

Speaking in tongues as the initial, physical evidence of the Spirit Baptism

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Introduction

The Initial Physical Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is one of the core doctrines of the Assemblies of God¹, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world. Together with the emphasis on the Spirit Baptism as the experience distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth², these are two classical and distinctive doctrines of the Pentecostal movement. This distinctiveness is especially important in the charismatic and evangelical world.³

These two doctrines also provoke the most controversy.⁴ The initial evidence seems to be the more explosive one. Indeed, it has been said that modern critics of the Pentecostal movement do not have problems with its evangelism efforts, worship style, etc. but with the initial evidence doctrine⁵. “Tongues make people fight.”⁶

Although we could consider such words too strong, we might agree that the phenomenon of speaking in tongues, perhaps more than any other, has marked the Pentecostal movement of the twentieth century.⁷

On the other hand, Pentecostalism – as with every other movement within Christianity – is a living organism with some kind of internal motion. Although the initial evidence doctrine is the classical one, there have always been people even within the movement itself who differed in opinion concerning it.⁸ Even some of

¹ Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths, Article Number 8, http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_short.cfm [accessed 28/1/2011]

² Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths, Article Number 7

³ See the definitions of *Charismatics* and *Evangelicalism* in B. T. Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), p. 4-5.

⁴ S.M. Horton, ‘Spirit Baptism: A Pentecostal Perspective’, in Ch. O. Brand (ed.), *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: 5 Views* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&G Publishing group, 2004), p. 101.

⁵ T. Enloe, ‘A Functional Approach to a Sometimes Touchy Subject’, *Enrichment Journal* 15/3 (2010), p. 106.

⁶ Enloe, ‘A Functional Approach to a Sometimes Touchy Subject’, p. 105.

⁷ M.J. Cartledge, *Speaking in Tongues, Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2006), p. XII.

⁸ See S.M. Burgess, G.B. McGee *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996 – Ninth printing), p. 339: “Not all classical Pentecostals teach initial evidence. Exceptions include organized classical Pentecostal Churches in Scandinavia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Latin America.”

the early leaders hesitated about asserting the necessity of tongues as the initial physical evidence of the Spirit baptism.⁹

We can see an on-going discussion over this issue throughout the history of the Pentecostal movement itself and within the broader body of the Christian world. However, a significant shift can be seen in the discussion with other parts of the Body of Christ in recent years. We can see an actual openness to the work of the Holy Spirit across the entire Christian spectrum. Evangelicals have re-examined their theological positions, and they are claiming to have the same gifts as Pentecostals.¹⁰ This brings not only good fruit and a larger acceptance of Pentecostals among other traditions, but also some degree of uncertainty and confusion within Pentecostalism's own ranks. As W.W. Menzies asserts, new questions are being asked by those who are genuinely interested in the work of the Spirit, but this also brings nuances that raise important questions for classical Pentecostals.¹¹ They have to define more clearly the heart of their theology where the doctrine of the initial evidence lays at the very centre.

One of the important reasons I have chosen this topic as the theme of my essay is connected with my own context. I come from a post-communist country in which the Pentecostal movement got its official recognition as a legal part of the religious scene in 1989. Before that Pentecostals existed as an underground and persecuted movement for many decades. No outreach, education or publication was officially allowed. Since 1989 much has been done especially in the area of evangelism,¹² church planting¹³ and education.¹⁴ In the area of theology, good theological materials have started to be published, especially

⁹ G.B. McGee, *Initial Evidence* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), p. 107-108. By far the best-known leader among them was AG minister Fred F. Bosworth, and among European leaders e.g. G. Jeffreys (England), J. Paul (Germany) and others.

¹⁰ W.W. Menzies, R. P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundation of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 47.

¹¹ W.W. Menzies, 'The Initial Evidence Issue: A Pentecostal Response', *Asian Journal of Pentecostals studies*, 2/2, (1999), p. 262.

¹² The Apostolic Church is the only Pentecostal denomination officially recognized by the government in the Czech Republic. In 1989 the Apostolic Church numbered around 800 people, in 2010 around 7000.

¹³ 1989 - 3 local churches, 2010 - 43 local churches.

¹⁴ 1992 The Pentecostal Bible Academy was founded and in 1996 it became the Higher School of Theology and Missions.

translations from other languages (mainly from English).¹⁵ However, debates over the outstanding points of Pentecostal doctrinal emphases, such as Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues, have not been represented much. Part of the reason is a lack of literature published in the Czech language concerning these issues and the debates which have developed throughout the years in Anglo-Saxon territory.¹⁶ Generally we might say that only positive perspectives are introduced. Some authors with alternative perspectives can be found in Czech translations but not many.¹⁷ Neither is there a document such as an official statement of fundamental truths. It is only presumed that every pastor from the movement holds the classical position.

The aim of this essay is to bring brief reflections of the important points of the discussion concerning the initial evidence doctrine and, if possible, the current development of this discussion. Thus, if translated, this work could add some information to that which we already have and broaden the picture of this important issue.

Doctrine and terminology defined

The initial evidence doctrine declares that the baptism of believers in the Holy Spirit is evidenced by the initial physical sign of speaking in tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance.¹⁸ It is closely linked with another core Pentecostal doctrine: that Spirit baptism is the experience distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth. The doctrine attempts to express that although there could be many signs that the Christian life is empowered by

¹⁵ Many materials of Global University have been published in the Czech language – textbooks from the Basic Level of Christian living, through the Christian Ministry Level up to the Bachelor level.

¹⁶ An exception can be seen in the Czech edition of S. M. Horton's *Systematic Theology* where the issues of Spirit baptism and initial evidence are treated to some extent. S. Horton, *Systematická teologie* (Albrechtice: Křesťanský život, 2001), pp. 435 – 466. The book from the former president of the Pentecostal European Fellowship J. Zopfi *Na všeliké tělo* (Albrechtice: Křesťanský život, 1997) is also available in Czech, and there are passages where these issues are briefly discussed.

¹⁷ A significant work to be mentioned here could be J. Stott, *Zápas mladé církve* (Praha: Návrat domů, 2001).

¹⁸ Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths, Article Number 8

the Holy Spirit, there is one outward sign God provided as the immediate indication of being baptized in the Holy Ghost – speaking in tongues.¹⁹

It should be acknowledged that the term initial evidence is not a biblical term²⁰ and that the doctrine is derived mostly from the book of Acts, although the context of the whole Bible has been recently stressed more and more.²¹ The absence of this term in the Bible is often seen as an indication that the issue of the initial evidence is simply not raised in the Bible and that the effort of Pentecostals to define this doctrine is rather artificial. The response of the proponents is that every theological formulation is not without its limitation because it represents the human attempt to express what the Word of God means. However, it captures well the sense of expectation inherent in the pages of the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts.²²

Glossolalia, the technical term derived from the Greek phrase *glossais lalein* used in the New Testament, literally means to speak in (or “with” or “by”) tongues. *Xenolalia* describes *glossolalia* when the language spoken is identifiable as one from among the over three thousand known languages.²³ It seems that Luke in the book of Acts understands it this way – as the speaking of actual languages. The Apostle Paul implies in I Cor. 13:1 the idea of speaking in the tongues of angels, but there is no general agreement if such an interpretation can be supported.²⁴

¹⁹ W.W. Menzies, S. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*, (Springfield: Logion Press, 1993), p. 135.

²⁰ It is uncertain who first coined the term. The earliest Pentecostals referred to the phenomenon of speaking in tongues as evidential tongues, the evidence, biblical evidence and so on. See G. B. McGee, *Initial evidence*, p. 110.

²¹ Enloe, ‘A Functional Approach to a Sometimes Touchy Subject’, p. 105 – 109.

²² Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 143.

²³ Burgess, McGee *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 335. The term was not used in English before 1879.

²⁴ Horton, ‘Spirit Baptism: A Pentecostal Perspective’, p. 73. Stanley Horton does not support this idea; rather, he suggests that there are more than 4,000 languages and dialects in the world today and probably up to 5,000 ancient languages, so the Holy Spirit has plenty to choose from.

Issue 1 - Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics can be defined as the principles used to interpret Scripture properly.²⁵ Everyone who attempts to interpret biblical passages faithfully has to follow some hermeneutical principles. There is common acceptance of some basic principles among the evangelical movement. B.T. Noel believes that the following are important for Evangelical Hermeneutics: authorial intent, grammatical content of the text, historical background of the text, author and original audience.²⁶ It is in the area of hermeneutics where the doctrine of the initial evidence is strongly challenged.

Narrative or didactic passages

Pentecostal theology and hermeneutics has some distinctive features and these are rooted in Luke – Acts. “Without Luke’s writings there could be no Pentecostal theology.”²⁷

The major support for the initial evidence doctrine comes from the narrative texts in the book of Acts.²⁸ This assumption has been historically subject to large criticism. The classical argument of Evangelicals is that if the narrative passages have something to teach, it should be explicitly stated there. If not, narrative passage cannot function in a normative way.²⁹

According W.W. Menzies this is the reason why evangelical theology has been largely Pauline theology. Paul’s writings represent the source for theology, while the Gospels and Acts provide the historical frame for this theological reflection.³⁰

²⁵ B.T. Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010), p. 5.

²⁶ Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics*, p. 5. This process is termed the grammatico-historical approach to hermeneutics or the historical-critical method of interpretation.

²⁷ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 43.

²⁸ Corresponding passages are Acts 2:1 – 4; 10:44ff; 19:1ff and sometimes also 8:4 - 24

²⁹ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 38. Proponents of this posture cited here are B. Ramm, G.D. Fee [who is Pentecostal!] and J.R.W. Stott.

³⁰ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 43.

The use of 2 Tim. 3:16 – 17³¹ in response to the argument is not much help because it is obvious that some practices from biblical narratives are simply not repeated any more.³² Still the sharp division between narrative and didactic passages seems to be an oversimplified view.

On the Pentecostal side, it was R. Stronstad who tried to show that Luke was not only a historian, but also a theologian in his own right³³ and that his theology clearly has some charismatic traits.³⁴ And I. H. Marshall!

The same proponents of the argument against using narrative passages admit the possibility of the doctrine flowing from the narrative. The problem is what doctrine this might be.³⁵

A number of authors resist the tendency to highlight this division.³⁶ According to some it even seems to be a Western-orientated argument.³⁷ This is especially interesting in light of the fact that there is rapid multiplication of believers in South America, Africa and Asia where the power of the gospel has not been nurtured so much by a rationalistic approach to theology³⁸ and where the narrative plays a more important role than in the West. One also must consider that “the church has legitimately established some of its doctrine and practices via historical narrative”.³⁹

³¹ “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (NIV)

³² As the classical passages from the book of Acts are quoted 1:26 or 4:32

³³ R. Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 7th edn, 2002), p. 12.

³⁴ Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, pp. 75 – 83.

³⁵ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 39.

³⁶ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 42. There is a quotation from W. Klein, C. Blomberg, R. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*: “... narrative often teaches more indirectly than didactic literature without becoming any less normative.” Also G. Osborn: “Narrative is not as direct as didactic material, but it does have a theological point and expects the reader to interact with the message.”

³⁷ See W.W. Menzies, ‘The Initial Evidence Issue: A Pentecostal Response’, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2/2, 1999, p. 266. “...the matter of initial evidence is not nearly as critical in much of Asia, as it appears to be in the West...because narrative is a natural medium for the communication of truth in much of Asia – perhaps much more than propositional doctrinal expressions.”

³⁸ E.R. Lee, ‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit – A Doctrinal Formulation’, *Enrichment Journal* 15/3 (2010), p. 99.

³⁹ R. Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy* (USA: Xulon Press, 2003), p. 148.

Generally it could be said that there is more openness in the evangelical world for the role of the narrative today. Menzies calls it ‘the quiet revolution’ which stresses the importance of biblical narratives and the richness of the biblical witness. This hermeneutical shift in the larger evangelical world opens up new possibilities for dialog with Pentecostals.⁴⁰

Normal or normative experience

Certainly, one narrative alone does not make a doctrine. There should be repetition to establish the norm, and this is the other point of disagreement in the matter of initial evidence.

The traditional position of Classical Pentecostalism says that speaking in tongues always accompanies the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Three key passages (or five⁴¹) are taken from Acts to demonstrate that people were speaking in tongues after being baptized in the Holy Ghost.

Rick Walston, a former minister in the AG, shares in his book *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy* the reasons why he changed his mind concerning this issue after holding to the classical Pentecostal position for 20 years. He tries to demonstrate that speaking in tongues is normal but not the normative experience.⁴² For Walston normal means something which can happen, whereas normative holds the idea that something must happen.⁴³

This argument is closely connected with the purpose Luke had in mind while writing the book of Acts. James Dunn challenged the approach to Scripture which treats the New Testament as a homogenous whole, from any part of which texts can be drawn on a chosen subject. He suggested instead that a better

⁴⁰ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 43.

⁴¹ Acts 8: 4 – 24 and Acts 9:17 but *glossolalia* is not mentioned here.

⁴² This is the position largely accepted in the Charismatic movement. See Larry Hart, ‘Spirit Baptism: A Dimensional Charismatic Perspective’, in CH. O. Brand (ed.), *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism*, p. 123. “Most Pentecostals would endorse a virtual law of tongues, viewing speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of Spirit Baptism. Charismatics, on the other hand, are somewhat softer on tongues: One may or may not speak in tongues when baptized in the Holy Spirit, but speaking in tongues is still seen as a normal part of Spirit-filled living available to all.”

⁴³ Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 12.

approach is to take each author and book separately, finding out his or its particular theological emphases.⁴⁴

Walston, considering Luke's purpose, argues that Luke's intention could not have been to establish the initial evidence pattern because there are many occasions in Acts when people believed (and most likely experienced a Spirit Baptism) but no mention of speaking in tongues is found. First, he compares five traditional passages presented as the foundation for the initial evidence doctrine and then shows that even here only three times speaking in tongues is explicitly mentioned. Still he concludes that "if there were in fact three explicit tongues-speaking incidents out of a total five, that would be fairly strong (deductive) evidence."⁴⁵

Walston goes on and presents 23 other occasions where Spirit baptism is presupposed (after the people are saved) but speaking in tongues is not mentioned⁴⁶ and concludes the following:

Arguing that the biblical pattern is that all who are baptized in the Holy Spirit should speak in tongues as the initial, physical evidence of that experience is now seen as a hasty generalization from faulty inductive reasoning.⁴⁷

The foundation of this argument is the question of authorial intent which is considered by Walston as the most convincing one. The guiding question is: What importance does Luke give to tongues as the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit? The answer is that Luke's emphasis is predominantly soteriological, not pneumatological,⁴⁸ and he is not attempting to establish paradigm about speaking in tongues.

⁴⁴ J.D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism today* (London: SCM Press LTD, 3rd edn, 1974), p. 39; he tries to see the issue of Spirit baptism from the perspectives of several NT authors, e.g. Paul, John and Luke.

⁴⁵ Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 123.

⁴⁶ See the table in Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 127; Examples are: Acts 2:38-41, 2:46-47, 5:14, 8:12, 13:12 and so on.

⁴⁷ Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 128.

⁴⁸ Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 73. He, however, acknowledges that Luke *also* presents a pneumatological one.

Menzies agrees that the question of what constitutes ‘the initial evidence’ is not raised in Acts or in the New Testament generally, but this does not necessarily “render the doctrine invalid”.⁴⁹ He responds that the doctrine of evidential tongues cannot be treated only in terms of the categories of biblical theology and that an exclusive focus on an author’s ‘primary intent’ often leads to a form of ‘tunnel vision’ that ignores the implications of an individual text for the theological perspective of the author.⁵⁰ Although he agrees with Dunn’s approach and encourages Pentecostals to seriously consider the theological perspective of each biblical author when providing convincing answers regarding the fundamental elements of their theology, he suggests also that the relationship between tongues and Spirit baptism is more a question of systematic theology.⁵¹

The Testimony of the New Testament only or both Testaments together

Instead of emphasizing merely the book of Acts as the foundation for the doctrine, there is a suggestion to see the phenomenon of *glossolalia* from the broader perspective of the entire biblical testimony, especially the Old Testament. This approach could fit Menzies’ claim for applying systematic theology in the matter. “The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament rarely, if ever, comes incognito.”⁵²

Proponents of this more holistic view emphasize that whenever the Holy Spirit interrupted a human life, various demonstrations of His power and presence were demonstrated, above all the gift of prophetic language.

In fact, these occurrences frequently displayed a two-stage process. The Holy Spirit came upon the person, and the person gave witness with sudden prophetic speech.⁵³

⁴⁹ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 122. The classical argument is that the doctrine of the Trinity is also not found in Scripture. However, see the argumentation in McGee, *Initial Evidence*, p. 191-192.

⁵⁰ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 124.

⁵¹ R. P. Menzies, ‘Evidential Tongues: An Essay on Theological Method’, *Asian Journal of Theological Studies* 1/2 (1998), http://www.aps.edu/aeimages/File/AJPS_PDF/98-2-menzies.pdf [accessed 10/1/2011]

⁵² Lee, ‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit – A Doctrinal Formulation’, p. 101.

⁵³ Enloe, ‘A Functional Approach to a Sometimes Touchy Subject’, p. 107. The examples are: Num. 11:25; I Sam. 10:6; I Sam. 19:20; 2 Chron. 15:1-7; 2 Chron. 20:14-17; Isa. 59:21;

Moreover, the same author, Enloe, sees similarities in the experience of four OT prophets⁵⁴ when they first heard inspired sounds, saw divine sights, felt a divinely inspired sensation and spoke divinely inspired words. Acts 2 then repeats the same model - the 120 first heard a sound and then saw the appearance of fire; they most likely felt the Holy Spirit and then began to speak Spirit-inspired words. Enloe calls this experience a 'textbook case'. The only difference is that now the gift of the Spirit is given to all, which is considered as a 'democratization' of prophetic experience and power.

According to proponents of the initial evidence doctrine, this connection between the Old and New Testament is also seen in the use of the unusual Greek term found in the phrase 'to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled (*apophthengomai*) them' in Acts 2. This same term is used in the Septuagint for supernaturally inspired speech and

Luke creates a conceptual bridge for the original Greek reader when he used the same verb to describe speech to the crowd in the known language (verse 14). Luke shows that the same Holy Spirit guided both events of speaking – one in tongues and one in a known language.⁵⁵

This argument does not fully answer the question of whether Spirit baptism is always accompanied by speaking in tongues; however, it might help us not to depend too heavily on the book of Acts alone.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 10.

⁵⁵ Enloe, 'A Functional Approach to a Sometimes Touchy Subject', p. 108.

Issue 2 - Purpose of tongues

“If sheer quantity of text is the measure, more is said in Scripture about *glossolalia* than about the Virgin Birth or the ordination of women.”⁵⁶

An important part of the discussion concerning the initial evidence doctrine is connected with the purpose of tongues. Despite of the amount of references and the fact that speaking in tongues is probably the most researched religious form of speech in the latter half of the twentieth century,⁵⁷ there is still a variety of opinions regarding the purpose of this phenomenon.

Classical Pentecostals distinguish between speaking in tongues as ‘the initial physical evidence of the Spirit baptism’ (reflecting accounts in Acts) and ‘the gift of tongues’ mentioned in 1 Corinthians.⁵⁸ Although these differ in purpose and use, they are the same in essence.⁵⁹ The tongues mentioned in Acts are evidential and private, while the tongues mentioned in the Epistles are public and intended for general edification when used with the gift of interpretation.⁶⁰

The Book of Acts

As already introduced Luke specifically records incidents of tongues on three occasions (Acts 2, 10, 19). The Pentecostal perspective (together with less explicit passages from Acts 8 and 9) understands these incidents to be confirmation of Spirit Baptism. Still the question remains: what is the purpose of speaking in tongues in the book of Acts? Luke does not explicitly explain that.

One of the potential answers is connected with the meaning and significance of *glossolalia* in the biblical text. As it has been already suggested, the wider testimony of Scripture (including the OT) appears to imply that speaking in tongues is somehow attached to prophecy “which is, in turn, the sign

⁵⁶ Burgess, McGee, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 337. “Roy Harrisville (1974) counts thirty-five references to the phenomenon in Mark, Acts and 1 Corinthians – twenty-eight of them in 1 Corinthians, twenty-three of which are in chapter 14.

⁵⁷ Cartledge, *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, p. XIX.

⁵⁸ Burgess, McGee, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 339.

⁵⁹ Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths, Article Number 8

⁶⁰ Menzies, Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*, p. 139.

that one has experienced the benefits (especially power in Luke) of the eschatological community”.⁶¹

Enloe makes a similar statement: “I believe tongues serve as prophetic confirmation of Spirit baptism”.⁶²

Prophetic speech was a sign of the coming of the Spirit in the Old Testament and remains also the great hallmark of the Spirit’s coming in the New Testament era.⁶³

Luke certainly placed glossolalic experiences strategically through the Acts in a classic narrative three-fold pattern, going so far as to make it crystal clear that glossolalia was, at very least, one definitive sign of the Spirit coming (Acts 10:46).⁶⁴

Many see a connection between the Pentecostal phenomenon of *glossolalia* and the dispersion of the nations at Babel. F. Macchia points out that the tongues of Pentecost were sign that the God of Israel was now also revealed as the God of the nations. He calls it ‘gentilisation’ of the Spirit that was active in Israel.⁶⁵ He also sees in the event of Pentecost an inherent protest against any effort to domesticate the gospel to a single idiom or culture.⁶⁶

In relation to the argument of ‘gentilisation’, it should be acknowledged that critics of the initial evidence doctrine use this idea to show that the main reason of *glossolalia* in Acts was to show the Jews God’s acceptance first of the Samaritans (Acts 8) and then the Gentiles (Acts 10). They see tongues as

⁶¹ Burgess, McGee, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 456.

⁶² Enloe T., ‘A Functional Approach to a Sometimes Touchy Subject’, *Enrichment Journal* 15/3 (2010), p. 108.

⁶³ See also W.W. Menzies, R.P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 126: “When Luke reminds us of the prophetic character of the gift of the Spirit, he is in fact affirming that the Pentecostal gift is intimately linked to inspired speech.”

⁶⁴ Lee, ‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit – A Doctrinal Formulation’, p. 104.

⁶⁵ F. Macchia, ‘Babel and the Tongues of Pentecost: Reversal or Fulfilment?’ in M.J. Cartledge *Speaking in Tongues, Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, pp. 34 – 51. He presents an interesting argument that the confusion of tongues and the scattering of the people at Babel should be seen as *grace*. “It is God’s plan for the free proliferation and diversification of a life that harbors no idolatrous illusions and finds its true dignity in glorifying God,” p. 42. “The unity of Pentecost is thus not abstract and absolute but rather concrete and pluralistic. It is not arrogant and self-serving but humble and obedient. It is respectful and tolerant of differences,” p. 45.

⁶⁶ Macchia, ‘Babel and the Tongues of Pentecost: Reversal or Fulfilment?’, 47.

“evidential” in the sense of expanding the gospel outside the Jewish world and conclude that these were unique occurrences that do not establish a paradigm for every believer. Tongues served just to catch the attention of the Jews and to indicate that God was now pouring his Spirit upon all flesh.⁶⁷ L. Hurtado suggests that each of the occasions (Acts 2, 10, 19) provides a basis for showing that the Spirit prompts and accompanies the progress of the gospel to new ethnic and cultural groups.⁶⁸

It might be good to add here that it seems that there is no support for the claim that *glossais lalein* in Acts served as evangelistic purpose.⁶⁹ As already mentioned, Charles Parham, the first promoter of initial evidence, considered speaking in tongues the key component in the divine plan to expedite missionary evangelism presupposing that the missionary will be given the language of the nation without learning it.⁷⁰ Later this idea was rejected. “Tongues are not for evangelism.”⁷¹

It also should be recognized that there is nothing in Acts to match the congregational phenomenon of tongues, described by Paul in I Cor. 12 – 14 or private practise.

Paul’s writings

Paul was speaking in tongues more than others⁷²; however, there is no record which would directly support the idea of his speaking in tongues after being baptized in the Spirit.⁷³ For some the passage in Acts 9 indicates that he

⁶⁷ Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 167.

⁶⁸ M.W. Mittelstadt *Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition*, (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2010), p. 73. See also M. Turner ‘Early Christian Experience and Theology of Tongues’ in M.J. Cartledge *Speaking in Tongues, Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, p.11: “It is reasonable to assume Luke considered the Pentecostal recognition of *xenolalia*, and the positive effect of this, to be a unique and providential sign marking the beginning of the eschatological age of the Spirit of prophecy, one that was not repeated exactly elsewhere.”

⁶⁹ Cartledge, *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, p. 11.

⁷⁰ McGee *Initial Evidence*, p. 102. Even Zinzendorf believed (like the early Pentecostals) that speaking in tongues had originally been given in order to facilitate the missionary enterprise - McGee *Initial Evidence*, p. 32.

⁷¹ Horton, ‘Spirit Baptism: A Pentecostal Perspective’, p. 75.

⁷² I Cor. 14:18.

⁷³ See the record of his conversion in Acts 9.

did not, and they suggest that tongues are only one of the gifts manifested at the time of Spirit baptism.

M.W. Mittelstadt points out that F.F. Bosworth could not reconcile the separation of tongues as initial evidence from 'the gift of tongues'. He warned that none of the inspired apostles or any of the world's great soul winners ever thought it.⁷⁴

This argument is sometimes met with the suggestion that Luke and Paul differed in intent and emphasis in their writings. Once we understand this, we are then able to reconcile the teaching of both authors. Thus both ideas – initial evidence and the gift of tongues – can be introduced together.⁷⁵

Generally, we could say that even Paul does not explicitly say why God has given the gift of tongues. Nevertheless he indicates several ways in which they function:⁷⁶

- (1) Tongues as a sign⁷⁷: The Old Testament quotation in this passage implies that *glossolalia* is a sign for unbelievers, but not as an evangelistic aid as could be supposed. It is sign of God's judgment on unbelief.
- (2) Tongues for the edification of the church: tongues with interpretation serve as a tool for strengthening the assembly of the saints. In this sense they are as equally important as prophecy (I Cor. 1:5c); however, unlike prophecy, the primary addressee of tongues is God, not the church.

⁷⁴ Mittelstadt, *Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 34. According to Bosworth, neither great soul winners taught it. Mittelstad also gives the example of William Seymour, the main protagonist of the Azusa Street revival in 1906. He changed his opinion about tongues after being disappointed that many people who came through this experience did not live a holy life "Tongues are one of the signs that goes with every baptized person, but it is not the real evidence of the baptism in everyday life. Your life must measure with the fruits of the Spirit," p. 36.

⁷⁵ Still this explanation fails to explain why the account of Acts 9 does not mention speaking in tongues.

⁷⁶ M. Turner, 'Early Christian Experience and Theology of "Tongues" – A New Testament Perspective', in M.J. Cartledge (ed.), *Speaking in Tongues, Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, pp. 20-23.

⁷⁷ I Cor. 14:22

- (3) Tongues as an Outflowing Expression of Private Prayer and doxology: as already suggested it seems tongues have more functions in Paul's thinking. They have the potential to edify, not only the congregation, but also every believer.⁷⁸
- (4) Tongues for the edification of believers: Paul is very positive about the building-up nature of tongues; he wishes that all the believers in Corinth would speak in tongues (I Cor. 14:5).⁷⁹

Especially in connection with the last point, the question is raised: if *glossolalia* is so useful for the believer, should we expect everyone to speak in tongues? It seems Paul did not;⁸⁰ however, he wished everyone could.⁸¹ These passages are difficult to explain, and there is variety of opinions concerning these two statements. W. Menzies tries to reconcile these two passages with the presumption that I Cor. 12:30 is referring to speaking in tongues in an assembly.⁸² Thus accessibility of this gift to all believers would be maintained. Others, for example Max Turner, however remain unconvinced with this explanation.⁸³

⁷⁸ This is generally not an accepted idea. See M.J. Cartledge *Speaking in Tongues, Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, p.24. "This explanation has, however, been vigorously denied by Edgar who offers a flurry of counter-arguments: (1) Such a view contradicts the *sign* purpose stated in I Cor. 14:22; Mark 16:5-17 and implicit in Acts 2:1-13. (2) A private gift would not be for the edification of the church and makes it unique. (3) Such a gift would be self-centered..." and so on. The response of Max Turner is that "There is no contradiction between tongues viewed as a means of devotion and what is said in I Cor. 14:22, Mark 16:15-17 and Acts 2:1-13 unless one arbitrarily asserts tongues may only have one function." Source?

⁷⁹ Turner, 'Early Christian Experience and Theology of "Tongues" – A New Testament Perspective', p. 25.

⁸⁰ I Cor. 12:30

⁸¹ I Cor. 14:5

⁸² W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 136-139. He quotes G.D. Fee: "Since verse 28 is coordinated with verse 27, with emphatic *you are*, meaning the church in Corinth, there can be little question that by this phrase (in the assembly) Paul also primarily intends the local assembly in Corinth."

⁸³ Turner, 'Early Christian Experience and Theology of "Tongues" – A New Testament Perspective', p. 27: "We must assume that prophecy, teaching, healings, miracles, leading and administration, were all both inside and outside the formal *assembly*. ..*Not all speak in tongues, do they?*, cannot be restricted to mean *Not all have the special gift to speak in tongues in the assembly*", *do they?* It must mean only *some* speak in tongues *at all* whether privately or in the assembly."

Regarding I Cor. 14:5 W.W. Menzies presupposes that “nothing in the context suggests Paul’s wish that all would speak in tongues cannot or should not be realized.”⁸⁴

Turner’s response is that “taken with I Cor. 12:30, I Cor. 14:5 suggests that not all do speak in tongues, in any context, but that Paul would be pleased if they could.”⁸⁵

Having reviewed Luke’s and Paul’s writings, we may conclude that *glossolalia* is an ambiguous phenomenon and its purpose is not always fully explained. This fact leaves room for miscellaneous perspectives of how speaking in tongues might be perceived and seems to bring confusion also in the matter of initial evidence.

⁸⁴ W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 141.

⁸⁵ Turner, ‘Early Christian Experience and Theology of “Tongues” – A New Testament Perspective’, p. 28.

Issue 3 - Historical development of the doctrine

“History: Not on the Side of the Evidence.”⁸⁶ Another important argument concerning the initial evidence is that although speaking in tongues is not absent from church history,⁸⁷ the connection between the baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues is missing.⁸⁸

It seems apparent that no significant individuals or groups in the history of the Church made the connection between the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the necessity of speaking in tongues.⁸⁹

Closer observation of church history implies that there is much more evidence of Spirit baptism being a subsequent experience from conversion than speaking in tongues being the initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Ghost.⁹⁰ According to S.M. Burgess, even the radical dualists made no specific connection between Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues.⁹¹

Those who believe that Mark 16:9-20 is an added appendix to the gospel, see in the mentioning of tongues in this passage evidence that *glossolalia* persisted into the second century.⁹² However, this is more an argument for tongues speaking only, not for initial evidence.

The Reformation era did not bring any development in the matter. Following Augustine, Luther argued that ‘new tongues’ had been a sign to the

⁸⁶ Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 155.

⁸⁷ Good source of these examples could be S. M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984) and the same author *The Holy Spirit: Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1997).

⁸⁸ But see Burgess, McGee *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 337.

⁸⁹ Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 158.

⁹⁰ See McGee *Initial Evidence*, p. 4 – 6: S. M. Burgess names for example Cyprian who asserts: “...they who are baptized in the Church are brought to the prelates of the Church, and by our prayers and by impositions of hands obtain Holy Spirit.” Similarly Hypolytus, Hilary Potiers and others. For more also Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions* and Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions*.

⁹¹ S.M. Burgess, ‘Evidence of the Spirit: The Ancient and Eastern Churches’, in G.B. McGee, *Initial Evidence*, p. 9; radical dualists had been emphasizing the Spirit baptism as subsequent and often superior experience.

⁹² Burgess, McGee, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 337.

Jews, and this confirmation is no longer needed. For Calvin the inner witness of the Spirit is more important than the gifts. Within the Radical Reformation, *glossolalia* remained incidental and occasional.⁹³

In the nineteenth century, E. Irwing called *glossolalia* 'a standing sign' of the presence of the Spirit. It was just after the turn of the last century when Ch. Parham first connected the experience of speaking in tongues and Spirit baptism, but even he was wrong in his conclusion concerning the purpose of *glossolalia*.

From this short review, we can conclude that it is difficult to defend the initial evidence doctrine from the perspective of its historical development. Still when we recognize that it has taken many centuries to restore its theological emphasis found in the Bible, we might be more tolerant to the thought that it could have taken almost 20 centuries to restore some truths that Pentecostals are holding, including initial evidence. I personally would agree with W.W. Menzies who argues that although the doctrine of evidential tongues is formulated in modern language and addresses contemporary issues, it is linked to the process of doctrinal development which extends back into the apostolic age.⁹⁴

⁹³ S.M. Burgess, 'Evidence of the Spirit: The Medieval and Modern Western Churches', in G.B. McGee, *Initial Evidence*, p. 28.

⁹⁴ Menzies, 'Evidential Tongues: An Essay on Theological Method', p. 6.

Conclusion

As it has already been stated, the western part of the Christian world especially tends to make strict categories and rigid schemes, and this sometimes goes against our understanding of the work of the Spirit; for the wind blows where it chooses⁹⁵ and there will always remain a place for some mystery concerning the ways of the Spirit.⁹⁶ Spirit baptism is not only matter of doctrine, it is also personal experience. However, we cannot emphasize experience over Scripture, “experience given by the Holy Spirit can make a difference in one’s understanding of the Scripture”.⁹⁷

It should not be overlooked that especially in the beginning and then during the twentieth century, thousands of people experienced *glossolalia*, much more than at any other time in history. Naturally, the desire rose up to explain this phenomenon scripturally. Thus the initial evidence doctrine was introduced, especially within the Pentecostal movement.

Not all Pentecostals teach that speaking in tongues is the only sign of Spirit baptism. This gives evidence that the doctrine still leaves room for questions. Some of them were raised in this essay. It seems that answering some questions is easier than answering others. There could be good answers to the issues of using narrative or didactic passages in formulating doctrine, of authorial intent and of the purpose of *glossolalia* in Paul’s writings. There is still room for questions concerning the issue of normal or normative experience.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, if the question is formulated positively: What is the consistently repeated sign of Spirit baptism in Acts? I would tend to agree with Enloe who says that it is *glossolalia*.⁹⁹ Moreover, Menzies’ suggestion of applying systematic theology to the issue seems also to be helpful.

⁹⁵ John 3:8

⁹⁶ Hart, ‘Spirit Baptism: A Dimensional Charismatic Perspective’, p. 127.

⁹⁷ Horton, ‘Spirit Baptism: A Pentecostal Perspective’, p. 49.

⁹⁸ For example, it is difficult to imagine 3000 people converted on the Day of Pentecost starting to speak in tongues. What an amazing experience that would have been! All of Jerusalem would have been upside-down. May we presuppose that Luke would not have mentioned that? Also the number of references to people who got saved without mentioning *speaking in tongues* is an open question for me.

⁹⁹ Enloe, ‘A Functional Approach to a Sometimes Touchy Subject’, p. 107.

The issue of historical evidence for this doctrine is also a strong argument that we should consider, and it is not an easy one to deal with it.

The truth is that the question of tongues does not take us to the core of the Christian faith, and I agree with the statement made by W.W. Menzies that this doctrine – however very important for Pentecostals – does not represent the most important theological contribution Pentecostals bring to the larger body of Christ.¹⁰⁰ “We cannot and should not allow our contribution to the Evangelical world to be reduced simply to the question of tongues.”¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, it is also true that in the average Pentecostal church where speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts are encouraged, anywhere from eighty to one hundred percent of the people might exercise *glossolalia*.¹⁰² It is worth encouraging people to seek (not only) this gift, because the benefits are great.

¹⁰⁰ W.W. Menzies, R. Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 142.

¹⁰¹ Menzies, ‘Evidential Tongues: An Essay on Theological Method’, p. 8

¹⁰² Walston, *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, p. 195. “In the average non-Pentecostal church, anywhere from eighty percent to one hundred percent of the people might not speak in tongues.”

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