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# The Significance of Pentecost

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by Howard Marshall

For the Christian “Pentecost” is a shorthand way of referring to the initial outpouring of the Spirit on the disciples of Jesus described in Acts 2, although of course the events of that historic day included a public address by Peter and the conversion and baptism of a substantial number of his hearers. The event is scarcely mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. The narrative in Acts interprets it as the fulfillment of the prophecy of the baptism with the Spirit made by John the Baptist (Acts 1:4f.), and there is one clear reference back to it in Peter’s account of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 11:15-17; cf. 10:47). Otherwise there is no specific reference to it elsewhere in the New Testament, and there is an account of what appears to be a different bestowal of the Spirit by Jesus on ten of His disciples in John 20:22. Luke’s narrative is filled with problems of interpretation, and the lack of comparative material makes assessment of its historicity and significance all the more difficult. What we may be able to discuss with some hope of success is Luke’s own understanding of the event,<sup>1</sup> since we have the rest of his narrative in the Gospel and Acts as a context to aid us in discovering his interpretation.

## I.

The Jewish festival known in the New Testament as Pentecost<sup>2</sup> is the same as the Feast of Weeks (*Shabuoth*) in the Old Testament. It is called the feast of harvest in Exodus 23:16; cf. 34:22. It celebrated the offering of the first-fruits of the wheat harvest, and was the second of the three great festivals of the Jewish agricultural year.<sup>3</sup> According to Deuteronomy 16:9-12 it was celebrated seven weeks after the beginning of the harvest with a free will offering to God. More detailed legislation

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*A lecture delivered at Western Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Oregon, and also as the Presidential address at the meeting of the Scottish Church Theology Society held in January, 1974, at Crieff. Howard Marshall, Esquire, is Professor of New Testament Exegesis at Kings College, the University of Aberdeen (Scotland).*

is given in Leviticus 23:15-21 (cf. Num. 28:26-31), where the date is established by counting 50 days (that is, seven weeks plus a day) from the day when the first fruits of the harvest was offered to the priest. Although this date may originally have been a movable one, dependent on the vagaries of the harvest, it came to be a fixed one, established by its relation to the Feast of the Passover.<sup>4</sup> The festival thus fell in the third month of the year. In the Old Testament legislation it lasted one day, which was regarded as a sabbath or holiday, and various special sacrifices were prescribed to be offered on it. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the feast of weeks is mentioned only in the list of regular yearly feasts celebrated in the Solomonic temple, II Chronicles 8:13. In the New Testament there is reference to the Jewish festival in Acts 20:16 and I Corinthians 16:8, apparently as a means of indicating a date, just as a modern Englishman might refer to "Whit-Monday" without thinking of its theological significance.

An important question is whether the festival had acquired any further significance in New Testament times beyond being a festival of harvest. We have clear evidence that in certain circles the festival was associated with the renewal of the covenant made by God with Israel. An allusion to this festival may perhaps be detected in II Chronicles 15:10-12 where a renewal of the covenant took place under Asa in the *third* month of the fifteenth year of his reign. It is also possible that the dating of the events at Sinai on the third new moon after the departure from Egypt (Ex. 19:1) may have been regarded as suggesting a link with Pentecost. The key passage, however, is Jubilees 6, in which God makes a covenant with Noah, and his descendants are commanded to keep the Feast of Weeks annually to renew the covenant. The feast was kept by the patriarchs, and then forgotten until it was renewed by God on the mountain, that is, at Sinai (Jub. 6:19). No date is given in the Qumran scrolls so far published for their renewal of the covenant which apparently took place annually (I QS 1:8-2:18), but if the sect followed the calendar of Jubilees, they may well have done so in the third month, and hence probably at the Feast of Weeks.<sup>5</sup>

How far this understanding of the feast was general in Judaism it is hard to say. In the rabbinic material, which is later in date, Pentecost is regarded as the day when the law was given at Sinai, rather than as a memorial of the covenant with Noah; the earliest datable evidence is a statement by R. Jose ben Chalaphtha, c. 150 A.D.,<sup>6</sup> and from about the same time Exodus 19 was the appointed lesson to be read on the feast day.<sup>7</sup> The fact that Philo and Josephus make no mention of this may

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be significant, and suggests that the sectarian view of Pentecost had not yet become the view of official Judaism. The most that we can say with certainty is that the association of Pentecost with the renewal of the covenant and perhaps with the giving of the law was taking place in some Jewish circles by New Testament times.

An associated question which should be raised at this point is whether the law was regarded as being given out at Sinai in the languages of the nations of the world. There is rabbinic evidence that when the law was promulgated this took place in the languages of the 70 nations of the world: "Each word which proceeded from the mouth of the Almighty divided into seventy tongues," said R. Jochanan (Shab. 88b). This statement comes from the third century, but there is a similar rabbinic statement from the second century (R. Ishmael's school) which may permit an earlier dating of the idea.<sup>8</sup> Reference has also been made to Philo (Decal. 32-39), but Philo refers simply to the law being given for or to all the nations, and makes no reference either to its being promulgated in different languages or to this taking place on the day of Pentecost.

## II.

The immediate Lucan context for the events of Pentecost is provided by the words of the risen Jesus to the disciples. Luke has divided the account of this conversation into two parts, one of which provides the conclusion to the Gospel, which thus ends on a forward-looking note, and the other at the beginning of Acts, which correspondingly commences with a clear link with the past. So in Luke 24:49 after the disciples have been commanded to preach repentance and forgiveness to all the nations, and have been appointed witnesses, they are told, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." There is a similar statement in Acts 1:4, where we are told that Jesus commanded the disciples not to depart from Jerusalem, "but to wait for the promise of the Father." At this point Luke makes Jesus break into direct speech — "The promise of the Father, which," He said, "you heard from me, for John baptized with water but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4f.). A further statement adds that the disciples will receive power when the Spirit comes upon them, and will be witnesses to Jesus to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The historical relationship envisaged by Luke between the statements of Jesus in these two scenes is not clear. At first sight the phrase in Acts, "which you

heard from me,” appears to be a reference to the statement in Luke 24:49, but the continuation in direct speech suggests rather that what we have is a repetition of that statement in somewhat different wording; in this case the implication is that the promise “which you heard from me” refers to some statement made earlier by Jesus in His earthly ministry. If so, what statement of Jesus is meant? One possibility is that the following saying about John the Baptist is a quotation of an earlier statement of Jesus not reported in the Gospel; some scholars would claim in fact that Luke has mistakenly attributed to Jesus the saying of John found in Luke 3:16,<sup>9</sup> but this is quite improbable. When Peter quotes this same saying as a saying of Jesus in Acts 11:16, he is undoubtedly referring back to the present occasion and not to some earlier occasion in Jesus’ ministry. If we are to look in the Gospels for some other saying that might be referred to here, our attention should be turned to Luke 12:12 with its promise that “the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” The parallel in Matthew 10:20 is closer since it refers to the “Spirit of your Father.” Nor should we ignore the promise of the Paraclete in John 14-16.<sup>10</sup>

In both Luke 24 and Acts 1, the word “promise” is used of the Spirit. This usage is paralleled in early church phraseology in which we have mention of the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14) or the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). The phrase recurs in Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:33, and the indication is that some Old Testament prophecy is in mind. We may locate this in Joel 2:28-32 or perhaps in Isaiah 32:15, a passage which refers to the Spirit’s being poured upon men from on high and gives a verbal link with Luke 24:49.

The Pentecost event is, then, identified with the baptism of the Spirit promised by John the Baptist. There is no reference in the present version of the saying to “fire” (Lk. 3:16). J. D. G. Dunn suggests that this omission is to be explained by the fact that on the basis of Luke 12:39f, Jesus has already undergone a baptism of fire on the cross vicariously for His disciples so that when they are baptized by the Spirit it is no longer a baptism with fire.<sup>11</sup> This exegesis is improbable, since the motif of fire is clearly present in the actual story of Pentecost. Rather, the term “fire” is omitted at this point because it is metaphorical, and the saying concentrates on the reality. The fire has perhaps been replaced by the reference to the power (Acts 1:8) which is to result from the baptism of the Spirit. This link between the Spirit and power is a very common one in the New Testament (cf. Acts 6:8; 10:38; Rom. 15:13, 19; Eph. 3:16; II Tim. 1:7).

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Elsewhere I have tried to show that when the term “baptism” is applied metaphorically to the Spirit, the picture is not that of immersion in a liquid, but rather of being deluged or sprinkled with a liquid that is poured out from above.<sup>12</sup> This interpretation is supported by the use of the verb “to pour out” in Acts 2:17f. and 10:45, and perhaps also by the idea of “being clothed” with power in Luke 24:49. But this motif of baptism remains on the sub-personal level, and it needs to be corrected by the concepts of the Spirit coming upon a person (Acts 1:8; cf. Acts 10:44; 11:15) and taking control of him or filling him.

It follows that the experience of Jesus at the Jordan is the pattern for Christian reception of the Spirit, although it should be noted that the experience of Jesus is not called a baptism with the Spirit; each of the Gospels states simply that after Jesus had been baptized with water the Spirit descended upon Him (Lk. 3:21f.; Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:9f); the reason for this is probably that the experience of Jesus was regarded as unique and hence different from that of the disciples.

Finally, it should be noted that the disciples, like Jesus, wait for the experience of the Spirit in an attitude of prayer, although we are not told what was the content of their prayer. Dupont draws attention to their unanimity, comparing the same motif (*homothumadon*, Acts 1:14) in Exodus 19:8.<sup>12a</sup> Their attitude is one of joy, worship and praise while they wait upon God to act.

### III.

It is against this background of the Jewish festival and the disciples' expectation that we now consider the main points in the event itself.<sup>13</sup>

(1) The initial outpouring of the Spirit was upon the whole group of disciples, reckoned in Acts 1:15 as 120 in number. The allusion in Acts 2:1 is quite vague, and it could be taken to refer simply to the eleven and Matthias, who have been at the center of attention in the previous chapter, or to the eleven with the women and brothers (1:14); in Acts 2:14 the emphasis is again on Peter and the rest of the eleven. But various considerations suggest that a larger group than the apostles is meant.<sup>14</sup> For if the Spirit was promised to all the converts of Peter's sermon in 2:41ff., it is unlikely that the existing disciples would have been excluded from the gift at an earlier point. Moreover, although the promise of Jesus is addressed to the eleven in Acts 1:1ff., it can hardly have excluded their companions, who appear somewhat belatedly in Acts 1:14. Finally, the use of *epi to auto* in Acts 2:1, when seen in

the light of the use in Acts 1:15, implies that a larger group than twelve apostles is indicated. The difficulty in interpretation is probably to be explained by Luke's desire to stress the pre-eminent place of the apostles over against the rest of the disciples; and it may be observed in passing that this feature strongly suggests that Luke is using a source which he is editing to bring out certain features that he considered important, rather than that he was creating a narrative free from any restraint imposed by the use of sources.<sup>15</sup>

(2) The outpouring of the Spirit took place not in the temple<sup>16</sup> (Lk. 24:53), but in the upper room (Acts 1:13). The word "house," which is used in Acts 2:2, means the temple as the dwelling place of God (Acts 7:47) only when there are clear indications in the context;<sup>17</sup> Luke does not mention the temple until Acts 2:46 in a different context. To be sure, on this view we have to assume that at some point the disciples leave the house to meet the crowd, but this is not too great a difficulty.

(3) The event was a purely spiritual baptism. There is no mention of any baptism with water at this point. For the event stands in deliberate contrast with Johannine water baptism. It is true that the converts later in the day receive Christian water baptism as a preliminary to the gift of the Spirit, but the first outpouring was on disciples who already believed in Jesus. It may be that some of them had been baptized by John, and that others had received baptism from the disciples of Jesus in the early days of His mission, as John 1:35; 3:22; 4:1f., imply.<sup>18</sup> While we should not use Johannine statements arbitrarily to explicate Lucan theology, it should be remembered that there was some community of traditions between Luke and John, and that Luke thinks of the apostles in particular as having been with Jesus right from the beginning, namely "from the baptism of John" (Acts 1:22). It is, therefore, possible that Luke thinks of the disciples as having already received Johannine baptism, and hence being in no need of Christian baptism by water, but it may be safer to say that he simply does not raise the question in any way.

(4) The coming of the Spirit was attested by two outward signs. Elsewhere the Spirit is likened to wind (Jn. 3:5), and the word itself (*pneuma*) means "wind." So it is not surprising that His coming was accompanied by a noise like that of wind.<sup>19</sup> The house was filled with it, a curious description of a noise which makes it into something almost palpable. The fact that the noise came from heaven means that it came from God and was unearthly. There is no suggestion that it was an in-

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telligible noise to anybody present. Wind can be an accompaniment of a theophany (II Sam. 22:16; Job 37:10; Ezek. 13:13), but it does not appear in the Sinai narrative;<sup>20</sup> it is associated in the present passage with the Spirit rather than with Old Testament theophanies.

Fire also is common in theophanies, and is an integral element in the Sinai imagery (Ex. 19:18).<sup>21</sup> But the mention of it here is basically due to its association with the Spirit. Often it signifies cleansing and purification, but this element is not stressed here, and the thought is perhaps rather of power. The narrative describes a flame that divided into several tongues, so that each tongue rested upon one of the persons present; one experience from one source was common to all the participants. As with the wind, the appearance is merely like that of the thing described. Luke is attempting to put into words something that is ineffable and is merely an outward accompaniment of a spiritual reality.

(5) The disciples were filled with the Spirit. Luke uses three different words for filling. The adjective *ptērēs* is used to describe the state of a person who is full of the Spirit, and it describes Jesus after His baptism (Lk. 4:1), the seven deacons (especially Stephen, Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55) and Barnabas (Acts 11:24). Thus it refers to a permanent endowment that becomes part of a person's character. Closely associated with the adjective is the verb *pteroō* which is used only once in Acts with reference to the Spirit: in 13:52 it is used in the imperfect to describe the way in which the converts in Pisidian Antioch were being filled with joy and the Holy Spirit; the tense suggests a continuing process. We may compare Ephesians 5:18 where the readers are exhorted not to be drunk with wine but to go on being filled with the Spirit. Finally, there is the verb *pimplēmi*, which is a characteristic word in Luke-Acts. It can be used of the initial endowment of a person who is to serve God, such as John the Baptist (Lk. 1:15) and Paul (Acts 9:17). But it is especially used where a person is inspired by the Spirit before making a statement under prophetic inspiration or preaching a sermon (Lk. 1:41, 67; Acts 4:8, 31; 13:9). The word can be used in this way to describe the experience of someone who is already filled with or full of the Spirit and now receives a further filling. The implication is that our western logical concept that something which is full cannot be filled any further is misleading if applied to the Spirit. One filling is not incompatible with another.<sup>22</sup>

Now the verb used in Acts 2:4 is *pimplēmi*. The choice of the verb is dictated by the fact that this is Luke's normal verb for the process, but at the same time probably by the fact that the filling leads directly to

prophetic utterance under the inspiration of the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit here could, therefore, be understood simply as a momentary, special inspiration to enable the disciples to speak in tongues. But it seems unlikely that this is the case, and that the verb refers at the same time to the reception of a permanent endowment.

For, first, as we have already noted, the verb can have this sense (Acts 9:17).

Second, Peter regards the gift of the Spirit to Cornelius, on the basis of which he becomes a member of the church, as being the same in essence as the gift at Pentecost. In fact, the Cornelius episode demonstrates the essential equivalence of all the various terms used to describe the gift of the Spirit.<sup>23</sup> It is a baptism (Acts 11:16; cf. 1:5). The Spirit falls on Cornelius (Acts 10:44; 11:15), just as He comes upon the disciples (Acts 1:8), and is poured out in the same way (Acts 2:17f.; 10:45). Cornelius receives the Spirit (Acts 10:47) in the same way as the converts at Pentecost (Acts 2:38). It is true that Cornelius is not said to be filled with the Spirit, but this is probably because the thought of filling is closely linked with that of Christian witness and mission, and also because the thrust of the Cornelius story lies in the sovereign act of God in pouring out the Spirit rather than in the human reception of the gift.

Third, it would not make sense if the converts on the day of Pentecost received a permanent gift which had not been received by the apostles. A possible counter-argument is that the apostles had received an earlier, permanent endowment with the Spirit, but this was not in fact the case. For the only possible identifiable situation in which this could have happened is the incident in John 20:22. There is, however, no proof that Luke knew of this incident, despite his familiarity with Johannine traditions; even if he did know of it, he would seem to have deliberately omitted it in favor of the Pentecost story; but he could not have done so, if he thought that both incidents were theologically necessary. He would not have left the basic endowment of the Spirit to his readers' imagination. In any case, the incident in John 20 still leaves Thomas, never mind Matthias, without the gift of the Spirit. Further, Luke regards the gift of the Spirit to new converts as being the same as the gift to the apostles. This is demonstrated by the parallelism in terminology that has already been observed between the Pentecostal outpouring and the gift to Cornelius, and between Cornelius and the Pentecost converts, both of whom "received" the Spirit. Any attempt at subtle differentiation between the terms used is doomed to failure.



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Our conclusion is that Luke refers to the Pentecost experience of the disciples as a filling with the Spirit, and that this means the same as the baptism of the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit, and so on. The choice of the particular term “filling” in this context rather than any of its synonyms is with a view to the prophetic inspiration which accompanied the gift on this particular occasion.

(6) As a result of the filling with the Spirit the disciples speak in “other” tongues, that is, tongues or languages other than their own. The verb *apophtheggomai* is used both of the activity of speaking in tongues and also in 2:14 of the sermon of Peter, and it indicates a solemn, weighty or oracular utterance. It can be used of speaking soberly in contrast to speaking madly (Acts 26:25). But it can also be used of ecstatic utterance by soothsayers and others under divine inspiration.<sup>24</sup> This idea is probably present here, only the idea is not of wild talk so much as of speech inspired by the Spirit.

The story makes it certain that intelligible human languages are meant, not the unintelligible tongues such as are often found in modern glossolalia or such as are usually thought to have been spoken in Corinth. It is to be assumed that the several speakers each spoke one particular language, although it is possible that they each spoke several different languages in succession.

(7) According to 2:5 the audience consisted of Jews.<sup>25</sup> They were not necessarily all permanent residents in Jerusalem, despite the use of *katoikeō*, which normally carries this meaning, for the same verb is used in 2:9 of one section of this people and describes them as residing in Mesopotamia. It has been objected that if they were largely temporary pilgrims, then the Christian church newly formed in Jerusalem would very quickly have shrunk to a small size after they had all returned home.<sup>26</sup> But Luke says nothing about the proportions of visitors and residents. They included proselytes, 2:11, but the stress is on their being Jews. The presence of Gentiles is not implied, and if the description of Pentecost is meant to foreshadow the worldwide expansion of the church, it is an expansion among *Jews* scattered throughout the world that is used to provide the picture. The presence of Gentiles at this stage in Luke’s account would have been anachronistic, and here it is the spread among Jews and proselytes, which had to be used to symbolize the universal spread of the Gospel.

(8) The speaking in tongues was followed by a sermon spoken by Peter, whose opening words act as a commentary on the preceding event. The disciples are not drunk. On the contrary, the event fulfills

prophecy. The words of Joel 2:28-32 are cited with one or two alterations to the text which help to bring out the significance more fully. First, Joel is regarded as describing what will happen “in the last days,” a phrase added to the text. The gift of the Spirit is thus a token that the last days foretold by the prophets have arrived. The passage from Joel does in fact go on to speak of the coming of the day of the Lord and describes various events which precede it, so that Luke’s *pesher* interpretation is justified: the period preceding the day of the Lord has arrived.

Second, the Holy Spirit is poured out by God, but this idea is clarified in verse 33. It is the exalted Jesus who receives the Spirit from God and pours it out upon men.

Third, the passage in Joel emphasizes that the Holy Spirit will be poured out on “everybody,” and not confined to a particular group of people such as the prophets. Male and female, young and old will all be the servants of God and will share in the gift – a thought which is not developed here, but which was seen to be fulfilled in the early church.

Fourth, the outpouring of the Spirit is associated with the gift of prophecy, and also with the seeing of dreams and visions through which God speaks to men. The repetition of “and they shall prophesy” in verse 19 underlines the importance of this concept. For Luke, prophecy includes the power to foretell the future (Acts 2:30; 11:27f.) and the gift of exhortation (Acts 15:32). There seems no reason why it should not be extended to include declaring the mighty acts of God (Acts 2:11; cf. 10:46). In Acts 19:6 the gift of tongues and prophecy are closely linked, but it is not clear whether they are identified. It is true that Paul distinguishes the two activities.<sup>27</sup> Luke may be simply associating two very similar spiritual phenomena, and finding the best Old Testament precedent that he can for speaking in tongues, or possibly he regards the gift of tongues as a “sign” and Peter’s preaching as “prophecy.” What is important is that the activity of speaking in tongues is regarded as a proclamation of the mighty acts of God and is closely related to prophecy. In other words, the gift of tongues is used here to proclaim the Gospel, although it needs to be “interpreted” by the sermon of Peter; in itself it is inadequate.

Fifth, it would appear that the speaking in tongues is to be regarded as a “sign.” Peter’s quotation alters Joel’s “portents in the heavens and on the earth” to “portents in heaven *above* and *signs* on earth *beneath*.” The strange natural phenomena in the following list fall into the category of portents, and these are probably regarded as the still future

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precursors of the day of the Lord (unless Lk. 23:44f. is regarded as fulfilling the prophecy). The signs are not listed, but no doubt include the speaking in tongues which is regarded as a divinely inspired accompaniment to the preaching of the Gospel.

Sixth, the prophecy speaks of the possibility of salvation for all who call on the name of the Lord. Accordingly, the sermon develops into an exposition of the identity of the Lord with Jesus and an appeal to men to be saved. Those who respond to this appeal are promised that on being baptized they will receive forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit. Luke describes how they were baptized, but does not say anything further about their reception of the promised benefits. It is to be assumed that what Peter promised to the converts actually happened; it would be a very wrong use of the *argumentum e silentio* to claim that it did not. What we would like to know is whether the new converts received the Spirit "with signs following," but we are simply not told. Perhaps the correct conclusion to draw is that it did not matter.

### IV.

So far we have been engaged in the fashionable pursuit of redaction criticism, that is, examining the passage for what it tells us about the purpose of Luke in recording it. But redaction criticism cannot be carried out in isolation from source and tradition criticism, and such study must be undertaken before we venture to draw any conclusions. It is time to ask how this narrative came into being and how it is related to other teaching about the Spirit in the New Testament.

Various scholars have detected internal inconsistencies and improbabilities in Luke's account which suggest that he used more than one source and/or that he has considerably modified his source material. We may list these as follows:<sup>28</sup>

(1) The number of people involved is immense. The baptism by immersion of 3,000 people cannot have taken place in a single day. Nor could 3,000 people gather together without the Romans intervening to suppress a possible riot. Nor could 3,000 people hear Peter speaking in the open air.

(2) The audience was at least largely Jewish, and nearly everybody would have understood Aramaic or Greek: what, then, was the need for the language miracle? Moreover, other accounts of the phenomenon of tongues appear to refer to speaking in unintelligible languages, such as are found in modern glossolalia. Now the apostles were accused of drunkenness, which is said to be an improbable comment on speaking

in real languages, but makes sense if the apostles talked what seemed to be gibberish. Hence it has been argued either that two different accounts, one depicting glossolalia and the other speaking in foreign languages, have been confused by Luke, or that he has wrongly interpreted an original account of glossolalia in terms of speaking in foreign languages (the drunkenness motif being a relic of the original story).<sup>29</sup>

(3) It is unlikely that Peter's speech would have been recorded at the time, and along with the other speeches in Acts it falls under the suspicion of being a Lucan composition.

(4) Finally, there is no mention of the Pentecost event outside Acts, and (5) the suspicion arises that the whole thing is a Lucan invention, making use of various current motifs.

These points vary in substance and importance:

(1) A basic difficulty lies in the size of the crowd: could 3,000 people have met together like this? The simplest solution may be that the number has been exaggerated, but it is not wholly impossible. If we are going to be dubious about the baptism of 3,000 people, it may be remarked that Peter's sermon began at 9:00 a.m., and this would allow plenty of time for baptisms, especially if there were 120 Christians available to help in the task. It is very doubtful whether early Christian baptism was invariably by immersion; the case for affusion, which could be carried out more expeditiously, is a strong one.<sup>30</sup> Given the right conditions, 3,000 people can hear a single speaker without a public address system. And Pilate was not necessarily in Jerusalem to halt the proceedings; he did not normally stay there.

(2) Although the audience was Jewish, the various groups from the Diaspora would still have had their own languages, and the declaration of the Gospel would come to them more significantly in their own tongues. We should not rule psychological explanations of New Testament phenomena completely out of court, and in this case we may note how ethnic groups may keep up their religious devotions in their own language long after they have become assimilated both linguistically and culturally to a larger group. Many immigrant groups in the United States continued to hold church services in Swedish, German and other languages until quite recently. The opposite may also be true; Jews, who may have worshiped in Hebrew in their synagogues, may have been all the more impressed to hear the gospel in the vernacular languages which they used every day.

The accusation of drunkenness would have been made by anyone who did not understand the languages other than his own which were

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being spoken,<sup>32</sup> and also by anyone who wanted to deride the bold speaking of the disciples and the enthusiasm and religious fervor which they showed. There is no basis for tracing two sources or an edited narrative here.

It is most difficult to get reliable criteria and evidence for evaluation of the phenomenon of tongues. It has been argued that the phenomena described in I Corinthians 12, 14, included speaking in known languages.<sup>33</sup> If this case is accepted, the major contextual argument against the historicity of Acts 2 at once disappears. To be sure, this view goes against the usual exegesis of I Corinthians 12, 14, and it demands that the gift of tongues be regarded as something miraculous; it will be unwelcome to scholars who feel that wherever possible a natural explanation should be preferred to a miraculous one. This fact no doubt explains the popularity of the view that ecstatic speaking in unintelligible tongues is meant, since this is a phenomenon that can be produced by ordinary, natural means.<sup>34</sup> But exegesis of the text is primary, and there is a good case that Paul understood the tongues spoken at Corinth to be, or to include, foreign languages. There are some cases of this phenomenon claimed by modern Pentecostals, although it must be freely admitted that modern glossolalia is usually conducted in unintelligible tongues.<sup>35</sup> It is of course possible that both types of glossolalia were found in the ancient church, just as both have been claimed to happen in the modern Pentecostal movement.<sup>36</sup>

(3) The third main element is the speech of Peter. This raises the whole question of the speeches in Acts, on which I accept the minority view that they are based, at least in part, on good tradition and are not entirely the creation of Luke.<sup>37</sup> In the present case the crucial point is the use of Joel 2:28-32 as a commentary on the gift of the Spirit: is the application of the text due to Luke, or is it based on the tradition? There is naturally no way of proving that Peter himself spoke in this manner on the actual day of Pentecost. The manner in which the quotation is subject to *peshet* treatment may suggest the hand of Luke (but *peshet* was common in the early church). But the fact that the use of the text is traditional may be deduced from the recurrence of the same text in Romans 10:13 and Revelation 6:12. This independent use of the text by Paul and the author of Revelation suggests that it came from the early church's stock of scriptural quotations.<sup>38</sup> We may perhaps conclude that here we have a text whose relevance to the experience of the church was recognized from an early date. If Psalms 67 (68): 19 is alluded to in Acts 2:33 (see note 43), this would be a

further example of use of an early church “testimony” (cf. Eph. 4:8).

(4) The next problem is that Pentecost is not referred to elsewhere in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the same basic experience is presupposed in Pauline theology.<sup>39</sup> For Paul, a man is not a Christian unless he possesses the Spirit of Christ, and this experience of the Spirit is crucial: it comes to those who hear the message with faith (Gal. 3:2; Rom. 8:9). Hence Paul attests the validity of the individual experience described in Acts 2:38. Furthermore, for Paul the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, in the same way as the individual (I Cor. 3:16f.; cf. 6:19; Eph. 2:22). Here we have the ecclesiastical equivalent of the gift of the Spirit to the individual. The question is whether Paul’s teaching implies a beginning to the process of the Spirit coming to men. Moreover, the New Testament writers were aware that the preaching of the message was accompanied by signs and wonders wrought by the Spirit (Heb. 2:4; cf. Rom. 15:19; II Cor. 12:12). This provides a context in which the story of Pentecost is thoroughly at home. But did the inducement provided by the context lead to Lucan creation of the story? Why is it not in fact mentioned elsewhere?<sup>40</sup> Evidence can be produced to strengthen the argument from silence, namely that in the East Syrian and Palestinian church, the Ascension was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Easter until the fourth century; the Pentecost tradition cannot have been known in that area.<sup>41</sup> This claim, however, applies only to part of the church and may simply mean that the ascension and outpouring of the Spirit were celebrated together.

(5) The final consideration must therefore be whether one can satisfactorily account for the story as a piece of fiction. Several attempts have been made to do this. It may suffice to outline the solution offered by E. Haenchen.<sup>42</sup> According to this scholar, Luke had no ancient traditions at his disposal for his attempt to depict the important event of the coming of the Spirit. Since he had already dated the Ascension 40 days after Easter, he chose the next following festival for the occasion. He wished to show that the Spirit came from God, and so adopted the imagery of a wind from “on high”; he also wished to portray graphically how the Spirit came upon certain men, and therefore chose the imagery of a flame of fire, which was derived from the Jewish tradition of the law-giving at Sinai on Pentecost. In Philo this flame had turned into voices, and with the help of the tradition of the law being given in 70 languages, Luke had the concept of the tongues spoken by the apostles. He could not make use of the imagery of Genesis 11, since the event was limited to Jews, but he could at least give

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some indication of the spread of the Gospel by making the Jews from the Dispersion represent the various countries of the world. Since, however, he wanted to make Peter the spokesman of the Gospel message, it was necessary to limit what was said in tongues to a vague praise of God and to indicate that it was unintelligible to part of the crowd.

The weaknesses in this reconstruction are patent. We have seen that the detailed Jewish traditions about Pentecost and the law cannot be certainly traced back to this date, and if they cannot be, then Haenchen's whole case collapses. Moreover, there is no clear indication that Sinai traditions were in Luke's mind.<sup>43</sup> It is impossible to account for the story without some original event in Jerusalem to spark it off, and this event must have included glossolalia. Moreover, it must have happened at Pentecost, for there is no reason why Luke should arbitrarily have chosen this date. Above all, Haenchen's view assumes that nobody remembered the first days of the church, which is highly improbable. The fact that the event is not recorded elsewhere in no way contradicts this assumption. The Gospel of John is concerned purely with events during the ministry of Jesus, and hence John 20 is in no way a substitute for Acts 2 – and certainly not for Haenchen, who does not regard it as an early tradition anyhow. In the end, the question is whether it is more plausible to try to account for material in Acts historically or in terms of creative fiction. I have no doubt where the answer ought to lie.<sup>44</sup>

### V.

We must now attempt to assess the significance of Pentecost for Luke. It is an important event for him, since he alone of New Testament writers explicitly refers to it. It is the first significant event in the story which he has to tell in Acts and constitutes the beginning of the church's mission. This *missionary element* is probably the most important single aspect of the story in Luke's view. The gift of the Spirit equips the disciples for witness, Peter's proclamation of the Gospel occupies the center of the account, and the story culminates in the conversion of some 3,000 hearers of the message.<sup>45</sup>

(1) We have seen that in some areas of Jewish thought the day of Pentecost was linked with the renewal of the covenant and the giving of the law at Sinai. Are these ideas present in Acts? Although a number of scholars have claimed that this is the case, we have found little evidence to substantiate this view. If it was true, we would expect to find

some trace of the typology in the wording of the passage. This would be all the more so since we know that the early church did operate with the idea of the new covenant (cf. II Cor. 3), and believed that Jesus had inaugurated the new covenant by His death; Luke is familiar with the idea of the covenant made with Israel (Lk. 1:72; Acts 3:25; 7:8), and in all probability with the concept of the new covenant (Lk. 22:20). But there is remarkably little trace of this idea in the wording of the Pentecost narrative. Nor does there seem to be any definite allusion to the law-giving at Sinai beyond the possible reference to Psalm 68 in 2:33. There is some parallelism between the theophany at Sinai and the visible manifestation of the Spirit; in particular there is the passage in which Philo speaks of the flame at Sinai being turned into articulate speech, but I can find no reason to believe that Philo's exegesis has influenced Luke. The fire in Acts is surely to be linked primarily with the fire in John the Baptist's saying. Nor again, is there sufficient evidence to link the use of tongues at Pentecost with the rabbinic tradition that the law was given in the tongues of the nations. If any such ideas were present in the tradition before Luke, he certainly did not develop them. It seems unlikely that a contrast with the old covenant was a major theme for Luke.

(2) The same negative verdict must be returned on accounts to see in Acts 2 a conscious Christian counterpart to the story of Babel in Genesis 11.<sup>46</sup> Once again the necessary verbal links are lacking, which we would have expected from a writer so thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament as Luke.<sup>47</sup> In Genesis 11 the basic point of the story is the scattering of the peoples of the world, which results from the confusion of their tongues. The story of Pentecost can certainly be regarded as a counterpart of this, although it does not in fact undo the confusion of tongues but simply makes use of it. One can preach a valid sermon on the contrast, but Luke did not do so.<sup>48</sup>

(3) We come back, therefore, to the basic point that for Luke the story of Pentecost represents the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus after His resurrection, which in its turn takes up the prophecy of John the Baptist, that the disciples would receive power when the Spirit came upon them, and would be witnesses to all mankind. The correspondence between the prophecy and the event is so close that it cannot be doubted that the working out of this correspondence is the main motif in the mind of Luke. Along with this emphasis on the fulfillment of the Baptist's prophecy is the indication that the earlier promises of God in the Old Testament, especially in Joel and possibly Isaiah 32:15,



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here find their fulfillment. Hence the event is regarded as falling into the pattern of promise and fulfillment, which is central to Luke's theology of history, and as such it forms part of the events prophesied for the last days. Thus, the mission of the church is seen to be an essential part of the divine plan of salvation.

(4) The main point of the narrative is the reception of the Spirit. We have argued that for Luke the various terms used to describe this experience all refer to the one basic event of Christian initiation, with the single exception that Luke regards "filling" with the Spirit as a repeatable act which is usually directed to preparation for some particular task of witness and inspired utterance. The Pentecost gift combined these two aspects of the Spirit's work. It was both initiation and preparation for inspired speech. The gift of tongues, regarded by Luke as a form of prophecy, is seen as an outward manifestation or sign of the presence of the Spirit, and appears when it is needed, whether to testify to spectators of the reality of Christian experience or to confirm it to the participants themselves (Acts 10:44-48; 19:6).

### VI.

Luke's various accounts of the gift of the Spirit do not indicate a clear relationship to baptism with water. Although the gift uniformly follows the preaching of the Gospel and the acceptance of the message, there is no uniformity in the relation of the gift of the Spirit to water-baptism, except that it can usually be assumed to follow it, and cases where this does not happen can be explained as exceptions to the rule. J. D. G. Dunn has disputed that in the New Testament water baptism is the means whereby the Spirit is bestowed on believers: "God gives the Spirit directly to faith," he avers.<sup>49</sup> This is too strong a statement. Against it we have the evidence of Acts 2:38, which should not be pressed to mean something else simply because it stands alone. It is probable that Dunn has been led to an unsatisfactory statement by failing to distinguish between water baptism as the *means* of bestowal of the Spirit and as the *condition*. The two things accompany each other, normally very closely. The Pentecost experience should, therefore, probably be regarded as an exception to the rule: it had a unique character.

There is little stress in Acts 2 and elsewhere in Acts on the ethical effects of the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit brings joy and assurance to believers, and equips the church for mission by giving it boldness and power in declaring the Gospel. But Luke does not mention the work of the Spirit as the *Holy* Spirit. Only once is the Spirit linked to Christian

ethics, namely in Acts 11:23, where the goodness of Barnabas is rooted in his being filled with the Spirit. This means that an account of the Spirit's activity which is based solely on the Pentecost story is one-sided and inadequate; the Pentecost story is concerned solely with mission, and stresses the importance of this aspect of the Spirit's work. In one sense, therefore, the church cannot be content merely with a repetition of "Pentecost": it needs an experience involving other dimensions of the Spirit's activity. But is Pentecost itself a repeatable experience? Obviously, as the birth of the church, Pentecost is basically unique. But that is not the whole story. We may, perhaps, draw an analogy with the apostolate as understood by C. K. Barrett. There is a primary sense in which the apostolate was basic and unrepeatable: the apostles could have no successors in principle, because apostles were essentially witnesses of the resurrection appearances of Jesus. But this does not mean that the church cannot still be apostolic in the sense of displaying apostolic qualities – what Paul calls the signs of an apostle.<sup>50</sup> So, too, the Spirit who came upon the disciples at Pentecost still comes upon the church to equip it for mission.

It does not seem to be the case that the foundation of any and every new local church is accompanied by a "little Pentecost": nothing in Acts supports such a view. But there can be repetition of what took place "at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). The experience of being filled with the Spirit was and must be repeatable. The experience of tongues was also repeatable, but was not a necessary sign of being baptized or filled with the Spirit. The fact that the gift of tongues is so rarely linked with reception of the Spirit in the New Testament indicates that it was not regarded as a normative or necessary accompaniment of spiritual experience. Other considerations will determine whether it is to be expected as a normal part of Christian experience outside the apostolic age, but this point lies outside our present scope. All that we are entitled to say at the moment is that the reception of the Spirit by individuals or groups is what characterizes the church throughout the New Testament; it is in the light of this that we are to test our own experience today.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>"We must start from the question, 'What was Luke's intention?' " E. Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Gottingen, 1959),<sup>12</sup> p. 137.

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<sup>2</sup>For the Greek word see Tobit 2:1; II Maccabees 12:32.

<sup>3</sup>For details see E. Lohse, TDNT VI, 44-53, especially 45-49; M. Delcor, DBS VII, 858-879; J. Kremer, *Pfingstbericht und Pfingstgeschehen*, Stuttgart, 1973, pp. 11-27.

<sup>4</sup>There was, however, a dispute between the Pharisees and the Boethusians over the right way to calculate the 50 days from Passover to Pentecost. The Pharisees interpreted Leviticus 23:15 to refer to the first day of the Passover feast, which was celebrated as a Sabbath, and hence reckoned 50 days from Nisan 15; this meant that Pentecost fell on the same day of the week as Nisan 16. The Boethusians interpreted the same text to refer to the first weekly sabbath after the celebration of the passover, and hence for them Pentecost always fell on a Sunday. The former practice appears to have been followed in the first century; cf. SB II, 598-600; J. Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 55-57.

<sup>5</sup>Unpublished evidence from 4QDB placing the ceremony in the third month is cited by J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (1959), 116f.; cf. J. Kremer, *op. cit.*, p. 16f.

<sup>6</sup>Seder Olam Rabba 5 (SB II, 601). However, in Jubilees 1:1 Moses receives the law at Sinai on the sixteenth day of the third month. It seems that already for the author of Jubilees the law-giving is associated with the Feast of Weeks. The question appears to have been discussed early in the second century A.D. by R. Akiba (Yoma 4b; B. Noack, "The Day of Pentecost in Jubilees, Qumran and Acts," ASTI 1, (1962), 73-95, especially 81).

<sup>7</sup>Psalm 68 was a lesson used at the Festival of Weeks. Jewish exegesis regarded verse 19 as a reference to Moses giving the law to Israel (cf. SB III, 596-598), but it is not clear how far back this use and interpretation go back.

<sup>8</sup>SB II, 604f.; J. Kremer, *op. cit.*, pp. 250-252. Cf. O. Betz, "Zungenreden und susser Wein," in S. Wagner (ed.), *Bibel und Qumran* (Berlin, 1968), pp. 20-36. For a more cautious verdict see E. Lohse, *op. cit.*, p. 49 n. 33. See further J. Dupont, *Études sur les Actes des Apôtres* (Paris, 1967), pp. 481-502.

<sup>9</sup>H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Tübingen (1963), p. 22.

<sup>10</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (1954), p. 36. On the place of the Spirit in the teaching of Jesus see G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Jesus and the Spirit," in A. Descamps et al., *Melanges Bibliques Gembloux*, (1970), pp. 463-478.

<sup>11</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Spirit* (1970), p. 42f.

<sup>12</sup>I. H. Marshall, "The Meaning of the Verb 'To Baptize,'" EQ 45 (1973), 130-140. Cf. J. Kremer, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>12a</sup>J. Dupont, *op. cit.*, p. 484.

<sup>13</sup>For a detailed treatment, see J. Kremer, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. J. Kremer, *op. cit.*, p. 215. Dupont holds that the group in 1:14 is meant, 1:15-26 being a later addition to the original narrative.

<sup>16</sup>Preferred by F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 55f.

<sup>17</sup>E. Haenchen, *op. cit.*, p. 131 n. 8.

<sup>18</sup>G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962), pp. 67-72.

<sup>19</sup>The choice of the word *pnoē* is dictated by the fact that *pneuma* was obviously unsuitable at this point in the sentence. For a similar physical accompaniment to the coming of the Spirit see Acts 4:31.

<sup>20</sup>Josephus, however, mentions it (Ant. 3:80). Certainly there was noise (*ēchos*) at Sinai: Ex. 9:16; Heb. 12:18f. Philo. *Decal.* 33, 46.

<sup>21</sup>Philo, *Decal.* 33, 44-49; Tg. Jon. Ex. 20:2 (cited by Kremer, *op. cit.*, p. 247). Cf. F. Lang, TDNT VI, 934-941. In Philo the voice of God was changed into a flaming fire as the commandments were uttered.

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<sup>22</sup>On the words used see G. Delling, TDNT VI, 128-131, 283-298.

<sup>23</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-72.

<sup>24</sup>J. Behm, TDNT I, 447.

<sup>25</sup>The problems caused by the list of nations in vv. 9-11 cannot be discussed here. Cf. B. M. Metzger, "Ancient Astrological Geography and Acts 2:9-11", in W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin, *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Exeter, 1970), pp. 123-133; J. Kremer, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-158.

<sup>26</sup>E. Haenchen, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>27</sup>G. Friedrich, TDNT VI, 851 f.

<sup>28</sup>See especially E. Haenchen, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-139; R. F. Zéhnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse* (Nashville, 1971), pp. 111-123.

<sup>29</sup>H. W. Beyer, TDNT II, 702f. and many scholars.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. I. H. Marshall, as in n. 12 above.

<sup>31</sup>Haenchen has evidently not heard of Hanham Mount or Mow Cop – or even taken into account the size of ancient theatres.

<sup>32</sup>K. Haacker, "Das Pfingstwunder als exegetisches Problem," in O. Bocher and K. Haacker, *Verborum Veritas* (Wuppertal, 1970), pp. 125-131. Similarly, J. Kremer, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-163.

<sup>33</sup>J. G. Davies, "Pentecost and Glossolalia," JTS 3 (1952), 228-232; R. H. Gundry, "'Ecstatic Utterance' (N.E.B.)?", JTS 17 (1966), 299-307. While these scholars restrict tongues to human languages, "heavenly" languages should probably be included also (I Cor. 13:1).

<sup>34</sup>Cf. K. Haacker's comments (*op. cit.*).

<sup>35</sup>W. J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels* (1972).

<sup>36</sup>Samarin claims that there are no authenticated modern examples

of speaking in foreign languages, but see D. M. Howard, *By the Power of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, 1973).

<sup>37</sup>F. F. Bruce, "The Sermons in Acts – after Thirty Years," in R. Banks, *Reconciliation and Hope* (Exeter, 1974).

<sup>38</sup>C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 1952, pp. 46-48.

<sup>39</sup>J. Kremer, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-86.

<sup>40</sup>J. Kremer, *op. cit.*, pp. 237, rightly notes that other important incidents such as the birth and baptism of Jesus find no mention in the Epistles.

<sup>41</sup>R. F. Zehnle, *op. cit.*, p. 112, citing G. Kretschmar, "Himmelfahrt und Pfingsten," ZKG 66, 1954-55, 209-253. But did this celebration on the fiftieth day include both the Ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit? Cf. Eph. 4:7f.

<sup>42</sup>E. Haenchen, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-139.

<sup>43</sup>There is certainly not sufficient proof of the association of the lawgiving in various languages at Pentecost to allow for a firm case. We need some firm indication in Acts 2 that the narrator had in mind a conscious contrast with the law giving at Sinai. Although J. C. Kirby asserts that this is implicit (*Ephesians, Baptism and Pentecost* 1968, p. 118; cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, 48f.), I cannot find any evidence for it in the narrative (similarly S. G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke - Acts*, Cambridge, 1973), pp. 126f. W. L. Knox, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Cambridge, 1948), p. 85f. claimed that Psalm 68 (67):19, which in Jewish tradition was interpreted of the giving of the law, is alluded to in Acts 2:33 with reference to the gift of the Spirit. J. Dupont (*op. cit.*, p. 100) originally rejected this allusion. In his later study of Pentecost (*ibid.*, p. 295 n. 25 and 481) he accepted it, and has recently attempted to substantiate it in "Ascension du Christ et don de l'Esprit d'après Actes 2:33," in B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (edd.), *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 219-228.

<sup>44</sup>R. Zehnle's theory is similar to Haenchen's and equally speculative and vulnerable. J. Kremer's detailed study comes to the conclusion

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that a historical event on the day of Pentecost lies behind Luke's narrative, although he claims that Luke has given it a more realistic, concrete form, and that much of the imagery of wind, fire and tongues is a midrashic development made at an earlier stage in the development of the tradition. See also L. Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, (1970), pp. 20-24.

<sup>45</sup>L. Goppelt, *ibid.*, rightly regards Acts 2 as programmatic for the Book of Acts in the same way as Luke 4:16-30 is for the Gospel.

<sup>46</sup>E. Trocme, *Le "Livry des Acts" et l'Histoire* (Paris, 1957), pp. 202-206; E. Haenchen, *op. cit.*, p. 138; S. G. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 126, argues that this element may have been more obvious in a putative original form of the tradition which described a mass ecstasy in which the disciples spoke in one single Spirit-language. But this is purely hypothetical.

<sup>47</sup>The use of *sugcheō* in Acts 2:6 and Gen. 11:7, 9 is not a very strong link.

<sup>48</sup>J. Dupont, *Études*, p. 501 n.

<sup>49</sup>J. D. G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>50</sup>For the development of this idea see C. K. Barrett, *The Signs of an Apostle* (1970).