
Contemporary pneumatology

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During the twentieth century, protestant theology in the West has been predominantly “liberal” with variations ranging from a Trinitarian framework to one in which Jesus Christ was regarded exclusively as a man, often an unknown historical figure. Consequently for many, the Holy Spirit was conceived in impersonal terms such as the influence of Jesus of Nazareth on people or merely God in relation to the world. Karl Barth exercised a dominant influence on British protestant theology and because of renewed interest at present in his Trinitarian theology, his significance at least needs to be noted here.¹ Breaking with the older liberalism and challenging its man-centred approach, Barth reaffirmed the “Infinite qualitative distinction” between God and man. He developed his famous three-fold understanding of the Word of God in which the Scripture only “becomes” the Word of God in moments of encounter with Christ. Within a strongly Christocentric and Trinitarian framework, however, Barth acknowledged the Holy Spirit as being divine, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Son and one of the “three indissolubly different modes of being”. While in places Barth’s language appears superficially to be modalist yet he uncompromisingly underlines the deity and distinct “personality” of the Holy Spirit.

In Britain during the 1970s, there began a detailed study of pneumatology by academics. James Dunn published his *Baptism In The Holy Spirit* in 1970 with the subtitle: “A Re-examination of the New Testament teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism today”. Essentially a New Testament study, Dunn concluded that the baptism in, or gift of the Spirit, was initiatory, alongside other constituent elements such as Gospel preaching, faith in Jesus as Lord and water baptism in the name of Jesus. Rather distinctively, Dunn regarded the reception of the Spirit as the “chief element”, “often dramatic” and “climactic”, the “high point” in his preferred description of initiation as “conversion-initiation”. In 1975 Dunn published his *Jesus & the Spirit* which concentrates on a study of the religious and charismatic experience of Jesus and the first Christians as recorded in the New Testament. Both books are thought-provoking, yet, like others, I find myself in profound disagreement with Dunn over a number of key points and interpretation of Scripture. One clear tendency is that of identifying Christ and the Spirit thus moving in a binitarian direction². More recent developments in his pneumatology demand attention and evaluation elsewhere.

Dunn’s research supervisor, Professor CFD Moule, published a useful but small work in 1978 entitled *The Holy Spirit*. Moule’s work contains some stimulating material but regarding the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit he is somewhat vague. “Plurality in unity”, he claims, “was the supreme revelation”³ but he regarded it as a matter of secondary importance whether this points to binitarity or to Trinity.

It was in 1977 that Geoffrey Lampe published his famous *God as Spirit* in which he endeavoured to replace traditional incarnational doctrine with a Spirit Christology⁴. John Macquarrie regarded this work as “a substantial...contribution to current theology...This

is liberal theology at its most questioning and adventurous”.⁵ Lampe insists that “Spirit” refers to the entire activity of God in His relation to man but definitely not to a divine hypostasis distinct from God the Father and God the Son. “Spirit” for Lampe refers to God’s general presence within creation; to speak of the “Holy Spirit”, according to Lampe, is to talk of the “transcendental God becoming immanent in human personality”.⁶ And the implications of this position are radical and far-reaching, leading Lampe into a Unitarian theology. A similar radical position was adopted by Maurice Wiles.⁷

Prior to, and alongside these developments in academic pneumatology, there was the emergence and development of the Charismatic Movement which initially, at least in the sixties, adopted an uncritical Pentecostal approach towards Spirit-baptism and the charismata. In the sixties, the Charismatic Movement was criticised legitimately for its lack of theological reflection. *Gospel and Spirit*⁸ in 1977 observed that “The main concern of the charismatic renewal, at least until recently, has been experiential rather than theological”. Earlier in 1971 Michael Harper acknowledged that the movement “has no great theologians. Its teaching is varied and unsystematic”.⁹ To meet this need, Thomas A Smail began to work for the Fountain Trust in 1975. He edited their *Theological Renewal* (1975-1983); an able and well-read theologian, he also authored three major books but his third book, *The Giving Gift* (1988), was his substantial contribution to pneumatology. Smail himself refers to “changes of stance and emphasis” in this book particularly relating to the central message of “the distinct Personhood of the Holy Spirit”,¹⁰ rather than to aspects of his work or gifts. From 1968-1988, Smail observes that nearly all the books published about the Spirit’s work “hardly so much as glance at the question of His Person”. Even Packer’s *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, he adds, “had almost nothing to say on the subject”.¹¹ Undoubtedly Smail’s book represents the most important theological and academic work by a charismatic in England on the subject. He made a daring attempt to tackle some complex questions and even attempted to reconcile the different emphases of East and West concerning the procession of the Spirit.¹²

Michael Green’s *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*¹³ (1975) also made a useful contribution as a competent, theological treatment of the subject sympathetic towards charismatic renewal. John Gunstone was one of the first Anglo-Catholics to claim the experience of being baptised in the Spirit and he published his *Baptised in the Spirit*, then, in 1982, his *Pentecostal Anglicans*.

Between 1965-1990 only a few books of any substance have been written in Britain by British evangelicals on the subject of pneumatology and their purpose was largely pastoral. **Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones** establishes the point that “in almost the entire range of the details of the great doctrine of the Spirit and His work, there is agreement”¹⁴ amongst evangelicals. He acknowledged, however, that with regard to the subject of the baptism with the Holy Spirit “there is a divergence and disagreement”. Lloyd-Jones’ contribution is certainly controversial but it is, in my view, the most extensive and detailed treatment of pneumatology in the above period. Publications by Donald MacLeod¹⁵ and John Stott¹⁶ were critical of Lloyd-Jones, insisting that Spirit-baptism is exclusively initiatory. The former especially is polemical in tone but both books leave many questions, raised by Lloyd-Jones, unanswered. Stott has since published a valuable commentary on *Acts*¹⁷ in which his position is more fully developed. The late Douglas MacMillan wrote a small but helpful book entitled *Jesus: Power Without Measure*¹⁸ while Professor EH Andrews

contributed in 1982 *The Promise of the Spirit*¹⁹. Like Lloyd-Jones, Andrews indicates areas of agreement on the part of evangelicals concerning pneumatology such as the Holy Trinity of Divine Persons, the personality of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit in Creation, “providential upholding of the universe”, applying the atonement, a continuing work in believers, empowering the preaching of the Word and distributing gifts to each church member.²⁰ Andrews discusses “four viewpoints concerning the more controversial aspects of the Spirit’s work. These viewpoints are the Old Pentecostal, New-Pentecostal or Charismatic, “Reformed Sealers” which include Lloyd-Jones, and the Traditional Reformed viewpoint represented by Warfield and others, including Andrews himself. Despite its defects, this book represents a serious attempt to address issues in pneumatology which divide and confuse evangelicals. James Packer’s *Keep in Step with the Spirit*²¹ was a popular and interesting overview in 1984 of the relevant Biblical data on pneumatology. In the Old Testament, according to Packer, the Spirit is “God active as Creator, Controller, Revealer, Quickener and Enabler...”²² Packer acknowledges that the Spirit’s “distinct Personhood is not expressed by the Old Testament writers”²³ although clearly taught in the New Testament.²⁴ While Packer holds a similar view to Lloyd-Jones concerning revival yet his view of Spirit-baptism is at variance with that of Lloyd-Jones as he understands it to be initiatory. Overall I find Packer’s treatment of pneumatology in this book disappointing in crucial sections; more detailed analysis and exegesis as well as greater consistency are required.

Hopefully, this brief overview of the more significant books on aspects of pneumatology by charismatics and evangelicals in Britain enables us to recognise the dearth of quality writing on the subject within our constituency between 1960-1985. Even for Pentecostals, it is only within the past eight to ten years that there has been a significant contribution by their own scholars and I will refer to this later.

Against this background I was delighted to read Sinclair Ferguson’s *The Holy Spirit* published in 1996 by IVP.²⁵ As part of the excellent *Contours of Christian Theology* series, the book aims to complement traditional textbooks and also “to rework the orthodox evangelical position in a fresh and compelling way”.²⁶

In his preface, the author rightly insists that to many contemporary Christians the Holy Spirit is no longer ‘forgotten’ but rather ‘an anonymous, faceless aspect of the divine being’,²⁷ even “*unknown*”.

Chapter One (pages 15-33) serves as a general introduction and deals first with the Biblical significance of the terms “holy” and “Spirit” (*ruach* in Hebrew). The latter term in the Old Testament has the dominant idea of power²⁸ but also “God extending Himself in active engagement with His creation in a personal way”.²⁹ In considering *Creator Spiritus*, the author understands Genesis 1:2 as a clear reference to the activity of the divine Spirit³⁰ yet “much remains opaque”³¹ here concerning the distinct divine hypostasis of the Holy Spirit. The “Governing presence” relates to the Spirit’s power-presence amongst His people distributing gifts and equipping individuals with exceptional strength and wisdom. In this context, Ferguson follows liberal scholars like Lampe and Wiles in describing *ruach* as “a bridge term”.³² The Spirit’s moral and redemptive work is then underlined before outlining the crucial work of inspiration with regard to Scripture. Pages 28-33 are vital in their discussion of the hypostatic Spirit and demand careful reading in the light of what scholars like Lampe, Moule and Dunn have suggested in their different

approaches to the subject.

Chapter Two, "The Spirit of Christ", is exciting and important. I am pleased he emphasises the legal nature of the language in John 13-16 which "continues a motif which runs through John's Gospel: Jesus is on trial".³³ Several "witnesses" give their testimony concerning Christ in chapters 1-12; the Apostles, too, are sent out as His witnesses but in 15:26 we learn that "the chief witness for Christ will be the Holy Spirit..."³⁴ The precise relationship between Christ and the Spirit continues to be explored by theologians but Ferguson rightly points to "an economic identity",³⁵ not "ontological fusion".³⁶

Chapter Three explains the significance and distinctiveness of Pentecost in terms of the Lukan and Johannine interpretations. Luke portrays Pentecost as "an event of rich redemptive-historical significance" which "marks the end of the limitations built into the divinely-ordained impermanence of the Mosaic economy and the beginning of the new era".³⁷ Ferguson interprets John 20:21-23 as "quite distinct from, although theologically related to" Pentecost in which the Apostles were equipped with the Spirit to "serve in His absence as His ministerial representatives".³⁸ A useful discussion of the procession of the Spirit is also included in this chapter from pages 72-78.

But what about Pentecost today? Passages like Samaria (Acts 8:9f), Cornelius (10:44-48) and Ephesus (19:1-7) mark "decisive points of advance" in the spread of the Gospel³⁹ and do not teach a "two-stage experience" as being normative for the future⁴⁰ but the "power" aspect of Pentecost is "repeatable".⁴¹ He adds in relation to revival: "Pentecost is the epicentre; but the earthquake gives forth further after shocks".⁴² Chapters five, six and seven touch respectively and helpfully on the *ordo salutis*, the "central role" of the Spirit in revealing Christ and uniting us to Christ, regeneration, conversion and holiness.

The communion of the Spirit with its "inherently eschatological structure"⁴³ is the theme of chapter eight; in such communion the blessings which the Spirit brings "provide grace for those who are in need"⁴⁴ so that "the Spirit is another Paraclete, like Christ". It is the corporate aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry which is emphasised in Chapter Nine; 1 Corinthians 12:13 is understood as referring to the "initial reception of the Spirit"⁴⁵ and our "incorporation into Christ's body". Two thoughtful sections reflect on water-baptism and the Lord's Supper without being polemical; a necessary emphasis is provided by Ferguson that the observance of the Lord's Supper is neither *ex opere operato* nor memorialist. "A genuine communion with Christ in the Supper"⁴⁶ by the Spirit can be enjoyed by believers. A more controversial chapter, "Gifts for ministry", provides an argued and reasonable presentation of a cessationist position, interacting in a stimulating way with continuationist-restorationist arguments, particularly Grudem's view that there are two levels of prophecy. The concluding section in this chapter on "The Spirit and Preaching"⁴⁷ is disappointingly brief and hopelessly inadequate. "The cosmic Spirit" is the title of the concluding chapter and handles the relationship between the created order of things and the redeemed order. Rejecting all forms of "unitarian immanence theology"⁴⁸ as well as religious pluralism and universalism, the author insists that "The New Testament places the Spirit and the world in an antithetical, not a conciliatory, relationship".⁴⁹ In this respect he identifies and illustrates an important and relevant hermeneutical principle.⁵⁰ Ferguson gives us a helpful and necessary reminder that the Spirit's indwelling in believers is "a limiting concept" with "limited implications for the present", but the Scriptures point us to "a future period when the redemptive activity of

the Spirit will be unlimited”⁵¹ in effecting the renewal of creation and the resurrection of the body.

I commend this book to you for careful reflection and stimulation. In addition to his fresh, contemporary and interactive approach to the subject, Ferguson provides us with ample scope for further reading, to all eleven chapters on pages 272-277. Do not neglect this book, even though you may disagree with the author in several places.

Another valuable and useful book recently published is *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, edited by Wayne Grudem and published by IVP in 1996 at £8.99 (368 pages). Contributors include Richard Gaffin (cessationist), Robert Saucy (open but cautious), Samuel Storms (Third Wave), and Douglas Oss (Pentecostal/Charismatic). The format of the book promotes clarity, fair representation of differing views, identification of the real issues and differences as well as mutual respect. Each contributor wrote a fifty-page “position paper” covering the following topics: baptism in the Holy Spirit, post-conversion experiences, continuation or cessation of gifts, specific gifts such as prophecy, healing and tongues, practical implications for church life and the dangers of one’s own position and that of others. An eight-page response was made by the contributors to each position paper. What is interesting is that the interaction did not stop at this point. The four authors together with the editor met for a “two-day, closed-door conference” in order to discuss together in detail what they had all written. Detailed evaluations of this conference are included in each author’s “concluding statement” written after the conference.

Another interesting publication is *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* by Max Turner and published by Paternoster in 1996 at £17.99. A large number of the chapters rely on or revise or develop earlier published articles by the author. The contents are divided into two main sections; the first has the overall theme of the development of New Testament pneumatology, whereas the second considers spiritual gifts then and now. In the first section, there is some helpful material. Chapter One, for example, is useful as it explores the background to New Testament pneumatology, “The Spirit in the Old Testament and in ‘Intertestamental’ Judaism”. The next chapter examines “Jesus and the Spirit in the Synoptic Tradition”. Turner concludes that the main emphasis here is the “empowering for mission”⁵² of Jesus in His Jordan experience. Undoubtedly it is Chapter Three with the title of “The Gift of the Spirit in Acts” which will attract the attention of new readers. In a concise and valuable way the author first indicates areas of consensus on Lukan pneumatology before discussing areas of continuing disagreement, namely: (a) “Was the Spirit in Acts Joel’s ‘Spirit of prophecy’ alone...and what range of charismata and effects are attributable to this gift? (b) How did Luke relate the Spirit to conversion-initiation? (c) Was the Spirit for Luke merely a *donum superadditum* of charismatic empowering, or did the Spirit also have soteriological functions?”⁵³ Many other interesting chapters follow in this first section touching on Johannine and Pauline pneumatology then the establishing of a Biblical and systematic Theology of “the Gift of the Spirit” to believers. In the second and final section discussion is focused mainly on prophecy, tongues and healings in the New Testament.

There is no longer a dearth of new literature relating to pneumatology and some of us have a lot of reading and reflection to do!

References

- ¹ Tim Bradshaw, for example, has argued that pneumatology in Barth's theology has not been sufficiently appreciated: see *Theology & Ontology*, Rutherford House Books, 1988, pp. 162-178, 302-324. Also *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 39, pp. 145-164, "Karl Barth on the Trinity". However, during the past seven to eight years, the situation has changed somewhat with a growing appreciation of Barth's pneumatology.
- ² See his "1 Corinthians 15:45, last Adam, life-giving Spirit" in *Christ and The Spirit in the New Testament*, ed B Lindars & SS Smalley, Cambridge, 1973, p. 141.
- ³ p. 26
- ⁴ See, e.g., John Bowden's *Who's Who in Theology*, SCM, 1990, p. 741
- ⁵ *The Expository Times*, volume 89, April 1978, p. 216
- ⁶ *God as Spirit*, p. 61
- ⁷ See his *Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, 1974, and his article "The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology" in *Explorations in Theology* 4. SCM, 1979
- ⁸ A Joint Statement by representatives of the Church of England Evangelical Council and leaders of the Fountain Trust who met in dialogue on four occasions over a period of eighteen months.
- ⁹ *None Can Guess*, p. 142
- ¹⁰ p. 10
- ¹¹ p. 12
- ¹² For the development of Smail's theology and his assessment of the Charismatic Movement, see his two essays in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, T Smail, A Walker, N Wright, SPCK, 1993
- ¹³ Hodder
- ¹⁴ *Joy Unspeakable*, Kingsway, 1984, p. 267
- ¹⁵ *The Spirit of Promise*, Christian Focus Publications. 1986
- ¹⁶ *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, IVP, 1964, revised edition, 1975
- ¹⁷ *The Message of Acts*, IVP, 1990
- ¹⁸ Bryntirion Press 1990
- ¹⁹ Evangelical Press
- ²⁰ Idem, pp. 13-18
- ²¹ IVP, 1984
- ²² Idem, p. 58
- ²³ p. 59
- ²⁴ pp. 61-63
- ²⁵ Priced at £14.99, this paperback has 288 pp.
- ²⁶ p. 9
- ²⁷ p. 12
- ²⁸ p. 17
- ²⁹ p. 18
- ³⁰ p. 20
- ³¹ p. 21
- ³² idem
- ³³ p. 35
- ³⁴ p. 36
- ³⁵ p. 37
- ³⁶ p. 54
- ³⁷ p. 64
- ³⁸ p. 65
- ³⁹ p. 83
- ⁴⁰ p. 84
- ⁴¹ p. 89
- ⁴² p. 91
- ⁴³ p. 176
- ⁴⁴ p. 189
- ⁴⁵ p. 194
- ⁴⁶ p. 206
- ⁴⁷ pp. 237-239
- ⁴⁸ p. 242
- ⁴⁹ p. 244
- ⁵⁰ p. 246
- ⁵¹ p. 248
- ⁵² p. 34
- ⁵³ pp. 41-42

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