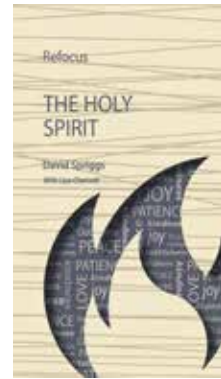


# Refocus: the Holy Spirit



## PREPARATION FOR STUDY

Pentecost (also known as Whitsun) is one of the great festival Sundays of the Christian Church – a time when we celebrate and remember the coming of the Holy Spirit to a gathering of the first 120 disciples in Jerusalem.

Until fairly recently in the United Kingdom, 'Whit Monday' was also a public celebration, with street marches, banners and bands. Sometimes these marches would be organised by the churches, particularly the Sunday schools, and sometimes by the Trade Unions. There was something very appropriate about it, as the 'first' Pentecost for the church was also a very colourful and public event, with many people turning to Christ.

*Are you aware of attempts by the churches to make a more public event of Pentecost again? Some Councils of Churches have organised 'Pentecost Picnics' or Christian 'fairs' to promote mission or offer prayer and other support in a town square. Do you know of anything being done in your locality to celebrate Pentecost? Do you consider that these are appropriate expressions of Pentecost?*

What about our churches' celebration of the Day of Pentecost? How can we mark it properly, not just on one Sunday of the year but every day of the year? It is clear from the book of Acts that the developing church was shaped, resourced, transformed and protected because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that we read about in Acts 2 – so much so that some people rename 'The Acts of the Apostles' as 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit'.

*Without reading it, write down all you can recall of Acts chapter 2, which recounts the sending of the Holy Spirit on the disciples. Now read through the chapter and see what you remembered correctly, what you got wrong and what you missed out. What influences our memories? Is it sermons, hymns and songs, or personal experiences? (Don't worry if you recalled very little – the following six studies will fill in the gaps in your knowledge!)*

While Pentecost is no longer a public celebration and has passed out of common memory, Christians across the churches have given more attention to the Holy Spirit over recent decades. This has also led to renewed attempts to appreciate the full reality of God – the Trinity.

Many people see great benefits in this new awareness of God's Spirit in the life of Christians and the churches. Among them are:

- Greater freedom in worship with many new worship songs
- A stronger sense of compassion and fellowship within local congregations
- A willingness to 'dare greatly' for God, including new expressions of evangelism, missional church and healing ministry
- A new impetus to (re)discover unity
- A new emphasis on social justice among many churches

*Do you think the renewed emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit has been helpful to you (as an individual), to your local Christian community and to the churches nationwide, of all denominations? In your experience have there been any downsides to this new emphasis?*