

Glossolalia:
The Problem of Interpretation

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Introduction

For many Americans religion is second nature. Ingrained at an early age by way of attending church with family, religious practice and teachings become common knowledge and set standards for behavior within their lives. Many Christians in America have come to a point of complacency; they remain comfortable in their respective churches and forget about the outsiders. What they do not consider is how their religious institutions appear to others; they remain too caught up in their own spiritual gain. A personal relationship with God is undoubtedly important, but it should not be the only one. How a religion functions in the society in which it exists should always be on the mind of the church. Should it cater to the present culture? Should it hold fast to ancient practices and beliefs? Should individual churches have the right to say what is right and wrong for the whole of Christianity?

People often regard their leaders, especially in a religious setting, to be all-knowing. They take their word as truth and often rely on them for guidance. While I have no problem with looking up to one's pastor or religious guide and going to them for help, I do have a problem with them being the ultimate authority. Where this becomes a problem is when people believe what an authority figure says without exploring the idea or belief for themselves. This idea is the basis for my argument about the spiritual gift of tongues. Through the exploration of biblical passages, various studies done on tongues, and looking at what those who practice this gift say, I will explain why I believe certain churches are preaching an incorrect message: that the gift of tongues is the *only* initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit

Biblical evidence is vital for understanding the gift of tongues. Paul writes in 1

Corinthians about the gift and how it is to be used. He also discusses the other gifts and why the gift of tongues is a lesser gift. The passages I explore will serve as a background for why I see the gift of tongues as being used improperly in some churches. I believe that Christian practices must be justified and supported by biblical evidence, and the way churches such as the Assemblies of God and the United Pentecostal Church International are using the gift is not.

The discussion of current studies on tongues serve the purpose of not only attempting to provide proof for the validity of the gift, but also to give a bit of insight into why the gift is popular and so widely-used in certain churches. It is impossible to fully understand a gift unless one possesses it, but the studies I chose to examine will attempt to uncover why these churches are so deeply committed to this gift over the rest.

The final discussion focuses on personal accounts of those who both possess the gift and believe it is one every Christian should exhibit. I will also give a bit of insight into why I chose this topic and why I believe it is an important issue.

The Early Appearance of Tongues in America

The American tongues movement began in the early 1900s in Topeka, Kansas. The earliest record of glossolalia is said to have been performed by a student at Bethel Bible College by the name of Agnes N. Ozman. After this first instance, glossolalia spread to Christians in Los Angeles in 1906. This spread to California was the spring board for the tongues movement; it produced twenty-six new churches and gained over two million members. This increase remained publicly within the Pentecostal churches

until the 1960s.¹

What has come to be called the Charismatic Movement started in 1960s when a pastor in Van Nuys, California, Dennis Bennett, revealed that his Episcopal congregation spoke in tongues. Watson E. Mills writes that “similar experiences began to crop up elsewhere dating back as far as the 1950s, perhaps previously unreported [...] because of a general uncertainty about the validity of the experience itself.”²

Whether or not glossolalia is a valid gift of the Spirit is not my concern. I fully believe in the possibility of all kinds of gifts through the power of the Spirit. What does concern me is the way the gift of tongues is being taught and used today.

One church that stands out as a prime example of using the gift of tongues in an improper manner, in my opinion, is the Assemblies of God. According to their official website, their position within the Christian community is as follows:

The Assemblies of God is notably classified as Evangelical. The church is distinguished as such because it places high priority on the inspiration of Scripture and its mission to bring the lost to a saving knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ . . . The most definitive identification of the Assemblies of God is Pentecostal. Just as it was founded in 1914, the Fellowship remains a full gospel church—one where the fullness of the Holy Spirit is welcomed, nurtured, and taught. This includes speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit . . . Among Pentecostal churches—the Assemblies of God is largest worldwide with over 52 million constituents.³

This specific church can be looked at as extreme in the Pentecostal tradition, much different than classic Pentecostalism, for example. They teach that speaking in tongues is

¹ Watson E. Mills, *Speaking in Tongues Let's Talk About It*, (Waco, Texas: Word Inc., 1973), 19.

² Ibid., 19.

³ “Our Position in the Christian Community,” *General Council of the Assemblies of God* 2006, <<http://ag.org/top/about/fellowship.cfm>> (22 March 2007).

a gift that every Christian will exhibit at some point. Their Constitution and Bylaws sections seven and eight of their statement of fundamental truths state:

All believers are entitled to and should ardently seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian church . . . The baptism of believers in the Holy Spirit is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance (Acts 2:4). The speaking in tongues in this instance is the same in essence as the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:4-10, 28), but different in purpose and use.⁴

Another church which believes in this initial evidence theory is the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI). It was formed in 1945 when the Pentecostal Church, Incorporated and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ came together. It now has over four million followers all over the world, including about four thousand churches in North America. They also “embrace the Pentecostal view that speaking in tongues is the initial sign of receiving the Holy Spirit.”⁵

Both of the previously mentioned churches’ beliefs will be discussed more in depth in the final section.

What is the Spiritual Gift of Tongues?

Ah’ ach ma hah moora, ay

Andorra ay ach-ah ha moora

Almtee muhr ah hah melah, ay

Ah nahah mahah munh

⁴ “Assemblies of God's Constitution and Bylaws,” *General Council of the Assemblies of God* 2006, <http://ag.org/top/about/constitution_bylaws.cfm> (22 March 2007).

⁵ “United Pentecostal Church International: About,” *United Pentecostal Church International* 2006, <<http://www.upci.org/>> (2 April 2007).

The previous may look like a whole lot of nonsense, and even the person who spoke those words may not know what they mean. Contrary to rational thought, it is possible to speak in a language of which one has absolutely no knowledge and cannot explain even after speaking it for numerous years. This ability is referred to as glossolalia.

Many people are undoubtedly familiar with this word in its more common terminology: speaking in tongues, or the gift of tongues. This gift is one of many spiritual gifts which exist in Christianity, along with the gift of interpretation.

Spiritual gifts in Christianity can range from a seemingly simple act of hospitality to a more dramatic act of healing. Some people think spiritual gifts should be apparent, the gift should actively and explicitly promote Christianity and the spiritual power one holds as a Christian. The gift of glossolalia, speaking in tongues, can seem like one such gift. Glossolalia is a term derived from two Greek words: *glossa* and *lalein*. It literally translates as “to speak in tongues.” The gift itself is a series of unintelligible syllables uttered during prayer. To anyone listening, including the speaker, it sounds like no language currently spoken.

A note should be made here that there are two types of glossolalia—public and private. The controversy over the gift of tongues lies in its public form. Though it will be later discussed that most glossolalists claim to speak in tongues most often in private, its public presence is nevertheless an issue.

⁶ Watson E. Mills, *Speaking in Tongues Let's Talk About It*, (Waco, Texas: Word Inc., 1973), 18.

Another form of speaking in tongues is referred to as xenoglossy: speaking in an actual foreign language which one has never learned. This is a less-occurring phenomenon today compared to glossolalia. Many people use the term speaking in tongues to mean glossolalia, not xenoglossy.

A distinction should be made in the case of glossolalia in a present context. Most Christians who claim to speak in tongues are not speaking any current foreign language. Though there are current claims of people practicing xenoglossy, it is not the version of the gift that will be in question. A better interpretation for today's glossolalia would be speaking in a language of the Spirit, a language of God, as most believers say they are speaking to God when they speak in tongues.

For this reason I find fault in the teachings of the Assemblies of God church and the UPCI. They use certain biblical passages which refer to xenoglossy, coupled with passages which refer to glossolalia, as proof for the gift being the initial evidence of baptism by the Holy Spirit. They believe that the only way to physically distinguish that one has been baptized by the Holy Spirit is if they exhibit the gift of tongues. The gift that they are telling their followers to strive for is glossolalia, and yet they are using passages referring to xenoglossy as evidence for why they should. The reason I see this distinction as vital in the discussion of this gift will be discussed in the following examination of the biblical passages.

The Biblical Evidence

Glossolalia and xenoglossy, tongue speaking, occur in multiple places in the New Testament—none of which are excluded from heavy debate. Some biblical passages that

are often used in support of glossolalia, when viewed in their historical context, are actually referring to xenoglossy. While I feel that both spiritual gifts are valid, glossolalia is the one that is used most often today. Biblical passages which do not promote this modern sort of tongues speaking should not be used as support for doing so.

Xenoglossy, the gift of speaking in an actual language, is the initial evidence for the apostles in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit comes upon them and they then have the ability to preach to the crowds in their respective languages. This gift of tongues was given to them for a specific reason: to prophesy to the unbelievers. The Assemblies of God and other initial evidence believing churches often cite Acts 2 as proof for the gift of tongues standing as the initial evidence. For this to be true, would not Christians today exhibit this same gift of tongues? If it is true that it was the initial evidence then and should be now, why is the gift different? As will be discussed in the first few passages, the gifts of the spirit are to be used in order to edify the church. A gift is given with a specific purpose in mind, and without a purpose that helps the church the gift is being used improperly.

Each of the following biblical passages looks at a different aspect of the gift of tongues. It is crucial to first look at how spiritual gifts are presented and to then move on to how tongues is discussed. 1 Corinthians holds the key for how any gift should be used, according to Paul. Paul is writing in reaction to a disorderly, far out-of-hand church in Corinth. They have begun to value status over prophesy; Paul is writing to teach them how the gifts are meant to be used in order to edify the church over the self.

1 Corinthians 12

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are discussed in a general sense in the book of 1 Corinthians 12. This chapter serves as an outline for how gifts are distributed by God. Toward the end of the chapter, after explaining that there are multiple kinds of gifts, Paul writes:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit . . . to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.⁷

This passage makes explicitly clear that the Spirit gives each person a gift. Everyone has the ability to work in accordance with the gospel. What is also made clear is that the Spirit does not give the same gift to everyone. A claim of the Assemblies of God is that speaking in tongues is the *only* initial evidence. It is proof that one is truly a Christian and has accepted the Holy Spirit into their lives. By simply looking at the last verse of this passage this claim is refuted. The twelfth chapter also discusses the idea that Christians are all part of one body, no gift is less significant than another. These “initial evidence” proclaiming churches declare that some Christians are not fully Christian because they lack one gift. They believe that tongues is the *only* sign of being saved by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 13

Directly following the previous passage is Paul’s discussion of love, the greatest

⁷ 1 Corinthians 12. 7-8, 10-11. *NIV*.

gift of all. A problem of many churches is forgetting for what Christianity truly stands.

People tend to get too caught up in politics and money and leave the true teachings

behind. Paul makes it undeniably clear what is important in this passage:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal . . . Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears . . . And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.⁸

The real desire of God is for his followers to spread love. Everything else in this world is temporary and can only be used as a means to an end. Everything should be done in the attempt to extend God's love. Paul declares that faith, hope, and love are the gifts which shall remain after all the temporary gifts are used to their fullest. The gift of tongues is one such temporary gift.

1 Corinthians 14

The passage that most overtly and fully explains the gift of tongues is 1 Corinthians 14. Paul leaves no room for interpretation in his writing regarding glossolalia and why it is an inferior gift. The very first line continues his declaration of the superiority of love. One should strive to use the spiritual gifts but should never forget that they are only in pursuit of love. Paul uses speaking in tongues as the example for how spiritual gifts can be misused:

For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the

⁸ 1 Corinthians 13. 1, 8-10, 13. *NIV*.

church.⁹

Unlike the passage in Acts which demonstrates the apostles speaking in other languages, this passage explains a different kind of tongues. Paul says that a person who speaks in tongues is understood by no one, clearly setting it apart from the sort of speaking in tongues displayed in Acts. This sort of tongues can most accurately be called glossolalia, as Paul says it is tongues which are aimed at God that no one can understand. The gift of tongues which is performed today by many Christians is then correctly called glossolalia, speaking to God. Paul makes it clear that one who speaks in tongues is only benefiting himself; the gifts of the Holy Spirit are to be used to benefit all. Paul is not dismissing the gift, he is simply showing that it is unwise to use it as a main tool in worship, as it does not promote encouragement to outsiders.

After explaining that God's message is superior he reifies this notion in saying:

I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets so that the church may be edified . . . So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.¹⁰

In verse five Paul states that he wishes everyone could speak in tongues; the Assemblies of God church uses this as proof that everyone should. It seems a shallow-based claim when the very next clause says that he would rather they proclaim God's message. It would make more sense for the Assemblies of God and UPCI's argument if Paul stated that everyone has the ability to speak in tongues, but the fact is: he does not. He states that it is valued in the church with interpretation. This then raises the question: why do these churches not also make a point of the importance of the gift of interpretation?

⁹ 1 Corinthians 14. 2-4. *NIV*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, 12. *NIV*.

The main point that should be derived from this passage is that of the use of gifts. Other places in the New Testament simply give proof that the gift of tongues was used by apostles and other people, but 1 Corinthians 14 lays out why the gifts are given at all. Paul is writing this in reaction to the way the Corinthians are misusing the gift of tongues and acting foolishly in his eyes.

Dale B. Martin, a professor of religion, writes that speaking in tongues was a sign of high status in biblical times. The Corinthians latched on to this gift in particular because it made them a credible religion. Many people would see this gift being performed and assume a higher connection to God because of it. In Paul's opinion this recognition is not nearly enough. His main objective is one of conversion.¹¹ Speaking in tongues does not promote conversion, it only serves as proof that the Corinthians were one of many spiritual cults at the time. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul says: "Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers."¹²

This passage can seem confusing at first glance, why would Paul proclaim tongues as a sign for unbelievers? I feel an accurate interpretation would be to say that tongues are but *only* proof for unbelievers, it is proof that they have spiritual power but it does not promote conversion. It is proof to them and yet they remain unbelievers because it gives them no reason to want to convert when they sound like many other cults. Paul then says the proclaiming God's message is what gains conversion as it is the real proof of God's work. Proclaiming God's message is what turns the unbelievers into believers,

¹¹ Dale B. Martin, "Tongues of Angels and Other Status Indicators," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59 (1991): 547-589.

¹² 1 Corinthians 14. 22. *NIV*.

followers of Christ.

The gift of tongues without interpretation is another problem Paul sees in the Corinthians, and it is the most important connection I see with charismatic churches today. In speaking of interpretation Paul says:

For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful . . . I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.¹³

Once again Paul addresses the validity of the gift of tongues. He makes it quite clear that he values this gift but only when used properly. His idea of tongues used in an appropriate way is with an interpretation. When coupled with Paul's previous statements about gifts being used to encourage God's love and promote conversion this statement fits perfectly. If one is using a gift as only to help oneself and in the place of a more useful gift, then that gift is being used improperly. I believe that Paul sees the potential for both good and evil in the Corinthians. He does not want to push them away from the gift entirely, thus proving its importance in some ways, but he also wants to strongly warn them against the harm it can do.

Along with the idea that an interpreter should be present when tongues are being spoken, Paul also addresses the idea of tongues in a group setting. He states that he would rather speak only five words of God's message than thousands in tongues. Paul is trying to bring to the light the outsiders, the audience, those who are witnessing the followers of Christ. He is also concerned with the order of the church which he addresses directly after:

¹³ Ibid., 13-14, 18-19. *NIV*.

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God . . . Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.¹⁴

This is the most vital passage for the use of tongues in church services. Paul directly states how many people should speak, why they should, and what they should do if no one is there to translate. It seems quite impossible to be able to construe this any other way. Perhaps that is the greater question then concerning charismatic churches in America today. Why, after reading what the Bible says about tongues, would they continue to practice glossolalia in a public setting, masses of people at once, completely disregarding Paul's urging? Is there something about our present culture that has spawned a need for mass glossolalia? Is there a benefit to this new way of using tongues or does it fall in line with how the Corinthians used it? What would Paul say to charismatic churches today?

Paul is writing to a group of people who are by no means evil. Their intentions are good but the way they execute them is the problem. Self-promotion and self-gratification are the concern. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are to be used in such a way that others are encouraged to follow Christ. Every aspect of Christianity should be in an attempt to be more like Christ. Christianity should not be a religion of the insiders. Part of Christians' duty is to spread the word of God in order to promote awareness of Christ's love. Nothing should be done in the name of God that does not fully endorse love. As Paul says: "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these

¹⁴ Ibid., 26-28, 39-40. *NIV*.

is love.”¹⁵

Acts 2

One of the most widely used passages for support of glossolalia can be found in the second chapter of the book of Acts. The passage reads:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven . . . Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?”¹⁶

There are two important aspects to note from this passage. One is the mention of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is clearly stated as working through the people to speak in tongues. What is also stated thereafter is that the people who hear them speaking *recognize their own languages being spoken*. This speaking in tongues, other languages, is not an unintelligible language, it is the message of God in an *actual language*. The people around the tongue speakers know what they are saying.

The passage continues with Peter reassuring the crowd that the apostles are not drunk as some suspected. He declares that they should listen to what the apostles are saying as God stated he would send his message in such a way. The majority of the crowd believes what they say and are baptized as followers.¹⁷ This work of the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues was used for conversion. All gifts of the Holy Spirit are to

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 13. 13. *NIV*.

¹⁶ Acts 2.1-5, 7-8. *NIV*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.14-42.

be used to support God's word and God's love. Gifts that do not fulfill this standard are being used improperly.

The Holy Spirit is said to suddenly rush into the dwelling place and fill each person with the gift to speak in other languages. This reference is what the Assemblies of God church uses as support for speaking in tongues as the initial evidence today. They teach that because this was the initial evidence for the apostles then, it remains as the initial evidence of all believers today. Nowhere in the passage does it say that this occurrence is the only way the Spirit will be present. It is also vital to note that this gift in Acts 2 is not the same gift exhibited as initial evidence today. These initial evidence churches use this passage to support their belief that tongues are the initial evidence, but the two gifts are entirely different in both purpose and use.

John 20

One major instance of the Holy Spirit's presence without tongues is John 20:22. This passage is following Mary Magdalene finding the empty tomb, telling the disciples, and then seeing the angels and eventually Jesus who tells her he is returning to the Father. It is then that Jesus appears to his disciples:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."¹⁸

¹⁸ John 20:19-23. *NIV*.

Nowhere in this passage is the gift of tongues mentioned. Jesus breathes on the disciples and they receive the Holy Spirit and that is it. If tongues were always the initial evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, they would undoubtedly appear in this passage. The Assemblies of God church proclaims that tongues are the initial evidence, but I infer from biblical evidence that they are not.

Modern Studies

I believe it is essential to look at many different sides of the gift of tongues in order to fully grasp the controversy surrounding it. It is not enough to simply look at what the Bible says concerning the gift without placing it in a modern context. The following section will look at a few studies performed to gain a new insight into the gift of tongues. There is undoubted interest in this gift, simply for its almost magic-like quality. Those who have never read anything on this gift are amazed at its presence in churches and prayer groups across America, and some are inevitably skeptical of its validity. While I do not believe that everything in life needs proof for it to be true, it is interesting when there *is* at least a bit of evidence for the seemingly supernatural acts of God.

Certain evidence, namely religious, is often not enough for some people. In the case of glossolalia, biblical passages only prove that speaking in tongues occurred sometime in the past. They really give no indication that the gift is viable in a present context. These things being true, why did glossolalia pick up again in the early 1900s in America? What about the society and culture made it adaptable to this gift in particular? Many researchers of various practices have tackled this very question. In looking at the

work of neuroscientists and psychologists/sociologists, these questions of how and why will attempt to be answered, as best as is possible.

Modern Americans have been trained to be rational. We are taught that we must prove something to be right, and that we need evidence in order to do so. When faced with a question of religion, most people turn away. Religious debate is heated, especially when science is considered. The majority of Christians would say that all they need is faith. Even though this is true, there are Christians who question the validity and value of the gift of tongues.

The SPECT Scan Study

People lie. People oftentimes cannot be trusted. For this reason many things like speaking in tongues are looked at so warily. What if those who claim to have the gift are just making it up? It is in this light that many scientists have studied glossolalists. In a study performed at the University of Pennsylvania four psychiatrists examined five women who spoke in tongues. Their main research involved measuring the regional cerebral blood flow while the subject performed glossolalia. The women ranged from 38 to 52 years of age and were all Christians belonging to a Charismatic or Pentecostal church.¹⁹ None of the subjects displayed any mood disorders or other psychiatric problems.

The test was performed by having the subject stand in a room and start singing in English. They would sing for twenty minutes and then be brought out for the SPECT

¹⁹ Andrew Newberg, "The Measurement of Regional Cerebral Blood Flow During Glossolalia: A Preliminary SPECT Study," *Psychiatry Research Neuroimaging* 1 (2006): 67-71.

scan which lasted forty minutes. The second test was identical but the subject would only start singing and then move quickly into the glossolalia state. They would perform glossolalia for five minutes and then the same SPECT scan was performed.²⁰

The two scans varied quite significantly. The subjects claimed, prior to being tested, that glossolalia was a non-voluntary state. The researchers observed a decrease in activity in the frontal lobes during glossolalia. This observation is consistent with the subjects' claim of a lack of control over glossolalia.²¹ Generally a left lateralization in the frontal lobes occurs when observing language functions. This lateralization was not found in the instances of glossolalia, instead the left hemisphere appeared to have a significant decrease in function. The researchers suggest that this "lack of a clear lateralization in the frontal lobes suggests that the expressive language parts of the brain may not be as directly affected by glossolalia as might be expected."²²

I find this study particularly relevant in a modern context because many people still hold the conviction that tongues is not a valid gift. I also think this helps to refute the notion that everyone could be faking speaking in tongues. While I do believe that it is possible that there may be some people who do fake it, there are definitely many who genuinely possess the gift. While my argument revolves around the teaching of tongues as initial evidence, I find that a major problem within the entire tongues discussion is an issue of understanding. If there were more understanding on both sides of the tongues debate I think it would be less heated and less controversial. It is too easy for non-

²⁰ Ibid., 68.

²¹ Ibid., 70.

²² Ibid., 70.

glossolalists to dismiss the gift as false, and studies such as this one can help to convince the more rationally-minded people that it does hold some physical validity.

Kelsey's Distinctions

In the early 1900s there was a common belief that glossolalia was oftentimes a direct result of psychosis or hysteria. This view was first challenged in the late 30s and continued to be throughout the twentieth century. It is now a common belief that glossolalia is in no way related to psychopathology. Certain psychotic disorders have symptoms of erratic speech, but these symptoms are often intelligible in some way, whereas glossolalia has most likely no relation to any current language whatsoever.

Morton Kelsey developed the idea that glossolalia can be evaluated in four different ways: as a psychological abnormality, as something completely not understandable to us, as something only useful in the early days of the church, or as a spiritual gift that is still valid today.²³ He also outlines the five main psychological views of glossolalia: a manifestation of schizophrenia, a form of hysteria, a result of hypnotism, autosuggestion, or an exalted memory based on repression. He argues that each of these preconceived notions about glossolalia can be refuted. For example, it is not a manifestation of schizophrenia because in most cases schizophrenics cannot differentiate between what is real and what is not. Hysteria is something that is harmful to the mind and body; the only relation it has to glossolalia is that they both arise in the unconscious.²⁴ Each of these views falls apart when looked at beyond the surface

²³ John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

similarities. Kelsey also believes that if religion is an important part of a person's life then contact with the Spirit is entirely possible. The power of willful thinking is not something that can be completely dismissed.

Glossolalia and Psychology: The Work of Kildahl

In a series of psychological tests, John P. Kildahl and his fellow researchers studied glossolalists and non-glossolalists to compare their mental health. Kildahl is a clinical psychologist who previously undertook two other studies about glossolalia. The previous studies were to help the church prepare guidelines for policy surrounding glossolalia in terms of theology and pastoral care. He worked with Dr. Paul A. Qualben, a psychiatrist, and Dr. Lowell J. Satre, a professor of New Testament studies, in all previous examinations.

The study that launched the writing of this text resulted from Kildahl and Qualben's belief that there was more to be said about the controversy surrounding the gift. Their main question was what, if anything, made glossolalists different from non-glossolalists. They based their study on the idea that those they studied were "given" the gift of tongues through their pastor or religious leader. It was only through observance of others in their congregation or by the guidance of a leader that they developed the gift.²⁵

In terms of general well-being the two groups did not differ. Mentally stable as well as mentally unhealthy people existed in both groups. The main difference between the tongue-speakers and the non-tongue-speakers was the issue of dependency, aptly named "The Dependency Syndrome" by Kildahl. The tongue-speakers tended to develop

²⁵ Ibid., 38.

much more submissive and trusting relationships with authority figures who acted as guides to their practice of glossolalia. “Without complete submission to the leader, speaking in tongues was not initiated. In psychotherapy, this is called dependent transference.”²⁶

Their reliance on authority should not be perceived in a negative way necessarily. While the glossolalists did feel strongly connected to their spiritual guide, their greater sense of adulation was for God. He acted as the supreme leader under which they were submissive. The feelings of euphoria that many of the glossolalists experienced were often attributed to the fact that they felt they were “in the hands of God.” They believe that somehow, by having this gift of tongues, they had proof that God not only existed, but was an active part of their lives.²⁷ I think it is also an attractive gift in itself because it gives some proof for the validity of Christianity. This ability to speak in a language of God which can be observed by others acts as evidence for a higher power and makes speaking in tongues all the more desirable.

Another, perhaps more questionable, aspect of their study involved psychological factors that went into performing glossolalia. Their basic question was whether or not someone can be predisposed to attain the gift of tongues. The most striking difference they found between glossolalists and non-glossolalists was in terms of anxiety. One of the investigators, Dr. Paul Qualben, interviewed all the participants and found that 85% of the glossolalists had experienced a self-defined anxiety crisis directly preceding their ability to speak in tongues. Only 30% of the non-glossolalists report experiencing a

²⁶ Ibid., 50.

²⁷ Ibid., 51.

similar anxiety crisis recently.²⁸

Kildahl attributes their development of the gift to their anxiety issues. People with a sense of helplessness and self-doubt are more likely to seek spiritual guidance from a leader in their church. Then through this guidance the leader would help them develop the gift. This makes sense, considering how many glossolalists claim speaking in tongues is a calming practice, one that makes them feel closer to God. It is also interesting to note that those they studied also stated that the uncertainty about whether or not they would receive the gift at all was a source of anxiety.

Another interesting finding in the study of the glossolalists was how they themselves explained their gift. The glossolalists did not feel it necessary to understand their gift in realistic terms; they were all content with it being entirely irrational in a scientific or normal sense. They essentially said that it could not be validated by people outside of the system. The experience could neither be proven or disproved scientifically as it is considered a private matter between them and the Holy Spirit.²⁹ One person in their study felt quite strongly about this and wrote them a letter about his beliefs:

You think you can psychoanalyze the gift of the Holy Spirit even if it is of divine origin. It seems presumptuous to think that science can probe and analyze such divine manifestations. Personally, I think this is hallowed ground and lies outside the realm of scientific analysis. If you try to analyze it, you will surely fail. A person who does not speak in tongues can no more explain what glossolalia means than an unconverted person can analyze what takes place in a true conversion to Christ.³⁰

There is no doubt that the feelings glossolalists attribute to speaking in tongues are valid.

²⁸ Ibid., 57.

²⁹ Ibid., 61.

³⁰ Anonymous letter written to Kildahl, *Psychology*, 62.

It undoubtedly does bring them a sense of euphoria and higher connection to the Holy Spirit. But it is often because of this feeling that some glossolalists can become preoccupied with the gift in a negative way.

This negative, obsessive quality that can sometimes come with the possession of the gift of tongues is what I believe can lead to believing it to be supreme. While it is never explicitly stated that this gift is *superior*, stating that it is the *only* initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit essentially means the same thing. By stating it is the only way to distinguish those baptized in the Holy Spirit, those who do not exhibit the gift are not baptized in their eyes, they have not fully accepted the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Many glossolalists Kildahl studied, once they had attained the gift, became motivated to help others find the gift as well. They were not content with simply having gained it for themselves as they felt it was a sign of the Holy Spirit, one that anyone could exhibit. Kildahl and his colleagues formed the opinion that if someone possesses the psychological characteristics necessary, they can learn to speak in tongues. Gifts of the Holy Spirit are not thought to be learned; they are supposed to be placed upon someone without their knowledge of it. If someone is being taught how to speak in tongues, as is Kildahl observed, is it truly a gift of the Holy Spirit?

The simple fact that people can be taught this gift, as if learning another language, is a big part of why this gift should not be held up so highly. People can quite easily fake the words by what they hear from those around them after being in their presence for long enough. If this gift were of ultimate importance in being one with the Holy Spirit, why would one even need to be taught? Kildahl observed meetings where leaders or group

members would recite a line of a script of speaking in tongues and the rest of the group would repeat it. While it would be very presumptuous to say this is a common occurrence, the fact that it is an occurrence at all is telling. The gift of healing, the gift of prophecy or of hospitality cannot be faked. No other gift can be faked because every other gift is community serving.

Kildahl believes that a gift should be evaluated based on whether it builds up the church community, as stated in 1 Corinthians 14:5. He believes that more harm is being done in terms of edification of the group concerning public glossolalia. “Tongue-speaking does not look very uniquely spiritual to me after many experiences of watching people teach other people how to speak in tongues ... It is the same procedure that a competent hypnotist employs ... I have reached the conclusion that tongue-speaking is a learned phenomenon.”³¹

It is important to note the differences in beliefs on private and public glossolalia. No one can affirm nor deny the validity of a gift to an individual’s well-being. If someone genuinely believes the gift is helping them in some way then their belief is valid. Whether or not this belief of theirs is beneficial in a public setting is what is often questioned. As Kildahl notes, in terms of community, far many more people than not tend to see glossolalia as disruptive in a public setting. The majority of those who say this are outsiders, but in many churches this majority feels pushed away because they cannot exhibit the gift. In extreme cases, Kildahl cites that almost one-third of a congregation left the church because of a feeling of a barrier between them and the glossolalists. Often fewer than this leave the church, but in most cases it is a significant

³¹ John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 74.

number and for a significant reason.³²

I find this portion of Kildahl's study the most telling in terms of how the gift is truly viewed and used in a present context. It is impossible to deny that it can push away people who never find the gift. But even if a person does get the gift of tongues they are serving no one but themselves without an interpreter. Many practitioners said they spoke in tongues most often in private, thus it being a far more self-edifying gift than a community-edifying gift. This is a very important note to make when looking at how churches like the Assemblies of God view the gift. Gifts are explicitly explained by Paul: they must be in service of the church and in the word of God. If the gift does not edify the church, it does not belong in the church. Why is the gift of interpretation not also enforced? It is absolutely essential if the gift of tongues is used in a public forum, yet it is not mentioned as being a vital part of the initial evidence theory.

Grady and Loewenthal: Insider vs. Outsider

In a study performed by Brian Grady and Kate Loewenthal at the University of London, the perception of glossolalia was looked at from an insider and outsider's perspective. This study sheds light on why glossolalia is so controversial in the church. Many outsiders have preconceived false notions about speaking in tongues that shape their entire belief about not only the glossolalists themselves, but about charismatic and Pentecostal churches as well.

Grady and Loewenthal looked at frequency, context, and associated behaviors in regards to glossolalia. The study was performed on forty-five adults in the United

³² Ibid., 66.

Kingdom, all Christians. Fourteen of them were glossolalists, fifteen were witnesses who belonged to charismatic churches, and sixteen acted as the control group who were neither a glossolalist or a witness.³³

What they found is striking. Non-glossolalists saw glossolalia as occurring less than daily and most often in a religious setting during some sort of religious activity. They also associated glossolalia with ecstasy and very emotional occurrences. Their main belief of why it should be used is for the benefit of community within the church.

The glossolalists, on the other hand, said that glossolalia was for them a daily occurrence that more often than not happened outside of a religious setting. Many noted that it usually occurred during some seemingly mundane activity such as driving or washing the dishes, typically relaxing settings. The emotions they associated with it were calm and peaceful, or in some cases no particular emotion at all. Their primary reason for practicing glossolalia was as a form of private prayer as that is how it generally is manifested.³⁴

It seems a bit surprising how differently the two groups interpret glossolalia. Even those who had witnessed glossolalia fell more in line with the control group of non-glossolalists. The conclusion Grady and Loewenthal derive from this is that there must be a difference between public and private glossolalia. As noted earlier, it is impossible to study private glossolalia without destroying its essential quality. But it does seem striking that most glossolalists claim that it occurs more often in private, and that it is this

³³ Brian Grady and Kate Miriam Loewenthal. "Features Associated with Speaking in Tongues (Glossolalia)." *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 70, 2 (1997): 185-191.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

private occurrence that is the most spiritually calming for them.

In my opinion, based on the work of these, and other, psychologists, glossolalia is definitely beneficial to the individual. Discussing the validity of the gift itself based on the fact that it can be taught in some cases does not concern me. It could very well be a possibility that some people do need guidance to be able to open themselves fully to the Spirit. I am in no position to judge how one communicates with the Spirit. But it is quite telling that this gift is unique in that it *can* be taught and never actually given as a gift.

Along with building up the individual, I do think it could be beneficial to a group of *all glossolalists*. Many of the people studied perform glossolalia in a group, and it gives them a sense of community and joy. But the fact remains that there are many who are members of churches that are not all tongue-speakers. In this case it does not build up the church. It often divides the congregation in an aggressive way and can push people away from Christianity entirely, though perhaps only in extreme cases.

I also would agree on the consensus that glossolalia is in no way a mental disorder. Part of this opinion lies in the fact that I do believe there are many things in this world that cannot be explained. A Christian has to have faith. Glossolalists claim that people outside of the system have no way of knowing what it is like, and can therefore not accurately assess the gift. While this may be a valid point in some ways, I do think it is an important element to have an outsider's perspective. Gifts of the Holy Spirit are meant to be used to build up the church community. If there are people in the community who feel strongly that this gift is being misused, they should be heard. Ignoring the feelings of the outsiders seems just as ignorant as ignoring the glossolalists themselves. The reverse is also true, the non-glossolalists have to take just as much care to try to

understand the glossolalists, even if their beliefs differ.

Insider Perspectives

One can read thousands of books and hundreds of studies about speaking in tongues. There will undoubtedly be an endless stream of discussion about the gift of tongues for quite some time. What is important to understand about speaking in tongues above all else is the experience of the gift itself; why it is so important to those who practice it. There is no better way to fully grasp the experience than through the words of the speakers themselves. The problem with finding out about this gift is that many people are hesitant to speak about it. When a lot of studies focus on trying to find some psychological or scientific reason for tongues, it is understandable that practitioners would get the impression that outsiders have no care for what the gift truly means for them. In an attempt to not be one of the narrow-minded outsiders, I will explore a bit of what those who speak in tongues have to say. More importantly, I will try to discover why they are so passionate about this gift above all others and if their reasoning justifies their beliefs.

The Assemblies of God

In the *Constitution and Bylaws of The General Council of the Assemblies of God* various beliefs are stated which all followers are to abide by. They start off fairly standard: the Bible being the guide for faith and practice, belief in the trinity, the salvation of man by Jesus Christ, and practices of baptism and communion. Number seven of the fundamental truths is “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit.” It states that “all

believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience in the early Christian church.” The following section then gives the explanation that:

the baptism of believers in the Holy Spirit is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance (Acts 2:4). The speaking in tongues in this instance is the same in essence as the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:4-10, 28), but different in purpose and use.³⁵

This is all that is said about the gift, and it seems a bit confusing and vague. It states that the gift of tongues is the initial evidence, that it is like the gift in the New Testament, but that it is different in purpose and use. What is not stated is what this all means.

In reaction to this statement in their constitution and bylaws, the Assemblies of God church created a frequently asked questions section on their website specifically about the gift of tongues. The question: “Can a person be filled with the Holy Spirit without speaking in tongues?” is posed. Their response is that because it was the initial evidence in Acts 2, and that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, that is clear that “speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. When the early believers were filled, they spoke in other tongues, and the same holds true today.”³⁶ In my opinion, they are taking these cases of tongues out of context. They use Acts 2 as justification for tongues being the initial evidence that should still be present today, even though the Acts 2 account of

³⁵ “Assemblies of God's Constitution and Bylaws,” *General Council of the Assemblies of God* 2006, <http://ag.org/top/about/constitution_bylaws.cfm> (22 March 2007).

³⁶ “Questions About Tongues,” *General Council of the Assemblies of God* 2006, <http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/baptmhs_faq_tongues.cfm> (22 March 2007).

tongues is of the prophets speaking in actual languages, xenoglossy.

As stated in the earlier discussion of the biblical passages, I think it is important to note that there are two distinct kinds of speaking in tongues referenced in the New Testament. One is xenoglossy: speaking in a foreign language that one cannot understand but that is spoken in order to give the gospel to someone in their native language. The other is glossolalia: speaking in no real language, more understood as a language of God or of angels. Instances of xenoglossy are still heard of but are very rare. Glossolalia is what is commonly meant when someone references speaking in tongues today. It is with this knowledge that I believe the Assemblies of God church, as well as other Pentecostal traditions who also believe in this dogma, are steering their followers wrongly in teaching them this way. They are instilling this belief that their faith is the right faith, their practicing of Christianity is the one and only way, the only “true” way. They state that they “do not look upon speaking in tongues as a proof of superior spirituality. It simply is a precious promise written in God’s Word and fulfilled in our lives . . . All who are hungry for the “filling” should be encouraged to trust the Lord for the overflowing evidence of that “filling”; namely, speaking in other tongues.”³⁷

What they may see as an explanation for their own practice of tongues feels like an exclusion for the outsider. They say they do not believe themselves to be superior, yet they say that everyone should just trust in the Lord to gain this “filling.” If they truly did not believe it to be superior there would be no mention of it being the one true evidence. It is strange to make a statement that speaking in tongues is the only initial evidence and then say they do not believe it is a proof of superiority. If it is not proof of a superior

³⁷ “Questions About Tongues,” *General Council of the Assemblies of God* 2006, <http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/baptnhs_faq_tongues.cfm> (22 March 2007).

spirituality than what is it proof of? Their explanation of why tongues is the initial evidence feels like they are just digging themselves into a hole, and saying that it is not proof of superior spirituality is their way out.

The United Pentecostal Church International

The UPCI follow many of the same justifications for the initial evidence theory as the Assemblies of God church. They cite the same biblical passages, namely Acts 2, as reason for it being the initial evidence today. One interesting distinction in the UPCI's beliefs was in their explanation of why God chose the gift of tongues to be the initial evidence.

Their first reason is that speaking in tongues "is an immediate, external evidence. There are many other evidences of the operation of the Spirit of God in a person's life, but it is a matter of time before they are manifest."³⁸ They believe that because tongues are apparent, they are the only gift that can let others know if the Holy Spirit is upon them.

The UPCI's major reason for why God chose the gift of tongues is because it "symbolizes God's complete control of the believer." The tongue is the most untamed part of humanity, it is what expresses our emotions. By God controlling this specific part of us he is controlling all of us. He is controlling a vessel over which we often have no control. The UPCI's discussion ends with the note that we should all simply not fight what God wants for us. We should accept what He says and be baptized with the Holy

³⁸ "Why Did God Choose Tongues?," *The United Pentecostal Church International* 2006, <<http://www.upci.org/doctrine/tongues>> (2 April 2007).

Spirit, simple as that.

They do make it seem quite simple. If only we all would just give in and let the Holy Spirit into our lives. It seems that for many of these insiders it just happens out of nowhere. They will be praying at church or at home and suddenly be praying in tongues. If they cannot even pinpoint a specific cause for why they achieved the gift how is anyone else to expect to get it? Apparently it is all about accepting the Holy Spirit and earnestly seeking the truth, but even after one does that, what if nothing happens?

Insiders in Kildahl's Study

In John Kildahl's study of speaking in tongues he concentrated on human behavior in relation to the gift. He visited mainline Protestant churches including Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian congregations that were influenced by the Pentecostal movement and their teachings of the gift of tongues. Over ten years he met with speakers and studied the phenomena, paying close attention to how they speakers themselves viewed the gift. One chapter specifically focuses the attention on the direct words of the glossolalists. In a series of eighteen questions we are shown why certain people speak in tongues and what they think about other aspects of the gift. A few questions in particular are interesting to explore.

When asked about why some people can speak in tongues and others cannot the main answer was questioning the faith of others. The speakers believe that if one is truly open to God and willing to accept what God wants for them that they should possess the gift. It is also stated that one cannot gain the gift if it is for selfish reasons. These beliefs fall in line with what is taught by such churches as the Assemblies of God in tongues

being the initial evidence. The standard answer from many tongue-speakers for why those who do not speak in tongues cannot is because they are not truly open and willing to accept the Holy Spirit.³⁹ I am quite sure that this is not meant in a malicious way, but being a Christian who considers herself to be a true follower and does not speak in tongues, this feels insulting. To them, I have not truly accepted the Holy Spirit in my life. To them, I am just not *really* a true Christian in the New Testament sense.

When asked if there was anything they could say to help understand the gift many responded that it is not something that can be understood scientifically or rationally. One person was quoted, saying “you can’t take a supernatural blessing bestowed from God and bring it down to a common denominator or natural level.”⁴⁰ I too believe that certain things in life simply cannot have a rational explanation. Any religious person has to have the belief that certain aspects of life are not to be understood, and that is why we have faith. I can go along with this idea that the gift of tongues should not try to be explained as in given a reason for how it happens. What I cannot agree with is that they seem to ignore the fact that for something to be a gift it must be given.

Joyce Meyer

Joyce Meyer, the famous author and television personality, wrote a book called *Filled with the Spirit, Understanding God’s Power in Your Life*. After being “born again” at nineteen years of age, she went on to teach a bible study and eventually became the pastor of Life Christian Church, a charismatic church in St. Louis, Missouri. She

³⁹ John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 8-9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

started her television ministry in 1993 and is now well-known for her almost Baptist-style of teaching. The majority of her work is Christian self-help.

In *Filled with the Spirit*, Meyer addresses the question of the gift of tongues. She makes sure to differentiate between the gift of tongues as the ability to stand up in a congregation and speak in tongues with interpretation and the gift of tongues as used for prayer. She believes that everyone is to obtain one of the gift of tongues. She poses the question: “Why don’t all believers speak in tongues today as they did at Pentecost?” Her response is that because some people are afraid of the gift, either because they have been taught it is false or they believe it is “nothing but emotion.”⁴¹ She seems to cover over everyone who does not possess the gift, simply stating they are afraid. There must be a lot of scared Christians out there if that is true.

Meyer considers the gift of tongues to be “God’s best” for us. “If God has poured out His Holy Spirit upon you, I encourage you to receive all the spiritual gifts and abilities He wants to impart to you.”⁴² She also makes a point of saying that it is quite hard to explain why the gifts are so important to anyone who has not experienced them, but once you have “there is no denying the reality of this wonderful gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”⁴³ Earlier she states that Paul says all the gifts will be distributed as God sees fit, but she believes that this does not mean that one gift cannot be given to everyone. In her opinion, it makes perfect sense to say that the gift of tongues is one that

⁴¹ Joyce Meyer, *Filled with the Spirit Understanding God’s Power in Your Life* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 120.

⁴² Ibid., 121.

⁴³ Ibid., 123.

can be possessed by everyone. If this was true, why would it not be stated as such in the Bible?

My Story

When my mother was first in seminary in the 1970s she truly desired to gain the gift of tongues. She even found a how-to book specifically meant to coach one to learn to speak in tongues. After reading this many times and doing exactly what it said she threw the book away. The gift of tongues never came. Even now, as a pastor of a small Congregational church in southern Minnesota, she does not possess the gift. I note this because I feel she is the most earnest and honest Christian I know. She has multiple friends who speak in tongues and yet she has never been able to. I simply cannot believe that this makes her unwilling to accept the Holy Spirit in her life.

I grew up in a Congregational church where most people were fairly conservative in their beliefs and actions. Our services were quite tame and mellow compared to other congregations. Though no one performed tongues during any of the services, I do know of certain members of the church who had the gift and used it at private meetings and prayer gatherings. A few of my mother's good friends spoke in tongues and she always had faith that their gift was genuine and was used more for their personal benefit.

Throughout high school I attended other churches with friends mostly for fun and for a different way of worship. I had two major encounters with the gift of tongues during my exploration of other churches and worship services. The first came at a church called the Living Word in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. The Living Word church was started by Mac and Lynne Hammond in 1980 and continues to be run by the couple, Mac

Hammond acting as the senior pastor. Part of their core doctrine is the belief in the gift of tongues as the initial evidence of baptism of the Holy Spirit. They also believe that “every born again, spirit-filled believer should maintain a consistent prayer life by praying regularly with their understanding and in their heavenly language.”⁴⁴ I was told by my friend and her family that the majority of those who attended the services spoke in tongues and that only those who could do so were allowed membership.

I was a bit nervous walking into the large meeting house of the Living Word, seeing television screens and endless rows of chairs lined up facing the stage. The service itself was not much different than those I had previously experienced: lots of singing, some people dancing, and a brief study of a particular bible verse. It was not until the last half hour when things were different. Mac Hammond invited those who wanted to be “saved” to come forward. Each row was dismissed and stood at the end of the stage as Mac placed his hands on their heads, speaking in tongues, until each person eventually fainted and fell to the ground. After seeing this happen I decided I was definitely not going up to the front. I believed I was saved, I did not need someone else to do it for me. During this time everyone around me was also praying in tongues, most not very loudly, but audible enough to catch my attention.

I was taken aback at how many people were openly praying in tongues. Only having heard the gift in person a few times before I was shocked that so many people in one place had this gift. The atmosphere was an anxious one for me. I did not know if I was being rude by not going up to the front of the church. I simply sat in my chair until

⁴⁴ “Doctrine,” *Living Word Christian Center* 2007, <<http://www.lwcc.org/ABOUT/doctrine.cfm>> (10 April 2007).

the people I was with came back and we left the service.

My second major experience with the gift of tongues was in a much smaller setting. During my freshman year of high school I attended a weekly bible study and small worship service with a few of my friends. One of the first times I went, the leaders led a prayer service where they went around and prayed over each person while everyone else was also praying, silently or aloud. They told us that we should pray however we felt moved to do so. Some people prayed in tongues, including all of the leaders, but I chose to pray silently.

One of the leaders came over to me and placed their hands on my back and prayed in tongues. I heard her say, amidst words I could not understand, “please heal her back.” I was not sure if this was said in English or not, but it was shocking. At this time I was in the middle of treatments for scoliosis. I was scheduled to have surgery in just a few months. But I had never told anybody there, not even the people I attended with. It scared me that she knew, even if she was unaware of what she said. I knew then that this gift was not something that could be dismissed, it was real.

Concluding Thoughts

Paul goes into great lengths about how the gift should be used, the interpretation of tongues, why it is important, how it can be misused, etc. If this was a gift that everyone should possess, would not Paul state that? Congregations that teach the initial evidence theory make assumptions. They combine Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 to mean that this gift must be the one that comes through first through everyone as it did through the prophets and Paul.

I am in no way trying to discount the gift itself. I have witnessed people speaking in tongues at smaller prayer gatherings throughout my life and found it to be fascinating. I would not take the time to explore this gift and what is taught about it if I did not have some respect for it initially. In my exploration I have yet to find a convincing argument for the gift of tongues as the initial evidence. The fallback for most initial evidence believers are the two aforementioned biblical passages and that outsiders simply cannot understand. While I do believe that we cannot understand how it truly affects them spiritually, I do not believe this means there should be any disparity in the way one interprets the passages.

My main problem with the teaching of glossolalia as the initial evidence of the Holy Spirit is that it implies that everyone will receive the gift of tongues. It is clear from Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians that everyone will receive different gifts from God and that each should be used to support the greatest gift of love. If this is true, then not everyone will receive the gift of tongues. Each person will receive the gift that God has intended for them, the gift that God believes they can use the most effectively. In saying that this gift is one that all should seek to possess, they are implying that this gift must be sought. I find this incredibly different than being given a gift. Yes, it is true that one must be open to fully use any gift and be aware of its potential. This being true does not automatically mean one will have the gift of tongues. There are plenty of faithful Christians who believe themselves to be fully connected to the Spirit, or desire to be so, and never gain the gift of tongues. Is one to say then that they are not true in their intentions, that their desire is false? I would not say so.

Annotated Bibliography

“Assemblies of God (USA) Official Website,” General Council of the Assemblies of God. 2006. <<http://ag.org>> (22 March 2007).

I used multiple pages within this website including: their constitution and bylaws, an explanation of their history as a church, and a frequently asked questions page about speaking in tongues and baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was used as my basis for defining the opposite side of the argument, who I was arguing against essentially. The website exists as a source for both members of the church and those curious about the church. It has numerous links to facts and articles about the church itself as well as the beliefs and truths they follow. The Assemblies of God church is the largest Pentecostal church which is why I chose it to study specifically.

Bertone, John. “The Experience of Glossolalia and the Spirit’s Empathy: Romans 8:26 Revisited.” *Pneuma* 25, 1 (Spring 2003): 54-65.

As suggested by the title, this article explores how Romans 8:26 is interpreted by Pentecostals as support for the practice of speaking in tongues, which Bertone states is against what the majority interprets it as. The discrepancy lies in one word in the passage which can be interpreted in multiple ways, often used to express intense emotion. Bertone concludes that this passage should be used as evidence for the private and emotional benefits of glossolalia. Bertone does not seem to have a bias one way or another, but does state that glossolalia is the right of all believers, and that it is hypothetically possible that all could practice this gift. I did not explore this passage in my writing, but his insight was useful to give me a sense of how certain passages are used.

Chester, Stephen J. “Divine Madness? Speaking in Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14.23.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, 4 (June 2005): 417-446.

This article takes a different look at 1 Corinthians 14 by focusing on the reaction of the outsider hearing tongues in the passage. The line that reads “you are mad” should not be interpreted to mean crazy because in that time mad could mean one with the spirits, divinely inspired. In Greco-Roman culture, Chester explains, multiple cults spoke in odd tongues. So this served as only but a sign that the Corinthians were one of these cults, but it would not promote conversion as is what Paul says to strive for. This article was very useful for my exploration of 1 Corinthians 14 as it gave me a sense of how to look at it within its historical and cultural context.

Francis, L.J., and Kay, William K. “Personality, Mental Health and Glossolalia.” *Pneuma* 17, 2 (1995): 253-263.

This study was performed to see if there was any difference in personality between glossolalists and the rest of the population. Previous beliefs were that those who spoke in tongues were perhaps schizophrenic or possessing some other mental disorder. What

these two researchers found is that, of their 364 candidates, the majority of them scored significantly lower in terms of psychoticism and neuroticism than people in general. It has been thought for awhile, I believe, that glossolalists are not mentally ill, but this study at least attempted to prove that point.

Grady, Brian, and Loewenthal Kate Miriam. "Features Associated with Speaking in Tongues (Glossolalia)." *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 70, 2 (1997): 185-191.

This psychological study explores the different ways tongues are viewed by both speakers themselves and non-speakers. The most notable differences were in how each viewed where and how often tongues were used in daily life. Glossolalists say that it is most often in private during seemingly mundane activities, whereas the outsiders thought it was most often in public resulting from high emotion. Their study gave a good look into how outsiders who are part of a tongue-speaking community do not view tongues in a negative way but perhaps just an uninformed one. This study was also very useful for its secondary sources, which I greatly benefited from.

Hinson, E, Glenn, Stag, Frank, and Oates, Wayne. *Glossolalia Tongue Speaking in Biblical, Historical, and Psychological Perspective*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967.

This was one of the first books I read in my research on glossolalia. It set up a good introduction to the gift itself and why it is/was relevant for a modern community. They took care to address multiple sides when looking at the biblical passages and the controversy over interpretation. Their main focus of the book was too look at the facts surrounding the gift in a non-judgmental way, which I believe they achieved. I used their discussion of Acts 2 specifically to guide my reading of the passages in a more informed way.

The Holy Bible New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

A big part of my study on the gift of tongues obviously had to rely on the Bible for textual reference. The main argument I make in my writing is that certain churches are misinterpreting and misusing certain biblical passages. I looked at multiple versions of the Bible before deciding to use this version because of how certain passages are written and interpreted.

Kildahl, John P. *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

This book was written by a clinical psychologist, Kildahl, with the help of a psychiatrist Dr. Paul A. Qualben. Their study was looking at how tongues exist in churches other than Pentecostal, including Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. Historical background for the gift is given and then discussions of group behavior, anxiety, regression, and other

individual qualities are addressed in terms of glossolalia. This study is following two other studies they performed to help churches set guidelines for a policy on the topic of tongues. The most beneficial quality this book had for my study was in their representation of the glossolalists themselves. They had a lot of direct quotations and discussion about how both glossolalists and non-glossolalists view the gift.

Martin, Dale B. "Tongues of Angels and Other Status Indicators." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59 (Fall 1991): 547-589.

Tackles both how tongues is present in other cultures throughout history and how it has always proved to be a symbol of high status. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that great honor should be given to those of lower status, thus him disagreeing with how the Corinthians have been overusing tongues: a symbol of high status. Martin concludes that glossolalia, like other issues at the time, divided the church socially by status, thus causing problems. This article had a lot of superfluous information for what I was researching, but the connections to 1 Corinthians and Paul were very useful.

Meyer, Joyce. *Filled with the Spirit Understanding God's Power in Your Life*. New York: Warner Books, 1996.

Joyce Meyer is a widely-known author and television personality who is known for her self-help mentality when writing about Christianity and the Spirit. She sides with those who teach that everyone should be able to speak in tongues. She believes that it is God's best, his intention, that everyone should have the gift. I found her writing compelling but also very flawed especially in terms of the use of biblical evidence. I feel the passages she chose were out of context and used specifically to further her argument instead of treating them as they are. I used her writing and beliefs in my third section in my discussion of why those who believe the initial evidence theory believe they are correct, for which this was quite helpful.

Mills, Watson E. *Speaking in Tongues Let's Talk About It*. Waco: Word Inc., 1973.

Watson looks at almost every area of study concerning glossolalia in this book, each in a fairly brief fashion. He explores, along with the writings of multiple other theologians and researchers, glossolalia in the Bible, how it exists in a historical and modern context, how it functions culturally, and how it exists within different denominations of Christianity. The most important chapters for my study were the first few which discussed the cultural and historical basis for glossolalia in a modern perspective. Mills explores elements of the gift which I did not find from other authors, such as the negative side to possessing the gift in terms of personal detriment. I also greatly benefited from his introduction to how the gift spread throughout other denominations in America during the 1950s and 60s.

Morgan, Donna, Newberg, Andrew B., Waldman, Mark R., and Wintering, Nancy A. "The Measurement of Cerebral Blood Flow During Glossolalia: A Preliminary SPECT Study." *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 148 (2006): 67-71.

This study is one of a few which has supposedly proven the validity of the gift of tongues in certain people. This cerebral blood flow measurement was specifically looked at in the frontal lobes to determine whether or not speaking in tongues was an intentional activity. What they found is that during glossolalia the participants actually had a decrease in frontal lobe activity. All of the participants were women who could perform tongues at will, which is something that seemed contrary to how I previously viewed the gift. This was one of the first articles I read on the more scientific side of glossolalia and was useful for its small, but thorough, explanation of their study.

“United Pentecostal Church International,” United Pentecostal Church International. 2006. <<http://www.upci.org>> (2 April 2007).

Another website used to explore the doctrine and beliefs of Pentecostal churches which practiced the gift of tongues. This website had many articles which focused on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how they are to be used in daily life. Another of their main focuses was on why they believe God chose tongues as the initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.