

## **Exploring the Meaning of Pentecost: Pluralism, Unity, and Christian Faith**

### **Study #4: Welcome One Another**

#### **Scripture Texts**

##### **Acts 2:1-12 (NRSV)**

**2** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

**5** Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. **6** And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. **7** Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? **9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, **11** Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” **12** All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

##### **Romans 15:7**

**7** Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

#### **Notes**

Thesis: The expression of biblical and orthodox Christian faith is inherently and irreducibly pluralist

The plurality of the Christian faith is not a problem to overcome; Scripture both reflects and anticipates the plurality and diversity of the historic Christian faith community; this plurality is the blessing and intention of God; this Pentecostal Christian plurality is paradigmatic not only for the church but for the world.

Toward a Theology of Christian Pluralism: The Life of God (Trinity); God Speaks (Revelation); Witness to Revelation (Scripture); Witness to Revelation (Church)

Witness to Revelation (Scripture)

The Plurality of Scripture: Diverse Creation Accounts; Diverse Law Codes; Diverse Chronologies; Diverse Ethical Assertions; Diverse Historical Accounts; Diverse Theological Assertions; Diverse Gospel Accounts

How do we account for this plurality? The words of scripture are part of particular social, cultural, and linguistic settings. Scripture's inspiration does not transcend the inherent limitations of its finite character.

As inspired by the spirit of God, the church confesses that scripture is a true and faithful witness to God. Scripture is itself a diverse collection of witnesses or, a manifold witness to the revelation of God. The Bible is not so much a single book as it is a collection of texts written from different settings and perspectives.

In other words, the Bible is polyphonic, made up of many voices. Scripture is the normative witness for Christian community. It is also the first in an ever-expanding series of presentations of the Christian faith for which it is paradigmatic.

The inclusion of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, each with their distinctive perspectives on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, alerts us to the pluriform character of the gospel.

When we try to ease the difficulties of the multiple perspectives in scripture to make matters more compact, clear, and manageable we suffer the loss of plurality and diversity woven into the fabric of scripture, and by extension, the divine design of God. This leads to serious distortions of the gospel and the community called to bear witness to it.

The Bible has given rise to a variety of meanings and interpretations derived from the work of exegesis, theology, and the particular social and historical situations of its interpreters.

This theological context provides the background for understanding the words of Paul in Romans: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

## Questions for Reflection

Although they may differ on the way they understand it, most Christian traditions and churches affirm the authority of the Bible. What does the idea of biblical authority mean to you? How do you understand it and what difference does it make in your life?

One of the common ways churches communicate the idea of biblical authority is in the phrase that scripture is “the Word of God written.” What does this mean to you? Do you see a difference between the Word of God lived in the person of Jesus, and the Word of God written? If so, how would you describe the difference?

Have you ever thought about the diversity of scripture before? If so, what did that lead you to conclude about the Bible? If not, how does it shape your understanding of the Bible and its authority for the church? Do you see a connection between the plurality of the Bible and the events of Pentecost?

The plurality of the Bible helps to understand why there have been so many different interpretations of the Christian faith throughout history. What do you think about these differences? Does the idea of biblical plurality help you make sense of this history? Why or why not?

Do you see the connection between the plurality of the Christian faith and the exhortation of Paul in his letter to the Romans that the followers of Jesus should welcome one another in the same way that Christ welcomed them? If so, what are the implication of this for you and for our church?

What is particularly significant to you in this study?

What questions do you have?