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Baptism in the Holy Spirit

COLIN BUCHANAN

THE title 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' does less than justice to the contents of this book,* though it does indicate one large area of polemical concern in it. Dr. Dunn surveys the whole character of initiation in the New Testament, and comes up with a whole series of very firm conclusions, many of them at odds with contemporary exegetical fashions. He challenges hermeneutical assumptions head-on, and surprises and provokes the reader. But he wrote under the tutelage of Professor C. F. D. Moule, when he prepared this material as a doctoral thesis, and this alone, without the plethora of erudite quotations and footnotes, would guarantee the author's scholarly procedures. He has made actual contact with those from whom he differs, and this emerges throughout. He is opposing solid positions which he has thoroughly tested and understood. It is not mere men of straw whom he demolishes. Confidence is inspired, even whilst presuppositions are shaken.

The procedure of the book is straightforward. Each New Testament writer is laid under contribution in turn, whilst the picture which has been adumbrated from the start is made progressively more solid and unshakable with each page that passes. The picture itself is best represented by a diagram:

	<i>One-Stage</i>	<i>Two-Stage</i>
<i>Evangelical</i>	Dunn	'Pentecostalists'
<i>Catholic</i>	'Sacramentalists'	'Confirmationists'

Dunn's own position is put forward as the only tenable one, and at each stage the various New Testament writers yield him blunt instruments with which to belabour his two nearest neighbours—the 'Pentecostalists' and the 'Sacramentalists'. Occasionally the inference has further to be spelled out that if both these are in trouble, then the last category—the 'Confirmationists'—are beyond all succour. Texts

**Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. J. D. G. Dunn. SCM Press. £2.50.

which afford double-edged weapons for smiting 'Catholics' and 'Two-Stagers' obviously deal death with both edges in turn to the 'Confirmationists'. This does not therefore get pointed out *ad nauseam*. We can see it for ourselves. It is the nearer opponents which preoccupy the author, and it is the position of one of them—the 'Pentecostalists'—which has given the title to the book.

The 'Pentecostalist' Position

THE treatment of Pentecostalists is both magisterial and fascinatingly detailed. The prophecy of the Baptist that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit was fulfilled at Pentecost upon those who were already in a sense 'disciples', but has since then been fulfilled at conversion, leaving no second stage in inward initiation to be completed later. The experience of Jesus at his baptism is 'an initiatory experience: it initiated the End-time and initiated Jesus into it' (p. 31). 'Jesus' birth belongs entirely to the Old Covenant, the epoch of Israel . . . Jesus' entry into the new age and covenant is the type of every initiation into the new age and covenant' (pp. 31-2). Partly, therefore, Jesus' baptism is *sui generis*. Partly, indeed, it is archetypal—but it is archetypal of one-stage initiation for Christians. When we come on to Pentecost it was 'only then that they [i.e. the disciples] became Christians in the New Testament sense of that word' (p. 52). Later we shall ask what that 'New Testament sense' is. Now we note that the Pentecostalist 'appeal to the experience of the 120 is a broken reed . . .' (p. 52). The Samaritan episode (Acts 8) presents the same picture. Philip's baptism was *not* a 'conversion-initiation' for the Samaritans (for the Scriptures do not favour a 'Sacramentalist' view of baptism). Therefore the experience of the coming of the Spirit *was* the conversion. There was no second stage. Paul's conversion, the events at Ephesus (Acts 19), and the other conversions recorded in Acts all add up to the same consistent story. The Ephesus business is particularly skilfully handled (pp. 83-9). At this point the book turns on a hinge:

As we have seen, Pentecostalism is built foursquare on Acts. So far as its doctrine of Spirit-baptism is concerned Paul need not have written anything. Indeed Paul seems to be more of an embarrassment than an asset . . . this means that while our primary task will be to examine the role of the Spirit . . . most of the actual debate will be not with Pentecostalists but with sacramentalists, who, generally speaking, have found in Paul a richer, more consistent and more satisfying picture than the one presented by Luke (p. 103).

This change of direction does not mean that Pentecostalists escape all further treatment. The shaky building has been demolished, now the site is cleared. Thus 1 Cor. 12: 12-13 receives four pages of treatment (pp. 127-31). There is, of course, no attempt to reclaim

'Sacramentalist' bricks from the demolition job—all the debris is swept aside together, because the ground is consistently evangelical one-stage, and is unsuitable for catholic building. The text here is initiatory, but it is not about water-baptism. 'The baptism in the Spirit is what made the Corinthians members of the Body of Christ, that is, Christians' (p. 129). Again, no second stage is in view. In Eph. 1: 13 the Pentecostalist interpretation depends upon a misuse of the Greek aorist participle (cf. Acts 19: 2). Dunn's conclusion about Paul and the Pentecostalists is:

Our study has shown: that Paul knows of only one reception of the Spirit, not two; that the concepts of anointing, sealing, outpouring, promise, gift, etc., all refer to that one coming of the Spirit; that this coming of the Spirit is the very heart and essence of conversion-initiation; and that even their own title of 'baptism in the Spirit' is used by Paul to describe nothing other than God's means of incorporating the convert into Christ (pp. 170-1).

The Gospel of John and the Catholic Epistles provide the data for the next section of the book. In relation to the Fourth Gospel Dunn is graciously prepared to concede 'the Pentecostalist thesis at this point [i.e. in John 20: 22] cannot entirely be rejected' (p. 178). But this does not justify the Pentecostalists 'in taking the apostles' experience as *the* or even a *possible* pattern for experience today' (p. 181). And, as the reader can by now guess, the Catholic Epistles are equally unhelpful to the Pentecostalist case.

At practically every point I find myself echoing Dunn's conclusions about Pentecostalism, though I have strong reservations (as I go on to show below) about the presupposition which has somehow crept into his approach. The unfortunate Pentecostalists are left without respectable refuge. A grinding inexorable logic has driven them from every stronghold they might have ever claimed to possess. Whether they can return by a renewed biblical onslaught on Dunn's hermeneutic remains to be seen. The prejudiced non-Pentecostalist observer may take leave to doubt whether they can. And if they cannot, then Dunn's book will on this point, his main point, have been epoch-making.

For the book highlights the great lack in the public front of Pentecostalism today—a systematic theology of the Holy Spirit drawn from Scripture. The apologists for the latter-day charismatics appear unsystematic, untheological, and in the last resort unbiblical. If they honestly believe their doctrine is patent in Scripture, then they must respond to Dunn's challenge. If they in fact base their doctrine ultimately on experience (flavoured with some scriptural-sounding theological terminology), then Dunn's book is calculated to expose these premises for the subjective shifting sands which they are. The great need of Pentecostalists today is to set up a case for their distinctive teaching confidently argued from the New Testament. Their tendency

is always to break off into personal experience as the foundation of their position. Dr. Dunn has done them a notable service not only by his thrusting theological onslaught, but also because he thrusts in the context of knowing them as persons, and caring for them too. His wounds are those of a friend. One dares to hope that Pentecostals will receive them gladly, and rejoice that they are so cleanly and accurately struck.

The 'Sacramentalist' Position

DUNN'S position over against catholics on the question of baptismal efficacy is starkly anti-sacramentalist. The starting-point of his attack is always that 'water-baptism' is one thing and conversion another. If the two happen together it is an illogical coincidence. One can well understand the notion that initiation in its inward aspect is 'one-stage' and in its outward aspect is 'one-stage' also. One can well understand that the inward and the outward are not to be identified *tout simple*. One can well admit that in the last analysis the inward is a more fundamental category than the outward. But need one go as far as the following?

Lampe argues that 'Pauline thought affords no ground for the modern theories which seem to effect a separation in the one action and to distinguish a "Spirit-baptism" and a "water-baptism", not as the inward and outward parts of one sacrament, but as independent entities' (*Seal* 57). But what is the 'one action'? The 'modern theories' are as old as John the Baptist! (p. 130).

Here we see Dunn at his most polemical, and perhaps tending to stray into overstatement. Let it be granted that John the Baptist administered a water-baptism which was separate in time from Spirit-baptism, yet his baptism was, according to Dunn, 'essentially preparatory not initiatory' (p. 17). Dunn's ironical note proves too much for his own thesis to bear, for it equates the pre-Pentecost baptism of John with the post-Pentecost Christian water-baptism with no more questions asked. But even if he claimed more modestly that the 'modern theories' were only as old as Paul the apostle (which would meet Lampe's point exactly) it is not self-evidently true.

The great part of this sort of anti-sacramentalist argument comes back in the book to the question 'What did the New Testament writers understand by the term "baptism" and its cognates?' It is a commonplace that the word may have a metaphorical meaning—as in Mark 10: 38 and Luke 12: 50. But Dunn's thesis is as follows:

- (i) The word and its cognates may refer to the outward rite ('water-baptism') or to inward conversion, but never to both at once.
- (ii) Therefore in any case where the effects of inward conversion

are attributed to 'being baptised', then the outward rite is distinctly not in view.

- (iii) In Paul the verb (*baptizesthai eis*) never means the outward rite (though the active is used of the rite in, e.g., 1 Cor. 1: 13), and the noun (*baptisma*) always means the outward rite (though it is allowed that there may be 'overtones' going beyond the outward rite).

Thus the lines of exegesis are drawn tightly. If sacramentalists see the outward rite as conveying inward effects, then they are accused of using the word 'baptism' in a 'concertina' way (p. 5). The 'concertina' can expand to include any desired meaning—but to Dunn this is trickery. I can lead you up the garden path literally, or I can lead you up the garden path metaphorically. But it is illicit 'concertina' use to lead you up it literally and metaphorically simultaneously. Dunn insists that rigorous linguistic usage excludes this possibility, and that this is the New Testament procedure. He might add that it squares with experience that the baptised outwardly are frequently without the Spirit of God. Here is a classic evangelical position, but with the doctrinal disjunction between the outward and the inward spelled out with greater scholarship, pungency, clarity and consistency than are normally encountered.

Thus we may summarise the putting to flight of the Sacramentalists: conversion is not baptism, and is not caused by baptism, and is not to be confused with baptism. Sometimes baptismal language is used of conversion, but then it does not imply baptism itself. Baptism conveys and confers nothing. With the right coincidence of timing, it may *symbolise* conversion. In the right psychological context it may help to *provoke* conversion (p. 99). But, although the New Testament has a clear, rich, and profound doctrine of conversion, including regeneration, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it has relatively few references to water-baptism, and these few are not only subsidiary to the treatment of conversion—they are also, in the strictest sense, actually irrelevant to it. The rite smiles blushing from the biblical text at intervals, but it is put quickly and firmly in its place, and not allowed to distract the reader. Little wonder that the Sacramentalist bites the dust so thoroughly.

Dunn's Own Position

AND yet, is the matter so solved? One must conclude with some hard, even rhetorical, questions addressed to Dr. Dunn.

Firstly, despite his strictures on the presuppositions of some exegetes, has he perhaps reached his own conclusions before examining the linguistic and other evidence? Could it be that he simply starts from a classic Protestant position (no doubt confirmed by experience), and

Scripture then *has* to confirm these findings? The confident assertions and denials (e.g. 'that curious hybrid unknown to the New Testament, Christian water-and-Spirit baptism' (p. 100)) do at times suggest that this has been his procedure. After all, suppose 1 Cor. 12: 13 is really telling us about 'Christian water-and-Spirit baptism'? What then?

Secondly, we dare to wonder whether he can hold as rigidly to his own exegetical guidelines as he intends. On Rom. 6 (where he admits to 'some hesitation') (p. 145) and on Col. 2 (where baptism is 'to some extent the means of burial with Christ') (p. 157) he looks as though his defences have dropped slightly. Once admit that the *baptisma* is literal water-baptism, and the problem of it having effects arises. The defences drop—and one or two exegetical fifth columnists get into his camp.

Thirdly, has he not a Protestant scholasticism of his own? We illustrate this in relation to unbiblical terminology. He objects to such terminology as 'receiving Christ' (p. 95) as being unbiblical. But with charming and apparently unconscious inconsistency he writes on the very same page (and frequently elsewhere) of what does or does not make a man a 'Christian'. Now this is a rare word in the New Testament. It is used only thrice in all, and although it distinguishes the people of God from others in broad terms, it has no technically exact sense which can be universalised. Yet Dunn has a series of statements about what does (Spirit-baptism) or does not (water-baptism) make a man a Christian. 'That man is a Christian who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit by committing himself to the risen Jesus as Lord, and who lives accordingly' (p. 229). But what New Testament justification, we may ask, is there for this? Were the Corinthian 'saints' all 'Christians' in this sense? Did they all 'live accordingly'? No, but they *were* 'saints'. Were they non-Christians saints those who did not 'live accordingly'? Or is there another way of looking at the New Testament?

We put up, simply for discussion, an alternative, and we suggest at least equally self-consistent, pattern. Suppose the 'saints' were those who had been through water-baptism, and were thus outwardly of the company of believers, and members of the body. Suppose they were, for this reason, entitled to be *treated as regenerate* (though open at the same time to warnings that 'adulterers and the like have no share in the kingdom of God'). In other words, is it possible that the 'saints' were simply the baptised? Dr. Dunn distinguishes the 'Christians' from the non-Christians, but where does this leave those who were baptised, were treated as regenerate, but whose hearts were only known to God?

We could respond to Dunn's picture by suggesting that although the New Testament can say 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his', it is not the foremost point of division. The main emphasis is on the community of 'saints', who are presumed to have the Spirit (although it is acknowledged that any particular individual

logically might not). This community is set over against the world and is separated from it by water-baptism. The community presents a gospel which includes the summons to be converted in and by baptism—to leave the world's side and join the Lord's *by* baptism. No doubt this picture is different from Dr. Dunn's—but it might rely upon the same passages of Scripture. Thus when he writes 'A recall to the beginnings of the Christian life in the New Testament is almost always a recall not to baptism, but to the gift of the Spirit' (p. 228), we have to remember that he has already made several of the passages which cite baptism mean this. His conclusion dictated his exegesis, and his exegesis led to his conclusion. And the conclusion creates a class of 'Christians' which smack of the Reformers' Church Invisible. Is this 'biblical terminology'?

Fourthly, to take up a further problem arising from the second question above, can Dunn both keep baptism coincident in point of time with conversion whilst being strictly irrelevant to it? The Anabaptist and what Dunn calls the 'traditional anti-sacramentalist view' (footnote p. 145—is Dunn disavowing anti-sacramentalism or only its traditional expression?) needs to make baptism subsequent to conversion as a sign of what has previously happened. That is understandable. But Dunn's desire for coincidence leads subtly into causality. 'Christian water-baptism . . . as Luke portrays it . . . resulted in the reception of the Spirit' (p. 101). Could there be an uncaused result? Or is it again that the rigour of Dunn the theologian is too tight for Dunn the exegete? One wonders idly whether Matt. 28: 19 involves causality, but this text has escaped all treatment except a bare allusion on page 207.

Fifthly, the nature of a sacrament is at issue in Dunn's epigrammatic summary of New Testament teaching on page 228:

Faith demands baptism as its expression;

Baptism demands faith for its validity.

The gift of the Spirit presupposes faith as its condition;

Faith is shown to be genuine only by the gift of the Spirit.

Now no doubt the classic Calvinist would find this to lean towards the Anabaptist position. But the problem for the present purposes lies not in whether faith can logically precede the gift of the Spirit. It lies rather in 'Baptism demands faith for its validity'. Who can determine whether faith was present at an adult baptism (to leave aside the infant problems)? If an adult baptised three years ago had in fact no faith, who is to assert it? And if faith was lacking, was the rite actually 'invalid'? 'Invalid' should mean that the rite cannot be counted as a baptism at all, and the person is unbaptised and should, if believing, now be baptised. This is to set up a perilously subjective criterion for validity. Or is Dr. Dunn so innocent of historical theology that he is using 'validity' in some private sense of his own? Surely not—for

the only alternative sense which comes to mind is 'inefficacious', and we know he reckons this is the normal attribute of baptism.

Sixthly, and most fundamental of all, is the either-or of Dunn's approach to the literal-metaphorical tension the only procedure? Or might there still be a respectable both-and? For instance, is it permissible to suggest Dunn's exposition of Spirit-baptism does not hold water?

To sum up these questions—does Dr. Dunn in fact occupy squarely his own quarter of the diagram at the beginning of this essay? Or is he residing in only a corner of the quarter? Could there be a one-stage evangelicalism which, without going for that invariable efficacy in baptism which he dubs 'sacramentalism', cannot nevertheless find its way into what one must call his anti-sacramentalism? Is there a healthy use and context for baptism which is both honouring to God, and true to the language of the New Testament, and actually efficacious? Not all evangelicals have such a position settled in their minds, but a growing proportion of Anglican evangelicals today are seeking it. This quest will be made harder by Dunn's book, but that is how it should be. The polemics he offers invite a head-on encounter. As with the Pentecostals, such an encounter can do nothing but good. Let none come to firm conclusions, even in Dunn's own quarter of the diagram, without subjecting his views to all the blows Dunn can direct against them.