

BOOK REVIEW

of

Frederick Dale Bruner,

A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New Testament Witness,
The Trinity Foundation, 2001 [Eerdmans, 1970].

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

A number of books have been written about the Holy Spirit. But this one, to my knowledge, is unique in that it presents a theology of the Holy Spirit motivated by the desire to understand the Pentecostal movement and contrasts Pentecostals' teachings on the Holy Spirit with that found in the New Testament. In fact, as explained in the Preface, Bruner was preparing for missionary service when he began studying the Pentecostal movement. Part of the motivation for doing so was the phenomenal success that Pentecostals have had on missionary fields. Although Bruner confesses that he was not strictly a New Testament scholar, nonetheless it became clear that his concerns were principally doctrinal. Likely to encounter Pentecostals on the missionary field drove him to research the Pentecostal movement, and primarily in terms of their theology of the Holy Spirit. Gordon Clark has referred to this book by Bruner as "masterly," "exceedingly well researched," "superb," and a "penetrating analysis." On the back cover of the book it says that Pentecostalism "is now the second largest religious group in Christendom" . . . it "grew from a few hundred adherents in 1901 to more than 500,000,000 in 2001."

The book is divided into two major parts. The first part is a history of the Pentecostal movement, and the second part is a presentation of the theology of the Holy Spirit as found in the New Testament contrasted with that of the teachings of the Pentecostal movement. The only shortcoming of the book, in my opinion, is in the first part. The book was originally published in 1970 (several printing companies have reprinted it since), and while the history appears to be very thorough as far as it goes, many of the names may be unfamiliar, and a great deal has happened in the Pentecostal movement since 1970 which, of course, goes unrecorded in this volume. How accurately this book reflects the current state of affairs among Pentecostals I cannot say with any certainty, but to my limited experience with such things I think it still holds true. My reasons for saying so is based on my limited direct experience in younger years with Pentecostals, hearsay from others, and my occasional viewing of "Christian" television.

Part One, *The Holy Spirit in Pentecostal Experience*, contains four chapters: *The Contemporary Place and Significance of the Pentecostal Movement*, *The Background and the Beginnings of the Pentecostal Movement*, *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal Movement*, and *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal Movement*. Part Two, *The Holy Spirit in New Testament Witness*, contains three chapters: *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles: A Comparative Study*, *The Way of the Holy Spirit According to the New Testament and the Consequences for Pentecostal Doctrine: A Systematic Survey*, and *Huper: The Relevant Spiritual Problems in Corinth*.

In summary, Bruner has attempted to be the dispassionate scholar throughout this book. It is very thoroughly researched and documented. He has attempted to the best of his ability to fairly present the Pentecostal position. So much so that by the time I finished reading Part One I thought the Pentecostals had an almost compelling position. Some of the founders of the movement were concerned for the coldness of Christian experience as seen in many churches, and concern for the coldness in their own hearts for the things of God. They wanted to experience more. They wanted to much more greatly sense the presence of God in their lives and to believe all that they thought the Bible taught. Part Two, however, presents another story. As Bruner presents it, Pentecostals are not very Biblical: they pick and choose verses to stress, and do not show much concern for good exegesis.

In Part One, Bruner attempts to trace as far back as he can just who and what influenced the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement. Some of what he reports may be surprising. For example, Bruner writes that "Methodism is the most important of the modern traditions for the student of Pentecostal origins. . . . 'The Pentecostal movement,' concluded a Jesuit student of Pentecostalism in Latin America, 'is Methodism brought to its ultimate consequences.'" In a footnote, Bruner expands upon this and writes "In important parts of Latin America this pedigree is true not only theologically but also historically. In Chile, for example, it was the Methodist pastor W.C. Hoover who began the Pentecostal movement . . . The European father of Pentecostalism was the Norwegian Methodist pastor T.B. Barratt." Not only the text proper, but also documents in the appendix provide evidence for this. Bruner links the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement to revivalism in general, and specifically to Charles Finney, and to a lesser extent to D.L. Moody.

In Part Two, Bruner investigates what the New Testament teaches concerning the Holy Spirit, and compares this teaching with that found in the Pentecostal movement. He concentrates on what he thinks are key passages such as those in John, Acts, Romans, and Galatians. However, in the last chapter he expounds upon I Corinthians. Bruner focuses on the Pentecostal requirements for the full experience of God in the lives of Christians, a continuation of the holiness movement, as being condemned by Paul, and Bruner does not treat such things lightly. He concludes that "something graver must be said about the Pentecostal evidence [speaking in tongues, etc.]. The Pentecostal evidence is not simply a harmless idiosyncrasy which can be smiled upon in its naiveté and passed by. For since this evidence is *required* of Christians *in addition to faith* before they can have God in his fulness, it threatens to remove Pentecostalism outside the sphere of Christian faith. The Pentecostal evidence bears the marks of the demand in the early church for circumcision (cf. Gal. *passim*; Acts 15). And Paul did not look upon this or any addition to faith as harmless."