



PENTECOST AND MULTIRACIAL UNITY

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Abstract

In the present time, the world is in need of multiracial unity more than ever. Two issues that draw the world's attention in the recent two years (2019-2020) are racism and the pandemic of Covid-19. I consider the problem of both issues as centering on the human body (its appearance in the case of racism and its health condition in the case of Covid-19), and I propose multiracial unity in a global scale as a solution to both. With such a unity, racism should be fought by people from all around the world, and the world should also unite as one entity to fight the pandemic. As Christians, reflecting upon the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 would be fruitful to reflect upon the issue of global multiracial unity. The narrative proclaims that salvation is for all nations, and all peoples from all races are called to be one people under God.

Keywords: *Biblical Theology; Pentecost; Acts 2:5-13; New Testament; Racism; Multiracial Unity*

I. Introduction

In 2019, there was a national issue of racism in Indonesia toward the Papua people. A soldier captured in a video calling Papuans as *monyet* ("monkey"), and as the video spread throughout the country, it had triggered protests with devastating effects.¹ A year later, a huge protest had aroused in America caused by the murder of George Floyd.² And sadly, the world has been hit by the pandemic of Covid-19 that affected millions of people worldwide while this paper is being written.³ As for our reflection, it is important to notice how racism and Covid-19 center in the same thing which is human body (its appearance in case of racism and its health condition in the case of Covid-19); and extremely in need of the same solution, which is unity, or to be more specific, a global multiracial unity. Multiracial unity is very important to fight both racism and covid-19. To accept others regardless of their skin color, language, and customs, we need to develop global multiracial unity. The same thing applies to Covid-19, as the world together as one entity is fighting the pandemic by all means, there should not be any disunity among human beings universally.

As Christians, it is important to reflect on how such a unity might be developed through theological reflections, and in that case, it is my conviction that approaching the theme of Church unity in the Pentecost narrative would be fruitful. Indeed, the unity of

¹ Anindita Pradana, "Manokwari Rusuh : 'Kami Orang Papua Dikatakan Sebagai Monyet,'" *BBC News Indonesia*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/media-49399008>.

² Derrick Bryson Taylor, "George Floyd Protests: A Timeline," *The New York Times Online* (New York, July 10, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-protests-timeline.html>.

³ "Covid-19 Corona Pandemic Update by October 19, 2020", https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?utm_campaign=homeAdvegas1?, accessed October 19, 2020.

the Church is not a human work, but “a mighty act of God” who gathered people from “every nation under heaven”. In other words, the unity of the Church is God’s gift that was bestowed at the very beginning of the constitution of the Church at Pentecost. The unity of Pentecost (Acts 1-2) could be seen as a way for us to respond to the disunity in the Babel narratives (Gen. 11:1-9). While Babel represents, “the sin of grasping for total power and control”, the Pentecost responds to that by showing that the true unity is only possible through our dependency on God.⁴

Given the importance of the Pentecost narrative in understanding the unity of the Church, this paper will attempt to probe deeper into its meaning and significance for today. This paper argues that the meaning of the church unity in the Pentecost narrative is best reflected in Acts 2:5-13 which specifically deals with the peoples of Pentecost, and as for its significance, I shall argue further that the narrative could be a normative standard for the Church—especially but not limited to Indonesian churches—toward global multiracial unity.⁵

II. Research Method

Toward that goal, I will do a biblical exegesis to the text which defined by Smith as: “In-depth, inductive examination of Scripture in which the exegete systematically applies established hermeneutic tools (exegetical methods) to discover the meaning and implications of a text of biblical text.” The purpose is to resolve interpretive problems to determine the meaning and significance of a biblical text.⁶

III. Discussion

Pentecost and Multiracial Unity

First of all, I will discuss the context of the book of Acts in overview; second, I will attempt to exegete the meaning of the peoples of Pentecost in Acts 2:5-13; third, I will elaborate both significances of the meaning of the peoples of Pentecost to the development of global multiracial unity; fourth, I will end in a conclusion.

The Historical and Literary Context of the Book of Acts

The author is probably Luke, “the beloved physician” in Col. 4:14, Paul’s travel companion (cf. the “we” in the passages such as Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16).⁷ The same authorship between Luke and Acts is reflected through the style and themes of the book of Acts. The style is varied between Greek contemporary prose and a Jewish style of Greek language influenced by the Septuagint. The author claims that he is

⁴ Thomas W. Currie, “Pentecost’s Costly Gift,” in *Journal for Preachers* (Montreat, 2017), 6; William Stringfellow, “The Unity of the Church as the Witness of the Church,” in *Anglican Theological Review* 100 No. 3, 2018, 523; Aikaterini Pekridou, “From Babel to Pentecost: The Changing Landscape and Its Implications for the Church’s Witness,” in *International Review of Mission* 101 No. 2, 2012, 373.

⁵ Keener places Acts 2:5-13 in a sub-section called “The Peoples of Pentecost”, whereas Bruce calls it “The Crowd’s Amazement”. Even though I follow Bruce’s structure, I agree more with Keener that 2:5-13 mainly talks about the Peoples who experienced the Pentecost, instead of about the “crowd” in general. Perhaps the text’s allusion to the “crowd” is only limited to the others who mock in v.13; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Ed.*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 322; F. F. Bruce, “The Book of the Acts,” in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), vii.

⁶ Kevin Gary Smith, *Writing and Research: A Guide for Theological Students* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2016), 131.

⁷ Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 308.

the eyewitness of some secondary incidents (see Acts 16:10), he knows the direct sources for the information he provided. If we accept the possibility that Acts is authored by one of Paul's travel companion, the tradition that says that Luke—a physician (Col. 4:14)—authors Luke and Acts would fit our knowledge about Luke. Indeed, some terms in Luke-Acts occur frequently in the medical literature. However, since most of those terms also occur elsewhere, this would not prove Luke's authorship in absolute certainty.⁸

Most scholars date Luke and Acts in between 70 and 90, and since the events in the book of Acts happened before Paul's death, some scholars suggest that it was written before A.D. 64. Others, through reading Luke 21 suggest to date it after A.D. 70, arguing that the events in Acts broke off around A.D. 62 due to literary reasons. Acts is not intended to be a biography of Paul, therefore, Luke has his reason to end on the climactic note of how the gospel finally reached Rome. In addition to that, allusions to the destruction of the temple make the majority of scholars date Luke-Acts sometime after 70. Keener tentatively accepts a date between the early to mid-seventies. Later dates seem to be unlikely since Acts records detailed riots such as 24:5, an account that would disturb people who were loyal to Roman order.⁹

There is a good reason to see that Luke's audience was wealthier and relatively more highly educated than that of other Gospels. This could be seen from how Luke designates his work to a "most excellent" Theophilus (Luke 1:3). That title perhaps suggests that Theophilus was a person of prestige and rank in society (cf. Acts 26:25). By addressing Theophilus as a part of his audience, Luke tries to appeal to a person with similar status in the larger society, "An educated audience would best appreciate the elements of classical rhetoric alongside the appropriate stylistic variations for different settings."¹⁰ Keener wrote:

Luke's ideal audience appears to be urban, Greek, and perhaps in officially romanized cities such as Corinth and Philippi and would be familiar with some measure of education and with public orations, Jewish religion, and (at least through banquet lecturers and philosophic orators) some philosophic ideas. Even if they did not have formal training, rhetorical techniques probably filtered down to urban audiences accustomed to hearing speeches.¹¹

Given the description, the Gentile Christians in the Roman Empire would be the most probable audience. Keener identifies two purposes of Acts which are legal and apologetic. Acts is written to consistently record legal precedents in favor of the early Christians. Acts depicts how Christians are declared not guilty in every Roman court. However, it is important to note that Acts is not a list of precedents but a narrative. It seems that Luke cited wide-ranging legal precedents from different local courts to argue that Christianity should continuously enjoy legal protection in the empire. The account of Paul's custody and several of his speeches take the final quarter of the book of Acts, which reveals how answering the false charges is important for Luke. As for the apologetic purpose, Keener adds:

Acts works on several fronts: the gospel confronts Roman law courts, Greek philosophers, rural Asian farmers and others on their own terms, and nothing can

⁸ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Ed.*, 314.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 315.

¹⁰ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. I (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 424.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I:426.

stop it. A major theme is the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. Ancient religions were respected by virtue of their age, and Christians needed to demonstrate that the Old Testament was their book and that they were authentic voice of Judaism (despite the opposition of much of the Jewish community of Luke's day to this claim). Luke develops this theme by displaying the fulfillment of Old Testament motifs.¹²

Luke wrote to them, "to tell the story of the birth and early growth of the church as the second stage of the fulfillment of salvation history, but also with various subsidiary theological and apologetic purposes." The main message is that God is fulfilling his plan, in which a new era has dawned by the outpouring of the Spirit and the gospel proclamation to the Gentiles accompanied by their positive response.¹³ Simply put, Acts is a historical work with a salient theological message.

Majority scholars see Acts as a historical monograph, "a historical work focused on a specific topic (in contrast to many historians' multivolume histories of expansive subjects)." By the ancient standards of historical writing, Luke is meticulously careful with his Gospel (Lk 1:1-4), and also trustworthy in his account of Acts, which can be cross-checked with letters Paul's letters, considering that there were only a few of them available to Luke himself. The fact that he sometimes wrote "we" as an eyewitness adds more reliability to that. Luke-Acts may be considered closer to standard forms of Greco-Roman historical writing compared to other Gospels, which are similar to ancient biography. Some multivolume histories of that time might have a volume or two devoted to a person, but when viewed in overall, the work would be seen as a part of a larger history. As Keener wrote, "In the first volume, Luke writes about Jesus; in the second volume, Luke writes about the Spirit's activity in the Jewish and Gentile churches, especially through the figures of Peter and Paul."¹⁴ Bruce describes the structure of the book of Acts as follow:¹⁵

- A. The Birth of the Church (1:1-5:42)
- B. Persecution and Expansion (6:1-9:31)
- C. The Acts of Peter and Beginnings of Gentile Christianity (9:32-12:24)
- D. Church Extension from Antioch and Apostolic Decree at Jerusalem (12:25-15:35)
- E. Paul Leaves Antioch and Moves to the Aegean World (15:36-19:20)
- F. Paul Plans to Visit Rome and Gets There by an Unforeseen Route (19:21-28:31)

Within that structure, the text that we exegete lies under the section I, which could be broken down into five sub-sections: first, The Descent of the Spirit (2:1-4); second, The Crowd's Amazement (2:5-13); third, Peter's Proclamation (2:14-36); fourth, Call to Repentance (2:37-40); fifth, The First Christian Church (2:41-47).¹⁶ While our text lies in the second sub-section, it is impossible to omit the first sub-section, since our focus is to know who are the peoples of the Pentecost. Due to that reason, we will delimit our text to the first and second sub-sections (Acts 2:1-13).

The Meaning of the Peoples of Pentecost in Acts 2:5-13

The concept of the peoples of Pentecost lies in Acts 2:5-13:

¹² Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Ed.*, 315.

¹³ Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction*, 308.

¹⁴ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Ed.*, 315-317.

¹⁵ Bruce, "The Book of the Acts," vii-xiv.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and 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, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." (ESV)

To understand the meaning of the peoples of Pentecost in Acts 2:5-13, we have to examine some of its keywords, such as Jews (*Ἰουδαῖοι*), tongues (*γλῶσσα*), speak (*λαλέω*), nation (*ἔθνος*), language (*διάλεκτος*), and proselytes (*προσήλυτοι*).

Jews (*Ἰουδαῖοι*), John uses this term to refer to the inhabitants of Palestine, "especially in explanation of Jewish customs or circumstances." So this term can be simply understood as "Jews". Acts uses it as it is in John, the difference is that Acts include the dispersion of the Jews by this term, and perhaps also proselytes in 2:5. The characteristic of the "Jews" are committed to the law as it is in 10:28.¹⁷ In Acts, the term appears first in 2:5, and it has some overlapping referents: geographic, religious, and ethnic.¹⁸ Tongues (*γλῶσσα*), the general use of this term includes: 1) "tongue" as a physical organ; 2) "speech, or manner of speech, or language;" 3) an in the third sense, "An expression which is strange or obscure and needs explanation." In Acts 2:11, this means "language". *Glossolalia* refers to "speaking in tongues" (1 Cor. 12-14). "This speaking is primarily to God (14:2, 28) in the form of prayer, praise, or thanksgiving (14:2, 14-17)." This is also the case for Acts 2, "it is a gift of the Spirit (v. 4) which causes astonishment (v. 7) and raises the charge of drunkenness (v. 13)." Perhaps this reflects the Jewish tradition that the law was given in Sinai to the nations in seventy languages.¹⁹

Speak (*λαλέω*), this word means "to prattle", or "to babble", it is like imitating childish babbling. "It is also used for the sounds of animals and music instruments. As regards speech, it may denote sound rather than meaning, but also the ability to speak."²⁰ Nation (*ἔθνος*), this term means mass, multitude, host, "and may be used for a 'herd' or 'swarm' as well as a human group."²¹ Language (*διάλεκτος*), This term means "speech, discourse", then also mean "a system of articulation or 'language'." It may refer to both language or dialect, "used in a particular locality or by a specific ethnic group," as in Acts 1:19; 2:6; 21:40.²² Proselytes (*προσήλυτοι*), "Acts 2:11 lists proselytes among the dispersion groups present in Jerusalem for the feast. Proselytes and Jews are terms denote the religious position of those who come from the geographical locations also mentioned." Starting from Acts 6:1, there is an account of Nicolaus, who is distinguished

¹⁷ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), 332–33.

¹⁸ Michal Beth Dinkler, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Gospels and Acts: Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 331, 327–363.

¹⁹ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, 111.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 449.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

²² Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 91.

from the other six, “he is a convert from paganism who has come to Jerusalem from Antioch.”²³

The word “Pentecost” is the Greek form of the Hebrew Bible’s “Festival of Weeks” (cf. Josephus Ant. 3:252; Bell. 1:253; Tob. 2:1; 2 Macc. 12:31-32). Just like other festivals, this festival was also rooted in the annual natural cycle, yet it was also linked to the salvation history, more specifically, the Sinai covenant.²⁴ Pervo wrote, “The signs accompanying the revelation are those of the classic Hebrew Bible epiphany: wind, fire, and noise, of which the Sinai theophany (Exod. 19:16-19) is a prime example.” Even though Sinai deserves the priority, it is important to note that there are many other epiphanies in the Hebrew Bible beside it.²⁵ The most sensible setting for the encounter described by Luke here is the temple courts, where someone could preach to a large crowd (Acts 2:41). In case the disciples are still in the “upper room” of 1:13, they would be nearby the temple and could move there. Very large upper rooms were only found in Jerusalem’s Upper City, which were near the temple.²⁶

Many Jewish from throughout the Roman and Parthian worlds would gather in three main Jewish feasts: Tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost. Since Pentecost was only fifty days after Passover, it was common for some Diaspora visitors to stay the seven weeks between the two feasts. Even though Pentecost perhaps the least popular among the three pilgrimage festivals, Josephus attests that it was still crowded.²⁷ Verse 5a alone suggests that Luke had in mind a great assembly of the most devout yet disposed Jews gathered in Jerusalem either for the feast or for permanent residence. This re-emphasizes Luke’s point that, “from the beginning the Christian church was an inspired community and a universal community. It therefore included both Jews and ‘pious men’ of every kind.” The inspiration is clearly indicated in vv.1-4, but it is not clear whether the people were festival pilgrims or not nor whether they all were born Jews or not. The phrase “under heaven” (v. 5) is also found in the Old Testament, such as Deut. 2:25; 4:19; 9:14; 29:19 and Eccles. 1:3; 3:1. In Eccles. 2:3, it is written as “under the sun”. The Old Testament more often uses those expressions as referring to all the nations on earth.²⁸

The Jews came from Parthia would know Aramaic and those from the Roman Empire, Greek. But many among them were also familiar with local dialects and languages spoken in the vicinities of their cities. According to Keener, “Even most Palestinian Jews were functionally bilingual, as are people in many parts of the world today.”²⁹ Even though these are Jews, they were culturally and linguistically belong to many nations. In line with Acts 1:8, Luke emphasizes that from the inception of the church, the Spirit started to move the church into multicultural diversity under the lordship of Christ. The list of nations here is best seen as a simple updated list from the names of nations in Genesis 10. That could be the most plausible shared background between Luke and his recipients. In Genesis 10, the nations were scattered at the tower of Babel due to God’s judgment that made them unintelligible to each other. But here, God transforms the judgment through a miracle that transcends the language barrier. Most of Diaspora Jews lived in Parthia, but many also lived in some provinces of Asia

²³ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, 853.

²⁴ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Ed.*, 322.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ C. K. Barret, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments: Acts 1-14*, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 118–19. Hereafter referred as ICC.

²⁹ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Ed.*, 322.

Minor, Syria, Alexandria, and Cyrene in North Africa. “Arabians” here specifically applies to the Nabateans, a kingdom with Petra as its headquarters and its people scattered including in Herod Antipas’s territory of Perea. This kingdom made a lot of trade with Jerusalem. Most of them were pagan, but the Jews had been successfully converted some to Judaism.³⁰

Luke provides the list of nations in Acts 2:9-11. The closest analogy to that list is the accounts of the Jewish diaspora throughout the world, as Josephus wrote about that in *Apion* 2.282; *War* 2.398. However, the list is not identical with that of Acts, therefore, there is no question of dependence or a common source. What similar is the form, and it is a probability that Luke made the list by himself on the ground of his own knowledge of geography. The precedent Jewish lists were used by Luke to construct the potential people of God.³¹ However, the text is somewhat problematic. If it is to be regarded as a catalog of the Mediterranean world nations, it is somehow deficient. “The most astonishing omission, from the perspective of Acts, is the entire Greek peninsula (Macedonia and Achaëa). The most astonishing inclusion...is the initial ‘Parthians, Medes, and Elamites’.” V. 10b seems to refer to the visiting Roman citizens since *Ῥωμαῖοι* means “Roman citizens” in Acts. This could fit to be the climax, as v. 11 is followed by an inclusive reference to both Jews by birth and by choice (proselytes), however, the list reverts to the ethnic groups of the “Cretans and Arabs.” It seems that Luke did not invent the list, and the catalog does not have a consistent form.³² It is also possible that the term *Ῥωμαῖοι* refers to the Jews who came from Rome. About the huge population of Jews in Rome, Keener wrote:

Rome had a significant Jewish community (a common guess is forty to fifty thousand) organized in numerous synagogues. Many lived in the impoverished area across the Tiber; the majority spoke predominantly Greek. The “local Jewish leaders” (NIV) are leaders ... of different synagogue communities ... The Jewish congregations in Rome were all autonomous, and Christians could spread their views among the various synagogues with relative freedom. The Jewish community there had also made many Roman converts and sympathizers (to the chagrin of many male Roman aristocrats). Many of these sympathizers would be happy to embrace a version of the Jewish faith that accepted them fully without circumcision.³³

Perhaps we should acknowledge that even though Luke’s message of the universality of the Gospel is clear, his list of nations is not very much clear. I would argue with Witherington, that “the list is a parenthetical insertion by the author, an irrational claim in defense of the rationality of the text.” Nevertheless, this is clear that the purpose of the catalog is patent, which is to symbolize the church’s universal mission, “this function can be seen not only in Jewish lists, such as that in Philo *Leg. all.* 281-82, but also in the Isis cult, as in the list of cult names in *P. Oxy.* 1380, 1-136, and in *Apuleius Metam.*”³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., 322–23.

³¹ Barret, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments: Acts 1-14*, 122.

³² Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 66.

³³ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Ed.*, 416.

³⁴ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 66; Ben Witherington III, ed., “Editing the Good News: Some Synoptic Lessons for the Study of Acts,” in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 335–44.

Luke's emphasis on the universality of the Gospel is also reflected by the gift of "tongues". The people's comprehension of the many languages seems to echo the rabbinic legend saying that, "God gave the Sinaitic law in seventy languages for the world's seventy nations." The sound of the wind and the tongues described as fire evoke Hebrew Bible theophanies as it is in Gen. 2:7; Exod. 3:2; 13:21; 19:18; Ps. 33:6; and also Isa. 5:24.³⁵ The quotation from Joel (Acts 2:17-21) leads the reader to understand the phenomenon as prophecy, thus Luke identifies "speaking in tongues" with prophecy. It is probable that, "Luke chose to view the phenomenon as intelligible prophecy out of a desire to dissociate the Christian movement from hostile criticism (and, possibly, to discourage Christians from venerating unintelligible ecstasy)." Pervo notes that Acts 2:1-4 and 13 could serve as a narrative presentation of the hypothetical situation of 1 Cor. 14:23.³⁶

Paul emphasizes "tongues" in a quite different theological perspective than that of Luke, but it seems like he is talking about the same phenomenon. While Luke pictures speaking in tongues generally as corporate experience, Paul's emphasis is on the private devotional use of tongues (1 Cor. 14:4, 18-19) unless it is accompanied by an inspired interpretation (14:5, 13, 26-28). "Luke associates them with the worldwide evangelism, but Paul does not clearly do so, and Luke associates them with prophetic speech more fully than does Paul."³⁷

However, one should not over-emphasize the differences among them. Both writers see those who speak in tongues are praying their own prayer yet by the leading of God's Spirit (Acts 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:4-11), both see it as prayer and praise (Acts 2:11; 1 Cor. 14:2, 14-17), both also acknowledge how the gift may be accompanied or produce such an ecstatic or such an abnormal joyful speech or behavior while it is experienced (Acts 2:13; 1 Cor. 14:23). Lastly, both closely connect prophecy and tongues (Acts 2:16-18; 19:6; 1 Cor. 14).³⁸

Luke appears to have two purposes in mind in this narrative. The first, as indicated above, is to demonstrate the fulfillment of Jesus' promise: his followers will receive supernatural power. The second amplifies the first. The church from the beginning, though at the beginning located only in Jerusalem, is in principle a universal society in which universal communication is possible. This appears to be Luke's twofold intention; it invites two comments.³⁹ "For Luke, the ultimate goal is cross-cultural communication and world evangelization, and the requisite power to carry out the task is only the Holy Spirit."⁴⁰ The story symbolizes both the universality of the message ("every nation") and the capacity of the gospel to address all sorts and conditions of people on their own terms.⁴¹ It is also important to notice that, "Aside from questions of translation and derivation, juxtaposing *Ioudaios* and the list of nations at the start of Acts substantiates the Lukan message that the gospel came first to the Jews, then spread throughout the world."⁴² While the audience is international but primarily the Jews in the diaspora, the variety of languages perhaps could be a symbol of all nations in the world.⁴³

³⁵ Dinkler, "The Acts of the Apostles," 331.

³⁶ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 62-63.

³⁷ Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, I:813.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Barret, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments: Acts 1-14*, 108.

⁴⁰ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2nd Ed.*, 317.

⁴¹ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 66.

⁴² Dinkler, "The Acts of the Apostles," 331.

⁴³ I. Howard Marshal, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 159.

Contemporary Significance: Toward Global Multiracial Unity

The sub-section “The Peoples of Pentecost” (Acts 2:5-13) shows that global multiracial unity is a normative standard for the Church from the very moment of her conception. To apply that to our contemporary situation, I would suggest that the Church, especially Indonesian churches should proclaim three crucial messages to the world: 1) universality of God’s salvation; 2) the dignity of the human body; 3) anti-racism.

First, it is clear that in the book of Acts, God’s salvation should reach the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). That is closely associated with Joel’s prophecy which is fulfilled in the Pentecost narrative. The narrative shows how, “the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy concerning the last days in which the saving action of God is extended to cover all kinds of people, young and old, male and female, and salvation is available to all who call on the Lord’s name.”⁴⁴ In Indonesia, we have both ethnic churches and multi-ethnic churches, and this suggestion does not mean to plea the ethnic churches to be multi-ethnic or vice versa. Rather, this suggestion urges both churches to care about human salvation in a universal sense. Not just about the salvation of certain ethnic groups, nor multi-ethnic groups among fellow Indonesians, but even to reach out internationally to all peoples of the earth.

Second, the book of Acts emphasizes the dignity of the human body. The human body is not bad or evil as it is in Greek philosophy. The Spirit is not against the human body, but the Spirit is the One who indwells in the body of the believers. Such a high view of the human body could be a powerful means to fight racism and also an encouragement to care for our health during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the case of racism, people failed to appreciate how glorious is the human body as God made it, so they despise God’s wonderful work. And in the case of the pandemic, we are called to care for our health and others’ health so together we could weather the pandemic well. As Christians, we should take care of our body, our health, accept it with its beauty, and cherish it even more than before, as we know how the Holy Spirit indwells us. By so doing we are also called to care for others, to appreciate their appearances as it is truly made in the image of their Makers.

Third, the Indonesian churches need to stand against anti-racism. Racism is not just a social problem but a spiritual problem. Those who commit it are those who insult God himself, the Maker of all humans, and they actively revolt against the fact that all humans are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27). On the other hand, it is important to note that the message of the Pentecost narrative is not just spiritual but also has tremendous social implications. The Jews were always thought that they were the most spiritual whereas the Gentiles were spiritually unclean, that is why they actively proselytized them to Judaism. However, the Pentecost narrative shows that God also calls the Gentiles, not just the Jews. Thus, the Jewish view of their higher social position is invalid, and the Gentiles are to be included as equals with the Jews (Col. 3:11). Rather, it should be the hope of the universal Church for the whole world to be one people under God through Christ.

IV. Conclusion

Attempting to move toward the development of global multiracial unity, it is fruitful to reflect upon the theme of church unity in the Pentecost narrative, especially in the sub-section “The Peoples of Pentecost” in Acts 2:5-13. The text shows how salvation comes first from the Jews but then extends to the end of the earth, to all nations. The

⁴⁴ Ibid.

peoples who experienced the Pentecost are those who proclaim God's mighty deeds in diverse languages to different nations. The spirituality of the Pentecost is not the one that restricts people from diversity but the one that opens up the way for true unity in diversity. Luke's understanding of the gift of "speaking in tongues" should reflect this unity and diversity as well. Also his inclusion of the list of nations, regardless of the unclear origin and original form of the list, the message is clear that God's salvation is universal, extends to the Gentiles as well to the Jews, thus his salvation is offered to everyone, as all peoples have the potentiality of becoming God's people. As we meditate this even deeper, let us pray for God's glory to fill the whole earth and for His Name to be glorified forever and ever. Amen.

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