THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WILLIAM H. DURHAM
FOR PENTECOSTAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

by Allen L. Clayton

In 1910 the tremendously popular Chicago pastor, William H. Durham was invited to address a convention of midwestern pentecostals. Ever since his Spirit baptism in 1907 at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, Durham's rise to fame in the pentecostal movement had been meteoric. Thousands had flocked to the North Avenue Mission to hear the message of Pentecost from one who was without doubt a prodigy preacher.¹

On this occasion, "where all was unity and blessing and all


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were melted together in love"\(^1\), Durham preached a sermon, entitled "the Finished Work of Calvary", that sought to "nullify" the understanding of sanctification as wholly realized in the believer by a crisis experience subsequent to and distinct from conversion. A doctrinal controversy ensued that eventually divided the nascent pentecostal movement into what Walter Hollenweger\(^2\) has labeled three-stage and two-stage pentecostalism. The former teaches three distinct experiences of grace—conversion, sanctification, and Spirit-baptism; whereas the latter conceives of holiness as a life-long process initiated at conversion and therefore teaches only two experiences of grace—conversion and Spirit baptism.

Traditionally, William H. Durham has been perceived as the man who spoke out in behalf of a number of pentecostals whose roots were in Baptist or reformed traditions, and whose doctrine of sanctification conflicted with the three-stage scheme.\(^3\) The purpose of this study is to examine the adequacy of this thesis as a historiographical device by focusing attention upon Durham's doctrine of sanctification and the subsequent developments of the controversy he engendered.

In essence the doctrine of the finished work was a denial of the Wesleyan understanding that Christ’s victory over both actual

\(^1\)Author unknown, title unknown, *The Faithful Standard* (November, 1922). Quoted in *A Sound From Heaven* by Carl Brumback.
