LUKE AND THE SPIRIT: A REPLY TO JAMES DUNN

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James Dunn has significantly shaped the context in which current discussion on the work of the Holy Spirit is being carried out. As questions generated by the rise of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements became especially prominent, Dunn's *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* provided answers for many. Although Dunn affirmed the charismatic character of the early church, he challenged the classical Pentecostal understanding of Spirit-baptism. Thus, while Dunn encouraged many to take seriously the charismatic dimension of the Christian life, his views also supported non-Pentecostals in their reluctance to accept and to seek a Spirit-baptism distinct from conversion. Dunn quickly became a champion of the non-Pentecostal Evangelical community.

Yet Dunn's contribution to the Pentecostal movement has also been enormous. Dunn demonstrated that Pentecostals could no longer continue to rely on the interpretative methods of the nineteenth-century holiness movement and expect to speak to the contemporary church world. Dunn not only challenged the hermeneutical foundation of traditional Pentecostal positions (a hermeneutic which treated the Bible as 'a homogeneous whole'), he also pointed the way forward by stressing the theological integrity of each biblical author. A truly biblical theology, Dunn rightly urged, could be developed only when we

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take each author and book separately and... outline his or its particular theological emphases; only when he has set a text in the context of its author's thought and intention... only then can the biblical-theologian feel free to let that text interact with other texts from other books.¹

Dunn's critique stimulated a burst of creative theological reflection by Pentecostal scholars. Following the methodology outlined by Dunn, Pentecostals have sought to interpret Luke on his own terms and, in this way, to highlight Luke's distinctive contribution to a biblical theology of the Spirit. Although many of these efforts have been critical of Dunn's treatment of Luke-Acts, his influence is apparent. Indeed, one can hardly discuss early Christian pneumatology without interacting with his views.

Because of Dunn's influence and his role as a critical protagonist, Pentecostal scholars wondered how he might respond to their recent efforts. In view of developments in Lukan studies which have emphasized the distinctive character of Luke's theological perspective and the wide-ranging criticisms of Dunn's handling of Luke-Acts (by both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals), many were hopeful that Dunn might reassess older positions. All eagerly waited for his response. The wondering and waiting is now over. In his recent article, 'Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts',² Dunn makes it clear that (in the words of Luther) he 'cannot and will not recant'. In the following essay, I will summarize Dunn's article, evaluate the major arguments he presents, and assess the implications of Dunn's position for contemporary church life.

1. A Summary of Dunn's Response

In his earlier work, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, Dunn argued that the authors of the NT uniformly present the gift of the Spirit as 'the most fundamental aspect of the event or process of becoming a Christian, the climax of conversion-initiation'.³ The pneumatological perspective of Luke, according to Dunn, is thus quite similar to that of Paul and John: the Spirit initiates believers into the new age and mediates to them the life of the new covenant. Recent Pentecostal scholarship has

². JPT 3 (1993), pp. 3-27.