

## Book Review

*The Holy Spirit: Lord and Life-giver*

**Ivan Satyavrata**

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Biblical scholars and teachers from all faith traditions are sure to appreciate *The Holy Spirit: Lord and Life-giver* by a gifted Pentecostal theologian/educator and churchman from the majority world. Dr. Ivan Satyavrata provides a concise and trenchant study on biblical pneumatology that is both theologically conservative and provocative. In the space of nine brief chapters covering just 171 pages, the author presents the person and work of the Spirit in the life of God's people through both testaments. In addition, he manages to survey church history (Chapter 2) to show that the Church has continuously had sectarian "spirit movements" which pursued a fuller experience of the Spirit. These movements have refused to limit the work of the Spirit to rituals conducted exclusively by clergy under the authority and direction of the organized or institutional church.

Pentecostals and Charismatics will be affirmed in their present emphasis and pursuit of pneumatic experience, but humbled and perhaps chastened for their propensity for parochial triumphalism. Roman Catholics can rejoice in their well-documented openness to the multilayered work of the Spirit but receive instruction and a challenge to learn that their

sacramentalism often lacks biblical confirmation and is contradicted by historical precedent. The Protestant Reformed tradition can likewise be challenged by the long-standing tradition of "spirit movements" within the confessing churches, emphasizing the work of the Spirit in ways that parallel the Book of Acts, ways thought to have ceased at the completion of the canon or end of the apostolic age.

Nevertheless, most readers will find that what Satyavrata has written about the Holy Spirit is orthodox. He is unapologetically trinitarian (see Chapter 5), committed to both the full deity and personhood of the Spirit which he amply demonstrates in Chapter 4. Thus, he rejects the monistic and impersonal notions of spirit found in many eastern religions (82). Moreover, he also rejects the proclivity within some forms of modern theology to identify all expressions of "spirit" in religious thought with the Holy Spirit of the Bible. Without equivocation, he asserts, "The Holy Spirit must not be confused with any other spirit; a general spiritual immanence or impersonal divine influence, a human spirit or some other supernatural spiritual being" (83).

The deity of the Spirit is alluded to in his titular identification of the Spirit as “Lord.” At first, one wonders if the author is confusing the persons within the triune Godhead; however, we soon learn that the author is merely expounding the Old Testament presentation of “the Spirit of the Living God,” whose close association with God, the Father and Jesus, the Son of God makes this designation “Lord” appropriate. Satyavrata repeatedly dispels all notions of Oneness modalism by a clear apologetic for tri-personal existence of the one triune God. He does not dodge the witness of Scripture that brings Christ and the Spirit in close alignment. After all, it is the “ultimate purpose of the Holy Spirit’s ministry ... to mediate the presence of the risen Lord” (84-85). I did find myself wishing he had alluded to certain passages (Acts 2:36; 2 Cor. 3:18) that would have illustrated that alignment in the Early Church.

In Chapter 5, some corners of the Pentecostal and Charismatic world may find themselves squirming when the author’s formal discussion of the Trinity reveals how common it is to lapse into tritheism in our explanations of the *threeness* and *oneness* of God. But Satyavrata insists that while the doctrine appears absurd to some people on rational grounds, it is a doctrine that is “vital and indissolvably linked to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ” as presented in the Scriptures. The enigmatic nature of this doctrine has elicited many attempts and metaphors to explain how one God can exist in three persons. Irenaeus’ reference to the Christ, the Word and the Spirit as the “two hands of God” is preferred over the “many simple images and analogies,” but judged by

our author as unsatisfactory. He opts for the conception of the “perfect Family” which retains the essential unity of God while allowing for personal distinction. However, he quickly cautions against the latent temptation within such a metaphor: to view Father, Son, and Spirit as three members of a divine pantheon, composed of three independent deities. No, he qualifies, it is more of “community of being” in whom each person maintains individual identity, but simultaneously shares the life of the others” (p. 91).

It may be that by opting for the perfect Family analogy, Satyavrata has fallen into the pit created by the dilemma of the finite attempting to come to grips with the Infinite. The fact is that there is no earthly human analogy that can explain the relational and ontological dynamics of this divine mystery. We have run aground on what theologians have called the “antinomy of human existence.” Humanity knows no example of family that does not exist without independent human members, no matter how loving and unified. Thus, we find him admitting as much and resorting to near-Athanasian language, stating what can be inferred from scriptural testimony without resolving the enigma.

Pentecostals and Charimatics are sure to applaud Satyavrata on a number of counts. Throughout the book, he expounds on the salvific role of the Spirit as “the active agent who effects the finished work of Christ in the life of the believer” (78). However, he gives near equal *Schrift* to the communal work of the Spirit in the Church and His vocational-equipping work. This includes

prophecy and other charismatic endowments that Pentecostals readily affirm.

Chapter 6, “The Spirit of Truth: The Spirit and the Word,” will challenge non-Pentecostal friends who should readily affirm the role of the Spirit in the inspiration of the canonical Scriptures and also His work in providing illumination that serves our interpretation and application of scriptural truth. The author shows that the New Testament evidence clearly indicates that His work, wisdom, knowledge and discernment are needed in the face of conflicting claims of truth. Implicit in this evidence is an ongoing prophetic ministry to which the Pauline and Johannine epistles attest (cf. 1 Cor. 12, 14, 1 John 2, 4).

Later, in Chapter 7, “Life in the Spirit”, and somewhat again in Chapter 8, “The Community of the Spirit,” the author makes his case for the ongoing function of the gifts of the Spirit against the position of cessationists. He cogently presents the dilemma of cessationism: Either all such subsequent experiences are *spurious* or *demonic* (136). Such rigidity and closed-mindedness is not unlike those who protested Jesus’ healing of the man born blind in John 9. What is more, it flies in the face of preliterate non-western Christianity. These vibrant Christians operate with the presupposition that the God of the Bible continues to manifest His supernatural presence among His people via the Spirit.

Despite his implicit *apologia* for Pentecostal/ Charismatic experience, Satyavrata conducts it in an ecumenical spirit that avoids denomination or sectarian doctrines that could prove divisive. Instead,

he consistently develops his pneumatology in such a way as to stress areas of widespread agreement among evangelicals, while adding an emphasis that invites deeper reflection that challenges traditional theological thinking, even traditional Pentecostal thinking. Satyavrata conducts a biblical theological investigation that looks to both the New and Old Testament for support. Indeed, it is his attention to the whole canon of Scripture that commands a hearing for his views. Moreover, his ability as a missiologist and churchman from the majority world allows him to poignantly illustrate these views from his own personal experience.

Despite the many outstanding features of this book, Satyavrata is bound to receive criticism from both Evangelicals and Pentecostals, albeit for different reasons. I took note of some as I read and found that they originate more from what is not said or developed than what is affirmed. For example, in affirming the *creative* role of the Spirit (Chapter 3), Satyavrata extends that role beyond creation to the creative work of humanity, as supported by the charismatic enablement of man in the Old Testament (e.g. Bezalel and Oholiab in the construction of the Tabernacle). He approvingly cites Chris Wright’s position that the Spirit’s creative activity is at work in all kinds of creative endeavors, even in the *secular* sphere. No scriptural support is given for this claim, and he fails to address some natural implications. Pentecostals and Charismatics will surely want to know if *charismata* is possessed by non-Christians. If so, how does one reconcile that with the Pauline understanding that *charismata*

exclusively belongs to members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, Eph. 4)?

Moreover, it seems to me that at least some qualifier is needed to Wright's position. A better case can be made for the creative capacity of humanity belonging to the *imago Dei*, rather than the mediated work of the Holy Spirit. One can certainly argue that the blasphemous art produced in our lifetime is creative, but I balk at giving the Holy Spirit credit for any of it. I have a problem seeing the Holy Spirit inspiring both the works of Michelangelo and Andres Serrano. In fact, we could argue along similar lines for the rational power and creativity of humans – capable of God-honoring or malevolent creations. A cure for cancer and a viral bio-weapon are not of the same order or origin. The *imago Dei* is intrinsically tied to humanity as a creation of God, but humanity's fallenness has caused its creative capacities to be corrupted and bent toward sin. They, too, need to be redeemed and renewed by the transforming grace of God and work of the Spirit.

As a Pentecostal, I applaud Satyavrata's treatment of the baptism in the Holy Spirit alongside the salvific work of the Spirit in Chapter 7 and understand somewhat his choice to avoid areas of exegetical and theological controversy over this doctrine. However, his treatment of "subsequence" and Spirit baptism makes avoidance impossible. Satyavrata obviously believes in the reality of an "experience distinct from and subsequent to conversion or regeneration by the Spirit" (130), but his appeals to isolated experiences of subsequent enablement of believers in Acts

or church history are less than convincing. Pentecostals have long argued for experiential verification of exegesis and theological conclusions regarding the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, Satyavrata ignores at least one exegetical support for the doctrine of subsequence. In a section dealing with the salvific work of the Spirit, he deals with Galatians 4:6: "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba Father." He affirms Gordon Fee's (non-Pentecostal) interpretation: "At first glance it sounds as though Paul regards sonship as prior to reception of the Spirit. Paul is, however, simply describing how the believer's experience of sonship through the Spirit is contingent on the objective reality of sonship Christ provides by his death on the cross" (126). As I review this book, I fail to see where that is clearly presented in the text or its immediate context, but the failure to see *subsequence* overlooks what is plainly stated in the verse. Moreover, it ignores Paul's own redemptive-historical illustration (verses 1-5), one that parallels Ephesians 1:13, which again clearly presents subsequence, if Paul has in mind the reception of the Spirit by the Gentiles after conversion. "You [Gentiles] also" indicates that Paul is stating that their reception of the Spirit is like or parallel to Jewish believers, "who were first to hope in Christ" (Eph. 1:12). My guess is that Satyavrata did not want to become embroiled in the theological controversy of seeing the Pentecostal baptism of/in the Spirit in a Pauline passage dealing with the salvific status of the Gentile believers. For me, the controversy of such a

juxtaposition is abated when I recall a statement the classical Pentecostal theologian, Stanley M. Horton, made to me. As a young seminarian, I asked him how his interpretation of Galatians 4:6 could support the doctrine of *subsequence*, but not posit salvific significance to Spirit baptism. He pointed out that Paul sees the multifaceted provision of the Spirit as singular, not subdivided. Paul sees Christians as New Covenant believers who possess the full-orbed blessings of the Holy Spirit. Thus, he can reference Pentecostal Spirit-baptism within passages that deal with the redemptive work of God in Christ.

Hopefully, the above criticisms do not detract from the many rich insights and positive contributions made by Satyavrata in this excellent work on the Holy Spirit. He has, indeed, written a challenging and thought-provoking work for theologians and students of the Bible, regardless of religious tradition. I have personally benefitted by reading this book and whole-heartedly commend it to everyone wishing to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church through one of his prophetic voices.