BELIEVING IN CHRIST AND RECEIVING THE SPIRIT:
A RESPONSE TO MAX TURNER

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It is often the case that those who are closest to each other in outlook are most conscious of the remaining differences between them. The debate between Turner and myself may seem to be about minor issues, but it has enormous pastoral implications and is highly significant in the context of the current state of Pentecostal theological discussion.

The twentieth century has witnessed the rise of 'Pentecostalism', at first outside existing denominations and later within them. Doctrinally, what has come to be described as the 'third force in Christendom' and is well on the way to becoming the largest, is basically orthodox and evangelical, though inclined to be dispensational in eschatology. The heart of the 'new' teaching concerned 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' and the ensuing exercise of 'spiritual gifts'.

This was primarily a rediscovery of the second person of the Trinity rather than the third. To his past ministry (as Saviour) was added an emphasis on his present activity (as Baptiser and Healer) and his future role (as Coming King).

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Traditional Pentecostal teaching focused on three dimensions of ‘baptism in Spirit’. First, subsequence. It was seen as separated from ‘conversion’, justification and regeneration, both theologically and chronologically. It was a ‘second blessing’ for those already ‘Christian’.

Second, separation. It had nothing to do with being ‘saved’. Unlike its roots in the ‘Holiness’ movement of the nineteenth century, which linked it with sanctification of one’s self, Pentecostalism restricted its purpose to power for service to others. Some talked about two ‘receptions’ of the Spirit, one for salvation and one for service, only the latter qualifying as ‘the baptism’.

Third, sensibility. It would be immediately apparent, both to the ‘baptized’ and observers present. Most Pentecostals insisted on glossolalia as the ‘initial evidence’ of this real experience. What is happening to these three distinctives at the end of the twentieth century? Where do Turner and I stand?

We both reject subsequence, as do an increasing number of Pentecostal scholars. Consensus is emerging that baptism in Spirit belongs to Christian ‘initiation’, relating directly to repentance, faith and water-baptism in a theological ‘complex’. They belong together at the beginning of the Christian life. The basis for this shift is the synonymous interchange in Acts between ‘receiving’ and being ‘baptized in’ the Spirit and the overall emphasis in the New Testament on only one ‘reception’ of the Spirit in the life of the believer (at any rate, subsequent to Pentecost).

We both reject separation, which follows from the first, though not so many Pentecostal scholars have accepted this implication. If there is only one ‘reception’, it must be for one’s own salvation as well as service to others. Baptism in Spirit marks the beginning of his indwelling, communicating both his purity and his power to the indwelt. He is, after all, the ‘Holy’ Spirit.

We both reject sensibility, if this is strictly limited to the manifestation of glossolalia. But we differ very widely over what other evidence is admissible.

On the one hand, I insist that it should be some form of inspired and spontaneous speech, as in Acts where, in addition to fluency in unknown languages, some ‘prophesied’ (19.6) and others simply ‘praised God’ (10.46), all of which fulfilled Joel’s prediction quoted by Peter at Pentecost (2.17-18); and that this happens simultaneously with ‘receiving’.