

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit and the Meaning of Pentecost

While there has always been much attention in the church for what happened on the day of Pentecost, this attention has not always meant special attention for the “baptism with the Holy Spirit.”¹ Exegetes certainly did discuss the term in commentaries on the relevant Bible texts. However, in dogmatic treatises the term hardly plays a role. Moreover, to my knowledge the term is not used in Reformed confessional documents.

Nevertheless, for a century now, the concept of “baptism with the Holy Spirit” has been frequently discussed, for this phrase is used to indicate the central experience of the Charismatic movement and Pentecostal circles. As a result, the phrase has also received added attention in circles beyond these. Summaries of what the New Testament teaches regarding the Holy Spirit carry titles like “Baptism with (or: in) the Holy Spirit.”²

This article does not intend to discuss the doctrine of Pentecostals on

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¹ This phrase is not found in the Bible. What we do find are the verbs “to baptize” and “to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” However, we see no objections to using the expression “baptism with the Holy Spirit.” Sometimes other expressions are used, such as “baptism of the Spirit” or “Spirit-baptism.” We object to such expressions, as they give the impression that the Holy Spirit gives the baptism. This is not the case; the Holy Spirit is the element with which the baptism is administered.

² Thus J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970) and L. Floor, *De doop met de Heilige Geest* (Kampen: Kok, 1982).

this baptism with the Spirit as a whole.³ We do wish to trace the use of this phrase in Scripture and explore what practical theological teaching can be built on it. We will first review several different understandings and then discuss the questions that arise from these.

Calvin

When studying Calvin on this topic, it is clear that his discussion on “baptizing with the Spirit” is very different from the one today. Calvin is not concerned about the views of the Pentecostal movement on the work of the Spirit, but about Roman Catholic teaching on the meaning of the sacraments. In his commentary on Matthew 3:11–12, he argues against the traditional understanding that the baptism administered in the churches is, in fact, the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and that the essence of the baptism of John the Baptist is different from our sacrament today, for this would imply that ministers today are actually handing out the Holy Spirit.⁴

Calvin posits that the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ are related in this way: John gives the sign, and Christ gives what is indicated by the sign. “The chief thing is, that [John the Baptist] makes Christ the Author of the baptism of the Spirit, while he is himself a minister of the outward form.”⁵

This is not only true of the baptism of John, it is also true of Christian baptism. “A general lesson is drawn from this, as to what is the role of man

³ See especially F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); see further works such as A. A. Hoekema, *Tongues and Spirit-baptism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); and K. Runia, “De doop met de Heilige Geest,” *Rondom het Woord* 16:1 (1974) 37ff. For a consideration of the Charismatic movement, see N. H. Gootjes, “Bedoelen jullie dat een Christen zich zó kan voelen!” *De Reformatie* 60 (1984–1985) 348ff., 369ff.

⁴ J. Calvin, *In harmoniam ex Matthaeo, Marco et Luca compositam commentarii* (ed. A. Tholuck; Berolini: G. Eichler, 1833) 1.101. Calvin has two other arguments against equating the baptism of Christ with the Holy Spirit and Christian baptism. It would also mean that John’s baptism is a dead sign, not able to bring about anything. Another consequence would be that we do not receive the same baptism which Christ received. Calvin argues against the common understandings of his day also in his commentary on Acts 1:5 and in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; ed. J. T. McNeill; trans. F. L. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) 4.15.7–8.

⁵ Calvin, *Harmoniam*, 1.101; see also *Institutes*, 4.15.8.

in baptism, and what is particular to the Son of God.”⁶ The same is also clear from what Calvin writes as an explanation of the expression “to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” “The sense is clear, that Christ alone confers whatever grace the outward baptism seeks to express, for he makes consciences clean by his own blood. He also puts to death the old man, and confers the Spirit of regeneration.”⁷ According to Calvin, the baptism with water, both that of John and that still administered in the church today, is the *sign*, and the baptism with the Spirit is the *reality* signified in that sign.

Calvin sees this reality in a very broad way. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is the whole work of salvation which the Spirit brings to existence in man: the cleansing from sin, the putting to death of the old man, and regeneration. “Regeneration” here does not refer to the beginning of faith, the moment when a person is changed inwardly unto repentance, but to the ongoing work of the Spirit to renew people to daily obedience.⁸

In Acts 1:5, the “baptism with the Spirit” is connected to the arrival of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This raises the question of whether one can speak of regeneration before this moment. Calvin realizes this question will come, but does not change his stance.

But it seems absurd that what was spoken in general of the grace of regeneration should be confined to the sending of the Spirit visibly. My reply is that Christ did not baptize with the Holy Spirit only at the time when he sent him under the form of tongues of fire. He had before this conferred this baptism on the apostles, and he baptizes all the elect thus daily.⁹

However, if the baptism with the Spirit is something which has already happened before, why does Acts 1:5 refer specifically to Pentecost? Calvin

⁶ Calvin, *Harmoniam*, 1.101.

⁷ Calvin, *Harmoniam*, 1.102; see also *Institutes*, 4.16.25.

⁸ See, for example, *Institutes*, 4.15.6. When noting the expression “baptism of repentance unto the forgiveness of sins,” Calvin posits that John the Baptist and the apostle Peter used the term “repentance” in the sense of regeneration, and “forgiveness” as the cleansing from sin. Calvin thus builds on the view that contrition and penance are daily repentance, a view already found in Luther’s 95 theses. For Calvin’s understanding of regeneration, see especially *Institutes*, 1.15.4, 2.3.9, and his commentary on John 3:3–6.

⁹ Calvin, *In Acta Apostolorum commentarii* (ed. A. Tholuck; Berolini: G. Eichler, 1833) 5, the commentary on Acts 1:5. When Calvin says here that the apostles had received the Holy Spirit, he is probably referring to a happening after Christ’s resurrection, recounted in John 20:22–23.

seems to give two reasons for this. The first is that Pentecost makes clear something which happens daily. “Because the sending of the Holy Spirit in so spectacular a manner was a symbol of the hidden grace wherewith the Lord continuously inspires his elect, it is appropriate that he should apply to it the testimony of John.” The second reason is that only from this moment onward is the Spirit present in all fullness. “Besides the fact that the apostles did not receive the Spirit for themselves alone but for the benefit of all the faithful, there was also mirrored forth the universal grace of Christ towards his Church, while he poured forth the gifts of his Spirit in full measure.”¹⁰

In the period that followed, this view that the baptism with the Spirit is in fact the essence of the baptism of John and of Christian baptism was very influential. A noteworthy exception is A. Scultetus (1566–1625), a theologian of great influence at the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619. He mentioned that the general understanding is that John the Baptist distinguished the external baptism and the administration by himself and other ministers from the internal administration of Christ. However, Scultetus cannot agree with this. In his opinion, Luke 3:16 mentions two baptisms: a baptism with water and a baptism with fire. The baptism with water has people submerged in water and pulled from it as a testimony to the Holy Spirit’s work of putting to death and raising to life. The baptism with fire takes place when the fiery gifts of the Holy Spirit are poured out in people in a miraculous way. This latter baptism refers to the special gifts of Pentecost, which have been repeated several times since then. Only Christ can give this baptism, and he ceases when the authority of the gospel is sufficiently confirmed.¹¹ Scultetus does admit that his opinion is different from that of the majority.¹²

Up until today there are theologians who connect the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ the same way as Calvin did. J. D. G. Dunn stated: “The contrast between the two baptisms is the contrast between

¹⁰ Calvin, *Acta*, 6. In his commentary on 1 Cor. 12:13 Calvin also discusses the relationship of sign and reality in the sacrament. However, he does not connect this to the declaration of John the Baptist or texts in Acts where “baptism with the Spirit” is mentioned.

¹¹ As quoted in B. Waleaus, *Novi testamenti libri historici: Gr. et Lat. perpetuo commentario* (1653) 574–575, as a commentary on Luke 3:16. Note: this book is a compilation of commentaries by various theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

¹² This is evident from the same collection of works of Waleaus, from quotes of Spanhemius on Matt. 3:11 and of Beza on Mark 1:8.

John and Jesus—the antithesis of preparation and fulfilment, of shadow and substance.”¹³

However, we should not lose sight of the difference between the old and new positions. While Calvin considers the “baptism with the Spirit” as the work of the Spirit which stretches from the beginning of faith up to and including the daily repentance until one dies, Dunn sees this baptism as the starting point.

The gift of the Spirit (that is, Spirit-baptism) is a distinct element within conversion-initiation, indeed, in the NT, the most significant element and focal point of conversion-initiation. It is the gift of saving grace by which one enters into Christian experience and life, into the new covenant, into the Church. It is, in the last analysis, that which makes a man a Christian.¹⁴

The Pentecostal Movement

It is very interesting to see how the understanding of the Pentecostal movement of baptism by the Spirit came into existence. For that, we have to look first to the Puritans. A number of these theologians were of the opinion that redemption takes place in two stages. In the first, a person becomes a Christian; later on, the second stage of assurance follows. According to Thomas Goodwin (1600–1676), receiving this assurance takes place when one receives the baptism with the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ However, it is questionable whether the expression “baptism with the Spirit” is often used as an experience of assurance.¹⁶

The next step in the direction of the view of Pentecostal circles is taken by J. Wesley. There is, of course, a huge difference between the Puritans, who tended to be anti-Arminian, and Wesley, who favoured Arminianism. How-

¹³ Dunn, *Baptism*, 19.

¹⁴ Dunn, *Baptism*, 226.

¹⁵ Dunn, *Baptism*, 1.

¹⁶ I have not been able to find a discussion of the words of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11 and parallels) nor of the term “baptism with the Spirit” in the writings of John Owen on the Holy Spirit. A nineteenth-century work of the same school of thought mentions Matt. 3:11 in passing but does not discuss baptism with the Spirit in the dogmatic section of this work. G. Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980 [1889]) 46. The idea of immediate assurance of faith through the Spirit was advocated in the twentieth century by M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974) 81; however, he does not use the expression “baptism with the Spirit.” He does appear to use the term in other works; see Runia, “Doop,” 54, note 8.

ever, like the Puritans, Wesley distinguished between two stages in the life of a believer. The first is the stage of justification, in which sanctification is only partial. The second, later stage is that of perfection, in which a Christian receives complete sanctification.¹⁷ J. Fletcher (1729–1785), an early supporter of Wesley, used the term “baptism with the Holy Spirit” for the experience of suddenly receiving complete sanctification.¹⁸

During the nineteenth century, the distinction between two stages is taken on by the Holiness movement. The experience which leads to the period of complete sanctification is preferentially referred to as “baptism with the Spirit.”¹⁹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Pentecostal Movement comes into existence. Here too, a distinction is made between two periods in the life of a believer. However, the second period is not that of assurance, as with the Puritans, nor that of sanctification, as with the followers of Wesley. According to the Pentecostal Movement, this second period is that of power and of speaking in tongues. With more certainty than before, the entry to this second period could be referred to as “baptism with the Spirit,” for the promise of the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) is connected to the promise of power (Acts 1:8), and when the apostles and those with them received the Holy Spirit, they spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4).

This movement from sanctification to power as characteristic for the second stage was especially due to R. A. Torrey. He has written much on the baptism with the Spirit. Of his propositions on this, we quote in part his third.

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is an operation of the Holy Spirit distinct from and subsequent and additional to his regenerating work.... A man may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and still not be baptized with the Holy Spirit. In regeneration, there is the impartation of life, and the one who receives it is saved: in the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, there is an impartation of power and the one who receives it is fitted for service.²⁰

This doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit belongs to the fun-

¹⁷ Dunn, *Baptism*, 1. For a summarizing series of quotes of Wesley’s thoughts on this, see Bruner, *Theology*, 323–332.

¹⁸ Dunn, *Baptism*, 1–2.

¹⁹ Dunn, *Baptism*, 2.

²⁰ For a summary of Torrey’s views, see Bruner, *Theology*, 335–337; the quote is from page 335. See also the sermons of Torrey on the Holy Spirit translated into Dutch, *De heilige Geest: Zijn aard en werking* (Frankfurt: Elmer Klassen, 1966) 81ff.

damental doctrines of the Pentecostal Movement. D. Gee, who for years was one of its leaders in America, gives the following summary:

The New Testament appears to indicate as an unmistakable historical fact that after the first entry of the Spirit in regeneration there can be and should be also a special personal reception by believers of the Holy Spirit in his original and unique person. This experience is called the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” and its purpose is not to impart life, but to impart power. Its characteristic accompaniments are not fruits, but gifts.²¹

Sometimes two works of the Spirit are both referred to as “baptisms,” but distinguished from each other as “baptism of the Spirit” and “baptism with the Spirit.” “In the new birth the Holy Spirit is the Agent, the atoning blood, the means, the new birth, the result; in the baptism with the Spirit, Christ is the Agent, (‘He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire’), the Spirit the means, the endowment with power, the result.”²²

It is obvious that the views of these theologians have distanced themselves on all points from the view of Calvin. While Calvin sees the baptism with the Spirit as the continuing work of the Spirit unto the renewal of the life of a believer, Gee and Williams see this baptism as a specific experience in the life of a believer, giving him power, usually accompanied by the sign of speaking in tongues.

H. Bavinck

How did Reformed theology react to this new attention for the work of the Spirit since the beginning of the twentieth century? If we were to give a complete overview, we would have to discuss at length A. Kuyper’s work, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1900 [1888]). However, we would rather present what H. Bavinck wrote, views that have always remained somewhat in the shadows. Various extensive notes added to the second edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics* make clear that he was well aware of developments in his time, those of later Methodism and those of early Pentecostalism.²³

We have seen that in the background of the views held in Pentecostal

²¹ Bruner, *Theology*, 75.

²² E. S. Williams, a theologian of the Pentecostal Movement, as quoted by Bruner, *Theology*, 60.

²³ For Methodism, see the notes in H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* (4 vols.; 4th ed.; Kampen: Kok, 1930) 4.231–232 (including a citation of R. A. Torrey). English translation: *Reformed Dogmatics* (4 vols.; ed. J. Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008) 4.247–248.

circles is the idea that two stages can be distinguished in the life of believers. Bavinck is very clear in his rejection of this position, and proposes weighty objections to it.²⁴

For Bavinck's own view of the work of the Holy Spirit we will draw on his exposition found in *Magnalia Dei*.²⁵ Chapter 19 has as title: "The Gift of the Holy Spirit." It consists of three parts. Bavinck first discusses the outpouring of the Holy Spirit against the background of the Old Testament (pp. 368–372). Next, he discusses the extraordinary powers and activities which came with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (pp. 372–377). Finally, he discussed the regulated, religious, and ethical labours which the Spirit fulfils continually in the midst of the congregation (pp. 377–385). We will note elements from all three sections.

The opening sentence of the chapter reads: "Christ's first activity, upon being glorified at the Father's right hand, is to send the Holy Spirit."²⁶

In what preceded, Bavinck has discussed the work of Christ in his humiliation and exaltation. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is part of the exaltation. It is such an important part that Bavinck gives it a chapter of its own. However, the sentence itself does not make clear whether Bavinck considered this outpouring a one-time-only event, or whether it is something Christ does repeatedly during his exaltation. This is cleared up when Bavinck a little later states: "This sending of the Holy Spirit, which took place on Pentecost, is a unique fact in the history of the church of Christ. Like creation and incarnation, it only happened once. It was not preceded by an outpouring of the Spirit of similar importance, nor can it ever be repeated." Of the parallels made with creation and incarnation, the second serves to clarify the permanency of the outpouring of the Spirit. "Just as Christ received his human nature through conception, never to take leave of it again, so the Holy Spirit has chosen the congregation as his dwelling place and temple on the day of Pentecost, never to be separated from her again."²⁷

²⁴ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4.250 (ET 4.263–264). Bavinck's objections come from the unity and inseparability of Christ and his gifts, the character of faith, and the character of sanctification.

²⁵ This was published first in 1907, after the origin of the Pentecostal Movement (1901, Topeka and 1906, Los Angeles). We have the impression that this publication reflects a later stage of development in Bavinck's thoughts than the second edition of his dogmatics, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*.

²⁶ H. Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei* (Kampen: Kok, 1931) 368. The same sentence is found in *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 3.493 (ET 3.499).

²⁷ Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 368. The same three (creation, incarnation, and arrival

It is clear to Bavinck that the arrival of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost is not just a stage in the life of faith of the disciples which can be repeated in the life of believers today. It is a fact that belongs to the great salvific deeds of God through Jesus Christ. This cannot be countered with the argument that Bavinck, in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, deals with the arrival of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in his chapter on the order of salvation.²⁸ Here too, the arrival of the Spirit is considered a once-only event with enduring consequence. “Whereas earlier the Holy Spirit was given temporarily for a specific purpose to certain isolated individuals, he now descends on all the members of the church and from this time on continues to live and work in them all.” Bavinck again compares the outpouring of the Spirit with the incarnation of Christ:

Just as in the days of the Old Testament, the Son of God in fact repeatedly appeared but did not choose human nature for his dwelling place until he was conceived in Mary’s womb, so also in earlier times various activities as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit were present. But it was only on the day of Pentecost that he made the church into his temple, a temple he perpetually sanctifies, builds up, and never again abandons.²⁹

Bavinck probably deals with the outpouring of the Spirit in his dogmatics when dealing with the order of salvation because he likes to deal with larger units. Substantially, the outpouring of the Spirit functions in this chapter as the decisive fact on which the order of salvation rests. At the same time, it is noteworthy that in his *Magnalia Dei* Bavinck discusses the arrival of the Spirit separately, prior to the chapter on the order of salvation. Might this have been because he felt that in this way he could demarcate his position more clearly over against emerging Pentecostalism?

In the second part, that on the extraordinary activities of the Spirit, Bavinck discusses the speaking in tongues of Acts 2 as well as other extraordinary gifts found in Acts. He refers to the boldness of speaking the Word, the special power of faith, the comfort and joy, the wisdom, the speaking in tongues, the prophesy, the appearances and revelations, and the miraculous healings.³⁰ According to Bavinck, these are all extraordinary activities, limited to that first, apostolic period. He opens this section as fol-

of the Spirit) are found on p. 374; see also *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 3.497 (ET 3.502).

²⁸ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 3.482ff. (ET 3.485ff.). The outpouring of the Spirit is dealt with on pages 493ff. (ET 3.499ff.).

²⁹ Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 3.495 (ET 3.501).

³⁰ Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 374.

lows: “In the early period this outpouring of the Holy Spirit was accompanied in the life of Christ’s disciples by a range of extraordinary forces and workings.”³¹ When he has finished discussing them, he summarizes them as the “temporal revelations of the Spirit that pass away.”³²

In the third section, Bavinck wants to draw attention away from these extraordinary activities and focus on the ordinary activities. Having discussed 1 Corinthians 12–14, he states: “Continually we see persons and parties arise who attach greater importance to extraordinary signs, to revelations and miracles, than to the activity of the Spirit in regeneration, conversion, and renewal.”³³ He summarizes this work as bringing into existence the unity with Christ, the *unio mystica*,³⁴ and distinguishes here, as already indicated, regeneration, conversion, and renewal.

It is clear that Bavinck is here doing battle with emerging Pentecostal theories and practices present in his time. But his exposition also leaves a number of questions unanswered. One such question is: if Bavinck so strictly adheres to a once-only outpouring of the Holy Spirit, how does this relate to later outpourings of the Holy Spirit? “The gift of the Spirit was ordinarily given to someone after they had come to faith, sometimes upon being baptized (Acts 2:38) or with the laying on of hands prior to being baptized (Acts 9:17), or with the laying on of hands after being baptized (Acts 8:17; 19:6).”³⁵

A second question relates to making regeneration and renewal part of this work of the Holy Spirit. Bavinck posits that attention for the continuing work of the Spirit had been prepared in the Old Testament.³⁶ However, the texts he quotes indicate that the Spirit was actually *doing* those works in the Old Testament.

Both problems relate, in fact, to the relationship between history of

³¹ Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 374. The same sentence is found in *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 3.495 (ET 3.501).

³² Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 377. See also page 374: “The outpouring of the Spirit becomes manifest in that early period in numerous extra-ordinary signs of power”; the same sentence is found in *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 3.498 (ET 3.503). On the same page: “During the whole apostolic period these extraordinary activities of the Spirit continued to exist.”

³³ Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 377; see also 379.

³⁴ Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 379ff.; see also *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 3.500–501. (ET 3.505–506.)

³⁵ Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 374.

³⁶ Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 377; see also 384.

salvation, which cannot be repeated, and the order of salvation, in which believers each in their own time receive the gifts of Christ. Bavinck is unequivocally clear about the redemptive-historical character of Pentecost, but is not clear in how he connects this to the personal life of faith of God's children.

I cannot resist adding something from K. Schilder. In an article on the meaning of Pentecost he asks whether we have fully taken into account that Pentecost only happened once. He gives two illustrations, the first apparently in view of the Pentecostal Movement:

The application of many a Pentecostal oration is: 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' However, the question is not asked whether 'the Holy Spirit' here is different from the one of Lord's Day 20, who 'comforts me,' and 'remains with me forever,' who 'guides me in all the truth.' The question is not asked whether the gift of the Spirit, as present in charismata and glossolalia and such extraordinary signs in those days, did not disappear at a later time from the church, as soon as in a certain place the new congregation was capable of organizing itself with officebearers.

He then asks a question which directly touches the Reformed tradition:

"Have you been comforted by that Spirit, been guided by him, brought to assurance, so that one day you may die in peace?" This is an application in another setting, as if what makes Pentecost special is actually found in regeneration, faith, repentance. However, is it not true that even in the centuries before, the same Spirit was working regenerations, faith, and conversions?³⁷

A Methodological Issue

We will now attempt to make progress with respect to such questions by researching the meaning of "baptism with the Spirit." When the "baptism with the Spirit" is discussed, an important place is usually accorded to the four events reported in Acts: Pentecost (Acts 2); the outpouring in Samaria (Acts 8); the events at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10–11); and the outpouring of the Spirit on disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19). A following point of discussion is whether those baptized with the Spirit during these occasions were already believers, or whether the arrival of the Spirit marked the starting point of their faith.

³⁷ K. Schilder, "Bij het Pinksterfeest," in his *Schriftoverdenkingen* (3 vols.; ed. C. Veenhof; Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1956) 1.444; an article dating to 1933.

However, most of these events are secondary when it comes to understanding the “baptism with the Spirit.” The references in the gospels do not point to specific events, but indicate that this baptism is something of the future. Acts 1:5 clearly contains a reference to the event of Pentecost: “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 8 and 19 the expression is not used. It is used in Peter’s report on the events in the house of Cornelius. However, those referring to this instance generally do not notice³⁸ that Peter does not say that Cornelius and his house underwent a baptism with the Spirit. “Then I remembered the word of the Lord how he said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’ ” (Acts 11:16). The word which Peter remembered is Acts 1:5, a clear reference to Pentecost. The events in Cornelius’ house make Peter think of Christ’s word which was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Cornelius and those who belong with him receive this same Spirit. But Peter does call what Cornelius and those who belong to him received the “baptism with the Spirit.”³⁹ After Acts 11:36, the only place where we find the expression is 1 Corinthians 12:13. However, there is no reference to a special event here either.

In seeking to understand the expression “baptism with the Spirit” we should first of all concentrate on texts that use this expression as well as Acts 2. This may then make clear how this should be linked to the other events recounted in Acts.

Is Baptism with the Holy Spirit a Reference to Regeneration?

As indicated, baptism with the Spirit is identified with regeneration in two ways. Calvin takes the term in its broadest sense and has it refer to the whole process of renewal of the believer from the first moment of repentance unto one’s death. However, today the term tends to be used in a more restricted sense as a reference to the moment at which a person begins to believe.⁴⁰ This starting point is also referred to as baptism with the Spirit. We will be using the term “regeneration” in this second way.

The first time we come across the baptism with the Spirit is in a state-

³⁸ Among others, Dunn, *Baptism*, 54, note 43.

³⁹ It is clear, however, why the events in the house of Cornelius made Peter think of Acts 2, and why such an expression is not found in Acts 8 and 19. In Samaria and Ephesus, the Spirit came with spiritual gifts by means of the laying on of hands by the apostles. But in Acts 10 he comes without mediation, as on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit himself created the breakthrough to the heathens.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4.50ff. (ET 4.75ff.).

ment of John the Baptist, in which he compares himself with the Messiah. “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt. 3:11). What is the relationship between these two baptisms? According to Dunn, the baptism of John prepares for the baptism of him who is coming.⁴¹ However, a little later he uses another expression without explaining this change: the baptism of John is a symbol of the Christ’s baptism. When discussing some passages from the gospel according to John, he writes: “The purpose of John’s baptism is to reveal Jesus to Israel, and presumably therefore it is only preparatory to the mission of the Christ (1:31); the Christ’s baptism will not be with water but with the Holy Spirit (1:33). The implication is that John’s water-baptism is only a shadow and symbol of the Christ’s Spirit-baptism.”⁴² Other theologians will consider the baptisms of John and Christ to be related to each other in the same way, even though they differ with Dunn on the meaning of the “baptism with the Spirit.”⁴³

However, “preparation” and “symbol” are not the same thing. If the baptism of John is preparation for the baptism with the Spirit, the contents of the baptisms will be different. If the baptism of John is a symbol of the baptism with the Spirit, the contents should be the same. In the latter case, the contents of the baptism with the Spirit is signified in the baptism of John with water. In my opinion it is untenable to consider the baptism with the Spirit as a reality, symbolized in the baptism of John.

First, John made clear what his baptism with water symbolizes. He did not point to the Holy Spirit. Mark 1:4 indicates that he spoke of a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” This baptism belongs to the repentance which John preached, and the symbol of immersion in water shows that God will cleanse away sins.⁴⁴

Next, when the baptism of John is considered a sign of the baptism with the Spirit, does this mean that it was not until the day of Pentecost

⁴¹ Dunn, *Baptism*, 14, 17.

⁴² Dunn, *Baptism*, 19. See also what he writes on p. 20: “Christian water-baptism takes the place of John’s water-baptism as a symbol of and contrast with Christ’s Spirit-baptism.” However, in Dunn’s conclusion on p. 227 we only find the term “preparation.”

⁴³ See for Calvin, notes 6 and 7 above. See also S. Greijdanus, *Lucas* (2 vols.; *Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament*; Amsterdam: Bottenburg, 1940) 1.169–170; H. N. Ridderbos, *Mattheüs* (2 vols.; *Korte Verklaring*; Kampen: Kok, 1941) 1.57.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4.476 (ET 4.501).

that the substance of the baptism of John could be granted? Calvin sees this objection coming and counters it with two arguments. First, the Spirit had already been given to the apostles earlier. Second, the event of the day of Pentecost made visible what had happened in a hidden manner and still takes place.⁴⁵

However, Calvin's response does not solve the problem. For what is then the situation of the elect under the Old Covenant? Did they not share in the regenerating grace of the Spirit? Moreover, his solution is contrary to Acts 1 and 2. Here the arrival of the Spirit is described as something new, not as a making visible of something that had already taken place in an invisible way.

There must be a relationship between the baptism with water and the baptism with the Spirit. However, it cannot be the relationship between a symbol and the reality it signifies.

Floor, who considers the baptism with the Spirit to be identical to regeneration,⁴⁶ holds that the contents of the baptisms of John and Christ, at least in part, are the same. There is also a difference though. Baptism with water has a strong negative meaning: cleansing from sin. Baptism with the Spirit has a more positive meaning: being given new life.⁴⁷ However, this does not exclude the cleansing from sin.

He has a number of arguments for this. First, the word "baptism" forces us "not to neglect the element of cleansing and forgiveness alongside the superabundance of new life when it comes to baptism with the Holy Spirit."⁴⁸ However, it cannot be said conclusively that the Greek word for "baptism" actually has the idea of "washing" in it. It means "to immerse," and given this definition it is often used in a metaphorical sense.⁴⁹ Only the context can indicate whether the element of "washing" is to be included in the meaning of "to baptize."

According to Floor, two passages in the gospel according to John also indicate that the element of forgiveness is subsumed in the meaning of

⁴⁵ See his exegesis on Acts 1:5.

⁴⁶ Floor, *Doop*, 57.

⁴⁷ Floor, *Doop*, 18.

⁴⁸ Floor, *Doop*, 18.

⁴⁹ See the examples by J. A. Meijer, "Is doop door onderdompeling een misverstand?" *Almanak Fides Quadrat Intellectum 1978* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1978) 180ff. The metaphorical meaning is also found in the New Testament: Mark 10:39; Luke 12:50; 1 Cor. 15:29. For the meaning of "to baptize" in relation to the last verse, see J. van Bruggen, *Het lezen van de Bijbel* (Kampen: Kok, 1981) 43ff.

“baptism with the Spirit.” The first is John 1:29–34. Using the method of structural analysis, he discovers a chiastic structure, which brings him to the following exegesis. “From the chiastic structure of the passage we may conclude that both the expressions ‘Lamb of God’ and ‘Son of God’ correspond to each other and that, at the same time, there is a relationship between the two-fold work of Christ: the removal of sin and the baptism with the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰ However, simply reading what the passage says makes clear it is pointing to a relationship between Jesus’ designation “Lamb of God” and his work of “removal of sin” (v. 29). There is also a relationship between the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, and his baptism with the Spirit (v. 33), for the sign given to John was the descending of the Spirit. However, there is no indication that there is a relationship between the removal of sin and the baptism with the Spirit. Surely there should be objections to this sort of structural exegesis which dismembers existing relationships and creates new patterns from the pieces.

The second text to which Floor points in this context is John 20:22–23.⁵¹ There is indeed a relationship here between receiving the Spirit and forgiveness of sins, but not in the sense that receiving the Spirit comes with forgiveness of sins. The text indicates that the disciples receive the Spirit, and thus the authority to forgive sins or to refuse forgiveness.

Having looked at the synoptic gospels and the gospel according to John, we turn to Acts 1 and 2 with the question: is regeneration to be identified with being baptized with the Spirit? The fact that the Spirit was poured out on Christ’s disciples has always been a strong argument for Pentecostals. Were the disciples not already believers, had they not already been regenerated when they received the Holy Spirit? When regenerated people receive the Spirit, does this not mean that the baptism with the Holy Spirit cannot be considered the same as being regenerated?

When Dunn tackles this argument of the Pentecostal Movement, he first of all presents a number of reasons why Pentecost as an event is at a different level from that of regeneration. It is the climax of Jesus’ work, the inauguration of a new era, the start of a new covenant, the beginning of the age of the church.⁵² However, then his reasoning suddenly changes direction. He quotes Acts 11:17 (“God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ”) and concludes from this that it was not until Pentecost that the disciples truly began to believe

⁵⁰ Floor, *Doop*, 20.

⁵¹ Floor, *Doop*, 20.

⁵² Dunn, *Baptism*, 44ff.

in Christ. “It was only at that moment of believing committal that they received the Spirit, only at Pentecost that their faith reached the level of Christian committal, only then that they became Christians in the NT sense of that word.”⁵³

It needs to be pointed out that this text has a translation difficulty. Does “believed in the Lord Jesus Christ” relate to “them” or to “us”?⁵⁴ However, even if one adopts the understanding of Dunn that “believed in the Lord Jesus Christ” relates to the apostles—a reading that seems unlikely to me—it still does not say that the apostles were regenerated through the arrival of the Spirit, but that they received the Spirit when they came to faith. Acts 11:17 does not speak about the work of the Spirit to bring people to faith.

Given all this, we may conclude that there is certainly a relationship between conversion and forgiveness of sins, or faith and the baptism with the Spirit. However, it is impossible to argue that the expression “baptism with the Spirit” as used in the New Testament is to be identified with that work of the Spirit by which He renews people so that they begin to believe.

Does the Baptism with the Spirit Mark the Beginning of the Second Stage of the Life of a Christian?

In this section, we will discuss a central thought of Pentecostal theology. As another of its leading figures, E. J. Jarvis, has stated, “Sometimes [the baptism with the Spirit] was received after tarrying; sometimes during the laying on of hands; sometimes it was completely spontaneous; but always it came after conversion, for it is a distinct and separate experience.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Dunn, *Baptism*, 52.

⁵⁴ The phrase is participial and could be translated as “when...came to faith.” Grammatically, the participle could relate to “them” or to “us.” Commentaries generally state that it should be connected to both, but that is not really possible. It does not say “to them and us” but “to them as also to us.” A choice will thus have to be made. The participle is positioned right after “us,” which favours Dunn’s approach that it should be connected with “us” (the apostles). However, from the perspective of contents, this is impossible. This is evidenced also by the fact that Dunn cannot simply write “when we came to faith” but creates expressions such as “when their faith reached the level of Christian submission,” a meaning which this verb never has. For the participle to retain its own meaning, it needs to be related to “them.” In Greek, it is not necessary for the participle to be found in the proximity of the word to which it relates. A similar construction is found in Mark 9:17.

⁵⁵ As quoted in Bruner, *Theology*, 75–76. See also notes 21 and 22 above.

Is this true of being baptized with the Spirit as it is spoken of in Scripture? The gospels do not speak directly about the relationship between baptism and the moment of coming to faith. In general, in order to prove that the baptism with the Spirit takes place some time after conversion, the focus is on Acts 2.

We may assume that when Christ said to the disciples “in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5) they had already come to faith. Peter’s confession recorded in Matthew 16:16 already presents evidence for their faith. However, we especially point to the work of Christ with them after his resurrection. He revealed himself to them and brought them to faith in the necessity of his crucifixion and resurrection (Luke 24:36–47). In addition, the election of Matthias to take the place of Judas (Acts 1:15–26) displays their faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 1:22, 24). This leads to the simple conclusion that if, in the case of the disciples, the baptism takes place some time after their repentance, this would be the general rule for believers everywhere.⁵⁶

However, it is not that simple. One cannot deny that Pentecost was a special event. The prophets announced that a new situation would be created when the Spirit would be poured out: Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 39:29, Joel 2:28–32. When Peter explains the events of Pentecost with reference to the passage from Joel, he adds the expression “in the last days” (Acts 2:17). The last period of the world in its present form began on the day of Pentecost. When the Lord Jesus spoke of the Comforter who would come (John 14–16), he indicated the Spirit would be present when he himself would no longer be in their midst. Note also that Luke separates his books at this juncture, further proof that Pentecost is a central moment. The main substance of his gospel is described by him as follows: “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven” (Acts 1:1–2). This implies that his second book is to be about all that Jesus did next, after his ascension.⁵⁷ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit marks the beginning.

⁵⁶ This understanding is problematic when it comes to Acts 10 and 1 Cor. 12:13 because these see that faith and what is referred to as “baptism with the Spirit” go together. Hence it is also said by some that the pattern of coming to faith and being baptised with the Spirit being one event should actually be normal, but that unfortunately the reality is that there is usually a period of time between the one experience and the other.

⁵⁷ Hence, it is not correct to refer to Acts as “the Acts of the Holy Spirit,” as Floor does (*Doop*, 82). For counter-arguments, see Bruner, *Theology*, 155f; and ear-

That Pentecost is one of God's great days of salvation through Christ is made decisively explicit by Peter in Acts 2. He does not explain how they, as believers, after a period, have now received a second blessing. His explanation is concentrated on Christ, who did great works (v. 22), was put to death (v. 23), and was raised by God (vv. 24–32). He was exalted by God and received the Holy Spirit (v. 33), and this is the Spirit whom he has now poured out. Surveying all of this, the conclusion will have to be that Pentecost belongs to the series of redemptive-historical events to which Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection also belong.

This does not necessarily mean that the outpouring of the Spirit has no consequences at the level of the believer. All great redemptive deeds of God have consequences at the personal level of human life. How could Christ's death not be important to us? However, it does not mean that he has to die again. So too, Christ's resurrection and ascension are decisive for living in faith without these events having to be repeated. This applies also to the outpouring of the Spirit with Pentecost. Of course it is important for the believer. However, it does not imply that Pentecost can be repeated. We do not have the right to consider the events described in Acts 2:1–4 as a model for a repeated outpouring of the Spirit today.

How then should the events of the day of Pentecost be connected to the life of believers today? Since the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost is announced as "baptism with the Spirit," we may also rephrase this question as follows: how should the baptism with the Spirit be connected to the life of believers today?

This question is quickly answered, as Peter himself makes the connection explicit in his speech. In his closing remarks, he says to his listeners: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). In the next verse he adds that this is a promise for those in his audience, the Jews, their children, and for all the heathens whom God will call.

In Pentecostal circles this text is often explained as follows: Peter here means to say that those who repent could receive the Spirit. This would create room for a second stage after faith and conversion. However, Peter does not speak of a possibility but of a promise. Everyone who believes and repents will indeed receive the Spirit. Since Pentecost, the general rule

lier yet, D. K. Wielenga, "De plaats van de Handelingen der Apostelen in de openbaringsgeschiedenis van het Nieuwe Testament," in his *De akker is de wereld* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1971) 73–74.

is in force that receiving the Holy Spirit is inextricably connected to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Thus, in this single chapter, Acts 2, we have both the redemptive-historical event of the first outpouring of the Spirit (vv. 1–4) as well as the way in which people may share in this gift, the consequence at the level of the order of salvation.⁵⁸

We may connect to this the one text in Paul’s letter which mentions “baptism with the Spirit.” “For we were all baptized with one Spirit into one body...” (1 Cor. 12:13, NIV footnote).⁵⁹ At this point in his reasoning Paul wanted to emphasize that the Corinthians, in spite of the different gifts they have received, are nevertheless one. This unity is evident from the fact that they have all been baptized with one Spirit. This baptism cannot be something which some have received while other believers have not (yet) received it. For all believers, this baptism is something that took place in the past.

Various attempts have been made to escape the force of this text. Thus Torrey wrote that what is written here should be the normal situation in the church. However, because the church has neglected the baptism with the Spirit, we can no longer simply presume that the congregation has received the baptism with the Spirit.⁶⁰ However, it would be very strange if the church of Corinth, with its party-spirit and neglect of discipline, should suddenly be presented as a model church. Moreover, Torrey does not prove the crux of his argument, that it is possible for the baptism with the Spirit not to take place.

Another attempt distinguishes the baptism referred to here as the baptism through the Spirit from the baptism with the Spirit in Acts.⁶¹ However, this terminological difference has no basis in the text. In Greek the expressions in both places are identical. If there is a difference, it will have to be shown from the context of the expressions in both places. If a difference must be pointed out, it is that the baptism with the Spirit in Acts 1:5 points to the first, decisive, redemptive-historical outpouring of the Spirit, while 1 Corinthians 12:13 speaks of the ongoing reception of the

⁵⁸ See Dunn, *Baptism*, 182; and Runia, *Doop*, 45f; both point to J. Stott, *Baptism and the Fulness of the Spirit* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1973) 11.

⁵⁹ For a justification of the translation “with one Spirit,” see H. N. Ridderbos, *Paulus* (Kampen: Kok, 1971) 416; and Floor, *Doop*, 106–107.

⁶⁰ As described by Bruner, *Theology*, 335.

⁶¹ Bruner, *Theology*, 60; see note 22 above.

same Holy Spirit in the context of the order of salvation.⁶²

The following texts confirm that every believer has the Spirit: Romans 8:9, 15–17; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:3; and Ephesians 3:22. The following texts make clear that the Spirit is received upon coming to faith: Acts 11:17; Galatians 3:14; and Ephesians 1:13.⁶³

The conclusion to this section is thus that nowhere in Scripture does the “baptism with the Spirit” indicate the experience of the believer marking the beginning of a second stage in his life of faith. This baptism is closely associated with the beginning of faith in man. However, it does not refer to the work of the Spirit to renew the heart of man, as a result of which he comes to faith. Since Pentecost, the expression “baptism with the Spirit” points to the fact that God has his Spirit enter the heart of those who repent and believe in the Son. It is the direct consequence of believing.

The Baptism with the Spirit and Receiving Power

The arrival of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost ushered in many changes for believers. The following might be listed.

One could point to the indwelling of the Spirit in the church and in believers and thus pay attention to how this is different from the way in which God dwelt among Israel in the old covenant.⁶⁴

One could also discuss the meaning of the Holy Spirit as guarantee (1 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14). The difference between then and now might be described as follows: the way in which the son was a guarantee for Abraham and the land was a guarantee for Israel, so the Spirit is the guarantee for God’s people today of their future inheritance.

Or, in contrast with the unity of the past, which had its origin in belonging to the same people, one could now point to the unity which exists by sharing in the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:18; 4:3f).

With respect to the daily obedience, many of the commandments which Israel had received have been abolished. Instead, the mature church

⁶² See also R. B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 28.

⁶³ One text may seem to give a different impression: Acts 8:12–13, 17. Various explanations have been given. I agree with the solution presented by B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (1918; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976) 22–23, that this is not about the arrival of the Holy Spirit himself but about the visible gifts of the Spirit, which could only be mediated by the laying on of hands by the apostles.

⁶⁴ See e.g. C. Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1983) 15ff.

is to live through the Spirit (Rom. 14:17–18; Eph 5:18).

However, I would like to return to Acts 1:5–8, which indicates that the consequence of being baptized with the Spirit is that the disciples would receive power. It is incorrect to weaken the connection between the “baptism with the Spirit” and receiving power.⁶⁵ On the other hand, we have to be careful not to misuse this text. The church is often attacked by means of this text. The church is weak because it has not been baptized with the Spirit. Does not Scripture teach that this baptism gives power? In established churches there is no baptism with the Spirit, which is why faith and activity are on the backburner. The church should try to regain the baptism with the Spirit. In practice, this means that meetings are held where one waits for special experiences which might then be considered to be a “baptism with the Spirit.”

The reasoning just outlined makes two mistakes. The first is that the event of Acts 2:1–4 is considered an event at the level of every individual believer, instead of part of God’s redemptive-historical activity. The second is that the church before Pentecost is considered a weak church, confused and without direction. However, the description of the situation of the church after the ascension of Christ presents a very different picture. Luke 24:52 reports that the disciples were filled with gladness and praised God. Acts 1:14 makes mention of their constant prayer to God. One event from this period is described for us in detail: the election of Matthias as apostle (Acts 1:15–26). This takes place under the leadership of the apostles, with an appeal to Scripture. This makes clear that the church is preparing for the future, but there is no evidence here of weakness in faith or lack of activity.

Why was the power needed for the baptism with the Spirit? Acts 1:8 says: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The church will break free from being restricted to the people of Israel as it had been for centuries, and the circle in which preaching is to take place will continually widen. Acts begins to tell the account of the spread of the church to the ends of the earth. It is with a view to that spreading out that it received power on the day of Pentecost.

We should not misunderstand this. The text does not say that the words of the disciples will be laden with much power. Or that continually

⁶⁵ Dunn tries this in his *Baptism*, 54: “The fact is that the phrase ‘baptism in Spirit’ is never directly associated with the promise of power, but is always associated with entry into the messianic age or the Body of Christ.”

powerful men will arise who will be able to bring many to faith. Christ's announcement of being baptized with the Spirit is not about a power to convince which the disciples would receive, but a power which would enable people to be true witnesses of Christ.

This is also what the prophecy of Joel emphasizes, the prophecy which was fulfilled with Pentecost. It does not say that certain powerful people will arise to whom all in church will have to listen but that everyone in church—young and old, male and female, rich and poor—will be able to speak the Word of God. It is just as Christ said in John 7:38–39: whoever believes will be a fountain of living water for others.

What makes Pentecost new, as emphasized in Acts 1–2, is that the Word of God is no longer just to be found with the prophets, but that every believer has the power to speak God's Word in public and be a witness of Jesus Christ. The church, empowered by the baptism with the Spirit, has been able to bring the gospel to all five continents. The fact that missionaries went to The Netherlands and also to Korea to proclaim Christ is the direct result of, and the practical proof for, the fact that the church has been baptized with the Spirit. This is the level at which the church will have to live and operate.