
Reviewed by David A. Dorman

Two books were published in 1970 which together effectively challenged the spread of Pentecostal theology on many of the world’s seminary campuses. James D. G. Dunn’s revised Cambridge dissertation, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (SCM), and F. Dale Bruner’s *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans), offered comprehensive critiques of the Pentecostal appeal to Scripture in support of a baptism in the Spirit for empowerment subsequent to regeneration. Bruner’s treatment was deliberately theological (pp. 7-8), although it leaned heavily on exegesis. Dunn’s inquiry via the discipline of NT theology was widened to include, as well as Pentecostal issues, the formal separation which exists in sacramentalism between (baptismal) regeneration and (confirmational) enduement. These two studies have been acknowledged singly or together in many subsequent writings as having attended definitively to the claim for a second, Pentecostal work of grace (e.g., C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* [Eerdmans, 1978] p. 85, esp. n. 2).

The continued dramatic growth of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement has indicated that not all comers are convinced. But not until 1983 was a full-scale response forthcoming from the Pentecostal side (Harold D. Hunter, *Spirit-Baptism: A Pentecostal Alternative*, University Press of America). Dr. Ervin’s *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, which we review in this article, is only the second such response. It is therefore with great interest that all those engaged in Pentecostal studies greet the publication of this book.

Ervin’s earlier *These Are Not Drunken As Ye Suppose* (Logos, 1968), which traced throughout the NT the evidence for an empowerment subsequent to regeneration, was quoted frequently by Dunn. Dunn’s counter-thesis set forth the claim that the NT teaches a unitary “conversion-initiation” of each believer which embraces regeneration, faith, repentence, conversion, justification, and empowerment in one “baptism in the Spirit,” and that to separate that one experience into distinct stages is not legitimate (e.g., Dunn, pp. 136-138, 228-29, *passim*). Ervin’s present book reaffirms his earlier position in response to Dunn, that empowerment is always subsequent to regeneration (pp. vii, 54, 55) and that the laying-on of hands is a normative accompaniment (pp. 49, 64-5).
It will surprise some readers to discover that Ervin also goes to bat for the sacramentalists. He observes that Dunn's linking of the two groups is fully appropriate, since the "world-views" of both sacramentalists and Pentecostals allow for a continuum between the numinous Spirit realm and the natural order—in contrast to the dichotomy which rationalism prefers (pp. v, viii, 81-83). Since, then, Ervin is basically wanting to refute most of what Dunn affirms, he takes the expedient of patterning his book after Dunn's, following it chapter by chapter, responding to arguments as Dunn presents them, "accept[ing] the gauntlet wherever Dr. Dunn has thrown it down" (p. v). A final chapter summarizes his conclusions.

His major criticism of Dunn is that Dunn has allowed his presuppositions to determine his exegesis. This is a notoriously facile accusation, but Ervin's detailed handling has helped make it stick. Especially in the Pauline material, as Ervin points out, Dunn tends to discover "conversion-initiation contexts" without regard for whatever elements are present or absent" (p. 162). Thus, for instance, Dunn states concerning 1 Cor. 1:4-9 that "it is the thought of the Spirit which lies nearest to the surface" (Dunn, p. 117) since grace, knowledge, confirmation, calling, and fellowship are all concepts closely related to "Spirit" in Paul—and yet a reading of the text itself shows that not the Spirit but in fact Christ is the deliberate focus here of Paul's conversion language. Now if Dunn overstates his case, it should be understood that his thesis comes in the nature of a proposal; his specific suggestions are the result of the weighing of probabilities, and their effect is cumulative. Ervin's annoyance with Dunn's language of probability (see esp. pp. 143-44) is an indication that he does not accept the value of this way of arguing, which is in fact sometimes the most one can do with exegesis. But he is not alone in charging that Dunn's exegesis looks predetermined (see Ervin, p. 76, at n. 12). Dunn oversteps the bounds even of proposal, as when on p. 152 he declares to be implied what can at best be inferred, or when he cites John 20:22 in support of his thesis (p. 226) after having decided it to be off-limits to either position (p. 182).

In a second broad area of criticism Ervin accuses Dunn of violating the methodology of NT theology, most notably in his interpretation of Acts: Ervin finds Dunn to be superimposing alien categories onto the Lukan material (pp. 70, 80). (It is interesting to note that Dunn pauses in his discussion of Acts 2 to give a plea precisely for maintaining the method of NT theology, pp. 39-40). Ervin's objection is to the point, although for this reader the foreign grid would seem to be Pauline rather than Johannine, as Ervin suggests. A rather blatant and indeed telling occasion is the