Bible provide us with propositions and insights that have implicit theological content. However, explicitly none of them tried to provide doctrine for the church of all ages; no one attempted to write a systematic theology in the modern sense. For systematic theology, this means that this scholarly discipline has a responsibility of its own (van der Kooi 2005:284-286).

In obedience to what is contained in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament about the encounter between God and humanity, this discipline intends to give an ordered insight into the complexity of what should be said of the relation between God, humanity and the world. In this way and by this means, systematic theology or dogmatic theology gives direction and suggestions for the proclamation of the gospel, for worship, for what can be said in pastoral or youth ministry, and regarding what definitely should not be said. Theology is some sort of steering wheel. It is not the engine; it is not faith itself; it might give direction and correction in order avoiding going astray. It provides a conceptual framework for the religious community of the church in its encounter and dealing with God.

I advance these more methodological remarks because I consider them to be important for our topic. Robert Menzies presents propositions that he considers as belonging to the sound doctrine of the church. I quote: “this baptism in the Holy Spirit is promised to every believer, to all of the servants of God (Acts 2:18).” This thesis or opinion could easily be multiplied by other remarks with the same intent. According to Menzies, the contribution of Luke's view on the baptism of the Holy Spirit for today is that these gifts are available for everyone. I take the freedom to disagree on this very point.

CONVERSION AND THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The core contribution of Pentecostal theology, according to Robert and William Menzies, is the conviction that Spirit baptism is a subsequent moment in the life of the believer, and has to be distinguished from conversion and regeneration. Chapter 2 of the book of Acts gives the ground for this opinion and not what the apostle Paul brings to the forefront in 1 Cor. 12 and 14 about the gifts or charisms of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts, the baptism of the Holy Spirit has to be sharply distinguished from conversion or regeneration. Nowhere in the book of Acts is baptism by or with the Spirit related to conversion. For this reason, it is argued by Menzies that one has to distinguish between a soteriological view of Spirit baptism and a charismatic view of Spirit baptism. The charismatic view of Spirit baptism means that this occurrence is an empowerment of the believer for mission and the proclamation of the gospel. Being baptized by the Spirit leads to the point where people utter inspired speech, glossolalia, or by way of prophecy in the service of God. Prophecy and inspired speech are two significant and outward perceivable phenomena that are evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This leads to empowerment and spiritual courage for the mission in the world.

This charismatic view should, according to Menzies, not be confused with the soteriological view of Spirit baptism. The latter can be found in the Epistles of Paul and the Gospel of John. In 1 Corinthians Paul explicitly relates faith in Jesus Christ to the work and presence of the Holy Spirit. “Nobody will say: Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” The words ‘baptized by the Spirit’ even surfaces literally in 1 Cor. 12:13. It links with the view defended by many Roman Catholic authors — that the Holy Spirit is already given with the sacrament of water baptism and in confirmation. The charisms or gifts of the Spirit are, in this view, the actualization or instantiation of something that was already present, although hidden or sleeping (McDonnell/Montague 1994: 368).

Let me first state that I consider what is brought to the fore by Menzies about the differences between Luke and Paul to be plausible, although I am aware of the debate on this point between him and Max Turner (Turner 1996: 36-56; Menzies 2005: 101-109). In the work of Luke the outpouring of the Spirit is articulated within the context of Jewish apocalyptic. The gifts of the Spirit will be given in and are sign of the last days. Because these last days begin with the coming of Jesus and the proclaiming of the Good News, Jesus is portrayed in Luke as a prophet. He is not a prophet like all the other prophets (Luke 4:24; 7:16), but the prophet of the final time—the

eschaton. Therefore Jesus proclaims, “Today this word of the Scripture is fulfilled for your ears” (Luke 4:21). The messianic time has begun. In this light and in this view, Luke gives a retrospective account of what happened in the beginning of the church. It is proper for this period that young and old, male and female, and rich and poor receive the Holy Spirit and become Spirit bearers. In other words, the gift of prophecy and the insight into the kingdom of God and his reign will characterize the new people of those last days. God has taken a decisive step. The phenomena of glossolalia and prophecy as forms of inspired speech are the marks of the people of God. It is the evidence that the latter rain of God’s life-giving presence has come over his people (cf James 5:7). Prophecy and inspired speech are signs of a new time. Menzies concludes that Luke does not show interest in the relation between conversion and the Spirit. In his view it simply does not exist in Luke’s pneumatological framework. As I already noticed, there is an interesting difference with Max Turner, when the latter stresses the soteriological necessity of the Spirit of prophecy. I will, however, not focus on their debate, but focus here on Menzies’ own exposition.

Luke, however, is not the only author in the Bible who deserves attention. Menzies takes this fully into account. The letters of Paul and the Gospel of John give a different picture. The work of the Spirit and the coming into being and existence of faith is rooted in the work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul states clearly that we have access to the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit (Eph 2:18). John writes in his gospel that faith is a gift from above and comes from the Spirit (John 3:5-6).

A question that can be asked is the following: Can the view of Luke be integrated with that of Paul? A couple of times this suggestion is made by Menzies. If that is the case, then the framework of Paul functions once again as it did in the Reformed tradition, as the overarching framework and as the wider and richer pneumatology.

On the other hand, is this a strategy by which we try to use the Bible verses as puzzle pieces which have to fit into the same puzzle? Would it not be better to observe Paul, John, Mark, and Luke as separate puzzles? They saw the same landscape or were in the same landscape, but made their own picture and structure. It means that systematic theology has its own responsibility regarding the biblical evidence. Systematic theology has the responsibility to search what — in obedience to the scriptures and in view of the contemporary church and culture — can be believed and proclaimed responsibly by the Christian community. Our dependency on our own culture can,

however, be so unconsciously deep that we unknowingly borrow too much from it. Here it becomes necessary to make some critical remarks in response to Menzies' paper.

THE SUBJECT-ORIENTED APPROACH CRITICIZED

First of all, a methodological remark: I would strongly recommend distinguishing more clearly than Menzies does between biblical theology and systematic theology. Placing the thoughts of Luke and Paul together is not to be confused with systematic theology. I think that Luke would have been astonished that someone had drawn his attention to the way in which John or Paul had described and elaborated the work of the Holy Spirit. In his writings Luke is focused on the fact that the first Christians were empowered and bestowed by very explicit and outward manifestations of the Spirit of God. This Spirit rested already on Jesus Christ. This Spirit now makes it possible for the Spirit bearer to have insight into the truth, into the things as they are. This Spirit is moving the Jesus community forward, moving them beyond the old and fixed frontiers, between cultic pure and impure, between Jews and Pagans, and between friends and enemies. This Spirit of Jesus leads them to the people of the world. Now I deliberately use the plural instead of the singular. The focus in the book of Acts is not so much on the individual receivers of the Spirit, but the focus is on what *God* is doing by means of the Holy Spirit. My suggestion is that Luke, in his speech on the baptism with the Holy Spirit, is highly *theocentric*. It is all about what God is doing. It is about the great acts or wonders of God. The outward signs and manifestations clarify that Christ bestows them with the promise of the eschatological Spirit. They are immersed in a new dynamic field. The emphasis lies on Christ as the acting Lord, on the Spirit as the moving agent, and not on the persons with whom this happens. The persons mentioned in the narrative of Luke function as a paradigm, as representatives. They are the living testimony that God breaks through old frontiers in sending the Son and in sending the Spirit. Moreover, these very frontiers are extensively and intensively articulated. The individuals on the stage are not featured for their own sake; they are the paradigms for God who crosses borders. The people mentioned in the address of Peter represent the world of those times. Cornelius did not primarily represent the individual Cornelius, but he represents the gentile Roman besieger. The high officer from Candace is a rich man—a decent representative of the *goiim*, the people far away—that nevertheless will hear God's call.

Therefore, I would like to ask: Can the promise from Joel 2:28 really be interpreted in the way that the prophetic phenomena of tongues and prophecy are meant for *each* of the members of the eschatological community? The Pentecostal approach of Menzies defends the position that the prophetic gifts are available for each believer and that every believer may expect to speak in tongues as an anointing for service and mission. Is this what the book of Acts teaches, or is the focus more on the freedom and sovereignty of God? What is at stake in Acts is that God crosses the borders of cultic pure and impure, Jew and pagan, and Israel and the people. This sovereignty means that the tone is on what God pleases to do or chooses to do (Acts 11:17-18).

In this connection I would like to ask: Is speaking in tongues in the book of Acts not more a phenomenon of the frontiers? We come across it when a border is crossed. The words of Peter in defense of the baptism of Cornelius seem to support this view. “When I had started, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as with us in the beginning” (Acts 11:18). Said otherwise, is the function of tongues in Acts not better articulated in theocentric and eschatological terms? *God* is the one who sends. *God* is the one who gives a sign.

In this connection something also has to be said about the terms *soteriological* and *charismatic*. The descriptions point to concepts that are part of theology and are as such deeply rooted in the history of reflection. We should remember that the specific content of these concepts, as currently used was established quite recently. To be more precise, the elaboration of the theme or locus of soteriology reflects the historical development and debate within Puritanism, Pietism, Methodism, Revivalism, and the Holiness Movement. The debate about how the human being as an individual person can be saved, receive grace, and be transformed to a new life became the focus of those movements. In this focus these movements are obviously part of and representative of the strong orientation of Protestantism on the human subject. Is this development and subject orientation imaginable apart from the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and modern empiricism? The answer must obviously be a clear affirmation of this connection. Pentecostal theology, as presented by Robert Menzies, shows that it is also an offshoot of this family. In fact, this theology is, to a large degree, concentrated on the human agent, on the way that God goes with the individual person, and on the experience of the soul in his or her way out of a lost situation. This perspective makes it understandable that Pentecostal theology has elaborated on and has pressed the issue of the availability of speaking in tongues as a source for service for every member of the community. It became the trademark of classical Pentecostalism.

Is modernity's focus on the subject or human agent as such wrong? Is this what I want to suggest? No, that is not what I want to state here. However, it should be clear that this preoccupation with modernity, this anthropological turn, has a bearing on theology, in which in the end wrong conclusions are made. The focus on the subject as an individual that stands on its own cannot be found in Luke and Paul. Luke has a particular interest in God or the Spirit of God as the agent. He does not discuss the availability of glossolalia as such. If that were the point, then it would have been mentioned more frequently. In the narrative of the high official on his way home from his visit to the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 8:26-40) and in the case of the call and conversion of Saul (Acts 9), the gift of speaking in tongues is not mentioned. Instead, we find with Luke that attention is drawn to the freedom or sovereignty of God. God calls people and pushes them over the borders. In Acts 2:38-39 the call by God, conversion, and the baptism with the Spirit are narrowly related. What I suggest the author has in mind is not all the individuals who are included, but the borders that are crossed by the Spirit of God.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

What does the foregoing mean in terms of systematic theology? In the first place, we have to concentrate on the notion of the acts of God that are decisive in history. The authors of the New Testament want to draw our attention to God in his deeds towards his people. In other words, the theocentric and eschatological perspective has to be predominant in our theology. God sends his Son into this world. In addition, from heaven the exalted Son sends his Spirit as an empowerment for the people who obey the message of the gospel (Acts 2:33). Moreover, at the end of time the Son will appear in glory. That is the theocentric perspective. In the meantime, between exaltation and parousia, the Spirit is given as a clear and outward manifestation and evidence of Spirit and power.

I can agree with Menzies that the Spirit as the foundation of faith and conversion is not found, at least explicitly, in Luke; the church found it in the teaching of John, Paul, and Matthew. In Luke the personal responsibility of the people is emphasized. Conversion is a reaction to the appeal that comes to them from God's side. The gospel challenges human beings to change. Luke writes as a preacher, who is proclaiming the gospel for his audience and calls them to the fore. In the letters of

Paul and the Gospel of John another world is found. Faith and conversion are the mystery of the Holy Spirit. Faith is not only a human work, but also a work that is a gift of God. Being brought into the body of Christ, the new community around the risen Lord, that is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. This is the wider pneumatological framework that influenced Augustine and the teaching of John Calvin. The work of the Holy Spirit is not only found in eschatology, it is also found in the work of creation and providence. This wider view of the Holy Spirit makes it possible to have an open eye for the fact that this world continues to be God's world. The work and presence of the Spirit has a universal outlook. However, we are still on the road and the work is ongoing.

What does this all mean for the place of inspired speech and prophecy in a Reformed theology? First of all, it means that God is able to give these gifts today. However, the following question is whether all these prophetic gifts are available for every believer? I think here a division is surfacing between Pentecostal and Reformed traditions. In the teaching of Paul we learn that the gifts of the Spirit, the 'charismata,' are given in view of the edification of the body of Christ, the church, or community. The gifts are not given as a function of the individual person, but as a function in the community. I take this as a focal point. The focus should not be on the general availability of the gifts for all.

From 1 Cor 12 and 1 Cor 14 it can be learned that not everybody was a partaker in the gift of inspired speech and prophecy. That does not decrease the importance and greatness of the gift of speaking in tongues. Paul does not mistakenly say that he wished that everybody would speak in tongues (1 Cor 14:5), but this remark is made in the context of a quarrel on spiritual superiority. The edification of the community is, for the apostle, the criterion of the value of a charism. The community may long for and reach out for the gifts. It is these gifts that God can endow between ascension and the second coming of our Lord. It is a gift that touches the heart and does well to the receiver. However, God remains the only one who bestows these gifts.

In 1 Cor 12:11: "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." He grants his gifts according to his good will. Said differently, in the work of the Spirit—the principle of God's sovereignty, his election dominates.

Reformed theology has slowly learned from Pentecostalism that this granting of God's gifts is not restricted to the young church. Everywhere in the world it is found, and we are told that it functions magnificently in situations of mission and oppression of the church. We are most grateful for that. And once again, the churches, also the Reformed Churches, may long for and reach out to

be blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit for empowerment in their own culture. The gifts can be received as signs of the presence of God. In addition, the congregation must be summoned to be open to the presence of these gifts. It is in this context that we may draw the attention to the fact that in the work of Luke the prayer of Jesus and the prayer of the community play such a central role. (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 12:12). It is where people pray they might be attentive to the work of God. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it is sound to teach that everybody in the community of believers is supposed to receive the prophetic gifts. Such a doctrine is, in my opinion, a mistake and is not consistent with the sovereignty of God.

NOTES

- ¹ This response was written for the occasion of the presentation of the Dutch translation of W.W. Menzies/R.P. Menzies (2005).
- ² This is the case in the Netherlands particularly through the work of of K.J. Kraan. W.W. Verhoef, M.F.G. Parmentier and J. Veenhof and in the work of the Charismatische Werkgemeenschap Nederland. See Veenhof (2005):214-310 and van Kooij (1995) and the Journal *Bulletin voor Charismatische Theologie*.

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