

## **SPEAKING IN TONGUES: EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE & PRACTICE**

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### *Abstract*

Speaking in tongues is arguably one of the most controversial and life-impacting experiences for Christian believers. Notably, it is a powerful experience often interpreted as a direct encounter with God when it first occurs. Despite the assumption by some Pentecostal-charismatic groups that they have a monopoly on it, the experience of speaking in tongues has remained, (sporadically at the least) throughout Christian history, and has found recent entrance into various denominations. Yet although it is practiced by probably hundreds of millions of people worldwide, the phenomenon remains an elusive and under-researched field. We have conducted a series of interviews with tongues speakers to gauge how, at and after the initial event (usually called the Baptism in the Spirit), tongues continue to be experienced. The results demonstrate that for many Christians speaking in tongues continues to be an important part of their lives. Many report that praying in tongues has positive effects, such as enhancing their prayer lives or helping them pray for aspects they feel inadequate to address in their own language. Tongues empowers, calms, gives peace and is experienced as a form of prayer substantially different from praying in one's own language. As such, we conclude that because of its perceived benefits, the practice is here to stay.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1906 the *Los Angeles Times* gave public exposure for the first time to a new religious revival in town that would later be identified by the nomenclature - Pentecostalism. The report read:

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<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to recognize the financial support obtained from the Templeton Foundation through Princeton University for this research, based on the Religious Experience Project grants.

Weird Babel of Tongues. New Sect of Fanatics Is Breaking Loose  
Wild Scene Last Night on Azusa Street  
Gurgle of a Wordless Talk by a Sister

Breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it would seem no sane mortal could understand the newest religious sect has started in Los Angeles. Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa street...and the devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites and preach the wildest theories and work themselves in to a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers, who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have the "gift of tongues" and to be able to comprehend the babel...<sup>2</sup>

The movement may be described as a religious faith "with exuberant worship; an emphasis on subjective religious experience and spiritual gifts; claims of supernatural miracles, signs and wonders-including a language of experiential spirituality, rather than of theology; and a mystical 'life in the Spirit' by which they (adherents) daily live out the will of God."<sup>3</sup>

It was in the City of Angels, on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1906, that a run-down stable on 312 Azusa Street opened its doors for the first time as a Pentecostal mission to the world. For Pentecostals theirs was a simple creed: "this is that" which was prophesied by the prophet Joel and experienced by a motley group of disciples in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 2. While all church organizations drew scriptural inspiration from the book of Acts, these early-twentieth-century urban worshippers understood themselves to be a replication of the early church replete with new visions and speaking in other tongues. If it happened in Acts 2 it should happen here.

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<sup>2</sup> *Los Angeles Times* (April 18, 1906): 3.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley M. Burgess & Gary McGee, eds., *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 5.

## BACKGROUND

More than one hundred years later Pentecostals and other charismatics are no longer a fringe curiosity; they represent a mainstream branch of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Estimating the size of this movement is a difficult undertaking given the difficulty of arriving at a common definition of what makes a Pentecostal or a charismatic. Should the two terms be mutually equated? Do the terms describe a denomination or an experience? According to a Pew Forum analysis of estimates from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are about 584 million Pentecostal/charismatic Christians in the world.<sup>5</sup> Researcher Allan Anderson suggests such numbers are difficult to substantiate but even if one quarter of that number referred to classical Pentecostals who identify historically with Azusa Street roots, that in itself would be statistically significant.<sup>6</sup> While describing the full range of this religious force is beyond the scope of this project, arguably the cornerstone of this movement has been associated with the embrace and practice of “speaking in tongues” which the *LA Times* referred to as gurgles of wordless prayer— a variegated practice where adherents were said to pray or prophesy in a form of speech unknown to them. Hardly original, these believers understood they were

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<sup>4</sup> Although the terms Pentecostal and charismatic are often used interchangeably, they retain historical and theological differences. Historically, the term “Classical” Pentecostal refers to those Pentecostal churches, which emerged during the turn of the twentieth century. Charismatics, on the other hand, date their beginnings either from the 1950s with the mainline Protestant denominations or from 1967 for the Catholics. To describe someone as Pentecostal may simply mean that he or she attends a Pentecostal church; to describe one as charismatic is to say something about one’s spiritual self-awareness and practices that distinguish them from the other churchgoers in their traditional church context. At the doctrinal level, for most classical Pentecostals, glossolalia or tongues speaking is the hallmark of having received the Baptism in the Spirit. Charismatics, meanwhile, tend not to be so exclusive in their definition. While charismatics maintain the importance of tongues, not all accept the position of “no tongues, no baptism.” Other ancillary trends include an emphasis on inner healing from the charismatics and an emphasis on physical healing among Pentecostals.

<sup>5</sup> Luis Lugo and Allan Cooperman, “Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population.” <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/> accessed July 2, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 253.

simply following the pattern laid out in Acts 2, and that God through his Spirit was revitalizing the gifts of the Spirit, which Jesus had bestowed on his earliest disciples.<sup>6</sup>

For many in the early part of the twentieth century, the novelty of speaking in tongues was a curious spectacle and it certainly attracted its share of voyeurs. For others, especially those conservative Christian believers who were already fighting a battle with liberalism in the church over the authority of Scripture, this outbreak of Spirit activity could not have come at a worse time. With every opportunity these conservatives, self-identified as the “fundamentalists,” arose to vilify Pentecostalism as a bastardized form of religious faith that errantly relied more on experience than the pure reading of Scripture.<sup>7</sup> The term “fundamentalist” refers to a late-nineteenth-century rift that developed in the church over the authority of Scripture. Concerned over a trend among many biblical scholars that weighed the human side of Scripture over its divine inspiration, a number of biblical scholars rallied together and produced an anthology that they appropriately titled *The Fundamentals*.<sup>8</sup> Through this volume the authors attempted to reaffirm the divine origin and hence the inerrancy of Scripture in matters of faith and conduct. Christian groups that adhered to “The Fundamentals” became known as “fundamentalists.” On this basis Pentecostal spirituality was suspect with its social and theological practices that countervailed many of the time-honored hermeneutical propositional truths of their day. From the perspective of fundamentalists, the Bible represents an archaeological dig in which experts in the field have spent a lifetime unearthing timeless truths. Pentecostals no less, in keeping with their own holiness roots, also placed high value on the authority of Scripture. But for Pentecostals, Scripture functioned more like a compass on a ship. The compass worked by keeping the ship on course but the Spirit set the course and filled the sails.

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<sup>6</sup> See Acts 2, 1 Corinthians 12-14. Speaking in tongues was not the only gift listed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. Other gifts included the gifts of wisdom, miracles, faith and so forth. But the revival of tongues-speech was arguably the gift that garnered the most attention at the turn of the twentieth century. While those on the liberal theological spectrum considered it a curious spectacle, many on the conservative side dismissed the gift as demonic and unfitting of a true Christian.

<sup>7</sup> The term “fundamentalist” should not be confused with its current usage as a radical, narrow-minded and sometimes violent religious way of living

<sup>8</sup> R.A. Torrey, ed., *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, Reprint 1990).

Nonetheless, this opposition from arguably a theological kindred group did not prohibit early Pentecostals from identifying with fundamentalists notwithstanding the difference that they also spoke in tongues. Perhaps with a tinge of naiveté, Pentecostals failed to understand that their openness to the active prophetic work of the Holy Spirit as evidenced by their practice of tongue-speech was too risky for the propositional theologizing of conservative churches who were already entrenched in a battle with theological liberalism over the authority of Scripture. For fundamentalists, Pentecostals and the impression they gave that the Bible was open and amendable as the Spirit saw fit represented yet another attack on biblical authority.<sup>7</sup> For many the lingering question became, what does this emphasis on the Holy Spirit do to God's final authority, revealed in the Bible? Of course, Pentecostals tried to affirm their scriptural orthodoxy but for many their actions often left that assertion suspect.<sup>8</sup>

For Pentecostals the interpretative community was the early church as witnessed by Luke in the book of Acts. While Pentecostals leaned on the Bible as a privileged source of truth, they also at least

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<sup>7</sup> For a survey of historical anti-Pentecostal polemics by theological conservatives, see William C. Irvine, *Heresies Exposed* (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1917); T.J. McCrosan, *Speaking with Other Tongues* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, n.d.); B.P. Neely, *The Bible Versus the Tongues Theory* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1930); Louis S. Bauman, *The Modern Tongues Movement Examined and Judged in the Light of the Scriptures and in the Light of its Fruits* (Long Beach, Calif., 1941); H.L. Stolee, *Speaking in Tongues* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963); H.A. Ironside, *Holiness: The False and the True* (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1955); John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, Ill., Van Kampen Press, 1954); For a more recent example, see John MacArthur. MacArthur presumes to speak for many conservatives when he concludes that after seven years of reading all sides of the issue, "tongues ceased in the apostolic age and ... when they stopped, they stopped for good" in *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) and later *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> For example it has been well documented that early Pentecostals broke ranks with conservatives on issues of race and gender largely based on a "Spirit" intuitive hermeneutic. In the years to follow, Pentecostals themselves struggled with the implications of such an approach. Reflecting this tension in 1994 a communiqué was sent to all pastors within the district of Eastern Ontario and Quebec of the PAOC, the district superintendent reminded the constituents that we must, "balance all that occurs with what the Scriptures declare. LET US NEVER FORGET THAT GOD'S WORD, NOT OUR EXPERIENCE IS THE ONLY CERTAIN AND RELIABLE GUIDE WE HAVE" (capitalization his). Stuart Hunter, "From the District Pastor" (Kanata, Ontario: Eastern Ontario Pentecostal District, 1994).

tacitly understood the developmental role experience plays in the hermeneutical task. In this sense even biblical interpretative truths remained constantly on probation. "It works because it is biblical, it is biblical because it works," seemed to be a common apologetic among Pentecostals.<sup>9</sup>

Today questions about the legitimacy of "tongues speaking" as an authentic biblical expression of Christian spiritual practice have faded. Christian onlookers from the outside might think the experience is quirky, nonessential, or even potentially dangerous, but few today would condemn the practice.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile Pentecostal leaders have largely moved on from defending the gift, instead offering reasons why church adherents should seek to practice it. The Pentecostal literature in this regard is vast. Somewhere along the way, a causal relationship between tongues and Spirit Baptism emerged as the defining issue for some Pentecostal denominations. Ultimately what is desired is the baptism in the Spirit.<sup>10</sup> One knows that she is baptized in the Holy Spirit because she speaks in tongues.<sup>11</sup> Classical Pentecostals opine that tongues are the initial evidence that one has been filled with the Holy Spirit. In time, for many Pentecostal denominations this became a credentialing issue – no tongues, no credentials.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In response to critics who questioned the authenticity of tongues-speech, Pentecostals often employed a classic tautology, by responding, "if you spoke in tongues you would know this to be true."

<sup>9</sup> This could be, in part, because until recent times Pentecostals came to embrace the propositional theologizing of their kindred counterparts. They stepped in line with a more cautious approach to hermeneutics with its preferred emphasis on a propositional reading of the text rather than what the Spirit might be saying through the text.

<sup>10</sup> Although the noun construct "baptism in the Spirit," does not appear in New Testament Literature, some of the various approximate phrases that do occur are: in active voice, present tense, "baptizes with Holy Spirit" (John 1:33), or future tense, "will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk. 3:16), or the passive future tense, "will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5; 11:16), or past tense, "have been baptized in one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13).

<sup>11</sup> Luke linked Spirit baptism and tongues in 3 out of 5 instances. Pentecostals have traditionally asserted that Luke intended to convey a normative cause/effect relationship between them in the book of Acts. Pentecostals are quick to point out that Peter knew that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles when they heard them speaking in tongues (Acts 10:45,46).

<sup>12</sup> It was genius, accidental or not, to fuse tongues and Spirit Baptism together. "It gave sympathetic adherents an objective (read: modern) way of testing their baptism. It kept the Pentecostal movement in the public eye and it encouraged adherents, at least to some degree, to explore the limits and possibilities of this gift of the Holy Spirit...In the end tongues as an 'evidential construct' of denominational Pentecostalism was

Many classical Pentecostal denominations are calling into question this causal relationship between tongues and Spirit Baptism. In a 2014 study, researchers Andrew Gabriel, Adam Stewart and Kevin Shanahan, with the full blessing of denominational leadership, surveyed 1,730 credential holders of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), the largest Pentecostal denomination in Canada. They examined how PAOC clergy views on tongues and Spirit baptism had evolved since the 1980s. Their survey revealed that while credential holders retain a close relationship between “speaking in tongues and Spirit baptism. . . less than half of clergy insist that tongues is a necessary indicator of Spirit Baptism and, therefore many affirm that some believers have been baptized in the Holy Spirit even though they have not spoken in tongues.”<sup>13</sup> Gabriel, Stewart and Shanahan further concluded that this is at least in part because PAOC clergy are influenced by their participation in a larger, generic evangelical subculture.

Our study is not directly interested in the standard doctrinal questions of Pentecostal insiders nor is it an apologetic in defense of tongues. Both of those questions have been thoroughly examined by others. Instead, we focus on current experiences of tongues by actual practitioners. We assume that those who speak in tongues do so because they understand it to be a viable spiritual practice. We probe into what tongues speakers perceive they gain by speaking in indiscernible audible sounds.<sup>14</sup> If meaning is understood to follow the rules of conventional cognitive discourse, why speak in tongues? We are interested in the phenomenological experience of the common practitioner by asking the question, “what do they think is actually happening in the event of tongues speaking?” In other words, what spiritual satisfaction is gained,

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pragmatically an absolute sociological necessity for the spread of Pentecostalism.” See Randall Holm, “The end of Tongues? A Conversation with Gabriel, Stewart and Shanahan,” *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* 7 (2016), 31.

<sup>13</sup>See Andrew K. Gabriel, Adam Stewart, And Kevin Shanahan, “Changing Conception of Speaking in tongues and Spirit Baptism Among Canadian Pentecostal Clergy,” *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* 7 (2016): 1-24.

<sup>14</sup>Several studies have been done examining the actual content of tongue-speech asking whether or not it could be classified as an actual language. See William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1972); Matthew Wolf, “Tongues and Language: Renewing the Linguistic Study of Glossolalia,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20 (2011): 132-149. In this latter work, favoring prototype–marginal categories over platonic categories, Wolf concludes “tongues” might best be described as a non-grammatical phenomena.

or need is fulfilled in the occasion of “tongues speaking?” And what occasions tongue-speaking? Is it a regular practice or does one speak in tongues only in crisis?

## **METHODOLOGY**

We developed a four-section questionnaire (See Appendix) asking questions about the person, how they first spoke in tongues, how and if they are using the gift today, and what they think theologically about tongues and spiritual gifts. The questionnaire was either filled in by the researchers during in-person or phone interviews, or emailed to individuals who speak in tongues and then filled in over the phone or by the individuals themselves. Tongues speakers were identified from conferences, people known to the researchers, contacts from churches and other organizations active in the charismatic or Pentecostal field, as well as people referenced by others.

We attempted to keep the sample diverse by contacting different denominations and by inviting participants from different countries and backgrounds. Preference was given to interviewing members of different churches, and therefore, only a few members of the same church were included in order to avoid obtaining opinions and experiences that tend to be aligned and homogenous.

Interviews were held between May and October 2016 by both researchers, based on the same questionnaire. In some cases, interviewees were contacted again for clarification of their answers.

## **DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE**

Our sample (N = 75) consists of 33 women and 42 men. Their ages vary between the age groups 21-30 and include individuals older than 80 years (

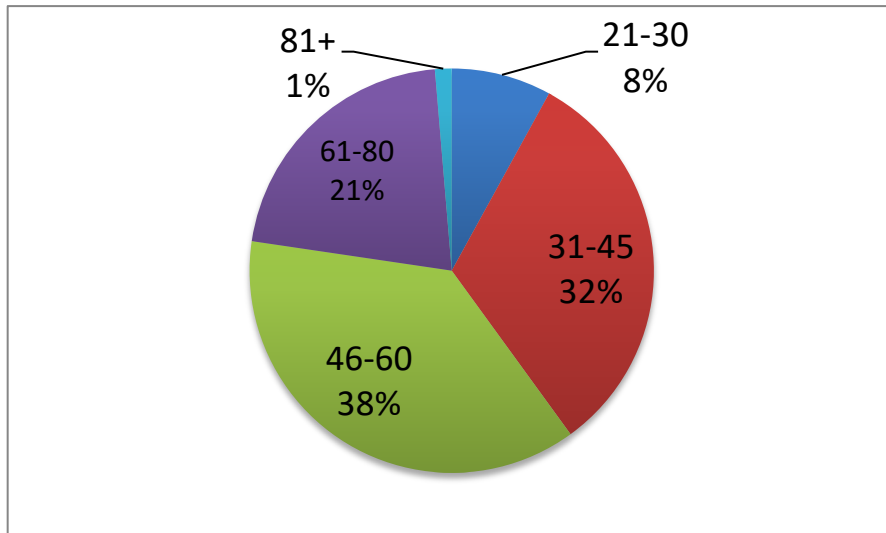
Figure 1). Denominational backgrounds were varied (Figure 2), as were linguistic/ethnic backgrounds (

Figure 3), and home countries (

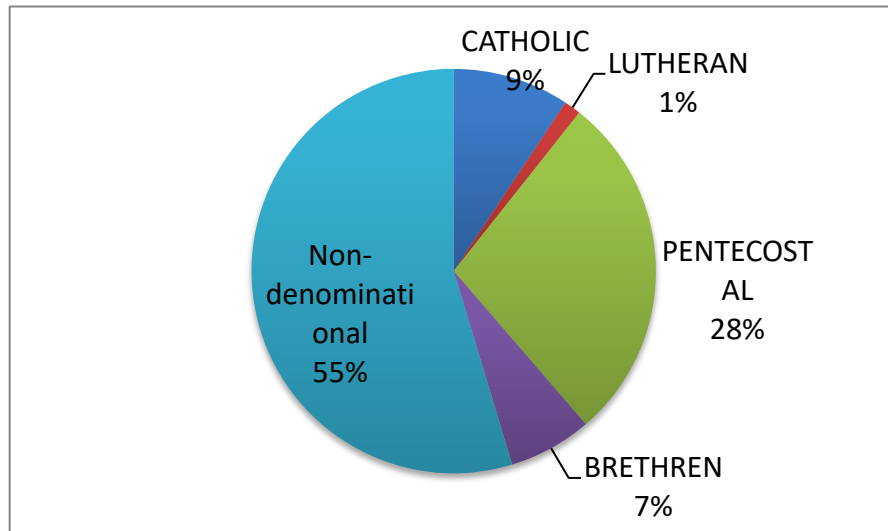


Figure 4). Most people interviewed live in Canada (predominantly Manitoba and Quebec) but have a variety of birth nationalities and cultural backgrounds.

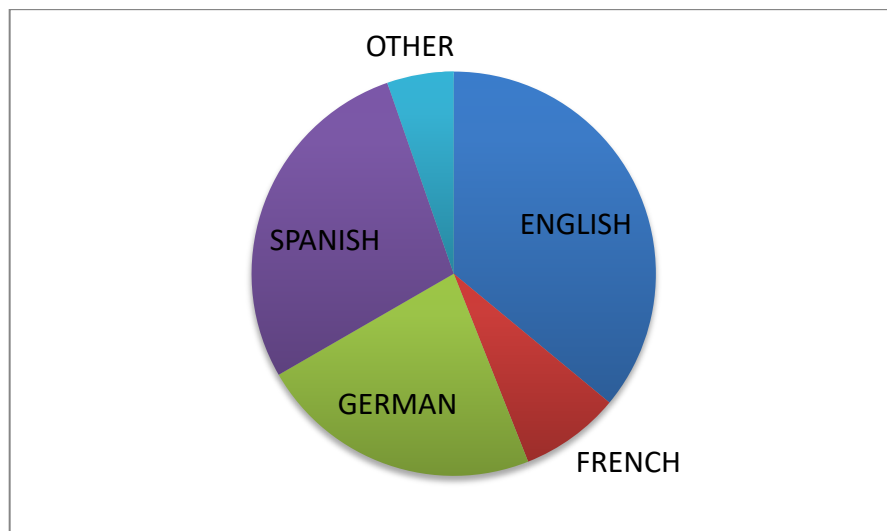
**Figure 1: Sample Age Distribution**

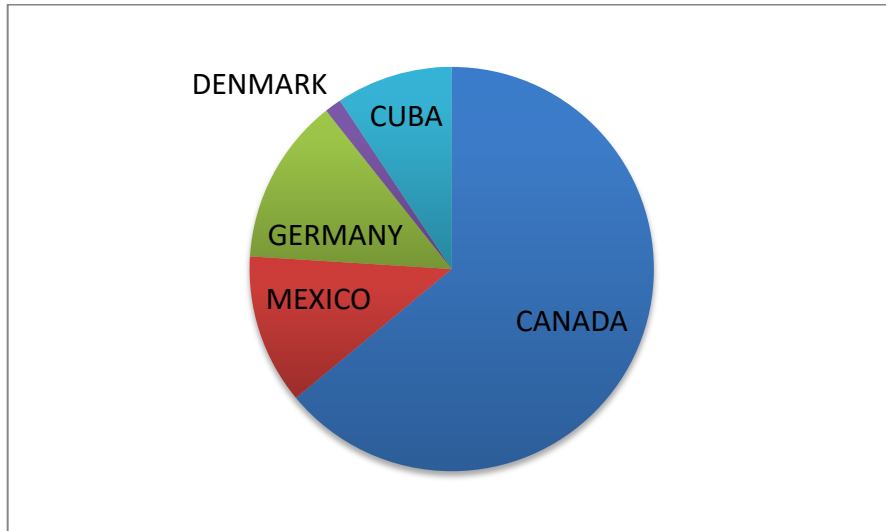


**Figure 2: Church Affiliation of Interviewees**



**Figure 3: Linguistic Background of Interviewees**



**Figure 4: Countries of Residence of Interviewees**

Some bias may still have occurred due to some of the interviewees being connected (e.g., part of the same church or the same movement). Bias also was introduced by the means of identifying interviewees using email lists for pastors and academics. Twenty-one interviewees (28%) were employed by a church or parachurch organization at some point in their lives.

We believe there is also some bias concerning attitudes about speaking in tongues in our sample: we most likely have respondents who have a mainly positive attitude towards speaking in tongues and who have not abandoned this practice over time (Only two reported having done so, and those who have done so are less likely to be willing to participate in a survey such as this).

## RESULTS

### 1. How was the gift received?

Overwhelmingly, respondents spoke in tongues for the first time as adults (37) or in their teens (27). Their ages when they first spoke in tongues could only be approximated from the data collected, given we did not ask for exact ages and because some people could not remember the year. Ten participants first spoke in tongues as children, as early as age 4 up to age 10. The usual way to start speaking in tongues was the

laying on of hands with prayer (53%). However, a substantial portion (29%) of people were alone when they spoke in tongues for the first time. In some cases, they had nevertheless been prayed for beforehand and then started speaking in tongues afterwards when they were on their own.

Sixteen people surveyed (21%) report that they never attempted to speak in tongues. This means they were not actively seeking this gift but received it spontaneously, often while praying or praising God, which then turned into tongues speaking without them intentionally trying or being aware of it at the time. Most people (32) were prayed for or attempted to speak in tongues only once (43%). A few “tried” twice, and those with three or more attempts were a significant (21%) portion of the sample.

Nine persons (12%) felt pressure to speak in tongues. Many reported a desire to speak in tongues but no social or other pressure to do so. 63 people (84%) had heard others speak in tongues before they started to speak in tongues themselves; nine people said they had not heard it before, and three could not remember.

## 2. How is the gift being used?

Seventy participants reported not using any technique (e.g., speaking certain words intentionally as prompts or listening to music) to speak in tongues. Three participants said they do use a technique but explained this was a prayer for God to “kick-start” them, or as praising God or singing.

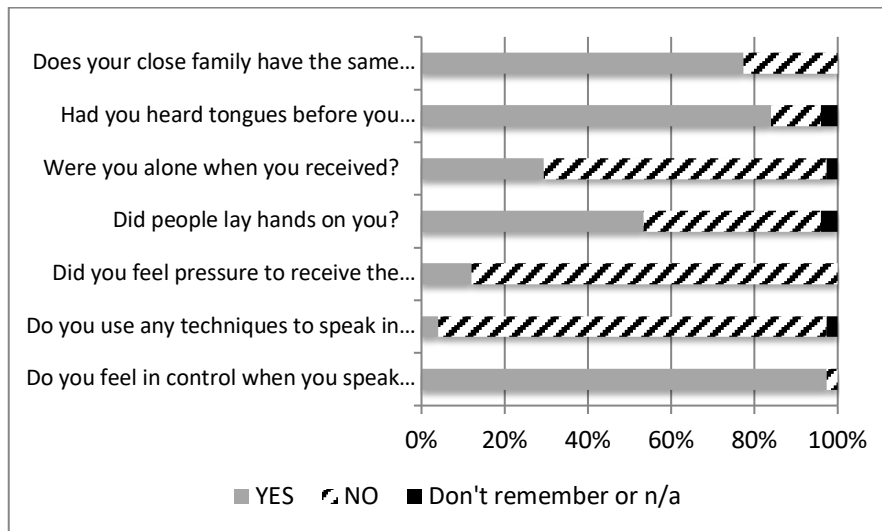
Four interviewees said they either only spoke in tongues once or only do so very rarely. Among the four people who never or hardly ever speak in tongues, one said he had abandoned the practice. One said he spoke in tongues once during a period of disease and another maintained that she cannot speak in tongues at will but only when the Holy Spirit acts upon her. The fourth person did not provide any explanation as to why she stopped speaking in tongues.

Almost all participants state they are in control of themselves when speaking in tongues. They can stop at any moment and feel no reduction in self-consciousness or loss of abilities to respond to outside events. As such, they reported not having control over what they are saying but otherwise being fully aware of their environment and able to

react normally, whether speaking in tongues or not. This is also reflected in the fact that many do not only pray in tongues during a set-apart prayer time but also while driving a car, doing manual work, during sports activities or other such situations. The one person who reported not being in control of himself also reports he only spoke in tongues once (an event that occurred during a period of disease and fever and was perceived as involuntary speaking in tongues).

Thirty-five per cent of the interviewees report speaking in tongues daily and another 31% use the gift weekly or several times a week. Twenty-nine per cent report speaking only occasionally (usually, during special events at church when glossolalia is practiced in a group setting) and four say they never or seldom spoke in tongues since the first occurrence. Many say their glossolalia has improved over time, i.e. it has become more fluent and/or less repetitive.

**Figure 5: Results on Background and Glossolalic Practice**



**Table 1: How much do you speak in tongues?**

Amount	Interviewees	Percentage
1 hour or more per day	3	4
30 minutes per day	4	5
15 minutes per day	11	15
5-10 minutes per day	3	4
60 minutes per week	2	3
30 minutes per week	1	1
15 minutes per week	23	31
15 minutes month	1	1
More than one hour per year	2	3
Less than one hour per year	18	24
Never	4	5
Undefined	3	4

Those who continue to speak in tongues follow somewhat different patterns as to how they use this gift. Whereas some speak in tongues for an hour or more per day (4%), many speak less frequently (see Table 1). For 47 of the interviewees (63%) speaking in tongues is a regular experience (at least weekly), whereas 24 (32%) report speaking only on a monthly, sporadic or undefined basis.

### 3. Other Insights

Only 20 interviewees (27%) report they also “interpret” tongues, according to the practice described in I Cor 14:5, which exhorts Christians to interpret tongues so their meaning is understood and the assembled church is edified. Many who interpret say they also say they do so rarely. Anecdotal information provided in the responses indicates that there are few opportunities to exercise the gift of interpretation, since respondents rarely exercised glossolalia in a group setting; more often they used it in private prayer. As such, the interviewees find few occasions for vernacular interpretation described in 1 Corinthians.

A majority of glossolalists (54 interviewees or 72%) report they also function in other gifts mentioned in 1 Cor 12. Most often they

named the gifts of healing, wisdom, discernment, prophecy, and occasional interpretation of tongues (see above). Interviewees mentioned faith (10 respondents) and miracles (7 respondents) less often as gifts.

## BENEFITS OF TONGUES SPEAKING

In his book *Thinking in Tongues*, James K.A. Smith argues convincingly that “Pentecostalism is not first and foremost a doctrinal or intellectual tradition; it is an affective constellation of practices and embodied ritual.”<sup>15</sup> And perhaps no activity better exemplifies “practice and embodied ritual” than speaking in tongues. In that vein, we asked those who prayed in tongues what benefits they thought they received over simply praying in a vernacular language. In other words, what *value* did they give to the practice of praying in tongues?

Among Pentecostal scholars this question is not new. Most of the scholarship has been apologetic, attempting to justify an evidential construct linking tongues directly with Spirit baptism. In more recent times, however, weighing the traction of tongues as practice over doctrinal apologetics is gaining more attention. In his *Speaking in Tongues*, Robert Menzies suggests six such values: 1) Tongues are the sign of our connection to the calling and power of the apostolic church; 2) tongues signify who we are: end-time prophets that Joel anticipated; 3) the diversity of tongues reminds us of the scope and nature of our mission; 4) the intimacy of tongues reminds us that God is with us; 5) the strangeness of tongues reminds us of our need to rely on the Holy Spirit; and 6) the drama of tongues reminds us that a transcendent God delights to communicate with us.<sup>16</sup>

In our survey, however, we allowed our respondents to express themselves freely without recourse to any fixed categories. As a result, our findings are varied and while some are reflective of the observations of Menzies they are broader and do not fit easily into a simple measured analysis. Nonetheless, repeatable patterns did emerge based upon the following three questions: 1) What happens to you physically and/or spiritually when you speak in tongues? Does it have any immediate effects? 2) How would you describe the benefits of speaking in tongues?

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<sup>15</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contribution to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), xx.

<sup>16</sup> Robert P. Menzies, *Speaking in Tongues: Jesus and the Apostolic Church as Models for the Church Today* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2016), 157-168.

and 3) Describe the importance of speaking in tongues – why do you do it, as opposed to simply praying in your own language?

Four dominant themes emerged. The largest single group articulated in a variety of ways that praying in tongues allows an individual to pray with the understanding of the Spirit over self. The Spirit in effect fills in what the mind is inclined to forget or not even think about. One person responded, “I don’t have to think up smart words, my ego is in the background.” In effect, the Spirit was credited with giving the words that needed to be said. Similarly, another person attested, “I pray in tongues when I run out of words in my native language and the Spirit finishes what I needed to pray for.” For another, tongues allowed the individual to pray longer, presumably again when he ran out of words to say in his vernacular prayer. For still another, tongues shortened their intercessory prayer life inasmuch as it allowed the respondent to get to the point quickly with as little verbiage as possible. In this case, when the respondent reached a certain set of syllables he knew the prayer was over. Two interviewees reported receiving visions of prophetic words during glossolalic prayer. The nature of these visions was not spelled out.

In having the right words this also meant for many of the respondents that they shared a conviction that their prayer in tongues was more powerful than conventional language. Praying, in this case, was more in tune with the will of God for their life. For at least two respondents, prayer was more powerful in tongues because the devil did not understand this language and presumably would be incapable of countering the prayer. Tongues became a clandestine form of spiritual warfare. However, despite the fact that the Spirit is apparently doing all the talking at least one person tied the effectiveness of prayer to the sincerity of the person praying in tongues. This, however, was an aberrant case and did not represent the norm. In fact, generally the opposite seemed to be the case. People felt the need to speak in tongues because sometimes their ego did get in the way of conventional prayers and they relied on the Spirit to pray through them in a manner that was pure and untainted.

The second major category identified as beneficial was a sense of intimacy with God. People responded that when they prayed in tongues they experienced the presence of God in deeper and more meaningful ways. Tongues was heartfelt communication with God. In at least three cases, those surveyed described this intimacy as an opportunity to “recharge their spiritual batteries.” Tongues opened an opportunity to



experience some kind of transcendence unavailable with conventional prayer. In this case, tongues were sacramental inasmuch as they assured one that God was near.

The third category proved more psychological in nature. Tongues speakers expressed greater peace, security, and relaxation. One respondent wrote, “speaking in tongues keeps me from depression;” for another, “it removes all doubt.” In all these instances there was an emotional and/or psychological benefit that the tongues speaker claimed to receive. In at least five cases respondents claimed heightened boldness and more power in their prayers. Presumably, the prayers enhanced their spiritual life not unlike perhaps a steroid on the body. In these cases, the impact of tongues was on the speaker and had little to do with one’s relationship with God. Some went beyond the psychological and claimed to experience physiological symptoms. One person reported getting tinnitus about four times a year, which was alleviated by speaking in tongues and taken as a prompt by the Holy Spirit to use the gift. The other physical/bodily effects include “intense feeling” (1), being emotional (1), increased intensity of prayer (1) and feeling tense (expectation). Others described feeling more relaxed and at least one believed tongues helped her to sleep better. On the other hand, 19 interviewees reported they did not experience any psychological benefits (if compared to vernacular prayer; see Table 2).

**Table 2: What happens to you physically and/or spiritually when you speak in tongues? Does it have any immediate effects?**

<b>Replies received</b>	<b>Number</b>
Physical effects (see text)	4
There is an added power/divine presence when I pray in tongues	12
Better focus/clearer thinking	2
Visions or prophetic words	2
More relaxed and peaceful	22
Joyful, uplifted, edified	7
No effect, no difference with normal prayer	19

The final category that stood out was knowing the will of God. Ironically, because of the nature of the practice, the speaker confessed that while they did not know the specifics of the will of God for their life through tongues speech, in at least six instances they felt they were

invariably aligning themselves better with God's will for their life. Some might dismiss this as a little more than tautological reasoning but there seemed to be no doubt among these respondents that they felt a greater assurance that whatever they were doing must be God's will.

In summary, speaking in tongues gives the practitioner a sense of peace, focus, assurance and power; tongues deepens prayer; and often extends times of prayer. Speakers experience the presence of God in ways they did not otherwise. Conspicuous by its absence was any mention of the historical emphasis of tongues as the "required" evidence of being filled with the Spirit. And while power for service was mentioned four times, the benefits were largely concerned with personal well-being and some might say almost pedestrian in their application. Little thought was given to any theological and or hermeneutical discourse that may be stirred by the presence and/or practice of tongues. For example, the six values of tongues championed above by Robert Menzies are nowhere to be found.

## CONCLUSION

In his book *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition*, Daniel Castelo observes that tongues speaking was "denominationally politicized, thereby privileging tongues as the central identity marker of Pentecostalism."<sup>17</sup> But while tongues were said to be available for all Christians, demonstrably not all have been available for tongues. There are "haves and have nots." This of course poses no end of problems for Pentecostal denominations that have relied so heavily on tongues as the distinctive mark of their brand of spirituality.

In retrospect, our survey only dealt with those who claimed to have been gifted at least once with tongues speech.<sup>18</sup> By virtue of their inclusion they are among the "haves", a group that, by all appearances, at least in the western hemisphere seems to be diminishing. In the future, more attention will need to be paid to the "have not's" - in particular those who have sought the gift but do not speak in tongues. Can the gift of tongues continue to perpetuate itself if Pentecostal clergy no longer demonstrate the gift or make room for corporately practicing the gift or

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Castelo. *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 130.

<sup>18</sup> Among those interviewed, some participants spoke only once or twice and then abandoned the practice, but most forged on because of long term impact.

seeking the gift? These are serious questions with no immediate answers.

With those caveats aside, tongues speech persists as a spiritual practice. In fact, arguably in a postmodern age the practice may even experience a bit of a revival as a mystic and alternative means for discerning truth. Against modernity, not all truth can be narrowed to what can be measured empirically or rationalized. And here there is an unescapable irony. While classical Pentecostal groups, such as the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, have used modern evidential proofs to perpetuate the gift of tongues speaking, postmodernity opens new thresholds for discussing the role of tongues speaking with the reception of Spirit Baptism. This is opening the conversation on the place of tongues speaking in bold new ways. Perhaps Pentecostals are on the eve of a fourth wave of the Holy Spirit – this time among classical Pentecostals.<sup>19</sup>

## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire

1. GENERAL			
Name:			
Email:		Phone:	
Country:		City:	
Date:		Gender:	M      F
Your highest degree:			
Are you (or have been) a salaried church or parachurch minister?			

<sup>19</sup> It is commonly held that a first wave of an outpouring of the Spirit emerged in the early part of the twentieth century. A second wave began with the birth of the charismatic community in the 1960s as the Spirit made inroads into mainline denominations. The third wave represents renewed spiritual activity among evangelical groups and in this case a fourth wave may represent renewed emphasis among classical Pentecostal groupings.

Name of the church you attend:						
Denomination (please circle):	Catholic	Lutheran	Pentecostal	Brethren	Baptist	Non-denom.
	Anglican		Other (Please specify)			
Your age group (please circle):	<21	21-30	31-45	46-60	61-80	>80
Your mother tongue is:						
Does your close family have the same religious affiliation?						Yes No
Briefly explain how you became a Christian						
<b>2. WHEN YOU FIRST SPOKE IN TONGUES</b>						
When did you speak in tongues for the first time (year, age or exact date)?						
Had you heard tongues before you received the gift?	Yes No					
Were you alone or with others when you received?						
How many attempts did it take you to speak in tongues?						
Did people lay hands on you?						
Describe the moments leading to your speaking in tongues. For example, were you told to repeat certain words or imitate someone?						
Did you feel pressure to receive the gift of tongues?						
Do you believe you speak in a known foreign language?						
If you answered yes, please tell us how you learned about the language you speak						

**3. HOW YOU USE TONGUES TODAY**

Since then, how often do you speak in tongues (please circle)?	Daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Never
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How much do you speak in tongues?	30 min/day	15 min/day	15 min/week	<1h per year	
Do you use any techniques to speak in tongues (e.g., background music, certain verbal cues to start)					
Do you feel in control when you speak in tongues?	Yes	No			
What happens to you physically and/or spiritually when you speak in tongues? Does it have any immediate effects?					
On which occasions do you usually speak in tongues?					
How would you describe the benefits of speaking in tongues?					
Describe the importance of speaking in tongues – why do you do it, as opposed to simply praying in your own language?					
Has your language (id- iom) changed over the years?					
Do you interpret tongues?	Yes	No			

#### 4. Your Experience and Understanding of Speaking in Tongues

Would you say your gift of tongues has "evolved" since you first began speaking in tongues (e.g., more intense, fluid wider range of sounds)?	
Since you began speaking in tongues, has it impacted your life in other ways? (e.g., spirituality, behaviour)?	

<p>In your opinion, is there a connection between speaking in tongues and the biblical expression, 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit'? If so, how would you describe it?</p>	
<p>Have you been used in any of the other gifts of the Spirit mentioned in 1 Cor 12-14? If so, which ones: Gift of knowledge, wisdom, miracles, interpretation, discernment of Spirits, faith, healings.</p>	
<p>Is there any correlation between these other gifts operating and speaking in tongues?</p>	
<p>Would you like to tell us anything else about your speaking in tongues?</p>	