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“Pilgrimage Into Pentecost: The Pneumatological Legacy of Howard M. Ervin”¹

Ecumenical Studies Group

**Daniel D. Isgrigg
Christian Chapel (Tulsa, OK)**

Presented at the 37th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies

Introduction

Howard M. Ervin, a Baptist and Pentecostal scholar, paved the way for other scholars to defend the Pentecostal faith in the academic world. During the last half of the twentieth century, charismatics, evangelicals and Pentecostals scholars have debated the nature and function of Spirit baptism. Early in the debate, Howard Ervin offered a view of Spirit baptism that centered on Luke’s unique pneumatology in Luke-Acts and meaning of the term “filled with the Spirit.” Ervin’s work, *These Are Not Drunken as Ye Suppose* (1968), was one of the first books to enter the scholarly debate from the Pentecostal position. Some of the leading Evangelical scholars, such as Anthony Hoekema and James D. G. Dunn, would offer a critique of Ervin and the growing Pentecostal position in the early 70’s. In response, Ervin offered his own rebuttal against renowned New Testament scholar James Dunn’s treatment of the Pentecostal position in *Conversion-Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*.² Today scholars are still debating the nature of Spirit baptism and what it means to be filled with the Spirit. But since that time, Pentecostals views have been more readily accepted in the academic arena. The Society for Pentecostal Studies is a demonstration of the broad level of interest in Pentecostal areas of study.

¹ Much of the content of this paper has come from this author’s M.A. thesis at Oral Roberts University, submitted May of 2007 called “The Doctrine of One Baptism – One Filling in the Pentecostal Theology of Howard M. Ervin.” This paper represents additional historical information gathered after completion of this thesis. This also better articulated the impact Howard Ervin has had on Pentecostal scholarship.

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With the explosion of new perspectives on Pentecostal issues, there can be a tendency to focus on the latest ideas. For variety of reasons, Pentecostal scholarship has moved beyond the theology and exegesis offered by Howard Ervin. As the dialogue continues and new insights are brought forth, fewer scholars are integrating Ervin’s ideas. Though his works were written in a different time, Howard Ervin’s pneumatology can speak to the theological issues of today.

Ervin has also been on the cutting edge of the ecumenical movement. In a tradition that has a history of exclusion, Ervin was able to effectively bring the Pentecostal experience to thousands of believers from traditional denominations. Through a tradition of scholarship and a legacy of ecumenism, Howard Ervin’s “Pilgrimage into Pentecost” can continue to inform and inspire the next generation of Pentecostals.

Biography

Howard Matthew Ervin was born into the family of Harry and Florence Ervin on September 21st, 1915 in the small coal mining town of St. Nicholas, Pennsylvania. After graduating from high school, this self-described “practical agnostic” had little interest in religion until he encountered the witness of a Baptist minister one day in his father’s barber shop in Mahanoy City, PA.³ As he was considering the minister’s words one evening, Jesus appeared to him in his room and he saw him face to face. That night, December 23rd, 1939, Howard Ervin entered the kingdom of God at the age of 25. Recognizing his call to ministry Ervin pursued his training at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. It was at Eastern where he met his Latvian-born bride to be, Marta Vaskis.⁴ Dr. and Mrs. Ervin married in April of 1944.

³Howard M. Ervin, “Pilgrimage into Pentecost,” Ervin Publications, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, n.d., audiocassette.

⁴Charles Farrah and Steve Durasoff, “Biographic and Bibliographical Sketch,” in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin Presented to Him by Colleagues and Friends on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), xi.

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Together they would eventually have three daughters, Gretchen, Deborah and Judith as well as five grandchildren and four great grandchildren.⁵ Ervin continued his education at Eastern as he completed his B.A. and Th.B. degree. He also earned a M.A. in Near Eastern Studies from Asia Institute and a B.D. from New Brunswick Theological Seminary.⁶ As impressive as the previous four degrees were, Ervin went on to receive a Th.D. in Old Testament Studies from Princeton Theological Seminary while ministering in New Jersey. With a keen theological mind and a scholar's vocabulary, Ervin has the ability to speak on any biblical or theological subject with excellence.

Though he is a scholar of impeccable credentials, Ervin has a pastor's heart. On January 17th, 1946, Howard Ervin was ordained by the Northern Baptist Convention of New Jersey. Ervin's first opportunity to pastor came when he was asked to fill the vacant pulpit of Dr. A.L. Murray, the man who had witnessed to him in his father's barbershop. He was appointed as the interim pastor at the First Baptist Church in Lansdale, Pennsylvania while Dr. Murray fulfilled his military chaplain position. Three years later, in February of 1946, he left Pennsylvania for Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey to pastor Central Baptist Church. He was recommended by the previous pastor, Richard Shearer who was Ervin's classmate at Eastern Baptist Seminary. After three years, Ervin left Central and founded Emmanuel Baptist Church in February of 1949. It was his seventeen years there that would be the fertile ground for the experiences that would fuel over fifty years of Pentecostal belief and teaching.

⁵ Marta was Ervin's love and constant companion until she passed away in October of 2004.

⁶P. H. Alexander, "Ervin, Howard Matthew," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley Burgess and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1988), 263.

Pilgrimage into Pentecost

During his time at Eastern, Ervin studied under what he calls a "rare group of men."⁷ He credits one professor, Dr. Adams, with a philosophy of interpreting Scripture by the maxim, "What does the text say?"⁸ Because of Ervin's commitment to good exegesis he has been able to "depart from traditional theology if the text supports it."⁹ It is this very principle that would lead Ervin on what he calls his "Pilgrimage into Pentecost."¹⁰ Determined to preach only what the scripture teaches, Ervin prided himself on exegetical, verse-by-verse teaching of the whole Bible. This commitment to the text brought him to the realization that he was living under the experience of believers that was communicated in the Bible. He recalls, "When I read the Scriptures it made my own experience seem like another world. If my experience was normative, there was something wrong with the Scriptures. If the Scriptures were normative, there was something wrong with my experience and the experience of the church as I know it."¹¹

Through a series of circumstances, he was given testimonies of men like Harold Bredesen and John Osteen who had received the Holy Spirit. The stories he heard resonated with him because these men struggled with their own emptiness in ministry and were looking for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. After finding out about the baptism in the Spirit from these men, he read Acts 2 again and it all finally made sense to him. Ervin began to tell God, "How soon can I

⁷Howard Ervin, Professor of Old Testament at Oral Roberts University, interview by author, Tulsa, OK, 9 February 2006.

⁸Ervin, interview by author, 9 February 2006.

⁹Ervin, interview by author, 9 February 2006.

¹⁰ Howard M. Ervin, "Pilgrimage into Pentecost," Ervin Publications, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, n.d., audiocassette.

¹¹Ervin, "Pilgrimage into Pentecost."

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have the experience? Don't leave anything out or I am going to feel cheated. I don't want to wait till it becomes popular. Let it cost me something."¹² Shortly after, he met with a well known Pentecostal man named David du Plessis who was speaking at Ervin's alma mater, Princeton. David du Plessis and Ervin would eventually become lifelong friends.

In 1960, Howard Ervin's pilgrimage into Pentecost was realized. After a year and nine months of investigation and prayer, Ervin received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues. Ervin had been invited to come to a FGBMFI meeting in Miami, Florida.¹³ After one of the sessions, David du Plessis and Dennis Bennett prayed with Ervin to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. When they had laid hands on him, he felt what felt like ten thousand volts of divine electricity go through him. Later that night Ervin began to hear in his head a language he did not know. That night, while he was in shower of his hotel room, he received the baptism in the Spirit in its fullness and spoke in tongues. Though his pilgrimage into Pentecost was complete, his pilgrimage into Pentecostalism was just beginning.

Howard Ervin would now begin to bring this experience of Spirit baptism back to his Baptist church in New Jersey. He always maintained a "Baptist" Sunday morning service but offered an evening Pentecostal healing service.¹⁴ These late night healing services lasted three years and had visitors that ranged from "Quakers to Catholics, a number of whom traveled fifty

¹² Howard M. Ervin, "My Testimony," Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, 1968, audiocassette.

¹³ Howard M. Ervin, "My Testimony," Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, 1968, audiocassette.

¹⁴ Howard M. Ervin, "My Testimony," Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, 3 October 1969, audiocassette,

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miles and more to attend the charismatic services.”¹⁵ This would be the beginning of Ervin’s ministry to all denominations. Through his relationship with Full Gospel Businessmen Men’s Fellowship International, Ervin established friendships with men like Demos Shakarian, David du Plessis, Harold Bredesen and Oral Roberts. With the help of these men, Howard Ervin was able to bring the message of the baptism in the Holy Spirit to people all over the nation. Through FGBMI, Oral Roberts was introduced to Ervin’s ministry and invited him to his multi-denominational Oral Roberts Ministry partner seminars. For the next three years, Ervin would establish a special friendship with Oral Roberts as he spoke at the partner’s seminars and FGBMI meetings around the country. This was the beginning of a relationship that would bind Howard Ervin to Oral Roberts University for the next forty years.

Oral Roberts University

In 1966, Pastor Howard Ervin became Professor Howard Ervin when he joined the founding faculty of the nation’s first charismatic university, Oral Roberts University. Prior to Ervin joining the faculty, Oral Roberts had invited Ervin to be an advisor in the creation of the School of Theology.¹⁶ Ervin was asked personally by Oral Roberts and Dr. R.O. Corvin the dean of the seminary, to be one of the founding members of the faculty of ORU.¹⁷ The founder, first president and current chancellor of Oral Roberts University commented that when building

¹⁵Paul Elbert, “Editors Preface,” in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin Presented to Him by Colleagues and Friends on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), xii.

¹⁶Howard M. Ervin, “For Such a Time as This.” *Outreach*, no. 1 (1965): 24.

¹⁷Howard M. Ervin, Professor of Old Testament at Oral Roberts University, interview by author, Tulsa, OK, 26 February 2007.

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the university, “God knew I needed Howard Ervin.”¹⁸ Because of his impressive credentials, he was quickly drawn into leadership and served as the Associate Dean of the School of Theology.¹⁹ In the summer of 1967, Howard Ervin became the acting dean of the School of Theology. As he quickly encountered the challenges of running a new seminary, Ervin realized that the young university was not ready for a Seminary. In 1968, he asked Oral to close the seminary. With the seminary now closed, he began the process of building an accredited undergraduate Theology department. Howard Ervin served as the Chairman of the Department of Theology from 1969-1978 and designed an excellent academic undergraduate program. In 1978 the School of Theology and Missions was reopened and Ervin became the Professor of Old Testament and the seminary’s most senior professor. Though qualified for leadership, he preferred his first love of teaching. Dr. Ervin taught classes in his two areas of expertise, Old Testament and Pneumatology. One class became known as Dr. Ervin’s signature class; GTHE 692: Pneumatology. Ervin taught this class every year of his forty year academic career.

Now retired, Dr. Ervin is still beloved by faculty and students. He has received multiple Outstanding Faculty awards. In 2006, Ervin was named the outstanding teacher of theology and the outstanding teacher of the University.²⁰ Howard Ervin retired from his duties as professor in the Fall of 2006. At age 91, Ervin completed a teaching career that spanned 40 years. This writer was privileged to be part of the final Pneumatology class of Dr. Ervin’s career in the Spring semester of 2006. At 91 years of age, Ervin was as articulate and challenging as any professor in the School of Theology and Missions.

¹⁸Letter to Howard Ervin read by Dr. Ralph Fagin, Vice President for Academic Affairs, “Howard M. Ervin Retirement Reception,” Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, 5 December 2006, Mp3 recording by author.

¹⁹Farrah and Durasoff, xii.

²⁰Elizabeth Porter, “Dr. Howard Ervin Retires after 40 Years of Teaching.” *The University Oracle*, 8 December 2006, sec. A, p. 2.

Ervin's Ecumenical Impact

Howard Ervin's primary impact on the Pentecostal world was outside of the formal Pentecostal denominations. Even with his strong defense of the Pentecostal faith, Ervin had only limited interaction with the formal Pentecostal denominations. Ervin's biggest impact was on the Charismatic renewal of the 60's and 70's. Through the FGBMFI and Oral Roberts Ministries Partner Seminars, Ervin led thousands of believers from all denominations into the Spirit-filled life. At the ORM partners seminars Oral always insisted that Ervin lead the Holy Spirit room. Ervin learned a great lesson during those days of ministering to believers from many of the formal traditions. Through these services, Ervin became convinced that "the number one priority of the Holy Spirit is the healing of the Church."²¹

Ervin was filled with the Spirit during the Charismatic renewal of the 1960's through 1980's. He has been labeled by his contemporaries as a Charismatic and a Neo-Pentecostal. However, Ervin has never been comfortable with this title. The gospel that he preached to believers of all traditions was a clear message of subsequence, evidential tongues, and empowerment. Ervin has many questions about the direction of the today's charismatic movement. Ervin saw very early that the Charismatic renewal was becoming a movement and consequently distanced himself from that label. Ervin prayed that the Charismatics would stay in their own traditions. Though Ervin never joined a Pentecostal denomination, his theology always remained classical Pentecostal. He is unashamedly Pentecostal, but believes that the Holy Spirit was the one who united the church, not divided it.

Dialogue with Rome

²¹ Ervin, "Pilgrimage into Pentecost."

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Through his friendship with David du Plessis, Ervin was invited to participate in the Pentecostal-Roman Catholic Dialogues. Du Plessis ask Ervin to participate because he knew that Ervin could articulate the Pentecostal position theologically.²² During the years of 1979 to 1987, Ervin participated in the dialogues as a representative of the Pentecostal point of view. Ervin was not only a participant but he also was a presenter for the Pentecostal position in the dialogue in 1979 and 1987 on the subjects of hermeneutics and koinonia. This was historic considering that the steering committee voted in 1976 to only have Pentecostals serve as in the Pentecostal participants.²³ Ervin’s Pentecostal theology, his scholarly and formal communication style, and ecumenical beliefs made him the exception to the rule. His participation in this dialogue helped “open ecumenical channels between these two groups.”²⁴

Though involved in the Charismatic renewal, Ervin was never caught up into the emotionalism that is typical in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement. Charles Farrah says, “Catholics particularly responded to his quiet and effective ministry.”²⁵ Ervin always maintained a high church demeanor. Ervin was considered a friend of Sacramentalists and his formal style was appreciated by the Catholic Charismatics. Ervin became convinced that Pentecostal pneumatology had more in common with the Catholic theology than Evangelical theology. This was evidenced in his response to James Dunn.²⁶ Given his great reverence for God and

²² Howard Ervin, Professor of Old Testament at Oral Roberts University, interview by author, Tulsa, OK, 8, January, 2008.

²³ Killian McDonnell, “Improbable Conversation: The International Classical Pentecostal/Roman Catholic Dialogue” *Pneuma* no 2, Fall 1995.

²⁴Alexander, 264.

²⁵Farrah and Durasoff, xii.

²⁶ Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984). v, viii. He often discusses the anti-sacramental presuppositions of James Dunn. Ervin argues that baptismal regeneration argues for subsequent Spirit baptism against the conversion-initiation paradigm.

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increasing ecumenical attitude he was an ambassador for the Spirit filled life to sheep in a different theological pasture. Ervin has been a speaker at many events for the Catholic Charismatic movement. It is truly remarkable that this Spirit filled Baptist would minister in more catholic settings than Pentecostal ones. Ervin was even present St. Nicholas Catholic Charismatic Center in Houston, Texas in 1978 following the passing of the Pope. Ervin was able to offer condolences and comfort to a grieving body.

In Tulsa, Ervin filled the role of shepherd to many of these Charismatic Catholics. When the Catholic Charismatic movement began in Tulsa, Fr. Francis McNutt was invited to Oral Roberts University. Fr. McNutt was asked by the Catholics who had received the Pentecostal experience to help them form a fellowship in Tulsa. Fr. McNutt insisted that Ervin be the advisor and group leader for the first Catholic Charismatic group in Tulsa.²⁷ Many of these Catholic Pentecostals in Tulsa considered him their "father." For many years, Professor Ervin would host a weekly Bible study in his home for those who were experiencing the Charismatic renewal in traditionally mainline churches. Whether in his healing services at Emmanuel or ministering to Catholic Charismatics, Ervin emphatically insisted that these believers stay in their own denominations. He would even discourage those Catholics who wished to be baptized and insisted that they remain faithful to their own communions.²⁸ As Jesus prayed in John 17 for the unity of the body, Ervin believed that this prayer for healing if the Church would be realized through Spirit filled believers in every tradition.

Ervin is an example of what it means to be ecumenical, but this has not always been his history. When he began his ministry, as a good Baptist he was quite prejudiced against many of

²⁷ Howard Ervin, "Testimony" Day of Renewal at St. Nicholas Catholic Charismatic Center, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK. October 1978. Audio cassette recording.

²⁸ Ervin, "Testimony." October 1978.

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the liturgical traditions. Like Saul of Tarsus, Ervin accuses himself of been the worst of those who were anti-Catholic.²⁹ Ervin grew up in a time a in a part of Pennsylvania where there was deep hatred between Protestants and Catholics.³⁰ Ironically, when the renewal began in his church, Ervin found himself praying for an Episcopalian man with a Catholic wife to receive the baptism in the Spirit.³¹ This confused him because in his evangelicalism, he really didn’t believe that they were even saved. He comments, “My problem was this. I was an evangelical Baptist, I had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and I was having all kinds of problems sorting out my theology.”³² Through his pilgrimage into Pentecost, the Holy Spirit melted his heart for believers of all traditions. He truly believes that the Pentecostal movement is the vehicle to bring all denominations together in unity. He believes that theological dogma divides, but the Spirit unites the church. He says, “The Pentecostal walk in the Spirit forces one inexorably to reexamine all sectarian dogma in the light of the overarching unity of the Spirit which they experience with other Christians of the most diverse theological backgrounds.”³³ Ervin truly became ecumenical because of his Pentecostal experience. Because of this, thousands of believers from all traditions experienced the Holy Spirit through his ministry.

Howard Ervin also never left his Baptist heritage. Ervin remains to this day an American Baptist. Even after coming to ORU, Ervin attended an American Baptist Church in Tulsa. Ervin was also influential in the Charismatic wing of the American Baptist Church. As the

²⁹ Ervin, “My Testimony,” 1968, Audio cassette recording.

³⁰ Ervin, “My Testimony,” 1968, Audio cassette recording.

³¹ Howard M. Ervin, “Refilled” Lecture from GTHE 692 Pneumatology, Oral Roberts University. 2 February 2006. Mp3 recording by author.

³² Howard M. Ervin, “Refilled” Lecture from GTHE 692 Pneumatology, Oral Roberts University. 2 February 2006. Mp3 recording by author.

³³ Howard M. Ervin, *This Which Ye See and Hear* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1972), 59.

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Charismatic wing of his own denomination began to gain momentum, many American Baptist pastors gathered to share their common experience. In 1975, Ervin was one of the keynote speakers at the first American Baptist Conference on the Holy Spirit where he gave a “Rationale for Tongues.”³⁴ Dr. Gary Clark, the long-time chairman of the Holy Spirit Renewal Ministries in American Baptist Churches, worked with Ervin in those early days. He says, “He was the patriarch of the movement, definitely. He was the trained, Th.D from Princeton, theologian. He was the biblical authority. We wanted him to give us the biblical foundation...He was very influential and his teaching was very good. It was the solid basis on which the early years of the American Baptist Movement, was built.”³⁵ Everyone looked to Ervin for solid teaching and articulate communication about the Pentecostal life.

Influence on Pentecostal Scholarship

Beginning with Howard Ervin’s scholarly book on Pentecostalism in 1968, a door was opened in the academic world to begin to defend Pentecostalism as a legitimate stream of evangelicalism. In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the evangelical community felt a need to respond the growing number of Pentecostals and their influence on the church as a whole. This produced several evangelical works by scholars like James Dunn, F.D. Bruner and Anthony Hokema. James Dunn comments, “Since 1960 Pentecostal teaching has been making a significant penetration in older denominations. Taken together these facts make imperative a close study of the distinctive Pentecostal doctrines.”³⁶ Thus, it was the force of the Pentecostal movement that spurred on New Testament scholarship to study the issue of baptism in the Holy

³⁴Howard M. Ervin, “A Rationale for Tongues,” First American Baptist Conference on the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, 10 September 1975, audiocassette.

³⁵Gary Clarke, Chairman of Holy Spirit Renewal Ministries in American Baptist Churches, interview by author, Cleveland, TN, 9 March 2007.

³⁶James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 3.

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Spirit and consequently to understand Luke-Acts better. William and Robert Menzies comment, “With the emergence of the Charismatic renewal, which by the decade of the 1960’s included not only mainline Protestants but a significant penetration of the Roman Catholic Church, literature relating to the person and work of the Holy Spirit has appeared in a veritable explosion on the Christian world.”³⁷ A simple rebuttal would not be enough; evangelicalism needed to have a firm hold on its own understanding of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, since 1970, the amount of works on all sides of the debate has grown into a whole new realm of theological emphasis.

Howard M. Ervin was one of the earliest defenders of the Pentecostal faith from an academic standpoint. While Pentecostals have always been able to articulate their experience, they have not always been on the side of sound exegesis. Many found Ervin’s teachings and writings to be a welcome defense of the Pentecostal faith. Few people with the credentials of Ervin were on the side of the Pentecostals. Ervin stepped into that void with sound exegesis and consistent theology.

Pentecost’s New Voice

The effect of Howard Ervin’s Pneumatology on the Pentecostal world is hard to articulate. Ervin is appreciated by colleagues, scholars and ministers from diverse backgrounds. Dr. Thomson Mathew, Dean of the School of Theology and Missions at Oral Roberts University, points out, “It is almost fashionable to be a Pentecostal today. This is not our history...at such a time, God raised up Dr. Howard Ervin to produce the first academic, exegetical defense of the Pentecostal experience that our critics had to respect.”³⁸ He also called him “the most articulate

³⁷William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 211.

³⁸Thomson K. Mathew, Dean of School of Theology and Missions, “Howard M. Ervin Retirement Reception,” Oral Roberts University, 5 December 2006, Mp3 recording by author.

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defender of Pentecostalism.”³⁹ H.I. Lederle, in his book *Treasures Old and New*, identifies Ervin as a leader in the Neo-Pentecostal tradition. He remarks, “In *These Are Not Drunken, As Ye Suppose* Howard Ervin presents a defense of the neo-Pentecostal position, one of the earliest scholarly accounts available.”⁴⁰ The noted Assembly of God scholar William Menzies remarks, “Back in the 1960’s, there were few engaged in serious academic efforts to present the classical Pentecostal view of Spirit Baptism. Ervin was one of the early “pioneers” of this enterprise. His work was a great encouragement to me as a young, budding Pentecostal professor. He ably engaged dissident views, such as those held by Gordon Fee and James Dunn. This was an important influence on my own studies. I owe him a great debt of gratitude.”⁴¹

Ervin will be best known in the academic world for his treatise on Pentecostalism published in 1968 called *These are Not Drunken as Ye Suppose*.⁴² His contributions to the discussion of Pentecost and in particular the theology of Luke-Acts was a major shift in New Testament studies. Paul Elbert compiled a *festschrift* in honor of Dr. Ervin’s sixty-fifth birthday. He says, “Howard did a good job at that particular moment in history, in expressing views that were new and I thought were good and right...I thought this man’s work was worthy of complements.”⁴³ Elbert believed that Ervin was a pioneer in this interpretation of Luke-Acts. Elbert recognized that the evangelical world view was dominating New Testament studies of Acts. He recognized that Ervin was able to open that door of discussion of Pentecostal

³⁹Thomson K. Mathew, Dean of School of Theology and Missions, “Howard M. Ervin Retirement Reception,” Oral Roberts University, 5 December 2006, Mp3 recording by author.

⁴⁰Lederle, 95.

⁴¹Menzies, William (wwmenzies@mchsi.com), Reply to Query Regarding Howard M. Ervin. e-mail to Daniel D. Isgrigg (danny@christianchapel.com) (7 January 2007).

⁴²Howard M. Ervin, *These Are Not Drunken As Ye Suppose* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos Publishing, 1968).

⁴³Paul Elbert, interview by author, Cleveland, TN, 10 February, 2007.

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pneumatology from an exegetical point of view. In Elbert’s tribute he writes, “Dr. Ervin will be warmly remembered as being in the forefront of those scholars who have entered into this historically neglected area. Stepping into the gap with fresh considerations he exposed the weak underpinnings of theories which unduly confined the Holy Spirit to a restricted range of activity.”⁴⁴ Elbert recognized that Ervin’s perspective on the unique theology offered by Luke was ground breaking in the area of Pentecostal scholarship. Elbert says, “I regarded him as a pioneer in terms of interpreting Luke-Acts at a time when in the United States, there was a lot of polemic coming from the larger publishing houses against looking at Luke-Acts this way.”⁴⁵ Elbert compiled this work with articles from scholars who involved in similar work in the area of Luke-Acts. Many of these scholars such as James Forbes, F.F. Bruce, and James Dunn recognized Ervin’s contribution to Pentecostal scholarship. James Forbes says, “At a time when I was looking for a solid biblical/theological foundation in support of my faith and experience, I was greatly helped by the scholarly efforts of Howard Ervin.”⁴⁶ Even James Dunn comments, “His work on the Holy Spirit has provided both a challenge to scholarship and an opportunity for dialogue for those seeking to understand this dimension of our Christian faith.”⁴⁷

Though many Pentecostals offered a defense for their faith, until Ervin, there was very little Pentecostal scholarship that gave the exegetical and theological foundation. Ervin not only

⁴⁴ Paul Elbert, “Author’s Preface.” *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin Presented to him by Colleagues and friends on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), v.

⁴⁵ Paul Elbert, interview by author, Cleveland, TN, 10 February, 2007.

⁴⁶ James Forbes, “Foreword,” in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin Presented to him by Colleagues and friends on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), xix.

⁴⁷ James D. G. Dunn, “Romans 7:14-25 in the Theology of Paul,” *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin Presented to Him by Colleagues and Friends on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 49.

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defended the Pentecostal position, but he engaged the evangelical views with substantial critiques. Robert Graves, the president of the Foundation for Pentecostal Scholarship, remarks, “Between Carl Brumback's *What Meaneth This?* (1947) and Ervin's *These Are Not Drunken As You Suppose* (1967), I am aware of no substantial Pentecostal defenses, and when Ervin's was published, it took the Pentecostal polemic to another level, rendering Brumback's defense, which was already dated, obsolete.”⁴⁸ At this time, Pentecostals were just beginning to defend this once maligned faith in the academic market place of ideas. Graves, an Assembly of God minister, comments, “To my knowledge, no Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, or Charismatic has matched Ervin's production of quality Pentecostal literature defending the distinctive doctrines of the continuity of the gifts of the Spirit and the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a subsequent Christian experience signaled by glossolalic (*sic*) utterances while bringing power for witness and service.”⁴⁹ It is high praise that this Baptist pastor with a Th.D. from Princeton would have so much influence on the arena of classical Pentecostal scholarship.

Ervin Responds to James D.G. Dunn

James Dunn, the noted New Testament scholar and professor of Divinity at University of Durham, introduced a book in 1970 on the Holy Spirit. His work *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* became popular amongst scholars and is considered one of the best treatments of the Evangelical view of Spirit Baptism. In it, Dunn argues for a conversion-initiation view of Spirit Baptism. Dunn's work takes particular issue with the Pentecostal understanding of Acts. Writing just two years after Ervin published *These Are Not Drunken, As Ye Suppose*, Dunn interacts with Ervin as

⁴⁸Robert Graves (rgraves@tffps.org), Reply to Query Regarding Howard M. Ervin, e-mail to Daniel D. Isgrigg (danny@christianchapel.com) (3 January 2007).

⁴⁹Graves, e-mail, 3 January 2007.

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one of the Pentecostal sources for his critique. Though Dunn dealt with several Pentecostal sources in addition to Ervin including G. Lindsay (1964), L. Christenson (1964), R.M. Riggs (1949), Ervin seems to get particular attention from him.

In November of 1980, the annual meeting of Society of Pentecostal Studies was on the campus of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. During that time, Robert Graves took time to interview Howard Ervin about James Dunn’s treatment of his work. Surprisingly, Ervin had not yet read the book or even given much consideration to Dunn’s arguments.⁵⁰ After discussing Dunn’s arguments, Graves challenged Ervin to answer Dunn. Always up for a good argument, Ervin said, “I’ll have to do a critique of Dunn.”⁵¹ The following semester, Ervin would offer an argument by argument rebuttal to Dunn’s conversion-initiation view of baptism in the Holy Spirit. One by one Ervin exposed Dunn’s neglect of the particular theology of Luke and his presuppositional exegesis. *Conversion-Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit* would eventually become a rallying point for Pentecostals in response to Dunn’s evangelical views. Many other Pentecostal scholars would follow with their own critiques of Dunn’s anti-Pentecostal view.

A Legacy of Lukan Pneumatology

The explosion of scholarship in the modern era produced some fine New Testament scholars. Among them are a number of scholars who have done their studies on Luke-Acts in an attempt to clarify Pentecostal pneumatology. This era of scholarship has produced profound developments in the area of pneumatology. Howard M. Ervin was one of the first to argue for a unique Lukan pneumatology. Ervin’s thesis was ground breaking work for the area of New

⁵⁰Howard M. Ervin, interview by Robert W. Graves, President of the Foundation for Pentecostal Scholarship, Tulsa OK, November, 1980, audiocassette.

⁵¹Ervin, interview by Robert Graves, November 1980.

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Testament studies that would lead to a whole field of New Testament studies in the area of Luke-Acts. Pentecostals have benefited greatly from these insights. As scholars like Roger Stronstad and James Shelton have added to this discussion, these men have also stood on Ervin's shoulders. Issues of subsequence, evidence and empowerment all find their particular support in the view of a unique Lukan pneumatology. This is the core of Ervin's arguments against the evangelical views of conversion-initiation and Pauline theology.

Conclusion

Howard M. Ervin's pilgrimage into Pentecost has produced a legacy of influence that reaches from the university to the local church. He is respected by Pentecostals, evangelicals and sacramentalists. His work with FGBMFI and ORU has brought the message of Pentecost to people from all backgrounds who desired to experience the reality of the Holy Spirit in their lives. His scholarly works are recognized by Pentecostals as groundbreaking exegetical defenses of Pentecostal theology and exegesis. His influence on the students and faculty of Oral Roberts University has spanned 40 years. These students have brought the message of Pentecost all around the world. Thousands were lead into the baptism in the Holy Spirit through the many years of Oral Roberts Ministry Partners Seminars.⁵² Howard Ervin's presence has truly been felt by people around the world.

Howard Ervin was at the cutting edge of Pentecostal apologetics. Yet his works did not have a broad or lasting effect on Pentecostal scholarship. Ervin wrote in a time when many Pentecostals focused on the practical and experiential and were not necessarily interested in the exegesis of Pentecost. Ervin helped pave the way for the explosion of work in the area of

⁵²Mathew.

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pneumatology and Luke-Acts in particular. In this way, his books may have come before their time.

Perhaps Ervin's greatest contribution was in the lives of the people that he ministered to. From parishioners, to members of mainline denominations, to students, to faculty, Howard Ervin's legacy is the impact his life and ministry had on individuals. This author was greatly impacted by Dr. Ervin's commitment to scholarship with a pastor's heart. His Pneumatology class showed this author that one can be both Pentecostal and sound in one's theology and exegesis. Ervin exemplifies the commitment to the Word and Spirit. His pilgrimage into Pentecost demonstrates an example of how the Holy Spirit can truly change one's life. But Dr. Ervin did not allow these experiences to be just for his own personal edification. From the beginning he knew that what he found in his relationship with God was to be shared with others. He broke down the usual barriers between denominations with the unifying experience of the fullness of the Spirit. This will be his legacy when he stands before the Savior that he so faithfully served.

His view of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a comprehensive one. His views are held together in a consistent whole that is true to the scripture and explains all the difficult passages and issues. This paper is a call for Pentecostals to re-examine his views again and discover the strength of his theology for Pentecostals. Ervin will not be accepted by everyone, but Pentecostals can take advantage of the commitment to scripture and the quality of scholarship that Ervin brings to the debate. Though his works were written in a different time, the message is still valid for today. The next generation of Pentecostals can stand on the shoulders of those who came before. This generation of Pentecostals can rediscover the strength of Howard M. Ervin's Pneumatology for the 21st Century Church.

Bibliography

Howard Ervin is not only an educator and pastor, he is a capable writer. He produced six books on the subject of pneumatology between 1968 and 2002 as well as several articles. His works show the quality and scholarship that he maintains. In 1968, Ervin produced his first work on the Pentecostal experience under the title, *These Are Not Drunken As Ye Suppose*.⁵³ This work outlines all Dr. Ervin learned and taught in his church on the subject of Spirit baptism. Considered one of the first scholarly works from a Pentecostal position, Ervin makes a strong exegetical argument for the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, tongues as evidence, one baptism-one filling and an evaluation of spiritual gifts. The tone and spirit of this text is apologetic. Ervin systematically explains each of the issues of Spirit baptism and Acts. This work is written for the pastor or educator and masterfully reflects the practical and theological arguments of his pneumatology.

In 1971, Ervin published a series of letters that he had written to a member of his former congregation. *And Forbid Not to Speak with Tongues*⁵⁴ contains answers to Tony's questions brought about by Dr. J. Vernon McGee's critique of tongues. Ervin answers pastorally the questions addressed in his previous book. This short book was written to be understandable by the layman and easy to read. Ervin shows his ability to expose the exegesis and presuppositions of the anti-Pentecostals.

In 1972, Logos published his third work, *That Which Ye See and Hear*.⁵⁵ As a series of essays, Ervin discusses further issues brought about by questions raised in his first work. Touted as a "Layman's Guide to the Holy Spirit," this writer would find it hard to recommend this work

⁵³Ervin, *These Are Not Drunken As Ye Suppose*.

⁵⁴Howard M. Ervin, *And Forbid Not To Speak With Tongues* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos Publishing, 1971).

⁵⁵Howard M. Ervin, *That Which You See and Hear* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos Publishing, 1972).

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to laymen. Ervin seems to stray from his usual clear and logical arguments. But this work does take on topics such as an understanding of the full metaphor, the purpose of Pentecost and tongues as prophecy and signs.

In 1972, Ervin contributed to the book, *The Layman’s Commentary on the Holy Spirit*, edited by his friend and colleague, John Rea.⁵⁶ Ervin was one of the contributing editors along with R.O Corvin, the original dean of the School of Theology at ORU, David du Plessis, and Rodman Williams. This work is a commentary on the Holy Spirit, but there is no direct reference to any one particular editor’s comments. Ervin’s contributions are not discernable from any of the other editors.

In 1984, Ervin produced his stunning exegetical response to James Dunn’s classic with his work, *Conversion-Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*.⁵⁷ This work provides an argument-by-argument critique of Dunn’s treatment of Pentecostal theology. With additional exegetical support for the Pentecostal viewpoint and a defense of his own views, Ervin shows how the Pentecostal exegesis is sound and consistent. Simple arguments as well as complex exegesis make this work important for any Pentecostal looking for solid defense of their faith.

In 1987, Ervin republished his classic work *These are Not Drunken as Ye Suppose as Spirit Baptism: A Biblical Investigation*, published by Hendrickson.⁵⁸ This work re-organizes and clarifies some of his best arguments. With added clarity and additional exegetical arguments, as well as a restructuring of the progression of the book, *Spirit Baptism* provides a fresh look at Ervin’s Pentecostal theology and is an excellent addition to the Pentecostal library. This book

⁵⁶*The Layman’s Commentary on the Holy Spirit*, ed. John Rae (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972)

⁵⁷Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*.

⁵⁸Howard M. Ervin, *Spirit Baptism: A Biblical Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987).

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provides the same scholarship but adds the insights made over the previous twenty years of speaking, lecturing, and teaching. With a logical progression and clear arguments, it remains one of the best explanations of Pentecostalism.

In 2002, Ervin published his latest book, *Healing: Sign of the Kingdom*.⁵⁹ This book outlines clearly his understanding of healing as a sign that the kingdom of God is present. He discusses the difference between signs and wonders and spiritual gifts of healing. He discusses the nature of healing and the difficult questions of healing and faith. The book is well written with easy to follow arguments. At just over a hundred pages it is a great work for the scholar or layman.

⁵⁹Howard M. Ervin, *Healing: Sign of the Kingdom* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002).