

INITIAL EVIDENCE:
A SOUTHERN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Mathew S. Clark

This article addresses a subject which has been the center of extensive debate both within the Pentecostal movement itself, and (particularly) in debate and dialogue with non-Pentecostal groups. The most heated debate has no doubt been between Pentecostals and Evangelicals, particularly in those societies in which both groups enjoy numerous adherents, and can boast well-developed teaching and academic institutions and structures. North America is a good example of such a society.

The perspective offered here is Southern African. However, Pentecostalism is sufficiently diverse at this end of the African continent to urge caution on any scholar claiming to offer *the* definitive position on the issue. I have also chosen to term it *Southern* African rather than *South* African, since the histories of the sub-continent's various countries and Pentecostal groups nevertheless reveal significant commonalities. Since no detailed study of this matter has been made by Pentecostal scholars in this region before (certainly none of which I am aware, nor which is commonly known), I am including insights and knowledge gleaned from my own personal ministry in South Africa (SA), Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and from contacts with the Namibian, Botswana, and Zambian churches.

In order to understand some of the significant differences between the Southern African approach to the issue of "initial evidence" and that of e.g., North Americans, it is necessary to provide a short sketch of Southern African history, both secular and Pentecostal.

1. HISTORY

1.1 Secular History

The original indigenous inhabitants of South Africa (if “original” can be taken to mean “predating both the European and Bantu migrations to this region”) exist today only in very small pockets and numbers. The most significant group is the so-called Kalahari Bushmen, a group whose most noticeable public relations opportunity was the film *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.¹ In the mid-seventeenth century (1652) the first European settlement was established at the Cape of Good Hope, not as a colony but as a way station for vessels plying the Holland-East Indies trade route. The Dutch occupants of this outpost were later (1688) joined by Huguenots, who were fleeing religious persecution in France. These refugees became permanent settlers, joining those adventurous souls who had penetrated inland from the way station and become farmers and miners. A fairly large contingent of Malays also settled at the Cape at this time, and have since maintained a distinctive culture. During this period the local tribes were virtually annihilated in the inevitable frictions between Europeans and locals.

While the European presence at the Cape was being consolidated during the eighteenth century, the migration of Bantu tribes from the North was growing. Following the eastern seaboard, or the fertile route through Zimbabwe, the forerunners of the vast Xhosa and Zulu tribes were making their way from central Africa into the southern sub-continent. These groups applied pressure upon the original inhabitants of the land, and between the Europeans and the Bantu tribes the Bushman presence in the eastern portion of South Africa was ended in the early twentieth century.

The wars between Britain and France at the end of the eighteenth century left the Dutch outpost in the Cape in a vulnerable position. Eventually the British used their superior naval strength to secure the Cape of Good Hope for their monarch, and the period of tension between Dutch settlers and British administration began. In the mid-nineteenth century the settlers (known later as Boers, Trekkers or Afrikaners) left the Cape Colony in dudgeon, and set out on the Great Trek. This culminated in the establishment of two Boer republics in the hinterland, and also led to

¹ This Jamie Uys comedy film proved to be extremely popular in Asia and Europe. It concerns a Bushman clan who encounter their first artifact from industrial society: a cool-drink bottle dropped from an aircraft. The head of the clan travels in search of the “end of the earth,” to throw the bottle back to the gods, and on his journey becomes embroiled in a typical African civil war.

military clashes between the Europeans and the Sotho and Zulu tribes. With the ongoing battles with the Xhosa on the Eastern Cape Border region, this period set the scene for the definitive clashes between the European migration from the south and the Bantu tribes from the north. The defeat of the Zulus by first the Trekkers (1838) and then the British (1879) led to the formation of the British colony of Natal and British suzerainty over Zululand. This colony imported indentured laborers from India in the mid-nineteenth century, leading to an Asian presence that today numbers over a million. Most of these are Hindus, while a powerful Muslim minority makes its presence felt particularly in politics, where today it is well-represented in the governing party in South Africa.

British imperial ambitions in the nineteenth century led to the fall of the Dutch Boer republics, the defeat and subjugation of the Xhosa and Zulu nations, and the establishment of protectorates over the Tswana, Sotho and Swazi people - who were nervous of the intentions of their Boer neighbors, and sought British protection from them. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Britain held colonial sway over a united South Africa, Rhodesia, and the three protectorates. South West Africa was wrested from the Germans shortly afterward, and Southern Africa, with the exception of the Portuguese colony of Mozambique, became British in name. However, in reality, it consisted of a cosmopolitan mix of nations and cultures: and into this volatile situation the first Pentecostal preachers brought the Foursquare message.

1.2 Pentecostal History

As in many other countries, the Pentecostal revival in South Africa had precursors that “prepared” the way for the Pentecostal movement itself.² These included a revival in the early 1860s in the Reformed Churches of the Western Cape, associated with a prayer movement in which Andrew Murray was involved; the so-called “Groenewoud sect,” who were the earliest Afrikaner practitioners of believers’ baptism in South

² These are recorded by e.g., W. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Minneapolis: Orbis, 1977), pp. 111-25; I. Burger, *Geloofgeskiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloofsending van Suid-Afrika 1908-1958* (Braamfontein: Evangelie Uitgewers, 1987), pp. 85-117; and L. du Plessis, *Pinkster Panorama: ‘n Geskiedenis van die Volle Evangelie Kerk van God in Suidelike Afrika 1910-1983* (Irene: Volle Evangelie Kerk van God Uitgewers, 1984), pp. 6-10. These last two works are the official histories of the two largest Pentecostal denominations on the subcontinent, the Apostolic Faith Mission of SA (AFM of SA or AFM) and the Full Gospel Church of God (FGCOG or FGC).

Africa; and the ministry of John Alexander Dowie's Zionist movement, which provided a holiness and divine healing emphasis, coupled with a distinctive three-fold baptismal immersion, that still marks its major successors, the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of SA and the Zion Christian Church.

The major impetus for the launching of a distinctive Pentecostal movement in South Africa was the ministry of John G. Lake and Tom Hezmalhalch.³ These ministers from America spent a relatively short time in South Africa, but their strong emphasis on divine healing struck a chord among an Afrikaner and Black population that was suffering severe deprivation after the British victory in the South African War. The Zionist movement provided an infrastructure of ministers and assemblies that was absorbed almost entirely when the AFM of SA was officially established in 1908. In 1913 its first South African President⁴ was elected, P. L. Le Roux. He had been a Dutch Reformed Church minister, a Zionist missionary among the Blacks in Wakkerstroom (SE Transvaal), and from 1910 a member of the Executive Council of the AFM. Lake and Hezmalhalch never returned to South Africa, nor did they maintain any close ties, and the largest Pentecostal group from then on developed very much as an indigenous movement. The majority of its members were Afrikaners or Blacks. Sadly, most of the Blacks left before 1920, primarily because of racial intolerance on the part of many Afrikaners, and became the core of the largest African Initiated Church, the Zion Christian Church.⁵

Although the Full Gospel Church of God has had a large percentage of English-speaking members, and the Assemblies of God has been primarily

³ Described in detail by Burger, *Geloofsgeskiedenis*, pp. 140-66.

⁴ The church was forced to register as a company, which it remained until 1961 when it was granted recognition by the state as a church. The chairman of its executive council has thus always been known as "president," rather than "bishop," "moderator," or similar more ecclesiastical titles.

⁵ The differences, commonalities and tensions between Pentecostal Blacks and the various types of "spirit" churches among the Black population of South Africa have been described in detail by A. Anderson, *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1992). C. R. De Wet, "The Apostolic Faith Mission in Africa 1908-1980" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1989), has described the development of a Black mission church within the AFM of SA. J. LaPoorta, *Unity or Division? The Unity Struggles of the Black Churches within the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa* (Kuils River: Japie LaPoorta, 1997), has described the process which led the racially divided AFM churches to structural unity at Easter, 1996.

English-speaking in its ministry and impact among Whites,⁶ the vast majority of Pentecostal membership in Southern Africa has been Afrikaners (from the White population), and Blacks. There has also been a significant impact among people of mixed race (the so-called Coloureds, most of whom use Afrikaans as a first language) and among the Indians in Natal, where the majority of Christians are converts from Hinduism to Pentecostal Christianity. Coupled with the relatively poor showing of the traditional Evangelical groups among these segments of the population, the Pentecostal movement in South Africa has developed as a largely indigenous movement, without major input from (although never totally isolated from) the issues that have determined Pentecostal-Evangelical relations in the western, English-speaking world. Debate between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostal groups has mainly been limited to two overriding and extremely emotionally-debated issues: the issue of infant versus adult baptism (for Afrikaners in debate with the Reformed churches, which have dominated Afrikaner religious culture since the first Dutch settlers arrived); and the issue of syncretism with elements of ancestor veneration and its associated rituals (between Black Pentecostals and the African Initiated Churches). The heat of these two debates has been so strong⁷ that the issue of “initial evidence” has never really been contentious for wider South African Pentecostalism⁸ - at least not in its relationship with non-Pentecostal Christian groups. The issue of tongues is also

⁶ The Assemblies of God has a relatively small White membership, with the overwhelming mass of its members being Blacks. This large Black group is primarily the product of the powerful evangelistic efforts of Nicholas Bhengu (Hollenweger, *Pentecostals*, pp. 126-39). P. Watt, *From Africa's Soil: The Story of the Assemblies of God in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Struik, 1992), has provided an informal history of the AOG in SA. Sadly, the group has splintered into a number of different factions who do not always relate well to one another.

⁷ F. P. Möller, *Die Sakrament in gedrang* (Johannesburg: Evangelie Uitgewers, 1951) was the definitive reply by a Pentecostal leader to the DRC charges of sectarian baptismal practice against the AFM of SA. Anderson, *Bazalwane*, pp. 74-76, enumerates (with statistics) the significant differences and disputes between Pentecostal Blacks and their counterparts in the African Initiated churches.

⁸ None of the histories of SA Pentecostalism noted above (Burger, de Wet, du Plessis, Watt) mention “tongues as initial evidence” as a contentious issue. It cannot be conclusively said of any prominent Southern African Pentecostal leader that he/she did not accept tongues as that evidence. I have asked current church leaders in most of the large Pentecostal groups if they have ever been involved in such a debate either inside or outside of their groups, only to discover that most were almost entirely ignorant of, and decidedly uninterested in it.

apparently not of particular interest to the self-understanding of South African Pentecostals, with only John Bond (leader of one of the small Assemblies of God groups) including it as *the* distinctive mark of Pentecostal religion, in a work that included a few South African essays on Pentecostal distinctives.⁹ Indeed, in the first ever publication of theological articles/essays by AFM theologians,¹⁰ of seventeen contributions not one discusses or even mentions the initial evidence question.¹¹

2. RELEVANCE

However, if the issue of initial evidence does not appear to have played a role in either the development of Pentecostal *self-understanding*, nor in the *relationship* of Pentecostals to other churches and groups, this should not be understood to imply that it is not an issue that needs urgent consideration in the context of Southern African Pentecostal *practice*. Indeed, the Southern African situation may actually provide a favorable theological climate for such consideration, since the matter might be discussed here without the heat and rancor that has marked so much of the Pentecostal-Evangelical debate in other parts of the world.

I would offer a number of reasons why the issue of tongues as initial evidence could be fruitfully discussed in the Southern African church, and indeed in the wider Pentecostal movement as well.

⁹ J. Bond, "What Is Distinctive about Pentecostal Theology," in *What Is Distinctive about Pentecostal Theology?* eds. M. S. Clark and H. I. Lederle (Pretoria: Unisa, 1989), pp. 134-35. Other contributors, including Lederle (Charismatic), Hattingh (AFM of SA) and du Plessis (FGCOG), as well as Clark (whose work the larger part of the publication is) prefer to speak of the notions of encounter and spiritual power as the *proprium* of Pentecostalism.

¹⁰ P. J. Gräbe and W. J. Hattingh, eds., *The Reality of the Holy Spirit in the Church: In Honour of F. P. Möller* (Pretoria: JL van Schaik, 1997).

¹¹ This does not mean that the issue has never been discussed in Pentecostal teaching material. F. P. Möller, *Ons Pinkstererfenis* (Johannesburg: Evangelie Uitgewers, 1955), pp. 28-40, and also *Die diskussie oor die charismata soos wat dit in die Pinksterbeweging geleer en beoefen word* (Johannesburg: Evangelie Uitgewers, 1975), pp. 89-150; M. Eloff, *Vrae en antwoorde oor die doping met die Heilige Gees* (Pretoria: Eagle Publications, 1993), pp. 13-16 are examples of such teaching. However, they merely reflect the traditional Pentecostal viewpoint without entering into debate (of any particular depth) with contrary views. Such views have been expressed in South Africa by Reformed teacher W. Marais, *Die hedendaagse spreek in tale ontmasker* (Cape Town: NG Kerk Uitgewers, 1981).

2.1 Diminishing Manifestation of the Charismata among Pentecostals

The AFM Theological College in Johannesburg inducts between 30-40 new students every year. These are representative of the wider AFM denomination, coming as they do from assemblies all over the country. The course “Gifts of the Holy Spirit” is offered as part of third-year New Testament studies, and I take the opportunity to ask the students about the manifestation of the charismata in their own lives, and in the liturgies of their local churches. The results in 1997 were something like this:

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| Speaking in tongues | 100% have done so, or do so regularly |
| Prophecy in worship | About 10% of the class have prophesied at some time or other |
| Other gifts | About 60% testify to praying for sick folk who were subsequently healed; A few spoke of receiving revelation via dreams/visions |

As far as speaking in tongues is concerned, the AFM of SA still insists that all candidates for ministry be baptized in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues as the initial evidence. The only candidates for theological training who may register at the College, and who do not comply with this requirement, are those who have no plans to enter the ministry in the AFM. (There have been two such cases in the 14 years I have lectured in the College.) The 100% for speaking in tongues is thus understandable. The high percentage of those who claimed to have exercised the gift of healing is also understandable in the light of the primacy of this gift in this denomination from the very beginning. The figure for prophesying is disappointing, and appears to be falling every year.

Students who report rich Charismatic manifestation in their local church liturgies usually come from rural assemblies or from medium-sized to small urban churches. In the larger and “hyper” churches Charismatic expression appears to be limited to individual ministers or to ministry teams, a tendency discussed below. Across the board, however, participation by the “laity” appears to be dwindling, particularly in terms of the charismata.¹²

¹² M. M. Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989) discerns similar trends in the largest North American Pentecostal denomination.

While the AFM College in Johannesburg is still attended primarily by middle-class White students, this is not true of students at Covenant Bible College in Durban. Attendance here has historically been Asian, although recent intakes have consisted of a majority of Black students. While the younger Asian students are not noticeably different from their white counterparts in Johannesburg, the Pentecostal communities they represent are markedly more Charismatic. This is probably because ministry on the Christian-Hindu interface regularly demands the ability to deal with occultic and demonic manifestations. Divine healing is also the single most common reason given by Hindus for converting to Pentecostal Christianity.¹³ The “missions” character of Pentecostal ministry on this interface thus places intense pressure on pastors and members alike to be endowed with spiritual power.

My experience of ministry among Blacks has been mainly in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Black graduates from the AFM College in Harare tend to reveal similar tendencies to their White counterparts in Johannesburg, although the church in Zimbabwe exhibits a far more rural nature than the urbanized communities of South Africa. This means that Pentecostal believers live in close association with tribal communities who are given to animistic and shamanistic beliefs and practices. This, as in the Pentecostal-Hindu interface in KwaZulu-Natal, places greater pressure upon members and ministers alike to “walk in the power of the Spirit.” Evangelistic ministry in particular emphasizes the Charismatic elements of healing and deliverance in these communities.

The situation in the AFM in Mozambique is radically different. I was privileged to offer the first training seminar for Christian workers held by the AFM in that unhappy country after the end of the civil war. The war had isolated the Mozambiquan church (which was a young church in a predominantly Roman Catholic country) from the larger Pentecostal movement for about 15 years. In that time there had been no visits from outside, no formal training, no evangelistic outreach. Indeed, under the Marxist government of Samora Machel, Pentecostals had been actively persecuted. They existed in greatest numbers in the central provinces, which were also the homeland of the rebel Renamo movement. The most vicious fighting therefore occurred where most Pentecostals lived.

¹³ T. Naidoo, *Indian Pentecostalism: A Hindu Assessment* (Durban: University of Durban-Westville, 1989), pp. 34-35, 42-44. Naidoo notes (pp. 34-35) that many Muslims also go to Pentecostals for healing, but do not officially convert to Christianity, as the social implications for such conversions are much more drastic than those for Hindus.

Some 100 workers arrived for the seminar. Of these, perhaps 10 had been baptized in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues. Despite the fact that, as in Zimbabwe, most lived in rural tribal society, surrounded by animism and shamanism, their ministry had little Charismatic content. They nevertheless understood well the power of deliverance from such systems, and were dismissive of anything that smacked of syncretism. It was a privilege, together with a colleague, to pray for these workers that they might receive the enduement of power associated with the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Diminishing Charismatic fervor or experience will perforce drive the Pentecostal groups to a re-consideration of their origins and distinctives. If these center on enduement with power and the demonstration of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, then it is precisely the initial experience of this power that is crucial. Initiation into the realm of the charismata, for Pentecostals, is synonymous and synchronous with the baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues. The issue of the “initial evidence” of this experience cannot be other than crucial to the consideration of current Charismatic practice within the Pentecostal churches. This leads to the next consideration.

2.2 Lessening Emphasis on the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

South African Pentecostals have adopted the practice of the Reformed churches, of having a series of evening prayer meetings from Easter Monday to Pentecost Sunday. Initially these were directed primarily at praying for new converts to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. They normally continued until late at night, often into the early hours of the morning. Since the advent of television broadcasts in 1976, this practice has been gradually dying out, particularly in First World (white, middle-class) communities. Those few assemblies that still hold prayer meetings usually do so for the last three of four evenings before Pentecost, and normally everyone has gone home by 9 p.m.

The official statistics of the AFM reflect the impact of this trend: in the last two decades, on average the number of people recorded as “baptized in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues” in the church’s annual census has been one-third to one-quarter the number of those baptized in water. The membership of the church is thus becoming increasingly weighted toward those who have had no personal initial Charismatic experience.

The AFM nevertheless maintains its emphasis upon evangelism, church growth and divine healing. However, it has been the ministers and the ministry teams who were understood to perform these functions.

Renewed emphasis on the role of the laity is detected in the move toward a “cell-church” structure based on the model of Ralph Neighbour.¹⁴ Since this model defines cell-groups primarily as centers for evangelistic outreach, and therefore discourages their use as Bible-study or prayer-meeting groups, it is unlikely that the cell-church will promote a stronger emphasis upon either baptism in the Holy Spirit or charismatic gifts among the laity. There has certainly been no evidence of this at this (admittedly early) stage.

Theological discussion of the initial evidence issue in Southern Africa might be just one platform on which the inevitable consequences of the trend away from baptism in the Holy Spirit could be considered. Together with diminishing charismatic manifestations, this phenomenon implies that within the next generation the Pentecostal movement might well be distinctively Pentecostal in name and remembrance alone, and have little to offer in the realm of the experiential to distinguish it from its Reformed or Evangelical counterparts. Since the Southern African Pentecostal movement has been little influenced by Evangelicalism, it is not a group with strong emphasis upon Bible study, use of the Bible, or exegetical method. A religious group with neither strong experiential distinctives, nor a marked doctrinal or teaching basis, is the grim prospect that awaits the Pentecostal movement here if the current trend continues unabated.

2.3 Signs of an Incipient “Tongues Cult”

Some Pentecostal teachers were discussing the notion of a developing “tongues cult” in the Pentecostal movement as early as the 1970s.¹⁵ The definition of such a cult or tendency was that it emphasized the essentiality of tongues, and the desirability of the phenomenon as evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit, to the virtual exclusion of any other evidence. Since the church was already becoming aware of the disparity in numbers between conversions and baptisms in the Spirit, various ministers took upon themselves the role of traveling mediators of the experience. It soon

¹⁴ The white churches in the AFM have been involved in a transition program toward a cell-church structure since 1996. The model of Neighbour has been adopted virtually without modification. The realization of structural church unity in the AFM in 1996 has affected this program to a certain extent, since the assemblies from the black, Indian and colored churches have not all been willingly co-opted into the transition process.

¹⁵ The Rector of the AFM Theological College from 1969 to 1987, Pastor Frank Cronjè, made a point of discussing this matter with the students every year. I was thus confronted with it in 1970, 1971, 1972 and the following years.

became clear that for some of them the emphasis in their statistics was not on how many had truly received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but on how many had spoken in tongues.¹⁶

Discussion of the initial evidence issue will direct attention to such practices. There are hopeful signs among the pastorate of a growing awareness that tongues are intended to be *initial* evidence, and certainly not the *only* evidence of baptism in the Spirit. There is growing agreement that the emphasis in Acts 1:8 is on the power received by the believer when receiving the baptism of the Spirit, and not the phenomena accompanying it. This does not deny that the notion of accompanying phenomena is crucial to Pentecostal practice: however, it asserts that the marks of a truly Pentecostal life would be in the manifestation of Holy Spirit power and not in the experience (often never repeated) of speaking in tongues.

2.4 The Tendency toward “Guru Cults” in Pentecostalism

One of the developments in Pentecostalism in South Africa in the last few decades has been the ideal of an urban hyper-church, with a pastor who has absolute authority over the ministry team and members “under” him. The role model for this has been the prominent figures of the Faith Movement. The notion of a spiritual hierarchy of “anointed” pastors who have the “vision” for God’s work, and their underlings who have no anointing or vision of their own, is borrowed from the neo-gnosticism which flows logically from Kenyon’s teaching on revelation-knowledge. Such pastors attempt to function in a similar fashion to an eastern *guru*, with unquestioned authority.

The experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues, as recorded by Luke in Acts 2, was strongly egalitarian. *All* spoke in tongues. Linked to Peter’s recorded use of Joel’s prophecy, this becomes even stronger: sons and daughters, old men and young men, female servants and male servants - no category is excluded from the experience

¹⁶ Or had made sounds that might possibly be explained as glossolalia. One such minister even produced a short booklet extolling tongues (rather than the Holy Spirit and His power): J. C. Louw, *The Speaking with New Tongues: A Heavenly Organ Recital* (Kempton Park: J. C. Louw, 1977). In her preface she comments: “Since 1970 I have traveled through South Africa and have spoken to many young people. Up to the present date (24.10.77) one thousand six hundred and eighty seven of our youth have been filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues as on the day of Pentecost.” The keeping of statistics was central to this particular ministry, but very few local assemblies were revitalized by the ministry, despite claims that some scores of people had received the Spirit.

of Holy Spirit power. If Stronstadt is correct, and Luke's aim was to categorize all Christians as a *prophethood* of believers,¹⁷ then the corrective to any notion of spiritual hierarchies is even more explicit.

If the baptism in the Holy Spirit is accompanied by the visible evidence of glossolalia, then the "common" believer is assured that he/she has become part of the egalitarian people of God, participating in the full blessing of the new covenant promise, as outlined in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36: knowing God for oneself, and being one of a people in *all* of whom God has put his Spirit. The initial evidence issue is therefore relevant to this challenge to mainstream Pentecostalism as well.

2.5 Religion Based on Spiritual/Emotional Sensation without Categories

The combined contribution to late twentieth century society of New Age spirituality and post-modern philosophy has been a renewed emphasis upon spiritual *experience* in religion. Those of us who can remember our schooling in the modernist system remember the cynicism that prevailed toward any notion of spirituality, including the existence of God. This has changed radically, and the notion of spirituality is now fashionable at all levels of society. Indeed, many direct their entire lives to the search for spirituality and spiritual experience.

Since the Pentecostal movement has been offering spiritual experience as part of its ministry ever since its inception, it is tempting to believe that some accord between post-modern spirituality and Pentecostalism can be found.¹⁸ However, this would be to ignore some real differences, not least the reality that Pentecostal experience is offered with very clear parameters and categories. The coupling of speaking in tongues to the baptism in the Holy Spirit is one example of such categories. In a Pentecostal-Charismatic milieu where it seems that experiences are becoming more and more sensational, and less clearly defined (whether by scripture or by tradition), a re-assessment of the initial evidence issue might also throw light upon this challenge to the movement. Pentecostals have always claimed that their teachings and experience in this area have been solidly Bible-based; indeed, it was Bible study that led to the seeking of the experience. A

¹⁷ R. Stronstadt, "The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology," in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, eds. W. Ma and R. P. Menzies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), pp. 60-77.

¹⁸ This is the express view of T. Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Pneuma* 15 (1993), pp. 163-88.

strong emphasis on glossolalia as initial evidence for Spirit-baptism is also a strong emphasis on the use of Scripture to evaluate, promote or reject the experiences that are being offered in the market place of spirituality.

3. CONCLUSION: SOME PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS

Although the initial evidence issue has never been hotly debated in South Africa, most ministers have had to develop personal clarity on the issue at some time or other. I first encountered skepticism on the matter as a teenager, when a Congregationalist minister challenged me on the traditional Pentecostal position. (A year or two later, while I was studying at Theological College, I received a letter from him, the first line of which read: "Dear Mathew: I have spoken in tongues...") In 1988 I participated in a discussion on hermeneutics initiated by the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa's theological commission, in which I was asked to speak on the Pentecostal understanding of the Biblical canon, in the light of our belief in ongoing revelation. That was an interesting session! However, most of us South Africans have not devoted much time or energy to the matter, for the reasons specified above. Nevertheless, I would like to make a few personal observations.

Firstly, the linking of glossolalia to Spirit baptism functions pragmatically as a "protection" for the experience. This occurs in a similar way in which believers' baptism operates as a "protection" for the experience of regeneration based upon personal faith in Christ. How one would "justify" such a notion scripturally is not immediately clear, hence my choice of the term "pragmatic" above. Yet it soon becomes obvious that where speaking in tongues is not essentially linked to Spirit baptism, such baptism no longer regularly occurs. This is most evident in the lack of power and enthusiasm that accompanies such a trend. At the risk of committing a gross generalization, I would argue that perhaps the reason Baptist movements have retained their Evangelical thrust, whereas Methodism has not (in South Africa, at least), is because regeneration in baptism has been associated with believers' baptism. And perhaps the reason why so many Charismatic groups have lost virtually all Charismatic manifestations, and Pentecostalism has not (yet), has been because Pentecostals have maintained the link between glossolalia and Spirit baptism.

Secondly, Pentecostal hermeneutics must be understood to differ substantially from that of Evangelical groups. This is true in a very basic sense, in that Pentecostals understand the baptism in the Holy Spirit as an

experience and not a *doctrine*. Whereas one would peruse the didactic portions of the Scriptures to validate a doctrine, experience is validated and promoted by the narrative portions. It is these portions that *testify* to events and experiences. The Book of Acts (with the gospels and also with Old Testament narrative) will thus always be crucial to Pentecostal self-understanding, since the movement is an experiencing movement as well as a believing or confessing movement.

Thirdly, Pentecostals need to bear in mind that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience that Scripture describes as being *observable* to the bystander. The bystander did not need to have any particular spiritual insight to see that something was happening to the recipients. This is most evident in Acts 8, where Simon wishes to add the ability to induce such an observable experience to his repertoire of tricks, so spectacular was it. Without marketing the experience in same way, as have been many of the content-less, category-less spiritual experiences of the New Age, Pentecostals will reduce it to some mystical inner experience at their peril. That it is public, observable, and has dramatic impact upon the recipient and upon bystanders is part of our Pentecostal heritage and ethos. It is this that led Pentecostals to speak of tongues as “evidence” of spiritual experience. Perhaps, however, we do need to emphasize again that this evidence is *initial*, and that it should be followed up by further evidence of spiritual power and zeal.

Fourthly, Spirit baptism accompanied by tongues, promoted on as broad a basis as possible, can be a ready corrective to the development of *guru*-cults in the movement. Admittedly this has not always been the case. However, where the vast majority of believers in a given location has had that experience, one can appeal to them as Paul did to the *guru*-deceived Galatians: “How did you receive the Spirit...?” The essentially egalitarian nature of the experience, and the generality of the sign, assures all believers at all stages of spiritual development, that God is not a respecter of persons. Fifthly, it is obvious that there is an increasing lack of real and genuine spiritual power in the Pentecostal movement.¹⁹ In the face of the challenges offered by pagan religions and the New Age movement, this is deplorable. The coupling of glossolalia to Spirit baptism, and a re-emphasis upon its generality for believers, might enable us to cope better with the crisis. On the other hand, devaluation of tongues may well bring with it devaluation

¹⁹ This fact, particularly its reality among Pentecostal academics, is the challenge to which Tarr directs his address, transcribed as: D. Tarr, “Transcendence, Immanence and the Emerging Pentecostal Academy,” in *Pentecostalism in Context*, pp. 195-222.

of other spiritual manifestations, to the detriment of the witness to which the movement has been called (Acts 1:8).

The tone of this article makes it obvious that the writer is a “traditional” Pentecostal who understands that there is a strong scriptural basis for understanding tongues as the initial evidence that accompanies the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is probably because he comes from, and has operated in, a Pentecostal milieu where this has never really been contested or queried. This perspective from Southern Africa, where Pentecostalism is a strongly indigenous movement that is nevertheless challenged by many different cross-cultural interfaces, may challenge or affirm insights which Pentecostals from other regions have gained along the way. I do not apologize for accepting and arguing the fact that a discussion of initial evidence inevitably becomes a discussion of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and that therefore the relevance and authenticity of the one reflects on the relevance and authenticity of the other.