

SPIRIT RECEPTION: LUKE VIS A VIS PAUL

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Introduction: The Problem

With Pentecostal scholarship coming of age, it is appropriate and expected that the critical issue of Spirit reception would be much discussed within the Pentecostal-Charismatic community and in dialogue with other Evangelicals. In fact so much has by now occurred that I may be presumptuous in thinking that I have anything new to contribute. Nevertheless, I have given much thought to the subject since I completed a Master's thesis at Fuller Seminary in the 1960's entitled: "Reception of the Spirit in the New Testament Church." And so with hopes I can contribute to the discussion, I am prepared to add my present thoughts to this important subject.

It is commonly recognized that the relatively recent dialogue/debate has been especially triggered with the publication of J. D. G. Dunn's book *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (1970). Since that time there have been numerous responses to Dunn's position of a one time reception of the Spirit at one's "conversion-initiation" experience, with this evident in both Acts and other parts of the New Testament. It is no surprise that these responses have been mostly from Pentecostal scholars who have taken issue with Dunn's thesis. In the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology (JPT)*, October 1993, Dunn provided an irenic but unrepentant response to his critics, in particular responding to H. D. Hunter, H. Ervin, R. Stronstad, F. L. Arrington, J. B. Shelton, and R. P. Menzies. In subsequent issues of the *JPT* there have been responses to Dunn's response. Worthy of particular mention are M. Turner's two volumes, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* and his *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, both published in 1996.¹ So the discussion has continued.

In this paper I will try very briefly to summarize the present status of the variance of opinion, as I understand it, and then add a perspective, which I hope will be helpful.

Professor Dunn's answer to his critics reaffirms his position that Luke does not separate the outpouring of the Spirit upon individuals from "conversion-initiation"² Again, in response, Dunn grants that for Luke the Spirit is pre-eminently the Spirit of prophecy. But, he asks: Is there really any justification for limiting Luke's understanding of the Spirit to exclude the Spirit's soteriological work?³ He highlights the Cornelius event of Acts 10, emphasized in Acts with its repeated narrative in Acts 11, as clearly indicating the work of the Spirit in salvation in the outpouring on the Gentiles. He then explains that exegetically in the Acts 15 reference to the

¹ The former published by Sheffield Academic Press as part of the Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, 9, and the latter by Paternoster Press and reissued in 1998 by Hendrickson Publishers.

² J. D. G. Dunn, "Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts," *JPT* 3 (1993), 6-7 with 25-26.

³ Dunn, 8-10.

event, the cleansing of hearts in verse 9 must refer to the bestowal of the Spirit in verse 8. Given the pivotal role of this event in Acts, Dunn concludes that Luke's account here ought to be allowed to shed light on other accounts that are handled more briefly.⁴ Finally, at the risk of appearing to interpret Luke through the eyes of Paul (for which he has already been much criticized), Dunn identifies points of commonality between Luke and Paul with respect to the Spirit in relation to our subject. Thus Dunn concludes that Lukan and Pauline pneumatology are one and the same at the point of Spirit-baptism in the "conversion-initiation" experience.⁵

In their response to Dunn's position, his critics are often not uniform in what they agree with and what they would like for Dunn to correct.⁶ All of course agree with Dunn that Luke describes the Spirit in charismatic terms. But those following R.P. Menzies' rebuttal understand Luke to describe the Spirit *exclusively* in charismatic or prophetic terms.⁷ Thus Luke does not present the work of the Spirit in relation to salvation. In contrast to Menzies, J. B. Shelton agrees with Dunn that Luke includes a soteriological function of the Spirit in Luke-Acts, and they agree that this is more prominent in Paul than in Luke.⁸ Most of Shelton's disagreements seem relatively minor to me. However, in his book *Mighty in Word and Deed* Shelton critiques Dunn for not recognizing the baptism of Jesus as primarily empowerment for ministry, rather than the start of the new covenant age.⁹ Also, Shelton sees a broader New Testament usage of "baptism" beyond simply initiation or conversion.¹⁰

In surveying the response of several of Dunn's critics regarding Luke-Acts, W. Atkinson concludes that critics generally have corrected two of Dunn's basic misunderstandings. First, there *is* a distinction in Luke's thought between entering the new covenant with forgiveness of sin, on one hand, and reception of the gift of the Spirit for empowerment in service. Secondly, they have shown that for Luke it is at least possible to believe and not have received the Spirit, certainly in historical fact, and probably in apostolic thinking. But Atkinson also concludes that the Pentecostal objection to making Spirit reception part of initiation is much weaker.¹¹

More favorable to Dunn's Spirit reception in "conversion-initiation," though not entirely uncritical, is Turner. Turner appeals to Evangelicals to reconsider charismatic aspects of Pentecostals, and appeals to Pentecostals and Charismatics to reconsider New Testament "conversion-initiation."¹²

⁴ Dunn, 14-16.

⁵ Dunn, 27.

⁶ For positions within the Charismatic movement, one may consult H. I. Lederle, *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of "Spirit-Baptism" in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* (Hendrickson, 1988).

⁷ Menzies, "Luke and the Spirit: A Reply to James Dunn," *JPT* 4 (1994), 115-138, esp. 137. Menzies sees Luke thus making a special contribution to biblical theology.

⁸ Shelton, "A Reply to James D. G. Dunn's 'Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts,'" *JPT* 4 (1994), 139-143. In *Mighty in Word and Deed* Shelton also says "Luke does not clearly delineate between the Spirit's role in conversion and empowerment for mission," Hendrickson (1991), 135.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 164-66. Similarly, R. Stronstad in *Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, shows the parallel between Jesus baptismal anointing and that of the disciples at Pentecost, Hendrickson (1984), 51-52. Jesus' anointing for ministry defines the Pentecost event,

¹⁰ "Reply," 143.

¹¹ "Responses to Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Luke-Acts," *JPT* 6 (1995), 87-131, in particular, 119.

¹² Especially, *Power from on High*, ch. 14.

Regarding Spirit reception and Luke, the issue boils down to this. Does Luke intend to say that the Spirit is received subsequent to becoming a Christian, **or** does Luke's *emphasis* upon Spirit reception for power in service sufficiently explain the absence of Spirit reception being more explicitly related to becoming a Christian. Is the issue one of substance, or is it one of Lukan emphasis? Perhaps another way of addressing the issue is to ask the following question. What does Spirit reception mean for Luke? Is there a dialectical difference between Luke and Paul (apparently e.g. Menzies and many Pentecostals), or are they more easily harmonized, while reckoning with their differences of emphasis regarding the work of the Spirit (e.g. Dunn and other Evangelicals)?

In pursuing our problem, surely it is vital that we consider authorial intent in both Luke and Paul, insofar as this can be discerned.¹³ This may go a long way in enabling us to explain differences between these two, as we seek to arrive at a possible Lukan-Pauline pneumatology of Spirit reception.

Reckoning with Authorial Intent

Lukan Purpose

Exploration of Lukan intent has been much aired, with somewhat diverse results. I will simply say that Luke can rightly be considered to be the theologian-historian of salvation history who purposes to establish the validity of the tradition of the Jesus mission (cf. Luke 1:1-4). This explains his rootage of that mission (and including the Christian mission of Acts) in the Old Testament prophetic hope, with numerous references to the Old Testament. Luke thus seeks to show the validity of the "new Israel" (believing Jews and Gentiles), with his apologetic drawing substantially upon the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. This risen Lord Jesus continues His mission with outpourings of the Spirit upon those who receive the salvation message. (Note especially Acts 1:8 in relation to 2:38-39 with 8:1,4.) The Spirit outpourings fulfill the O.T. prophetic hope, where the Spirit of prophecy is to be received by all of Yahweh's people (cf. Joel 2:28-29). This Spirit is linked to the mission of the church at the start of Acts (1:8), as the mission goes forth in word and deed in the leading and power of the Spirit from the risen Lord. The gospel progresses into the Gentile world and will do so until the Messiah returns at a future time. Acts concludes in chapter 28 with Paul in Rome giving forth the message.¹⁴

Concerning Spirit outpouring/reception, Luke draws heavily upon the Old Testament background of the Spirit in proclamation (prophesying) and in mighty works. Such provides support for the way he develops his salvation-history motif. The key phrases are the Spirit

¹³ I realize that the possibility of knowing authorial intent is debatable, e.g. M. J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* (Baker Books, 1993), ch. 1. However, often we may arrive at a reasonable judgment by observing an author's emphases.

¹⁴ Turner provocatively gives equal emphasis to a Lukan message on the purging or renewal of Israel, *Power from on High; Holy Spirit*, 46-56. This is well argued and supportive of a soteriological theme in Lukan purpose. This has come to my attention too late to give due consideration in relation to overall Lukan intent.

coming "upon," poured out "upon," etc.¹⁵ This clearly relates to Luke's purpose to underscore the apostolic mission of the church in relation to the gift of the Spirit, as seen in key Acts passages. Luke's distinctive "upon" vocabulary harks back to O. T. Spirit references that stress inspired utterance and power. The report of such overt manifestations of the Spirit thus ties his message into his salvation-history theme, but also coincides with his concern to show the outreach of mission in an ongoing unfolding of salvation-history. This should help us to understand Luke's distinctive contribution to pneumatology. Luke hardly addresses the question we are considering of whether or not Spirit reception normally coincides in time with the initial exercise of saving faith. Luke's concerns and authorial intent also help to provide a rationale for Lukan difference from Pauline purposes, which we shall now consider.

The Pauline Purpose(s)

Pauline intention is of course more diverse in that pastoral needs of various communities are addressed in letters traditionally ascribed to Paul.¹⁶ When reference is made to Spirit reception, it is in service of affirming or correcting a matter of church experience or practice and leads Paul naturally to link this to other aspects of coming to faith. For example when Paul encourages the converts in Thessalonica in their new found faith, he reminds them of the joy of the Spirit that was integral to their conversion (1 Thess. 1:6f.). When writing the Galatians to warn them against the pitfall of legalism over against the faith-way, Paul speaks of their definite reception of the Spirit by faith rather than by works of law (Gal. 3:1-5). Paul is here recounting the start of their Christian lives, as is clear from the context of Galatians (cf. "having begun by/ with/in the Spirit" in 3:3 with 1:6-9; 4:8-11, 13). Similarly in 1 Cor. 12:13 Paul parallels the Corinthians' Spirit baptism into one body with their drinking of the one Spirit. In so speaking Paul is of course underscoring the unity of the body as the context of the congregational diversity of *charismata*. There is no clear indication here one way or the other whether Paul has two chronologically separate experiences in view in verse 12 when he refers to their Spirit baptism and Spirit "drinking." However at the start of the letter in 1:1-9 Paul undoubtedly refers to their reception of *charismata* at the start of their Christian lives (cf. vss. 5-7), thus "drinking of the Spirit" from the beginning. Without here examining all relevant Pauline references, we can affirm that the several references Paul makes to the Spirit, a number of which speak of "reception," Paul's purposes are varied and determined by particular needs of various congregations that he addresses. *We may conclude that Paul relates Spirit reception to various aspects of Christian initiation which are important to recall for maintaining purity of praxis, but he does not really address directly the question we raise whether or not regeneration and empowerment are in some way two separate experiences. Paul's own authorial intentions do not lead him this way. From what Paul does say, we would have to conclude that there is one basic reception of the Spirit at the start of the Christian life which makes one "Christian."*

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¹⁵ The Spirit *epi* ("upon") passages are very numerous in the LXX and may constitute the single most repeated expression of Spirit manifestation in the O.T. Thus the Joel 2:28-29 prediction of Spirit outpouring cited in Acts 2:16-18 catches what is most prominent concerning the work of the Spirit upon certain individuals in the O.T. and predicts this for all Yahweh's people *generally* in the new age.

¹⁶ I am here including all New Testament letters traditionally ascribed to Paul.

Given the differences of authorial intent, how can we live with both Luke and Paul without in any way short changing either with respect to his distinctive message(s)? First, considering points of commonality is appropriate.

Living with Luke and Paul: Exploring Three Areas

1. One reception for Luke and one reception for Paul.

There is no clear indication either in his Gospel or in Acts that Luke sets forth two experiences of the Spirit that are equally decisive in some way as initial experiences. From the reference in Acts in 2:38-39 (repentance, water baptism, Spirit reception) to the various times the Spirit is given initially to new believers (at least Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-48 with 15:8-9; 19:1-6), Luke does not explain this as any kind of "second" experience. This must be inferred or read into his accounts.

There are several texts in which Paul refers to a single past initial experience of the Spirit for believers (e.g. Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 1:21; 5:5; 11:4; Gal. 3:2; Eph.1:13). One is hard pressed to find Paul referring to any kind of second initiating experience. If this is read into Paul, it is possibly an unconscious attempt to "Lukanize" Paul from the way one reads Acts. Theologically Paul assumes one initiating experience of the Spirit, however with subsequent experiences and manifestations of the Spirit (e.g. Eph. 5:18).

2. The Baptismal Rite and Spirit Reception

That the baptismal rite occurs at the start of the believer's Christian pilgrimage is clear enough in Acts (2:38 with vs. 41; 8:12-13; 8:35; 10:44-48; 16:14f; 16:31-33; 18:8; 19:4). How this relates to receiving the Spirit is not uniform in Acts, though some association is found in contexts that are detailed enough to include reference to both.

The 2:38 reference is predominate in that it expresses a prescriptive apostolic teaching. It may well be that Luke sees the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit at the time of baptism as a model for those who become disciples of Jesus. Note that Jesus is praying according to Luke when the Spirit descends upon Him (Luke 3:21-22). In addition to Acts 2:38, three unusual sequences help to accent the apostolic formula of 2:38, two of them by way of exceptions to that rule. In Acts 8:16 the Spirit had not *yet* fallen on them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. An apparent second exception to the 2:38 formula is witnessed in 10:47-48 and is understandable, since the Spirit is poured out on *Gentiles*, to the surprise of the circumcized believers who came with Peter to that gospel service. The unusual ministry to Gentiles may have had a part in the Spirit being given prior to baptism rather than with or following baptism. The point here is that this is another exception to the only (apostolic) prescriptive kind of statement we find in Acts (in 2:38). In Acts 19 certain "disciples" had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul then asks (tellingly for us): Into what then were you baptized? The implication is that baptism had something to do with Spirit reception. This is in continuity with 2:38.

References to water baptism are more oblique in Paul. In 1 Cor. 1:14-17 Paul appears to diminish the importance of the rite. Nevertheless we do have here reference to Paul's own baptismal practice and that of others.

The term "baptism" itself is utilized in conversion passages where initiatory spiritual experience is evident (cf. Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:12). Given the prominence of water baptism in the early church, and given the use of the term in conversion contexts, it is quite probable that the rite itself is in the back of Paul's thinking in such texts. Similarly an allusion to water baptism is likely in 1 Cor. 6:11 ("but you were washed").¹⁷ The experience is related to the Holy Spirit (*en to pneumati*). The same appears true of Titus 3:5 with reference to the "washing of regeneration." This is closely linked with the outpouring of the Spirit in the next verse (6), with the result of being "justified" and made heirs of eternal life (vs. 7). If there is an allusion to water baptism in the "washing" of the last two references, as is quite likely, this is highly significant for our argument, for "washing" here is coupled with reference to experience of the Holy Spirit in the conversion context. The existence of the baptismal rite in the early church easily explains the use of the terms "baptized/baptism," and "washing" in a figurative way.¹⁸

3. Dynamic outpouring in Acts and in Paul

We hardly need to demonstrate that Luke paints a picture of outpouring, filling, empowerment etc. in the way he describes the bestowal/reception of the Spirit. Whether speaking from the viewpoint of the Giver or the recipient, he uses terms that are loaded with dynamic implications.

The Spirit is "given" (11:17), "poured out" (2:33; 10:45), and reception amounts to being "baptized" in/with (cf. 1:5). Consequently, the Spirit is "received" (2:38; 8:15, 17; 10:47; 19:2); recipients are "filled" (2:4; 9:17); the Spirit "comes upon/falls upon" people (1:8; 8:16; 10:44; 19:6). The programmatic text of 1:8 indicates that when the Spirit comes on the apostles, He will come with power (*dunamis*). As the foregoing references indicate, subsequent references bear this out for the wider Christian community. No doubt the manifestations of inspired utterances both point to the "power" and show fulfillment of the promised "outpouring" of Joel 2:28-29, wherein all of Yahweh's people will receive the dynamic of the Holy Spirit.

The question for us at this point is what does Paul have in mind when he writes of believers "receiving" the Spirit. Does he have something different in view from what we find in Acts? Or is there correspondence also at this point between Luke and Paul?

¹⁷ It is interesting that the same verb for "washing" (*apelousasthe*) is used in the baptismal text of Acts 22:16, apparently with the sense of "getting yourself washed," or "allowing yourself to be washed," the verb being an aorist middle.

¹⁸ Regarding 1 Cor. 6:11 Dunn, who is concerned to guard against sacramental interpretation of water baptism, grants that in this text, "it may be implied that water-baptism was the occasion when this moral cleansing took place," *Baptism*, 121. Various other commentators agree. Dunn likewise allows for an implicit reference in Titus 3:5, *Baptism*, 168. Writing in the early '60's, G. R. Beasley-Murray said that of commentators on the Pastoral Epistles, he could find only one who denied the Titus passage referred to water baptism, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1962), 209.

Galatians 3:1-5 is an important passage. Paul thinks of Spirit reception as an observable experience in some sense. He asks the Galatians to recall when it happened. He does not ask them to recall when they confessed Christ, but when the Spirit came to them. (Did you receive the Spirit by works of law or by faith?). Paul in the same breath speaks of the working of miracles (*dunameis*) in their midst at the same time (vs. 5). In other words, their "beginning" was in a charismatic context.¹⁹

An important point of contact with Acts is found in the Titus 3:5-6 text, to which we referred above. The verb for "poured out" (*ekcheo*) is used to describe the Spirit who renews in the process of salvation (see above). The same verb is found in Acts 2:33 and 10:45 in reference to the bestowal of the Spirit. In fact in Titus 3:6 the adverb "richly" (*plousios*) is added to "poured out"! Experientially, could this be any less than the dynamic to which Luke refers? The somewhat parenthetical positioning of the "outpouring" in verse 6 does not necessarily require a simultaneous experience with the "washing of regeneration," (vs. 5), but the context is more naturally read as seeing all occur within a context of conversion-initiation setting. What is also of critical importance is that this text has a traditional history behind it that involves Christians more generally. We may glean this from verse 8: "Faithful is the saying." The Titus letter indicates that what the Acts passages indicate happened in specific conversion-initiation events was repeated over and over in the early church.²⁰

In Ephesians 1:19 Paul prays for believers to "know" the "extraordinary greatness" of God's power (*dunamis*), which raised Christ from the dead and which is comparable to what these believers have already experienced at the time of their conversion (cf. 2:4-6). Although the Spirit is not identified as such in this immediate text, the idea concurs with the work of the Spirit in conversion seen in 1:13f.

Without attempting to be in any way exhaustive, we may now bring together our data and give an answer to our problem of Spirit reception.

Conclusion: Solution

First, there may not be so much actual difference between Luke and Paul as has often been held, particularly by some Pentecostal scholars. I say this with in mind that each inspired author addresses pneumatology with diverse authorial intentions. Luke is providing a reason for the message and mission of the church to confirm its legitimacy for those needing such confirmation (Luke 1:1-4). The Pauline letters address various pastoral needs that have arisen in newly established Christian communities. Neither is attempting to provide a "systematic theology" of the Spirit.

¹⁹ In commenting on the decisiveness of reception in vs. 2, B. H Streeter has vividly remarked that it was "something as definite and observable as, for example, an attack of influenza," (!) *The Primitive Church* (MacMillan, 1929), 69.

²⁰ I explore this in "Titus 3:5-6: A Window on World-Wide Pentecost," *JPT* 8 (1996), 53-62.

It is noteworthy that both authors do provide echoes of the other: Luke does place Spirit in a salvific context in 2:38 (though we may wish to say "conversion-initiation") and in Acts 15:9; and the Pauline letters either allude to or explicitly speak of Spirit outpouring in a salvific context.

But at the same time, this does not mean that we ought to read Luke-Acts through a salvific lens that minimizes Luke's pneumatology in conversion-initiation. Luke states explicitly that there are immediate observable and verbal consequences. Paul implies as much--observable and possibly verbal. If both Luke and Paul speak of a single reception of the Spirit at the time of conversion-initiation, in which the Spirit normally comes with power that is typical of charismatic experience, then we are led to ask a follow up question. In what kind of conversion-initiation scenarios did this normally occur? Should we still speak of two experiences, regeneration followed by empowerment, but in praxis seen together so that both Luke and Paul speak of one initiating experience of the Spirit?

It is important to remember that neither Luke nor Paul gives direct and clear answers to *our* question. No doubt this largely explains the differences of interpretation within Christendom. *But perhaps the lack of more precise delineation of what would have happened at the time of conversion-initiation is providential and itself reflective of some diversity within the early church.*

It is also important to realize that both Luke and Paul place the initiating work of the Spirit in the context of what we can call "conversion-initiation," which at least in Acts 19:6 includes the laying on of hands. The closest we come to a Lukan normative expression of Spirit bestowal/reception is in Acts 2:38, which links in some (though imprecise) way water baptism with reception. Granted the apostolic dictum here, and the clearly exceptional situations later described by Luke (see above), this must have significant prescriptive weight. But Luke says no more. In fact he does not even tell us what actually transpired on the "Pentecostal" day to the new converts. Luke's authorial purpose apparently leads him elsewhere in Luke-Acts.

Paul assumes that when the Spirit comes in the salvation event, he comes with an "outpouring" that reminds us of what Luke relates happening. But his agendas do not really answer our questions either. We can say that each author *assumes* what the other more explicitly sets forth. So where does this leave us?

I conclude that it was normative in the early church to receive the initial regenerative graces of the Spirit in such proximity to an outpouring that was characteristically "charismatic," that neither Luke nor Paul expresses himself in terms of two initiating experiences of the Spirit, which many have thought of as two separate experiences. Both speak of one basic reception of the Spirit. The caveat is in assuming that because one experiences regeneration that one has necessarily experienced all the New Testament has in mind when it speaks of Spirit reception. It is probably correct to say that in contemporary experience the remainder of what early Christians thought of as Spirit reception often occurs at a time sufficiently removed from coming to faith initially that this is viewed theologically as a second experience. For whatever reason, this is not wholly unlike the exceptional situation in Acts 8.

If the foregoing is correct, are there implications for modern church praxis? How might this inform us on the meaning and place of water baptism in relation to conversion? What place should expectation of Spirit outpouring as in Acts have in conversion-initiation?