Titus 3.5-6: A Window on Worldwide Pentecost

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It has been customary in New Testament studies to accent theological differences between Acts and the Pauline corpus. This has understandably included pneumatological themes. In this article I find a bridge between these two literatures, in spite of the fact that we deal with a letter that many consider to be pseudo-Pauline. I examine Tit. 3.5-6 in light of its literary affinities with Acts and in light of certain historical considerations. On the basis of these reflections, I find reasons to see the dynamic of the pentecostal Spirit as found in Acts serving as a presupposition for understanding Spirit reception in the Pauline mission and even beyond within first-century Christianity.

Literary Factors

The language and context of Spirit reception in these two verses point back quite distinctly to the pentecostal outpourings described in Acts, and especially to the initial outpourings on the day of Pentecost. This is apparent in the following parallels.

First, the use of the verb ἐκχέω with ἐπί (‘poured out upon’) in v. 6 is found in the LXX of the Joel 2.28-29 prophecy, which is quoted by Peter in his pentecostal sermon in order to explain the phenomenon of Galileans speaking in other tongues (Acts 2.7-18). The language of ‘outpouring’ is utilized by Luke himself in Acts 2.33, wherein he also

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refers to Peter speaking of the ‘promise’ of the Spirit. Thus it is clear that Luke highlights the ‘outpouring’ in this Joel prophecy in relation to the event of Pentecost. The only other time that we find ἐκβάλλω with ἐπί in the New Testament is in Tit. 3.6. Various commentators agree that the pentecostal event is to some degree reflected in the Titus passage.

In Luke’s terminology ‘outpouring’ is interchangeable with ‘baptized with’ (1.5) and ‘filled with’ (2.4). In Acts 10.45 a Gentile ‘pentecost’ is similarly described by Luke as an ‘outpouring upon’ of the Spirit, which experience is again equated with being ‘baptized with the Holy Spirit’ (11.15-17). Glossolalia is again part of what is described as an ‘outpouring’ of the Spirit (10.45-46). Thus the idea of ‘outpouring’ in Acts with immediate visible evidence extends beyond ch. 2.

Second, the thought of Jesus Christ being instrumental in the bestowal of the Spirit in Tit. 3.6 (‘through [διὰ τοῦ] Jesus Christ our Savior’) conforms to Acts 2.33, where the risen Lord has ‘poured out’ the Spirit. Apart from the Gospel predictions (Mt. 3.11 = Mk 1.8 = Lk 3.16 = Jn 1.33; 15.26; cf. Jn 20.22), the linking of Christ with the bestowal of the Spirit is very unusual (if even present) in the rest of the New Testament. Furthermore, Christ poured out the Spirit ‘richly’ (πλούσιως) according to Tit. 3.6. Although this adverb is not found in the Acts accounts, there is no doubt that Luke means to describe such an ‘outpouring’ (Acts 2.17-18, 33; 10.45-46; cf. 8.18-19; 19.6). The Spirit coming or falling

1. I assume Lukan authorship of Acts, although my argument fundamentally does not depend on identifying the author as Luke.