

**Aaron T. Friesen, *Norming the Abnormal: The Development and Function of the Doctrine of Initial Evidence in Classical Pentecostalism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), paperback, xxi + 218 pp., ISBN: 978-1-62032-236-9, US\$ 35.00.**

In *Norming the Abnormal*, Aaron T. Friesen goes back to the basics and presents the North American Pentecostal Church with an analysis of one of its core doctrines: “initial evidence.” This doctrine, which has been foundational for many classical Pentecostals, maintains that speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) is the “initial evidence” or sign of Spirit Baptism. Friesen knows firsthand the importance of this doctrine, both theologically and practically. He himself is a Pentecostal minister (he is a Foursquare pastor, but was with the Open Bible Churches at the time of writing). Originally, *Norming the Abnormal* formed Friesen’s doctoral work at the University of Wales under the supervision of Professor William K. Kay. The presentation of this work is in seven chapters with an appendix.

After a brief introduction, Friesen defines his terms, discusses the background literature, and outlines his methodology, which includes an empirical study of a few classical Pentecostal fellowships. The fellowships, all who represent “Finished Work” Pentecostalism (as opposed to Holiness or “Second Work” Pentecostalism), are the Assemblies of God, Open Bible, and the Foursquare Church. He classifies each according to their understanding of initial evidence: Assemblies of God as *Distinctive* (“those that have historically upheld the doctrine [of initial evidence] and continue to do so”), Open Bible as *Post-Distinctive* (“those that have historically upheld the doctrine [of initial evidence] but have recently softened their stance”), and the Foursquare Church as *Non-Distinctive* (“those that have never codified a rigid doctrine of initial evidence in their doctrinal statement”).

Next, Friesen traces the history of initial evidence in chapter two, specifically highlighting three early Pentecostal pioneers: Charles Parham, William Seymour, and Alexander Boddy. All three valued their experience with tongues, yet only one, Parham, articulated a doctrine similar to initial evidence. Based on his reading of Acts, Parham believed that tongues was always the evidence of Spirit Baptism. For Parham, speaking in tongues was pragmatic. He believed tongues would enable missionaries to communicate the gospel in foreign lands. For Seymour and Boddy, the effects of Spirit Baptism were much broader. Seymour, who initially was a proponent of Parham’s views, concentrated on Christian character and virtue. Boddy concentrated on love for God and a passion for the lost. Neither

Seymour nor Boddy denied a connection between tongues and Spirit Baptism; they simply placed less emphasis on tongues as evidence.

In chapter three, Friesen considers the influences behind the Assemblies of God, Open Bible, and the Foursquare's doctrine of Spirit Baptism. In addressing the Assemblies of God, he discusses the impact of William H. Durham on E. N. Bell, the fellowship's first general chairman. Durham, who was the champion of "finished work" sanctification, was an ardent supporter of initial evidence. Although Friesen notes correctly Durham's influence, he neglects other possible influences on the young Assemblies of God. For example, Mack Pinson, an original executive presbyter for the Assemblies of God, was an early associate of Bishop C. H. Mason of the Church of God in Christ. The connection between Mason and the Assemblies of God has long been documented. Mason, like Durham, was a strong supporter of initial evidence. In regards to the Open Bible and the Foursquare, Friesen discusses the influences behind their softer, more nuanced approach to initial evidence.

The fourth chapter is where it gets really interesting. Here, Friesen charts the development of initial evidence, and beliefs regarding *glossolalia* as a whole, from 1940 to present-day scholarship. Along the way, he notes such developments as the Charismatic Movement and ecumenical dialogue. The most interesting topic of Friesen's discussion is the development of tongues as a "prayer language." He notes: "This change in doctrine is important because it shifted the focus from tongues as evidence of Spirit Baptism to Spirit Baptism as the inauguration of a means to intimacy and closeness to God through a private prayer language . . ." (135). Friesen's treatment of this subject is helpful since much of the present discussion, at least inside the church, addresses the notion of tongues as prayer language. He ends this chapter by mentioning the importance of such modern Pentecostal scholars as Roger Stronstad, Robert Menzies, Franck Macchia, Simon Chan, and Amos Yong, among others.

This discussion of modern Pentecostal scholars leads into chapter five, where Friesen applies the four functional categories for examining doctrine detailed in the work Alistair McGrath, a non-Pentecostal, to evaluate how Spirit Baptism functions within Pentecostalism. The four categories, according to McGrath, are "demarcates groups socially, interprets narrative, interprets experience, and makes truth claims" (164). Friesen evaluates Spirit Baptism as it relates to McGrath's four categories in some detail, and ties it in nicely with the history of initial evidence already presented. This leads Friesen to challenge Pentecostals to broaden their theological discussion regarding initial

evidence, noting the shortfalls of solely defending the doctrine based on a reading of Acts.

Chapters six and seven present the results of the empirical study, where Friesen gathers survey data from more than 500 Pentecostal ministers. The ministers, each belonging to either the Assemblies of God (*Distinctive*), Open Bible (*Post-Distinctive*), or Foursquare (*Non-Distinctive*), were asked a series of questions regarding Pentecostal beliefs and practices. The conclusions of this survey are many and varied, but one thing sticks out: “Ministers with a rigid doctrinal stance [towards Spirit Baptism and initial evidence] were more likely to have recently experienced visible manifestations of the Spirit” (244). Friesen then concludes his work by providing a few ways forward for Pentecostals with regard to Spirit Baptism and initial evidence. The appendix includes technical data from the survey.

My one caveat for *Norming the Abnormal* is Friesen’s inclusion of only three classical Pentecostal fellowships in this study. Although he explains his reasons for excluding Holiness or “Second Work” Pentecostals (pp. 200-01), he does not mention why Oneness Pentecostals are excluded. The incorporation of other groups into this study, such as the Church of God in Christ, Church of God (Cleveland, TN), International Pentecostal Holiness Church and the Church of God of Prophecy would significantly alter the results of his analysis. Further, why Friesen does not include the Pentecostal Church of God, which is a “Finished-Work” Pentecostal fellowship, is a little confusing. The exclusion of these groups leaves only the Assemblies of God, which at times, feels as though they are the one lone holdout in regards to initial evidence, to represent the *Distinctive* category. However, if the above mentioned groups—all who utilize “initial evidence” language in their statements of faith—were to be included, the Assemblies of God would stand as one among many North American Pentecostal fellowships who maintain initial evidence.

With that said, I recommend this book gladly to all interested in Pentecostalism or the doctrines of Spirit Baptism and initial evidence. Although the content of *Norming the Abnormal* is specific to North American Pentecostalism, it does provide valuable historical insights and critique for the global movement. It is well-written and researched. I found it both informative and interesting. Any professor of Pentecostal doctrine or history should surely utilize *Norming the Abnormal* in the classroom.

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