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

Study #3: Different Kinds of Working  

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?”

1 Corinthians 12:4-6  
4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Notes  

What is the theological basis or rationale for the “different kinds of working” in which it is the same God at work? This is part of the meaning of Pentecost and moves us in the direction of Christian Pluralism.

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

Based on the witness of scripture

Became succinct means of identifying the Christian conception of God

Confession emerged out of the attempt to address central theological questions for Christian faith

Particularly, the relationship of Jesus Christ to the core belief in one God: While Jesus is divine; he is not the same as the Father

Leads to numerous approaches and variations in attempting to explain the ways in which Father and Son are both one and yet also distinct: Modalism (over emphasis on unity); Tritheism (over emphasis on distinction)

The Spirit is also divine yet not the same as Father and Son

The Relational Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one by virtue of their interdependent relationality; God is plurality-in-unity and unity-in-plurality

Hence, difference and otherness are part of the divine life; while Father, Son, and Spirit together are one God; their unity is not an outgrowth of sameness. Rather, they are one in the very midst of their difference.

God Speaks (Revelation):

On what basis are we able to justify our convictions about God other than simply affirming what we want and/or hope to be true? The Christian response: God Speaks

The Creator-Creature Distinction:
One of the most basic assertions of the Bible is the difference between God and human beings. Simply stated, God is God and we are not. Isaiah 55:8-God’s thoughts are not our thoughts; God’s ways are not ours; 2 Peter 3:8-for God a day is like 1000 years and 1000 years are like a day. These and many other texts point to the conclusion that the infinite God is radically different from finite creatures. This is the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humans. Human beings cannot know comprehend ultimate divine truth.
However, because God wants to have a relationship with us, God condescends to our level. John Calvin says God makes “baby-talk” to us so that we can understand how God wants us to live. This is the idea of revelation.

The purpose of revelation is to draw creatures into relationship with their creator and to invite them to share in the love and fellowship of God and to participate in the divine mission of love and reconciliation.

Revelation involves both a divine dimension and a human one: Divine-the revelation of God in Jesus Christ points to its objective character; Human-the reception of revelation by humans who hear and respond to it points to its subjective character and its plurality.

**Questions for Reflection**

Paul writes, “There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” What does this mean to you? What are the implications of this?

The Trinity is a mysterious idea to many people, even Christians. What do you think about this idea? Does it make sense to you? Does it matter to you? Why or why not?

What do you think about the idea that difference and otherness are part of God’s life as Father, Son, and Spirit? What might be some of the implications of this for human beings?

Does the “infinite qualitative difference” between God and human beings make sense to you? What are the implications of this notion for our understanding of God and God’s ways in the world?

What do you think about the idea that God “descends to our level” and speaks to us in ways that we can understand? Does this make sense to you? Do you see the connection with “different ways of working” and the idea of Christian pluralism?

What is particularly significant to you in this study?

What questions do you have?