

# Chapter 11. THE WITNESS IN CHURCH HISTORY: TONGUES

*"We also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." (Hebrews 12:1).*

This chapter investigates the existence of the Holy Spirit baptism with tongues in church history and draws conclusions about the complete apostolic message throughout history. We should keep in mind all the difficulties associated with such a study, as discussed in [Chapter 10 - The Witness in Church History: Baptism](#). The words of *Encyclopedia Britannica* serve well as our central proposition: "[P]ost-apostolic instances of glossolalia have been recorded throughout the history of the Christian church." [\[171\]](#)

## First and Second Centuries

The post-apostolic fathers of the first two centuries believed in the gift of the Holy Spirit, practiced the laying on of hands to receive the Spirit, and testified that the gifts of the Spirit, including tongues, existed in their day. [\[172\]](#) In the following quotations from these men, the English word *gifts* represents the Greek word *charismata* in the original texts, [\[173\]](#) the same word Paul used for the nine gifts of the Spirit including tongues (I Corinthians 12).

Clement of Rome (died 100?) reminded the Corinthians that "a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit was upon you all." [\[174\]](#)

Ignatius (died 107?) wrote to the church at Smyrna: "Ignatius... to the Church of God the Father, and of the beloved Jesus Christ, which has through mercy obtained every kind of gift, which is filled with faith and love, and is deficient in no gift, most worthy of God, and adorned with holiness... Be ye strong, I pray, in the power of the Holy Ghost." [\[175\]](#) He also admonished Polycarp to pray so that he might "be wanting in nothing, and... abound in every gift." [\[176\]](#)

The *Didache* says, "For the Father desireth that the gifts be given to all" and also describes prophets who speak "in the Spirit." [\[177\]](#)

Justin Martyr wrote, "For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time... Now it is possible to see amongst us women and men who possess gifts of the Spirit of God." [\[178\]](#)

Irenaeus (130?-202?), Bishop of Lyons, wrote, "[T]hose who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform (miracles). It is not possible to name the numbers of the gifts which the Church (scattered) throughout the whole world, has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ." [\[179\]](#) He taught the necessity of receiving the Spirit and specifically described speaking in tongues as evidence of the Spirit:

"[T]he perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father... For this reason does the apostle declare, 'We speak wisdom among them that are perfect,' terming those persons 'perfect' who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he used [h]imself also to speak. In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages... whom also the apostle terms 'spiritual,' they being spiritual because they partake of the Spirit." [\[180\]](#)

Celsus, a pagan, wrote near the end of the second century that Christians in his day spoke in tongues. The theologian Origen (died 254?) preserved his testimony without denying the existence and validity of tongues, and accepted the gifts of the Spirit for his day. [\[181\]](#)

A group called the Montanists emphasized the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues.

## Third Century

Tertullian wrote against the heretic Marcion shortly after A.D. 200: "[T]he Creator promised the gift of His Spirit in the latter days; and... Christ has in these last days appeared as the dispenser of spiritual gifts." [\[182\]](#) Tertullian specifically mentioned the gift of tongues and quoted I Corinthians 12:8-11 and Isaiah 28:11 as applicable in his day. He regarded speaking in tongues as one of the marks of a true church:

"Let Marcion then exhibit, as gifts of his god, some prophets, such as have not spoken by human sense, but with the Spirit of God... let him produce a psalm, a vision, a prayer - only let it be by the Spirit, in an ecstasy, that is, in a rapture, whenever an interpretation of tongues has occurred to him... Now all these signs (of spiritual gifts) are forthcoming from my side without any difficulty." [\[183\]](#)

Novatian (died 257?), a presbyter in Rome, wrote about the Holy Spirit:

"This is He who places prophets in the Church, instructs teachers, directs tongues, gives powers and healings, does wonderful works, offers discrimination of spirits, affords powers of government, suggests counsels, and orders and arranges whatever other gifts there are of *charismata*; and thus makes the Lord's Church everywhere, and in all, perfected and completed." [\[184\]](#)

Sabellius apparently taught the baptism of the Holy Spirit with tongues. None of his writings have survived, but Epiphanius said that Sabellius taught regeneration by the Holy Ghost and Pseudo-Athanasius records that Sabellius taught on the spiritual gifts of I Corinthians 12. [\[185\]](#)

Asterius Urbanus (c. 232) indicated that the Christians of his day expected the spiritual gifts to remain permanently in the church. Writing against the later Montanists, he asked why they no longer had prophets after their prophet Montanus and his co-workers died. Urbanus noted that the true church would always have the prophetic gifts (prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues): "For the apostle [Paul] deems that the gifts of prophecy should abide in all the church up to the time of the final advent." [\[186\]](#)

## Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Hilary (died 367), bishop of Poitiers, mentioned both tongues and interpretation of tongues, describing them as "agents of ministry" ordained of God. [\[187\]](#)

Ambrose (340-98), bishop of Milan, taught that all the gifts of I Corinthians 12 were part of the normal Christian experience. [\[188\]](#)

By the late fourth century and early fifth century, Christendom had for the most part evolved into what came to be known as the Roman Catholic Church. Apparently, speaking in tongues had practically disappeared from most places in the backsliding church, but the memory of it remained to some extent. John Chrysostom (345-407), bishop of Constantinople, wrote a comment on I Corinthians 12:

"This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place... Well: what did happen then? Whoever was baptized he straightway spoke with tongues... They at once on their baptism received the Spirit... [They] began to speak, one in the tongue of the Persians, another in that of the Romans, another in that of the Indians, or in some other language. And this disclosed to outsiders that it was the Spirit in the speaker." [\[189\]](#)

Augustine (354-430) testified that the church in his day did not expect to speak in tongues when receiving the Holy Spirit, but admitted that this used to be the case:

"For the Holy Spirit is not only given by the laying on of hands amid the testimony of temporal sensible miracles, as He was given in former days... For who expects in these days that those on whom hands are laid that they may receive the Holy Spirit should forthwith begin to speak with tongues?" [\[190\]](#)

Evidently some "heretics" in Augustine's day believed in receiving the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues. He sought to refute them by the following argument: (1) Tongues are valueless without love (I Corinthians 13); (2) love comes only by the Spirit (Romans 5:5); (3) they did not have the Spirit because they did not belong to the Catholic Church; and (4) no one expected tongues any longer anyway. [\[191\]](#)

## The Medieval Age

Evidence of tongues in medieval times is sparse, probably because the Roman Catholic Church was so effective in silencing "heretics." Nevertheless, there are reports of speaking in tongues among the following groups:

(1) Waldenses, 1100's, Europe. [\[192\]](#) A group that rejected papal authority and attempted to base their beliefs solely on the Bible.

(2) Albigenses, 1100's, Europe. [\[193\]](#) Another group that rejected papal authority and emphasized purity of life.

(3) Franciscans and possibly other mendicant orders, 1200's, Europe. [\[194\]](#) Catholic monks who embraced a very simple lifestyle and traveled throughout the countryside preaching.

## The Reformation Era Forward

Reports of speaking in tongues increase greatly after the Protestant Reformation, due to several factors: 1) greater religious freedom, (2) renewed emphasis on Bible study, apostolic doctrine, conversion, and spiritual experiences, (3) the invention of printing,

and (4) the closer proximity to our time. According to respected historians, speaking in tongues has occurred among many groups (from 1500 to 1900):

(1) Anabaptists, 1500's, Europe. [\[195\]](#) One of the four main branches of the early Protestant movement (along with Lutherans, Reformed, and Anglicans). Unlike other Protestants, the Anabaptists emphasized the restoration of apostolic patterns of worship and lifestyle, the importance of a conversion experience, baptism of believers only, baptism by immersion, total separation of church and state, the power to overcome sin after conversion, and the need to live a holy life. A prominent Anabaptist leader named Menno Simons, whose followers became known as Mennonites, wrote about speaking in tongues as if it were expected evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost. [\[196\]](#) Many early Anabaptists worshiped quite demonstratively; in the words of a secular history text some participated in "very excited, 'enthusiastic,' evangelical practices... what Americans know as 'holy rolling'... The congregation sometimes shouted and danced, and always sang hymns with great fervor." [\[197\]](#) In view of their doctrine and worship, it is not at all surprising that speaking in tongues occurred among early Anabaptists.

(2) Prophecy movement, 1500's, England. [\[198\]](#)

(3) Camisards, 1600's and 1700's, southern France (often called the Prophets of the Cevennes). [\[199\]](#) A group of Huguenots (French Protestants), mostly peasants, who resisted the attempts of Louis XIV's government to convert them to Roman Catholicism. Many were imprisoned, tortured, and martyred. Observers reported tongues, uneducated peasants and young children prophesying in pure, elegant French, enthusiastic, demonstrative worship, and people "seized by the Spirit."

(4) Quakers, 1600's, England. [\[200\]](#) A group that emphasized spiritual experience and waited on the moving of the Spirit in their services. The early Quakers received their name because they literally "quaked" under the power of the Spirit.

(5) Jansenists, 1600's and 1700's, France. [\[201\]](#) A Catholic reform movement.

(6) Pietists (including Moravians), late 1600's, Germany. [\[202\]](#) The Pietists emphasized spiritual experience and Christian living.

(7) Converts of Camisards, early 1700's, England. [\[203\]](#) Some Camisards fled to England to avoid persecution, making converts there.

(8) Methodists, 1700's, England, particularly in the revivals of Wesley and Whitefield and in later American revivals. [\[204\]](#)

Wesley himself believed that the gifts of the Spirit had practically disappeared but that a fully restored church would have them again. [\[205\]](#) When a certain Dr. Middleton wrote that the gift of tongues was absent from later church history, Wesley replied that (1) many ancient writings are no longer extant, (2) many Christians wrote no books, (3) the ante-Nicene fathers do not say tongues ceased with the apostles, and (4) just because

tongues was not specifically recorded does not mean it was not practiced. [206] He said, "Many may have spoken with new tongues, of whom this is not recorded; at least, the records are lost in a course of so many years." [207] In reply to the objection that tongues did not exist in his time, Wesley replied, "It has been heard of more than once, no farther off than the valleys of Dauphiny" [southern France]. [208]

We should also note the strong emphasis on repentance and physical demonstrations in the Methodist revivals. One hostile historian wrote, "Extreme emotional disturbances, ecstasies and bodily seizures of various sorts were common in the Wesleyan Revival of the eighteenth century in England," with people in Wesley's meetings exhibiting "violent motor reactions... convulsions and shakings" and screaming. [209] Similar phenomena occurred in the Great Awakening, a period of American revival in the 1700's led by Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and others. [210]

(9) Revivals and Camp Meetings, 1800's, America. It is reported that physical demonstrations occurred in later American revivals, called the Second Awakening, which began with camp meetings in Kentucky and swept across the American frontier. [211] In the camp meetings people "shouted, sobbed, leaped in the air, writhed on the ground, fell like dead men and lay insensible for considerable periods, and engaged in unusual bodily contortions," in addition to manifesting the "holy laugh," the "barks," and the "jerks." [212] Observers at various American revival meetings reported sobbing, shrieking, shouting, spasms, falling, rolling, running, dancing, barking, whole congregations breathing in distress and weeping, and hundreds under conviction and on the ground repenting. [213]

These meetings were conducted by Methodists, Baptists, some Presbyterians, and later the Holiness movement. With such a strong emphasis on repentance and free, demonstrative worship, it is not surprising that many people received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. A great revival swept the University of Georgia in 1800-1801, and the students "shouted and talked in unknown tongues." [214]

In many cases tongues speaking went unreported because observers did not recognize it or its significance and did not distinguish it from other physical phenomena. One historian said, "Throughout the nineteenth century speaking in unknown tongues occurred occasionally in the revivals and camp meetings that dotted the countryside. Perhaps the phenomenon was considered just another of the many evidences that one had been saved or sanctified." [215]

(10) Lutherans, early 1800's, Germany. [216] This began among followers of Gustav von Below.

(11) Irvingites, 1800's, England and America. [217] The Spirit fell among the London congregation of a prominent Church of Scotland pastor named Edward Irving, beginning with Mary Campbell and James and Margaret MacDonald. Soon after, Irvingites formed the Catholic Apostolic Church, which emphasized the gifts of the Spirit. This revival also gave birth to the Christian Catholic Church and the New Apostolic Church, and there

were Irvingites in the traditional denominations. Unfortunately, these groups gradually lost the gifts of the Spirit, degenerated into ritualism, suffered rapid decline, and are almost nonexistent today. Church historian Philip Schaff(1819-1893) wrote of observing speaking in tongues in an Irvingite church in New York:

"Several years ago I witnessed this phenomenon in an Irvingite congregation in New York; the words were broken, ejaculatory, and unintelligible, but uttered in abnormal, startling, impressive sounds, in a state of apparent unconsciousness and rapture, and without any control over the tongue, which was seized as it were by a foreign power. A friend and colleague (Dr. Briggs), who witnessed it in 1879 in the principal Irvingite church in London, received the same impression.' [218]

(12) Plymouth Brethren, 1800's, England. [219]

(13) Readers (Lasare), 1841-43, Sweden. [220]

(14) Revivals, 1859, Ireland. [221]

(15) Holiness people, 1800's, Tennessee and North Carolina. [222]

We should note that one German historian attributed speaking in tongues to Martin Luther, and a friend of Dwight Moody described some of Moody's followers speaking in tongues. [223] However, it is unclear whether either source definitely meant speaking in tongues as we know it. The *Westminster Confession*, an important statement of Presbyterian Calvinism adopted by English Puritans in 1648, specifically required that prayer be made in a known tongue. [224]

## Twentieth Century

The modern Pentecostal movement began on January 1, 1901, in a small Bible college in Topeka, Kansas, operated by Charles Parham, a minister with a background in the Holiness movement. The students began to seek the baptism of the Spirit with tongues, and Agnes Ozman was the first student to experience speaking in tongues. The revival soon spread to many denominations and around the world. Since then speaking in tongues has been verified and documented many times. [225]

In the late 1950's a revival of tongues speaking, known as the charismatic or neo-Pentecostal movement, began among non-Pentecostal churches and has spread throughout the Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox world. [226] Some charismatics have joined Pentecostal churches, others have formed their own churches, and many have remained in their traditional denominations.

## Statistics on Pentecostals Today

According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia* in 1970 there were 160,509 Pentecostal congregations, 18,694,038 adult adherents, and total affiliation of 36,794,010; by 1980 total affiliation had reached an estimated 51,167,187 worldwide. [227] As *Time Magazine* noted, this means Pentecostals are larger than any single bloc of Protestants in

the world today. [228] In addition to these figures, total charismatics or neo-Pentecostals numbered 1,587,700 in 1970 and 11,005,390 in 1980. [229]

As defined by this source, affiliation is much more than membership or regular attendance; it includes adult adherents, children, attending sympathizers, and irregular attenders.

Below is a chart of the major Oneness Pentecostal groups in the United States today. [230]

Table 9 - Oneness Pentecostals, USA (1970)				
	Name	Churches	Adults	Affiliated (estimate)
1	Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Jesus Christ (Spanish speaking)	195	24,000	55,000
2	Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God (black)	300	20,000	75,090
3	Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ	200	25,000	60,000
4	Associated Brotherhood of Christians (spiritual communion)	100	2,500	6,000
5	Bible Way Churches of Our Lord Jesus Christ World Wide (black)	250	20,000	42,000
6	Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith (black)	200	45,000	60,000
7	Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (majority black)	550	45,000	60,000
8	United Pentecostal Church International (majority white; many blacks, Hispanics)	2,200	250,000	450,000

In addition to these figures, a number of smaller organizations, independent churches, and charismatic groups embrace Oneness Pentecostal doctrine. It should be noted that these figures from 1970 are out of date since most Pentecostal groups are experiencing rapid growth.

In September 1983, the UPCI estimated a constituency of approximately 500,000 in the United States and Canada and 500,000 overseas. [231] At that time it had 3295 churches in the United States and Canada, with 500 considered as home missions churches and with about four new churches being started per week. [232] Foreign missions statistics at that time included: works in 90 countries, 5998 churches and preaching points, 53 established Bible colleges, and an increase in twelve months of 534 churches and 86,686 constituents. [233] Major foreign missions fields as of 1984 are listed below. [234]

Table 10 - Major UPCI Mission Fields (1984)			
	Country	Churches	Constituents <a href="#">[235]</a>
1	Brazil	220.	11,000
2	Burma	16.0	9,000
3	El Salvador	439	14,000
4	Ethiopia	445	95,275
5	Ghana	102	9,000
6	Haiti	135	12,151
7	India, N.E.	613	52,356
8	India, South	175	10,000
9	Indonesia	202	12,901
10	Jamaica	160	22,000
11	Kenya	212	28,000
12	Madagascar	122	10,000
13	Pakistan	205	15,000
14	Philippines	1,275	60,000
15	Venezuela	608	40,000

Many other Oneness Pentecostal groups exist outside the United States. The following table lists those with over 10,000 adult adherents as of 1970: [\[236\]](#)

Table 11 - Jesus Name Pentecostals, Non-US, Non-UPCI (1970)					
	Country	Organization	Churches	Adults	Affiliation
1	Canada	Apostolic Church of Pentecost in Canada	100	12,000	30,000
2	China (PRC)	True Jesus Church	1700	15,000	35,000
3	Colombia	United Pentecostal Church of Colombia	570	47,000	95,000
4	Indonesia	Pentecostal Church of Indonesia <a href="#">[237]</a>	1500	750,000	1,000,000
5	Mexico	Apostolic Church of the Faith in Christ Jesus	954	16,034	48,192
6	Mexico	Light of the World Church	20	15,000	30,000
7	Taiwan	True Jesus Church	187	25,000	50,000
8	Japan	Spirit of Jesus Church	453	37,000	62,726



The True Jesus Church is an indigenous church formed by mainland Chinese in 1917 without any prior contact with other Oneness Pentecostals. Just before the Communist takeover, it had 1260 churches and 125,000 affiliated; since then its members have gone underground in secret house meetings. [238] It is one of the few churches to resist successfully the government's efforts to merge all Protestants into one registered body called the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. [239] The True Jesus Church teaches that birth of water is water baptism, that using the name of Jesus at baptism is for remission of sins, that birth of the Spirit is receiving the Spirit, and that the evidence of receiving the Spirit is speaking in tongues. [240]

The UPC of Colombia is a completely autonomous church founded by UPC missionaries. It is the fastest growing and the largest non-Catholic denomination in the country. Its amazing progress had been the subject of two scholarly books by non-Pentecostal researchers. [241]

Many smaller Oneness Pentecostal bodies exist around the world including several in Mexico, many in the Caribbean, many among Caribbean immigrants to England, and the Church of the Spirit (Footwashing) in Yugoslavia.

For the U.S.S.R., the *World Christian Encyclopedia* lists a single Oneness Pentecostal body, an underground group known as the Evangelical Christians in the Apostolic Spirit. They are the oldest Russian Pentecostals, dating back to Andrew Urshan's revivals of 1915, and they practice footwashing. The only officially registered church which contains Pentecostals is the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB).

In the 1940's the Oneness people were forced to join this government controlled organization, but many soon left, preferring to become an illegal sect. [242] Apparently, many remained in this group, for in 1974 a Oneness believer named Peter Shatrov was elected to the presidium of the AUCECB, thereby becoming the major Pentecostal spokesman in the AUCECB and in the U.S.S.R. as a whole. [243] We assume, then, that many groups classified as trinitarian could have significant numbers of Oneness believers. Below are statistics for Russian Pentecostals: [244]

<b>Table 12 - Russian Pentecostals (1970)</b>				
	<b>Name</b>	<b>Churches</b>	<b>Adults</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
<b>1</b>	Christians of Evangelical Faith (underground, classified as trinitarian)	600	80,000	320000
<b>2</b>	Evangelical Christian Pentecostal Zionists (underground, classified as trinitarian)	100	10,000	20000
<b>3</b>	Evangelical Christians in the Apostolic Spirit (underground, all Oneness)	50	2,000	5000
<b>4</b>	Christians of Evangelical Faith (AUCECB) (registered church,	400	40,000	160,000

	classified as trinitarian hut elected a Oneness leader)			
5	Other Pentecostal Bodies (underground, not specified as Oneness or trinitarian)	900	80,000	160,000

The *World Christian Encyclopedia* lists these total statistics for Oneness Pentecostals worldwide in 1970: 13,350 churches; 1,593,999 adults; 2,682,248 affiliated; and 4,205,428 projected affiliated by 1985. [\[245\]](#)

## Conclusion

We do not agree with all the doctrines of every individual or movement discussed in this chapter, but our investigation has demonstrated a basic truth: through the ages people have believed, preached and experienced repentance, baptism by immersion, baptism for the remission of sins, baptism in Jesus' name, receiving the Holy Spirit, and speaking in tongues. These are not modern day inventions; the Bible teaches them and many throughout history have followed them.

In particular, it can be stated that some groups adhered simultaneously to baptism in Jesus' name and the baptism of the Spirit with tongues. We find both doctrines among the early post-apostolic fathers (1st and 2nd centuries), the early Sabellians (3rd century), and modern Pentecostals (20th century). The historical evidence also indicates that both doctrines existed among Montanists (2nd and 3rd centuries), later Sabellians (4th, 5th, 6th centuries), various "heretics" (3rd and 4th centuries, middle ages), Anabaptists (16th century), Antitrinitarians (16th and 17th centuries), early Quakers (17th century) and Plymouth Brethren (19th century). No doubt Satan has tried to suppress the facts, but there is enough evidence to indicate that God has always had some people who taught the full apostolic doctrine. We are confident that the apostolic church, as defined by message and experience, has never been absent since the days of the apostles.

Church history alone can never prove the validity of doctrine, but it provides insight into how these key doctrines were altered or lost over the centuries. It helps to dispel the myth that these doctrines are of recent origin. The clear teaching of Scripture is enough to tear away the shrouds of nonbiblical tradition, but perhaps this brief historical survey can aid in the process.

In these latter days, the full apostolic truth is proclaimed around the world. This century has seen a miraculous revival of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with tongues. In less than one century, the Pentecostal movement has grown from a small group to the largest single grouping of Protestants in the world, and it has affected every branch of Christendom. We firmly believe a revival of the name of Jesus will match the outpouring of His Spirit. The history of the church is not over; we believe the best is yet to come!

