

David K. Bernard

A
HISTORY
of
HISTORY
Christian Doctrine

The Twentieth Century

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Volume 3

A History of Christian Doctrine

Volume Three

The Twentieth Century
A.D. 1900 – 2000

by David K. Bernard

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Contents

Preface	7
1. The Pentecostal Movement	9
2. The Finished Work Controversy	39
3. The Jesus Name Controversy	59
4. Oneness Pentecostal Organizations	89
5. Trinitarian Pentecostal Organizations	125
6. Liberalism and Neo-Orthodoxy	165
7. Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism.	199
8. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy	227
9. The Healing Revival and the Latter Rain Movement	249
10. The Charismatic Movement.	275
11. Christianity Today.	319
Appendixes	331
A. Dates in the History of Christianity, 1900-2000	333
B. Early Pentecostal Leaders Baptized in Jesus' Name	335
C. Answering the Charge of Cultism	340
D. Response to a Cult Hunter	347
E. Major U.S. Pentecostal Organizations	358
F. Major Jesus Name Pentecostal Organizations .	359
G. Major United Pentecostal National Organizations	361
Notes	362
Select Bibliography	389
Index	397

1

The Pentecostal Movement

The first day of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a new movement in Christianity that would sweep the world in the next hundred years. By century's end, more people would identify with this Pentecostal movement than any other label in Christendom, except for the Roman Catholic Church.

Although the modern Pentecostal movement was a new historical development, spiritually it was not new at all, but it sought to restore the doctrine and experience of the apostles and the first-century church. While in many ways it succeeded, in many ways the majority of adherents have not fulfilled its original promise. But the end is not yet.

The story begins with Charles F. Parham, an independent Holiness preacher and founder of a small Bible school.

He and his students began to study the baptism of the Holy Ghost in the New Testament. To understand their motivation, we must first understand the Holiness movement. Chapter 13 of *A History of Christian Doctrine, Volume 2* discusses the Holiness people and how they set the stage for the Pentecostals; we briefly summarize this information below.

Roots in the Holiness Movement

The Holiness movement arose within conservative Protestantism in America in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was a revival of the founding principles of Methodism, which developed from the ministry of John Wesley, an eighteenth-century preacher in the Church of England.

The distinctive doctrine of the Holiness movement was Wesley's teaching of entire sanctification, which the Methodists had largely abandoned by this time. According to this doctrine, when a sinner first believes on Jesus, he is converted and justified and receives forgiveness of all sins. He still is dominated by his sinful nature, however, until he receives entire sanctification or Christian perfection. This divine work purifies his motives, desires, and thoughts. He still has the ability to sin, but his inward nature (the sinful nature inherited from Adam) is no longer a source of temptation. Wesley emphasized an ongoing process of sanctification with the goal of Christian perfection, but the later Holiness movement emphasized sanctification as a crisis experience. In essence, the Holiness groups taught that everyone should seek two distinct experiences with God, or works of grace: conversion and sanctification.

As people in the Holiness movement studied the Scriptures, particularly the Book of Acts, they noticed that the disciples were “baptized with the Holy Ghost,” and they began to equate entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Ghost. They did not necessarily associate this experience with speaking in tongues, although there were some instances of speaking in tongues among them, as among the Methodists earlier.

A number of holiness-minded people in the late nineteenth century began to proclaim an alternate view of holiness. The practical effect was much the same, but the approach was somewhat different. They denied that the inward nature of sin is eradicated in this life, but they proclaimed that by His Spirit God gives Christians power to overcome and suppress the influence of the sinful nature. This view is sometimes called Keswick holiness, after a parish in England where meetings were held to promote the teaching.

Adherents of this position exhorted all Christians to seek a distinct encounter with God’s Spirit in which they would receive power for Christian service and power to bear spiritual fruit. It could happen at conversion or afterward. Subsequently, they should live in the “fullness of the Spirit” and participate in the “higher Christian life.” These teachers also began to use the scriptural terminology of being “baptized with the Holy Ghost” for this crisis experience.

An American group that was aligned with Keswick thinking was the Christian and Missionary Alliance, an evangelistic organization founded in 1887 by Presbyterian minister A. B. Simpson. He proclaimed a fourfold gospel of Jesus as Savior, sanctifier, healer, and coming