PENTECOSTAL RESPONSES TO DUNN'S
BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: LUKE–ACTS

William Atkinson*
Kensington Temple, Kensington Park Road
Notting Hill Gate, London W11 3BY, UK

Introduction

Content, Scope, Methods
The many works by James Dunn are well known and widely respected, but some are regarded as 'classics'. One such volume is his first book, Baptism in the Holy Spirit.1 In this study, he engages with the particular doctrine of Pentecostalism2 that baptism in the Spirit is distinct from conversion, and is 'charismatic' in nature.3 Dunn questions this belief:

[D]oes the NT mean by baptism in the Holy Spirit what the Pentecostal understands the phrase to mean? Is baptism in the Holy Spirit to be separated from conversion-initiation,4 and is the beginning of Christian life to be thus divided up into distinct stages? Is Spirit-baptism something

* William Atkinson (MA, London Bible College) is Pastoral Team Coordinator at Kensington Temple, an international charismatic church in London, England.
2. Baptism in the Holy Spirit (abbreviated in this article as Baptism) is subtitled A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism Today.
4. Dunn uses 'conversion-initiation' consistently for the 'total event of becoming a Christian' (Baptism, p. 7), including both the inward subjective (conversion) and ritual external (initiation) aspects.
essentially different from becoming a Christian, so that even a Christian of many years' standing may never have been baptized in the Spirit?5

On this issue, Dunn reveals his position at the outset:

I hope to show that for the writers of the NT the baptism in or gift of the Spirit was part of the event (or process) of becoming a Christian... ; that it was the chief element in conversion-initiation so that only those who had received the Spirit could be called Christians.6

The rest of Dunn's book carefully examines every New Testament passage relating to conversion-initiation, in order to substantiate his thesis.

Over the years since its publication, Dunn's book has evoked a considerable response, not least from Pentecostals. This study will consist of a comparative and evaluative review of five such responses,7 found in the following works: The Charismatic Theology of St Luke by Roger Stronstad;8 Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit by Howard Ervin;9 'The Baptism in the Holy Spirit in relation to Christian Initiation' by David Petts;10 The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology by Robert Menzies;11 and Mighty in Word and Deed by James Shelton.12

The scope of the review will be governed by the following limits.

1. Only the five works listed above will gain individual attention. Other Pentecostals have responded to Dunn in print (for instance, French Arrington in The Acts of the Apostles,13 Stanley Horton in What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit14 and Harold Hunter in Spirit-

5. Dunn, Baptism, p. 3.
6. Dunn, Baptism, p. 4.
7. Since this review was first written, as an MA dissertation at London Bible College in 1992, Dunn has himself replied in this journal to his Pentecostal respondents ('Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship in Luke-Acts', JPT 3 [1993], pp. 3-27). This review will not seek to appraise Dunn's recent contribution to the debate, but rather to offer an independent evaluation of the Pentecostal response.
8. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984 (abbreviated in this article as Theology).
10. MTh dissertation, Nottingham University, 1987 (abbreviated in this article as 'Baptism').