

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TONGUES AS INITIAL EVIDENCE: FROM EDWARD IRVING THROUGH
FIRST-GENERATION PENTECOSTALISM

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Introduction

Tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a unique doctrine of classical Pentecostalism. *Glossolalia* is intimately connected with classical Pentecostalism's understanding of Spirit baptism.¹ This branch of Christianity believes that there is a baptizing action of the Spirit distinct and subsequent to salvation that empowers believers. This empowerment results in speaking in tongues which signifies the Spirit baptism. The terms "initial evidence" and "initial physical evidence" are the labels for this tongues-as-witness concept.

From the start of the Pentecostal movement, tongues as initial evidence occupied a prominent place in Pentecostal thought. Pentecostalism's earliest founder, Charles Parham, stressed the importance of the connection between Spirit baptism and tongues in his theology. Early Pentecostal leaders and theologians after Parham differed in their acceptance and understanding of tongues in its evidentiary role, but by the end of classical Pentecostalism's first-generation (1900-1929), the tongues concept was firmly ensconced as the credal distinctive of the movement.

While early Pentecostalism embraced tongues as initial evidence, modern Pentecostals are increasingly questioning the doctrine. In two scholarly discussions in the late 1990s, a number of Pentecostal theologians worldwide suggest that the doctrine needs to be rearticulated

¹*Glossolalia* is a Greek word meaning "speaking in tongues."

or modified.² Frank Macchia asserts that Pentecostals have impeded the natural and necessary evolution of initial evidence by their defense of it. By focusing primarily on its protection, Pentecostals have not devoted enough time and energy to developing its theological nuances.³ Tan May Ling urges Pentecostals to develop a broader theological framework for the initial evidence creed in light of her understanding of language as both verbal and non-verbal.⁴ Simon Chan asserts that initial evidence is in dire need of revision as it is fast becoming both irrelevant to lay Pentecostals and theologically embarrassing to the movement as a whole.⁵

Given the modern controversy and the call for new articulations of the doctrine, taking a fresh look at the origin and early formulations of Pentecostal initial evidence belief will help put the current debate into historical perspective. How did the idea of evidential tongues arise in classical Pentecostalism? How readily was it accepted in the early years of the movement? Did it evolve over time? When did it become doctrinally fixed and why? Were there social and cultural factors that influenced its development? In this study, I will present an overview of tongues as initial evidence from its earliest antecedent in the theology of Edward Irving through first-generation Pentecostalism. I will especially focus on the Assemblies of God as the doctrine's major decisive moment occurred within this denomination in 1918 ensuring evidential

²Both the July 1998 and July 1999 issues of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* are exclusively devoted to the issue of tongues as initial evidence.

³Frank D. Macchia, "Groans Too Deep for Words: Towards a Theology of Tongues as Initial Evidence," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1 (July 1998): 149-50.

⁴Tan May Ling, "A Response to Frank Macchia's 'Groans Too Deep for Words: Towards a Theology of Tongues as Initial Evidence,'" *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1 (July 1998): 178-79.

⁵Simon K. H. Chan, "Evidential Glossolalia and the Doctrine of Subsequence," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2 (July 1999): 195.

tongues' survival and status in the Pentecostal movement as a whole. Then, I will examine societal factors that likely influenced how early Pentecostals understood and articulated the relationship between tongues and Spirit baptism.

Historical Survey to 1901

When did the idea of tongues as initial evidence of Spirit baptism arise in Christianity? Stanley Burgess conducts a survey of church history to find the answer to this question. From his study, he discovers that the first link between Spirit baptism and tongues occurred in the ministry of Edward Irving in the 1830s. Before this time, Burgess asserts that no Christian individual or group in history understood tongues as a necessary sign of a Spirit-filled life.⁶ Gary McGee concurs with Burgess's conclusion. He notes that the connection Irving made between Spirit baptism and tongues appears to be the first instance in church history of anything resembling the Pentecostal doctrine of tongues as initial evidence.⁷

Edward Irving

Seventy years before the beginnings of Pentecostalism, a revival took place in Britain in connection with the Scottish-Presbyterian minister Edward Irving. Healings, prophecy, and tongues occurred in the west of Scotland and spread to Irving's church in London, England in the early 1830s. Irving understood the spiritual manifestations to be the result of Christians receiving baptism in the Holy Spirit as an experience separate from and subsequent to

⁶Stanley M. Burgess, "Evidence of the Spirit: The Medieval and Modern Western Churches," in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary B. McGee (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 37-38.

⁷Gary B. McGee, "Initial Evidence," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Mass (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 784-85.

conversion. He believed that the tongues were likely *xenolalia* but he did not emphasize it in his ministry.⁸ He linked speaking in tongues to Spirit baptism stating that “the baptism with the Holy Ghost, whose standing sign, if we err not, is the speaking with tongues.”⁹

What exactly Irving meant by “standing sign” is unclear given that he never explained his statement. The fact that he understood much of the sign value of tongues in relation to unbelievers further confuses the issue. In Irving’s understanding, “a tongue is but the sign and manifestation to the unbeliever” being “the last arrow in His [God’s] quiver for carrying conviction to the heart of an unbelieving generation.”¹⁰ When tongues-speakers were alone or in the midst of Christians, Irving stressed tongues as a gift and “a means of grace.”¹¹

Irving posited a unique relationship between tongues and other spiritual gifts that may have shaped his understanding of them as the “standing sign.” Tongues were crucial for every Christian because they formed the foundation for the functioning of all other gifts of the Spirit. He understood the gift of tongues to be “a chief means of God for training up the children of the Spirit into the capacity of prophesying and speaking in the Church for the edification of all, whether ‘by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine’.”¹² Irving asserted

⁸David W. Dorries, “Edward Irving and the ‘Standing Sign’ of Spirit Baptism,” in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary B. McGee (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 41-47. *Xenolalia* is a Greek word meaning “speaking in tongues in a recognizable earthly language.”

⁹Edward Irving, *Day of Pentecost or the Baptism with the Holy Ghost* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1831), 28, quoted in Dorries, 49.

¹⁰Edward Irving, “On the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, Commonly Called Supernatural,” in *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving in Five Volumes*, ed. Rev. G. Carlyle (London: Alexander Strahan, 1865), 5:559, 546.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 5:559.

¹²*Ibid.*, 5:541.

that the gift of tongues was “the root and the stem of them all [spiritual gifts], out of which they all grow, and by which they are all nourished.”¹³

Pentecostal commentators differ on how they interpret Irving’s understanding of tongues in relation to Spirit baptism. David Dorries notes that while Irving would have disliked the term “evidence,” what he taught was essentially the Pentecostal initial evidence concept. He emphasizes Irving’s statement that “we find it [tongues] always to have been the gift first bestowed upon the baptized.”¹⁴ He also points out that Irving directly linked “the introductory sign of the unknown tongue” to Spirit baptism on another occasion.¹⁵

Taking similar but less emphatic positions, Gordon Strachan and William Merricks assert that Irving clearly taught that the sign of Spirit baptism was tongues speech. Strachan views Irving as a Pentecostal John the Baptist and directly links Irving’s “standing sign” with Pentecostal initial evidence.¹⁶ However, he does not try to argue that the two tongues conceptions are exactly identical. Likewise, Merricks does not try to make a case that Irving held to an essentially Pentecostal understanding of tongues as initial evidence. Merricks appears to rely primarily on a single Irving quote, “I do not mean to say that the gift of tongues is the sign of infallibility; but that it is the sign of the baptism with the Holy Ghost; the outward and visible sign of that inward and invisible grace which the baptism of the Holy Ghost conferth; and that

¹³Edward Irving, “Facts Connected with Recent Manifestations of Spiritual Gifts,” *Fraser’s Magazine* (April 1832): 316, quoted in Dorries, 49.

¹⁴Irving, “On the Gifts of the Holy Ghost,” 5:539, quoted in Dorries, 49.

¹⁵Edward Irving, *Fraser’s Magazine* (January 1832): 761, quoted in Dorries, 49.

¹⁶Gordon Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1973), 21.

every one who hath not received this sign should look upon himself as having yet the gift of power to receive.”¹⁷ Intriguingly, while this Irving quote appears to be strong evidence for Irving holding a Pentecostal initial evidence position, Merricks does not pursue the point but simply drops the whole issue.¹⁸

Derek Vreeland, Harold Hunter, and Burgess take varying middle positions on the extent of the correspondence between Irving’s understanding of tongues as the sign of Spirit baptism and the Pentecostal initial evidence doctrine. After reviewing Dorries’ material, Vreeland simply concludes that “Irving formulated the role of tongues in the baptism of the Holy Spirit in quite Pentecostal terms.”¹⁹ Hunter states that scholars who believe that Irving held to Pentecostal initial evidence have ignored the fact that Irving connected prophecy to Spirit baptism just as strongly as he did tongues. Hunter also points out that there is no indication that Irving ever spoke in tongues himself even though he stressed the importance of receiving Spirit baptism.²⁰ Burgess’s main worry about the issue is that modern Pentecostals are reading their own biases into Irving’s statements about Spirit baptism and tongues.²¹

¹⁷Edward Irving, “On the Gifts of the Holy Ghost,” in *The Morning Watch or Quarterly Journal on Prophecy and Theological Review* (London: James Nisbet, 1831-32), 4:91, quoted in William S. Merricks, *Edward Irving: The Forgotten Giant* (East Peoria, IL: Scribe’s Chamber, 1983), 175.

¹⁸Merricks, 174-76.

¹⁹Derek Vreeland, “Edward Irving: Preacher, Prophet, and Charismatic Theologian,” *Pneuma Review* 5, Spring 2002 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.pneumafoundation.com/resources/articles/EIrving.pdf>; Internet; accessed January 16, 2004.

²⁰Harold D. Hunter, “Aspects of Initial-Evidence Dogma: A European-American Holiness Pentecostal Perspective,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1 (July 1998): 189.

²¹Burgess, 35-36.

Given that Dorries bases much of his argument upon stringing together single statements from Irving's many writings, Burgess's caution is warranted. Irving's writings clearly contain the raw materials for the Pentecostal initial evidence doctrine, but it is questionable if he ever held or advocated an early version of it. Perhaps the Pentecostal tongues concept was nascent in Irving's understanding, but there is no way to be certain.

Whatever he thought of the role of tongues in relation to Holy Spirit baptism, Irving does not appear to have stressed it in his ministry. Irving's view of tongues did not significantly shape the revival with which he was associated. In fact, Columba Flegg in his study of the Irvingite movement states that by 1847, the Irvingites believed that the assurance and results of Spirit baptism should be spiritual and inward in nature. Flegg notes that when the Irvingite apostles laid hands on their members to impart Spirit baptism, they immediately halted any outward manifestations and viewed them as inappropriate interruptions to the ceremony.²²

Charles Parham

While Irving's tongues as the "standing sign" of Spirit baptism parallels Pentecostal initial evidence doctrine, initial evidence thought originated with one of the founders of Pentecostalism, Charles Parham. He viewed tongues as the necessary "Bible evidence" of Spirit baptism, declaring that "speaking in other tongues is an inseparable part of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit distinguishing it from all previous works; and no one has received Baptism of the

²²Columba Graham Flegg, *Gathered Under Apostles': A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 85-86.

Holy Spirit who has not a Bible evidence to show for it.”²³ Parham held and promoted the belief that tongues signify the reception of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the restoration of the New Testament church in the end times. He claimed that tongues were actual foreign languages given to a special set of missionary end-time believers to be used to preach the Gospel in foreign lands. The Pentecostal Holiness Church and the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church later coined the phrase “initial evidence” in 1908 to describe Parham’s concept.²⁴

Although there are great similarities between the ideas of Parham and Irving, there is disagreement about whether or not Irving influenced Parham. Dorries and Larry Christenson assert that Irving’s movement and doctrine did not affect Pentecostalism in any way.²⁵ However, Roland Wessels and McGee point to literary evidence that Parham knew about Irving and his sect. Parham mentions Irving by name in his text, *Kol Kare Bomidbar: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, published in January 1902. Apparently, before the move of the Spirit in Topeka, Parham was fascinated with tongues and sought to discover contemporaneous cases of tongues speaking. It is in reference to his research that he mentions Irving and the Irvingites.²⁶ However, no sources exist detailing what exactly Parham understood about Irving and his linkage of tongues to Spirit baptism. Whether or not Irving influenced Parham’s development of initial

²³Charles F. Parham, *Kol Kare Bomidbar: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (Kansas City, MO: Charles F. Parham, 1902; reprint, Baxter Springs, KS: Robert L. Parham, 1944), 35, quoted in Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 48-49.

²⁴McGee, “Initial Evidence,” 784-86.

²⁵Dorries, 54; Larry Christenson, “Pentecostalism’s Forgotten Forerunner,” in *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*, ed. Vinson Synan (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1975), 25.

²⁶Roland Wessels, “Charles Parham’s Exegetical Journey to the Biblical Evidence of the Spirit Baptism,” in *To the Ends of the Earth: The Twenty-Third Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, November 11-13, 1993* (Guadalajara, Mexico: Society for Pentecostal Studies, 1993), 11; McGee, “Initial Evidence,” 784-85.

evidence remains a mystery. However, by the late nineteenth century, Irving's collected writings as well as several significant works about him had been published.²⁷ If Parham had desired to research Irving and his beliefs, sources were available to him. Vreeland sums up the problem arguing that "to claim that there is no historical connection is an oversimplification based on a lack of textual evidence."²⁸

Even without the issue of a possible Irving connection, there are many questions about how and when Parham formulated his initial evidence belief. Parham's wife chronicled her husband's recollection of what happened late in 1900 at his Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. In her account, it is strongly implied that Parham formulated his initial evidence doctrine from his students' biblical study and experiences after the Topeka outpouring.²⁹ Early Pentecostal scholars for years accepted Sarah Parham's report that forty students studied Spirit baptism in the Bible individually and all independently concluded that tongues evidenced the phenomenon. As a result, the students came together and fervently prayed for the baptism with accompanying tongues. On January 1, 1901, Agnes Ozman was the first to be baptized in the Spirit with the expected sign. Within a few days, about half of the Bethel students experienced Spirit baptism and tongues. James Goff notes that Pentecostals have utilized this version of

²⁷A selection of the major works available by 1900 include: William Jones, *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Edward Irving, A.M.* (London: John Bennett, 1835); Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism or of the So-called Catholic and Apostolic Church*, 2 vols. (London: C. Kegan Paul, 1878); and M. O. W. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862).

²⁸Vreeland, Internet.

²⁹Sarah E. Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham: Founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement* (Joplin, MO: Tri-State Printing, 1930), 51-53.

events as proof that the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement, including the doctrine of tongues as initial evidence, were divinely revealed and orchestrated.³⁰

However, many Pentecostal historians today no longer believe that Parham created the initial evidence creed following the Topeka revival. Most like Goff and McGee believe Parham had already formed his tongues as evidence belief before the Spirit's move in Topeka.³¹ Wessels contends that Parham underwent an exegetical journey to arrive at his initial evidence concept before he founded Bethel Bible School. He notes that Parham originally presented chapter three of *Kol Kare Bomidbar: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* as a sermon on January 21, 1901. In this discourse, Parham explains what happened at Bethel Bible School less than three weeks after the events. Wessels points out the detailed theological argumentation that Parham presents and does not think it likely that Parham could have constructed such a developed rationale in so short a time. Wessels concludes that Parham “had held this position even before the happening in the school and that he imposed his understanding of the manifestation upon those who experienced it.”³²

Further validating this position, Goff contends that Ozman's story of the Topeka outpouring does not match Parham's rendition. In her remembrance of the event, Ozman stated, “before receiving the Comforter I did not know that I would speak in tongues when I received

³⁰James R. Goff, Jr., *Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 66-70.

³¹Ibid., 74; McGee, “Initial Evidence,” 786.

³²Wessels, 2.

the Holy Ghost for I did not know it was Bible [*sic*].”³³ Ozman did not mention that the students engaged in any Bible study about the baptism in the Holy Spirit much less that they all agreed separately that tongues evidenced the Spirit’s coming. Like Wessels, Goff deduces from analyzing Parham’s past that he had fully formed his theology by the end of the fall of 1900.³⁴

Because it appears Parham already understood tongues as the initial evidence of baptism in the Spirit before he established his Bible school, how did he arrive at his tongues view? To start, Wessels asserts that by 1899, Parham believed in an eschatological baptism in the Holy Spirit leading to manifestations of spiritual gifts. Wessels points to an article in the *Apostolic Faith* in 1899 describing the beliefs of a healing home Parham had founded. One of its distinctive values was “the baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire which seals the Bride and bestows gifts.”³⁵ Wessels theorizes that in further exploring his eschatological understanding of Spirit baptism as sealing, Parham made the connection between Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues.³⁶

Parham’s eschatological beliefs greatly influenced his initial evidence position. He assumed that the end-times were near. He understood that the Church would go through the tribulation but a portion of it would go through it triumphantly.³⁷ He believed that God would

³³Agnes N. O. LaBerge, “History of the Pentecostal Movement from January 1, 1901” (Manuscript, Editorial files of the *Pentecostal Evangel*, Springfield, Missouri), 3, quoted in Goff, *Fields*, 71.

³⁴Goff, *Fields*, 71-72.

³⁵*Apostolic Faith* (Topeka) 1 (March 22, 1899): 8, quoted in Wessels, 3.

³⁶Wessels, 8.

³⁷James R. Goff, Jr., “Initial Tongues in the Theology of Charles Fox Parham,” in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary B. McGee (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 67.

baptize certain Christians in the Spirit and seal them for a special mission in the end times. These Spirit-baptized Christians would preach the Gospel and perform supernatural signs and wonders all over the world resulting in total global evangelization.³⁸ In order to witness on a world-wide scale, Goff claims that Parham had concluded by 1900 that this elite group would need to be able to speak in the languages of all people. Goff points to the April 1900 issue of the *Apostolic Faith* that reported a couple staying at Parham's healing home who were waiting for Christ to "give them a heathen tongue, and then they will proceed to the missionary field."³⁹ Tongues become an integral component of the end-times Spirit-baptism for Parham.⁴⁰

Like Goff, Wessels notes that by 1899, Parham had become extremely interested in tongues. In Parham's collection of real-life tongues stories, the testimony of Jennie Glassy especially impacted him. She was connected with Frank Sandford's Shiloh community, and Parham became intrigued with Sandford's ministry. During a visit to Shiloh in the summer of 1900, Parham heard several students speaking in tongues. Wessels believes that hearing *glossolalia* first-hand cemented Parham's growing belief that tongues were an essential component of the baptism of the Spirit and that the time of the Spirit-led conversion of the world was dawning. This viewpoint motivated Parham to found a Bible school in September 1900 to prepare future missionaries for the imminent move of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

³⁸McGee, "Initial Evidence," 786.

³⁹*Apostolic Faith* (Topeka) 2 (April 1, 1900): 7, quoted in: Goff, "Initial Tongues," 64.

⁴⁰Goff, "Initial Tongues," 64-65.

⁴¹Wessels, 11-15.

Historical Survey from 1906 to 1917

As the Pentecostal movement spread across the United States, Parham's ideas about the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied it. According to McGee, Parham's doctrine of initial evidence became the subject of the first major controversy in the new Pentecostal movement beginning in late 1906. Several prominent Christians within the movement and sympathizers on its fringes questioned whether or not tongues always occurred with Spirit baptism. Until 1908, the vast majority of early Pentecostal leaders wholeheartedly accepted Parham's initial evidence formulation.⁴² In response to the missionary reality of the first decade of the twentieth century, most Pentecostals modified Parham's understanding of initial evidence without rejecting it outright. However, a minority of first-generation Pentecostals and significant Pentecostal sympathizers either discarded the doctrine entirely or did not hold strictly to it. The period of 1906-1917 produced significant Pentecostal initial evidence discussion and theology both pro and con.

Dissenting Voices

William Seymour

After Parham and the revival at Bethel Bible School, the next major happening in the Pentecostal movement occurred in Los Angeles, California in 1906. Spirit baptism with attending tongues broke out in the Azusa Street revival under the leadership of William Seymour. Seymour, a disciple of Parham, understood the tongues manifestation in terms of Parham's categories. However, over time his view of the doctrine shifted. By mid 1907,

⁴²McGee, "Initial Evidence," 786.

Seymour had moderated his understanding of the tongues sign. He now understood it to be only one mark of the baptism of the Spirit and not the definite proof.⁴³ Seymour asserted that “if you get angry, or speak evil or backbite, I care not how many tongues you may have, you have not the baptism with the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁴ In 1908, Seymour stated in the *Apostolic Faith* that the real evidence of Spirit baptism was divine love manifested through the fruit of the Spirit.⁴⁵

As his ministry matured, Seymour became more and more critical of Parham’s initial evidence position. According to Cecil Robeck and Douglas Jacobsen, Seymour’s doubts and concerns were pastoral in nature and also likely reflected his anger with Parham’s criticism and continued attack of his Azusa Street ministry. Seymour believed signs were biblical, but in practice he noted that focusing on them too much created significant problems.⁴⁶ Seymour expressed his frustration that “some people to-day [*sic*] cannot believe that they have the Holy Ghost without some outward signs: that is Heathenism.”⁴⁷ He was also very concerned about the possibility of counterfeit tongues.⁴⁸ By 1915, Robeck suggests that Seymour had totally rejected the concept of initial evidence, deciding that the Bible did not support it. Seymour had come to

⁴³Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “William J. Seymour and ‘The Bible Evidence’,” in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary B. McGee (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 76, 80-81.

⁴⁴“To the Baptized Saints,” *Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles), 1:9, June-September 1907, 2.1, quoted in Robeck, 81.

⁴⁵“Questions Answered,” *Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles), 1:11, October-January 1908, 2.1, quoted in Robeck, 81.

⁴⁶Robeck, 81, 86-87; Jacobsen, 75-77.

⁴⁷William J. Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles, Cal.* (Los Angeles, CA: William J. Seymour, 1915), 8, quoted in Jacobsen, 78.

⁴⁸Robeck, 85.

view the idea as a human theological creation that limited the sovereignty of God.⁴⁹ Robeck points to Seymour's assertion that "many people have made shipwreck of their faith by setting up a standard for God to respect or come to. When we set up tongues to be, the Bible evidence of Baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire only [*sic*]. We have left the divine word of God and have instituted our own teaching."⁵⁰ Yet, Jacobsen contends that Seymour never completely abandoned the initial evidence doctrine since there is no record that he ever refuted that tongues should accompany Spirit baptism.⁵¹

Alfred Garr

Even when Seymour firmly believed and preached Parham's initial evidence, the doctrine soon proved problematic for some early Pentecostals. When missionaries went overseas from Azusa Street and tried to preach in their new languages, they were unsuccessful. Alfred Garr, a Pentecostal missionary to India in early 1907, discovered that he could not speak Bengali. He was the first in print to make the jump from tongues being actual foreign languages to their being spiritual prayer languages. He did not challenge any other aspect of Parham's initial evidence formulation. Garr's modification of the role of tongues soon became the dominant Pentecostal understanding of the gift as well. Most Pentecostals very quickly began to understand tongues as drawing the soul close to God and providing power for evangelization and witness.⁵² Despite

⁴⁹Ibid., 87.

⁵⁰Seymour, 91, quoted in Robeck, 87.

⁵¹Jacobsen, 78.

⁵²McGee, "Initial Evidence," 786-87.

this redefinition of tongues as *glossolalia*, Parham's basic formulation of initial evidence remained intact.

Minnie Abrams

As the function of tongues was shifting in the Pentecostal consciousness, one of the first challenges to the initial evidence concept itself came from India. India experienced its own revival in 1906 completely independent of American Pentecostalism and Charles Parham's theology. One of its leaders, missionary Minnie Abrams, asserted that in India, tongues often accompanied baptism in the Holy Spirit but not in every single case. She pointed to the multiple manifestations listed in Joel 2 as attending Spirit baptism as well as the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12.⁵³ Later, she stated, "I believe it is God's rule to give speaking in tongues at the time or sometime after one's baptism, but I think I see from the Word of God that He has exceptions. . . ."⁵⁴ She declared that the primary evidence of the experience was love.⁵⁵

Early Pentecostal Debate and Test

In the United States, the first debate about tongues as initial evidence within the Pentecostal movement occurred in 1907 in Waco, Texas. Early Pentecostals held a convention and short-term Bible school to hammer out points of doctrine. At these meetings, ministers who

⁵³Minnie F. Abrams, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire*, 2d ed. (Kedgaon, India: Mukti Mission, 1906), 69-70.

⁵⁴Minnie F. Abrams, "The Object of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit," *Latter Rain Evangel* (May 1911): 10, quoted in Gary B. McGee, "Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Tongues as Evidence in the Book of Acts," in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary B. McGee (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 108.

⁵⁵McGee, "Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 108.

had recently joined the Pentecostal movement questioned the initial evidence creed. The group's spokesman, A. G. Canada, asserted that any spiritual gift could serve as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The more established Pentecostals mounted a defense with W. F. Carrothers, a deputy of Charles Parham, successfully justifying the traditional Pentecostal position. According to Howard Goss, Carrothers's biblical exposition permanently convinced most of the participants.⁵⁶

Even so, Carl Brumback notes that the Pentecostal leadership decided right after Waco to test the initial evidence concept in San Antonio, a city that Pentecostals had never evangelized. The ministers involved made sure not to mention that tongues evidenced Spirit baptism in their San Antonio meetings. They figured that no one in the city would be expecting *glossolalia*. When tongues accompanied Spirit baptism in San Antonio, Brumback notes that "this early-day confirmation helped to establish the doctrine as a permanent tenet in the Pentecostal Movement."⁵⁷ Nevertheless, one has to wonder how ignorant the San Antonio seekers really were about the Pentecostal initial evidence belief given the dramatic nature of tongues and the ability of radical evangelicals of the period to effectively network and communicate.

Agnes Ozman

An unexpected critic of the initial evidence concept spoke out in late 1908. In a piece for *The Latter Rain Evangel* telling of her experience as the first person to speak in tongues in the Pentecostal movement, Agnes Ozman revealed that tongues do not function as the sole evidence

⁵⁶Howard A. Goss, *The Winds of God: The Story of the Early Pentecostal Days (1901-1914)* (New York, NY: Comet Press, 1958), 57-59.

⁵⁷Carl Brumback, *Like a River* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1977), 66-67.

of Spirit baptism. She claimed that God revealed the Pentecostal tongues error to her. From her testimony, it is clear she had held this position for some time.⁵⁸ Yet, McGee notes that Ozman successfully sought ordination with the Assemblies of God in 1917.⁵⁹ While there is no written documentation, Ozman's affiliation with the Assemblies of God would seem to indicate that she changed her mind and accepted the doctrine of initial evidence sometime before or not long after receiving her credentials.

A. B. Simpson

Outside Pentecostalism proper, American Pentecostal sympathizers had serious reservations about the tongues doctrine. One of the most famous and vocal was A. B. Simpson. Simpson and his Christian Missionary and Alliance denomination had been open to the possibility of *xenolalic* tongues for witnessing overseas since the early 1890s. By 1907, significant numbers of Christian Missionary and Alliance members reported Pentecostal tongues. While affirming baptism in the Spirit, Simpson came to the conclusion that *glossolalia* was not its evidence even though tongues constituted a valid spiritual gift. Because he understood the tongues in Acts as the gift of tongues, he could not biblically assert that every Christian would receive this one gift.⁶⁰ He also disliked the initial evidence position because of its divisiveness and objected to “the narrowness and uncharitableness of making this [glossolalic] experience a

⁵⁸Agnes Ozman, “The First One to Speak in Tongues,” *Latter Rain Evangel* (January 1909): 2.

⁵⁹McGee, “Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” 109.

⁶⁰McGee, “Initial Evidence,” 789.

standard for every other Christian and insisting that without this special gift of the Spirit no one has a right to claim the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”⁶¹

Supporting Voices

George Taylor

George Taylor published the first major Pentecostal theological defense, *The Spirit and the Bride*, in 1908.⁶² In his book, Taylor adopted Parham’s understanding of tongues as the initial evidence of Spirit baptism. Taylor clearly and forcefully argued that tongues functioned as the unique and unmistakable proof of Spirit baptism.⁶³ He contended that the tongues “manifestation” allowed Christians to preach the gospel in unknown languages as the Spirit prompted.⁶⁴ Taylor believed that tongues always authenticated Spirit baptism because God used physical “manifestations” to verify all of his major inner workings in humans. Taylor created a seven-stage progression of Spirit activity and corresponding external proofs with Spirit baptism and tongues as God’s culminating work in believers’ lives.⁶⁵

⁶¹A. B. Simpson, “Editorial,” *The Christian and Missionary Alliance Weekly* (January 1912): 235, quoted in Michael Thomas Girolimon, “A Real Crisis of Blessing: Part II,” *Paraclete* 27 (Spring 1993): 1.

⁶²Douglas Jacobsen states that while the preface of *The Spirit and the Bride* contains a 1907 publication date, the book was actually published in February, 1908. Referenced in: Jacobsen, 85.

⁶³George F. Taylor, *The Spirit and the Bride: A Scriptural Presentation of the Operations, Manifestation, Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit in His Relation to the Bride with Special Reference to the “Latter Rain” Revival* (Dunn, NC: George F. Taylor, 1907), 57.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 62-63.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 19-23.

David Myland

In contrast to Taylor's rigid and stringent initial evidence view, David Myland did not promote tongues as initial evidence in his 1910 Pentecostal theology, *The Latter Rain Covenant and Pentecostal Power*.⁶⁶ Yet, he did not expressly deny it either. He is difficult to classify either as a supporter or critic of initial evidence. Myland took a poetic, metaphorical, and mystical approach to his Pentecostal theology believing that God often moved unexpectedly and in surprising ways resulting in unique and varied personal encounters with the divine.⁶⁷ Thus, he did not believe or advocate formulas. Myland did not make a firm distinction between tongues as a sign and as a gift. He also did not believe tongues were actual foreign languages that Christians should use to preach the gospel around the globe.⁶⁸ He contended that tongues served as a sign of Spirit baptism as "the advance agent, the telltale of Pentecost. That is where it is valuable as a gift when nothing else will do."⁶⁹ Yet, he immediately cautioned that "we may get too much of the gift of tongues and not enough wisdom to balance it, and then it works weakness. . . . How we need perfect assemblies where all the gifts are in operation!"⁷⁰ Myland argued for balance when it came to tongues stating that "I am no modifier of tongues, please remember that, nor am I a stickler about tongues; you never had any too much tongues [*sic*] for

⁶⁶Myland's *The Latter Rain Covenant and Pentecostal Power* primarily consists of a compilation of teachings Myland presented at a Pentecostal conference at the Stone Church in Chicago in the spring of 1909. Referenced in: Donald W. Dayton, preface to *Three Early Pentecostal Tracts*, ed. Donald W. Dayton (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1985), ix.

⁶⁷David Wesley Myland, *The Latter Rain Covenant and Pentecostal Power with Testimony of Healings and Baptism* (Chicago, IL: Evangel Publishing House, 1910), 64.

⁶⁸Jacobsen, 131.

⁶⁹Myland, 112.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 113.

me, but I will not, I cannot, and I *shall* not magnify tongues out of its legitimate place, its scriptural setting, and its value compared with other gifts of the Spirit. Tongues is the least of all the gifts, and subordinate to other gifts, and when it is not kept so, there is some trouble.”⁷¹

According to Jacobsen, Myland emphasized inner peace, love for others, and unity in the body as signs of spiritual fullness just as surely as or even more clearly than tongues.⁷² Yet, Myland did not modify initial evidence or explicitly argue against it.

William Durham

From 1908/09 to his death in 1912, William Durham taught that Spirit baptism was a process culminating in tongues. Jacobsen argues that for Durham, tongues were the final completing step in the process of Spirit baptism itself as well as serving as the external sign of that fact.⁷³ Jacobsen points to the following statement as summarizing Durham’s position:

The power, which has already overcome and which shakes the person’s body, simply moves to his vocal organs and begins to operate on them and, if yielded to, soon produces a language. After a person had spoken in tongues we pronounced them through. By this we meant his baptism was complete. Many would have the power on them and not get through to the baptism at the first time, or even the second. When this was the case the power of God, after dealing with a person, would simply lift from him. When He filled him and spoke in tongues He remained with him.⁷⁴

Yet, Durham asserted in another article republished after his death that “every person who receives the gift of the Holy Ghost breaks forth speaking in new tongues **as soon as He**

⁷¹Ibid., 108.

⁷²Jacobsen, 130-32.

⁷³Ibid., 159-60.

⁷⁴[William Durham], “Speaking in Tongues Is the Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” *Pentecostal Testimony* 2, no. 2 (1912?): 10, quoted in Jacobsen, 160.

finishes His work and takes up His permanent abode within him” (emphasis Durham).⁷⁵

Durham’s two statements appear to contradict each other. Jacobsen’s contention that Durham believed tongues were the last step within the Spirit baptism action itself may not be valid. It is possible that Durham did not think through the exact relationship of tongues to Spirit baptism except to argue that tongues always accompany this Spirit action. Regardless, for Durham, the connection between tongues and Spirit baptism was the “great distinguishing truth” of Pentecostalism.⁷⁶ Holding fast to his convictions, he believed that Pentecostals must be active advocates and defenders of the initial evidence concept.

Joseph King

Likewise, Joseph King asserted in the first edition of his work, *From Passover to Pentecost*, that tongues marked full Spirit baptism in all cases.⁷⁷ For King, partial Spirit baptisms existed and might precede the full baptism. These incomplete fillings empowered believers to some degree but never produced tongues.⁷⁸ Internal manifestations likely would result from either partial or full Spirit baptism so the external manifestation of tongues was the

⁷⁵William H. Durham, “What Is the Evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost?” *The Christian Evangel*, no. 250/251 (August 10, 1918): 2.

⁷⁶William Durham, “The Two Great Experiences or Gifts,” *Pentecostal Testimony* 1, no. 8 (1911?): 6-7, quoted in Jacobsen, 160.

⁷⁷There seems to be inconsistency regarding the dating of this text. Douglas Jacobsen in his *Thinking in the Spirit* gives it a 1914 date without comment while Gary McGee in his initial evidence entry in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* gives the title a tentative date of 1911.

⁷⁸Joseph H. King, *From Passover to Pentecost* (Senath, MO: F. E. Short, 1914), 141-42, 165.

only way to know that a full baptism had occurred. For King, “the speaking in other tongues is the only outward aspect of Pentecost, the same being given as an evidence of its reception.”⁷⁹

Garfield Haywood

Coming from a Oneness Pentecostal perspective at the time he wrote, Garfield Haywood strongly contended for the reality of tongues as initial evidence. In his undated text, *The Birth of the Spirit in the Days of the Apostles*, written after his embrace of Oneness doctrine in 1915, Haywood notes that “we cannot believe that a man has received the Holy Ghost until we see the signs as were manifested in Apostolic days, therefore tongues are for a sign.”⁸⁰ He distinguished between tongues as a sign and as a gift believing that the sign of tongues evidenced salvation in all cases while only some believers received the gift of tongues. Looking back to his Trinitarian days, Haywood acknowledged that he and others “who receive[d] this miraculous experience as it is recorded in the second chapter of Acts, stood firm and proclaimed far and wide that, according to the apostolic record, all who were baptized with the Holy Spirit spoke with other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance.”⁸¹

Assemblies of God

In 1916, only two years after its formation, the Assemblies of God committed its core beliefs to paper with the creation of its first *Statement of Fundamental Truths*. Article six

⁷⁹King, 114. However, by 1934, Joseph King had changed his mind about tongues being the exclusive initial evidence of Spirit baptism. In the second edition of his book, King added prophecy to tongues as an additional evidence of Spirit baptism. Referenced in: Joseph H. King, *From Passover to Pentecost*, 2d ed. (Franklin Springs, GA: Publishing House of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, 1934), 219.

⁸⁰Garfield T. Haywood, *The Birth of the Spirit in the Days of the Apostles* (Indianapolis, IN: Christ Temple Book Store, n.d.), 21.

⁸¹Ibid., 16.

addressed initial evidence. It read, “The consummation of the baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost and fire, is indicated by the initial [physical] sign of speaking in tongues, as the Spirit of God gives utterance. Acts 2.4. . . .”⁸² There is some confusion over whether or not “physical” should be included in the original rendition of this creed. The term does not appear in the minutes of the General Council of 1916. However, the minutes of the 1917 meeting state that “by an oversight last year the word ‘physical’ got left out before the word ‘sign’ in reference to tongues as the initial physical sign of the Baptism with the Holy Ghost.”⁸³ Therefore, it seems best to include “physical” in the original 1916 statement.

Glen Menzies notes that the creation process of this article of faith is undocumented so it is impossible to know what issues the General Council debated or any fine distinctions of belief that the discussion raised.⁸⁴ There appears to be no official written explanations or discussions of the nuances of the original understanding of initial evidence after its adoption either. Thus, how exactly the Assemblies of God officially understood tongues in relation to Spirit baptism is not clear. Given the loosely-organized and cooperative nature of the Assemblies of God denomination at this time, it is likely that the fellowship allowed a variety of formulations and opinions within its general affirmation of initial evidence.

⁸²Glen Menzies, “Tongues as ‘The Initial Physical Sign’ of Spirit Baptism in the Thought of D. W. Kerr,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 20 (Fall 1998): 178-79.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., 178.

F. F. Bosworth and the Events of 1917-1918

The strongest Pentecostal challenge to initial evidence occurred in the Assemblies of God in 1917-1918. An early Assemblies of God leader, Fred Bosworth, rejected initial evidence. He believed the doctrine to be unbiblical, experientially false in the lives of many Christians, and potentially destructive for individual Christians' spiritual lives as well as the Pentecostal movement as a whole. Bosworth had come to understand tongues in Acts as the gift of tongues and thus could no longer assert the phenomenon's potential universality.⁸⁵ Pastoral concerns also motivated him as he related that he personally knew many Spirit-baptized believers who had never spoken in tongues as well as tongues-speaking Christians with highly questionable spiritual lives and experiences.⁸⁶ He also believed that many famous soul-winners from the past had received Spirit baptism without tongues. Most strikingly, Bosworth asserted that the initial evidence concept hindered and destroyed faith in God. He warned that this belief encouraged seekers to pay more attention to physical manifestations than to the promises of the Bible and the work of the Spirit in their hearts.⁸⁷

According to William Menzies, the fact that Bosworth rejected initial evidence was much less of a problem for the new Assemblies of God denomination than the fact that he was vocal about it. Bosworth resigned amicably from the denomination in the summer of 1918. However, because of the controversy, the General Council meeting during the fall of that year revolved around discussion and debate of initial evidence. Daniel Kerr's explication of the scripture

⁸⁵Fred Francis Bosworth, *"Do All Speak with Tongues?": An Open Letter to the Ministers and Saints of the Pentecostal Movement* (Dallas, TX: by the author, 1918), 5-7.

⁸⁶Ibid., 12-13.

⁸⁷Ibid., 12-13, 21.

surrounding the doctrine won the day with the denomination deciding to reaffirm its allegiance to the creed.⁸⁸

Initial Evidence after 1918

With Bosworth's resignation and the Assemblies of God's re-approval of initial evidence, the discussion of the doctrine's validity was essentially over for all of white American Pentecostalism and much of Pentecostalism around the world. The basic concept of initial evidence was now set in stone. McGee implies that any possible future evolution of the creed was severely limited due to the Assemblies of God's decision to require all its ministers and missionaries to affirm the doctrine on an ongoing basis.⁸⁹

Even so, the acceptance of initial evidence outside white American Pentecostalism was far from universal. McGee notes that some black North American Pentecostal churches viewed *glossolalia* as only one evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit or did not link tongues and Spirit baptism in an evidentiary way. The United Holy Church of America did not accept initial evidence from its Pentecostal beginnings, believing tongues to be simply one of many gifts associated with Spirit baptism. Other black Pentecostal groups initially accepted initial evidence but changed their positions over time. For example, the Church of God in Christ added dancing and shouting to tongues as initial evidences of Spirit baptism.⁹⁰

⁸⁸William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 128-29.

⁸⁹McGee, "Initial Evidence," 789.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

Like black North American Pentecostalism, the initial evidence picture was diverse overseas. While the majority of Pentecostal leaders and organizations worldwide accepted the doctrine, a significant number remained unconvinced or modified it to fit their understandings. According to McGee, early European Pentecostals like Jonathan Paul of Germany and Gerrit Polman of the Netherlands questioned the necessity of tongues as initial evidence.⁹¹ Thomas Barratt of Norway, who introduced much of Western Europe to Pentecostalism, exercised flexibility regarding the doctrine. In a 1928 publication, he stated “many have, we expect, received the Baptism without this outward sign [tongues], as it may have been kept back through unbelief, unwillingness, ignorance, fear, distrust, or from other reasons.”⁹² The Elim Pentecostal Church in England and its founder, George Jeffreys, accepted both tongues and prophecy as proofs of Spirit baptism. Similarly, the Pentecostal Methodist Church in South America, founded by Willis Hoover, considered tongues and “holy dance” as evidences.⁹³

Even within the Assemblies of God, the doctrine was not completely static during the final decade of first-generation Pentecostalism. At least semantically, the initial evidence article in the denomination’s *Statement of Fundamental Truths* evolved from 1918 to 1927. While most of the changes in wording during these years did not impact the meaning of the statement, in 1927, the Assemblies of God leadership removed the phrase “full consummation of,” which referenced Spirit baptism, from the article.⁹⁴ This change appears to indicate that some sort of

⁹¹McGee, “Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” 108; McGee, “Initial Evidence,” 789.

⁹²Thomas Ball Barratt, *In the Days of the Latter Rain*, rev. ed. (London: Blim Publishing Company, 1928), 219. He makes similar statements on pages 152-53.

⁹³McGee, “Initial Evidence,” 789.

⁹⁴Glen Menzies, 178-79.

shift or narrowing in the official understanding of the baptism in the Spirit had or was taking place. However, there are no official statements or records available explaining the reasoning behind the deletion. This revision occurred in the context of the Assemblies of God drawing up its constitution and bylaws in 1927, an event which marked the growing institutionalization of the denomination and the beginnings of the move of the Pentecostal movement as a whole into its second-generation.⁹⁵ In the concluding years of Pentecostalism's first-generation, the Assemblies of God's statement on initial evidence read just like it reads in the early twenty-first century, "The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance. Acts 2:4. This speaking in tongues in this instance is the same in essence as the gift of tongues, 1 Cor. 12:4-10, 28, but different in purpose and use."⁹⁶

To further explore the specifics of the late first-generation Assemblies of God initial evidence position, I examined the denomination's only official theology of the Spirit from that time period, "*The Spirit which Is from God*," published in 1928. Frank Lindblad, an Assemblies of God pastor and district presbyter, wrote and self-published this work in 1927 before the denomination published it a year later.⁹⁷ In his chapter on the infilling and its evidence, Lindblad emphasized that Spirit baptism is often a process ending in tongues and no two infillings are the

⁹⁵Edith L. Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism, Volume 1-To 1941* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 260.

⁹⁶Glen Menzies, 178-79.

⁹⁷Larry E. Martin, "A Brief Biography of Frank and Lois Lindblade," in *The Spirit which Is from God*, by Frank Lindblade (Duncan, OK: Christian Life Books, 1995), 276. Around 1930, Frank Lindblad changed his last name to Lindblade.

same. It appears that Lindblad's understanding of Spirit baptism reflected the denomination's pre-1927 "full consummation of" language.

Lindblad was quite flexible in his understanding of Spirit baptism and its relationship to tongues. He did not try to precisely define how tongues and Spirit baptism are related.

The process of being filled with the Spirit and the incidents leading to it differ with different persons. . . . With some, the power of the Spirit may come with the rushing of mighty wind, as it were, and in a few moments the work is done. . . . But in the majority of cases it is more of a gradual process. The Spirit of God will often come upon a person again and again with an intervening time of days, and even weeks, before the final fullness arrives.

These preliminary broodings of the Spirit are for the purpose of assuming full mastery of that person and of subjecting the whole body to His will. This operating and subjecting process even includes the vocal organs. But singularly enough, this is most often left to the very last, until all the rest of the body has become completely subjected. . . . Sometimes the vocal organs are not affected until all other things are out of the way. Sometimes they are played upon as others are being finished. In some cases the Spirit takes complete control in an instant and without any preliminary activities, but usually, like the others, it is a more gradual process.⁹⁸

For Lindblad, speaking in tongues might happen just before the inevitable completion of the Spirit baptism process, but most often it occurred afterwards. The specific timing of the sign did not appear to concern him so long as it took place.

Lindblad also detailed "spiritual" manifestations that might accompany Spirit baptism before evidential tongues. He mentioned "deep stillness," "a mighty fire in the very bones," "filling the whole body with a something that feels like a powerful electric current," "supernatural power which feels very beautiful upon . . . flesh," "visions," and "trance."⁹⁹ He argued that God likely uses tongues as the initial evidence so that Satan cannot "endeavor to

⁹⁸Frank Lindblad, *The Spirit which Is from God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1928), 131, 134.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 133-35.

cause a person to doubt as to who or what is the cause of these feelings and this phenomenon. . . . But when he [the person] finds that these utterances [tongues] consist of praises and worship of Jesus and adoration of God, and bring the very presence of heaven into his soul, he knows that it must be God. For Satan never yet has magnified Jesus, and never will.”¹⁰⁰ These statements suggest that for Lindblad, the “physical” in initial physical evidence held meaning. “Spiritual” manifestations are early evidences of Spirit baptism but are not sufficient to stand alone without tongues as the uncontestable physical proof.

Social History

Having surveyed initial evidence in Christian history and first-generation Pentecostalism, I will now attempt to uncover social forces that likely influenced its development. A legitimate question with which to begin is, “Why did the relationship between tongues and Spirit baptism come to be labeled ‘initial evidence’ or ‘initial physical evidence’ as these terms are not biblical?” Spittler suggests that this evidential language reflected the cultural milieu of early American Pentecostalism. He notes that the radical evangelical movement out of which Pentecostalism arose believed in Spirit baptism for empowerment and/or sanctification and actively sought it. By the late nineteenth century, there was discussion in these circles regarding what constituted the proof of Spirit baptism. Thus, the early Pentecostal movement was predisposed to think in terms of evidence and proof when it came to Spirit baptism.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 136.

¹⁰¹Russell P. Spittler, “Maintaining Distinctives: The Future of Pentecostalism,” in *Pentecostals from the Inside Out*, ed. Harold B. Smith (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 132.

Going beyond the immediate radical evangelical context to the larger American social scene, Spittler believes that the radical evangelical and Pentecostal tendency to look for evidence for Spirit baptism was likely grounded in the overwhelming influence of Darwinism on American thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even though Pentecostals rejected evolution, there is a strong possibility that they unconsciously imbibed the evidentiary worldview from the larger society and articulated their religious experiences in light of it. Spittler also points to the strength of German higher criticism and its emphasis on the necessity of historical evidence for religious belief in the period as well.¹⁰²

I will extend Spittler's arguments to include the effects of the philosophy of pragmatism on early Pentecostalism. Pragmatism "refers to the usefulness, workability, and the practicality of ideas, policies, and proposals as criteria of their merit and claims to attention."¹⁰³ This philosophy is intimately tied with Darwinian thought and emphasizes experience over the abstract. One of the basic theses of pragmatism is that any concept must have recognizable consequences for it to have any meaning or truth.¹⁰⁴ Logically, this premise mirrors the Pentecostal relationship between Spirit baptism and tongues. Is the similarity merely a coincidence or did pragmatism shape initial evidence?

Between 1900 and 1925, the philosophy of pragmatism dominated the American mindset, influencing law, education, politics, social theory, art, and religion.¹⁰⁵ William James

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Pragmatism," by H. S. Thayer, 636.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

popularized this philosophy right before the turn of the century. James's pragmatism was intrinsically vague and adaptable, and most of his writing was geared to educated average Americans rather than to the scholarly philosophical world. Both factors led to pragmatism's filtering down to the mass consciousness of the era.¹⁰⁶ Given that first-generation Pentecostalism spans the same time period as this influential system of thought, it seems very possible that it exerted influence on how early Pentecostals understood and formulated initial evidence.

While not connecting early Pentecostals to the philosophy of pragmatism directly, Grant Wacker asserts that first-generation Pentecostalism can be understood in terms of a realism and pragmatism. His main thesis in *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* is that the genius and strength of the early Pentecostal movement lay in its ability to hold primitivism and pragmatism in a creative tension.¹⁰⁷ In defining what he means by pragmatism, Wacker asserts that "at the end of the day Pentecostals proved remarkably willing to work within the social and cultural expectations of the age."¹⁰⁸ Wacker's understanding of the early movement would seem to indicate that the American philosophical spirit of 1900-1925 greatly impacted American Pentecostalism.

Interestingly, pragmatism's popularity was a uniquely American phenomenon. Many European philosophers looked down on pragmatism and saw it as a reflection of the American ethos, "a philosophical expression of the American go-getter spirit with its success-oriented

¹⁰⁶David Warren Bowen, "William James," in *World Philosophers and Their Works*, ed. John K. Roth (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2000), 2:929-30.

¹⁰⁷Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 12-14.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 13.

ideology.”¹⁰⁹ Perhaps pragmatism’s largely American influence helps explain why tongues as initial evidence did not take as firm a hold overseas as in the United States. It might also help explain why black Pentecostals, a group well outside the white American mainstream in the early twentieth century, exhibited flexibility in their understanding of the relationship between Spirit baptism and tongues.

While the pragmatic mood of the age may elucidate why early Pentecostalism understood tongues in evidentiary terms, were there any other social reasons behind the doctrine of initial evidence taking root in American Pentecostalism? Wacker suggests that tongues served a socio-psychological function in the emerging Pentecostal movement. For early Pentecostals and other Spirit seekers, receiving Spirit baptism meant more than simply gaining an experience. The event indicated that they were in right relationship with God. Radical evangelicals of all stripes sought for the baptism in the Holy Spirit with all their might. Given the psychological pressure in that kind of cultural environment, Wacker states that something was bound to appear to serve as a sign of receiving the crucial yet silent Spirit baptism.¹¹⁰

That tongues arose as the longed-for evidence of Spirit baptism does not surprise Wacker. He contends that the disassociative nature of tongues perfectly fit the primitive impulse of Pentecostalism. Speaking in tongues took Pentecostals out of their ordinary lives and into the realm of the Spirit. It was an otherworldly activity that joined Pentecostals to the world of the early Christian church. That early Pentecostalism would intimately link such a quintessential

¹⁰⁹Nicholas Rescher, “Pragmatism,” in *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 712.

¹¹⁰Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 40.

element to Spirit baptism and then come to define their movement around it makes both psychological and sociological sense to him.¹¹¹

In a similar vein, McGee points out that Pentecostals realized that their experiences paralleled those of the early church, confirming the truth of Spirit baptism with initial tongues for them. Modern instances of tongues speaking and the movement's emphasis on the Spirit gave them a strong belief in the significance of the Acts narrative for the contemporary church.¹¹²

In addition, McGee notes the widespread nature and effectiveness of Pentecostal literature in defending and promoting the doctrine as well as the establishing of Pentecostal denominations with initial evidence as a required belief. He believes these two factors help explain why the initial evidence concept survived and thrived in spite of all the questioning surrounding it.¹¹³

Looking at the issue from a different angle, Wacker and Jacobsen both assert that the great similarity between the Holiness movement and early Pentecostalism provided a strong social impetus for Pentecostalism's adoption of tongues as initial evidence. The theology and practices of the two groups were identical except for Pentecostalism's insistence on the unique role of tongues in Spirit baptism. Because of the great overlap, bitter conflict erupted as Holiness believers did not appreciate Pentecostals insinuating that they had not received Spirit

¹¹¹Ibid., 56.

¹¹²McGee, "Initial Evidence," 789-90.

¹¹³Ibid., 790.

baptism.¹¹⁴ Wacker considers it inevitable that Pentecostalism adopted tongues as a fixed identity marker to distinguish itself from its Holiness roots as all successful sects realize on some level that they need opposition and resistance to define and solidify them.¹¹⁵ Jacobsen notes that Pentecostalism broke away from the Holiness movement and established itself as a separate sociological religious entity by using its single distinctive, initial evidence, to draw a clear boundary line around itself.¹¹⁶

Finally, Wacker suspects that Pentecostals' defense of initial evidence took on a life of its own at some point in the movement. He asserts that Pentecostals formed their beliefs and practices in light of outsiders' perceptions of them. Since most Christians and non-Christians dismissed and devalued tongues, Pentecostalism adopted a defensive tongues posture very early in its history. Wacker believes by 1910 at the latest, the tongues defense had gained sufficient momentum to sustain itself in the face of nearly any criticism. By that date, everyone, including Pentecostals themselves, defined Pentecostalism around the issue of tongues even though less than one-half of first-generation participants actually spoke in tongues.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

All in all, tongues as initial evidence caught on quickly and remained remarkably stable and static throughout first-generation Pentecostalism. The specifics of first-generation initial

¹¹⁴Grant A. Wacker, "Travail of a Broken Family: Radical Evangelical Responses to the Emergence of Pentecostalism in America, 1906-16," in *Pentecostal Currents in American Protestantism*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer, Russell P. Spittler, and Grant A. Wacker (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 26, 38.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 40.

¹¹⁶Jacobsen, 288.

¹¹⁷Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 40-41.

evidence theology were fuzzy and fluid as would be expected of any new concept in the early years of a religious movement. Yet, the basic construct survived criticism from within and without extremely successfully. It appears that initial evidence was uncannily well-suited to early Pentecostalism and its larger social context which helps explain its popularity and resilience. This near-perfect fit suggests that the American worldview of the early twentieth century in combination with the social factors involved in the emergence of the movement influenced and shaped first-generation Pentecostalism's understanding of the relationship between Spirit baptism and tongues.

As times have changed for both Pentecostalism and America, it is no wonder that modern Pentecostals are questioning the initial evidence doctrine. Pentecostalism has succeeded in establishing itself as a distinct and viable religious movement. It now dwarfs the radical evangelicalism that spawned it. Likewise, Darwinism and pragmatism exert much less of an influence on the current American psyche as the dominant society appears to be moving in the direction of post-modernism. If initial evidence rose to prominence in Pentecostalism because it fit the needs, experiences, and worldview of the movement at its earliest stage of development, then the doctrine must be revisited and reformulated in light of Pentecostalism's new level of maturity, increasingly sophisticated biblical scholarship, and twenty-first-century cultural setting in order to remain relevant. If not, then the creed will likely grow increasingly incomprehensible to average Pentecostals until it becomes insignificant to the point that it fades into a practical, if not institutional, obscurity.

In investigating tongues as initial evidence from Edward Irving through first-generation Pentecostalism, further research questions present themselves. Until 1927, the Assemblies of God understood Spirit baptism to be a process, indicated by the denomination's inclusion of the

phrase “full consummation of” in its Spirit baptism/initial evidence Fundamental Truth. What effect, if any, did the phrase’s removal have on second-generation Pentecostalism and beyond? I suspect that its deletion led later Pentecostals to view Spirit baptism as an instantaneousness or essentially timeless event. What were the consequences for the initial evidence belief if this was indeed the case? Does it help explain the common Pentecostal error of equating evidential tongues with Spirit baptism itself? Does it clarify the loss of meaning of the “physical” in initial physical evidence? Has it any bearing on the current issue of the creed’s immediacy? A research project tracing tongues as initial evidence in the Assemblies of God from 1927 to the present would likely shed new light upon many of the contemporary concerns and controversies surrounding the doctrine within the denomination.

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