



CAMERON FISHER / AZUSA STREET CENTENNIAL

« Thousands gathered in Los Angeles in April to celebrate the birth of Pentecostalism.

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Study: Many Pentecostals Don't Speak in Tongues

While noting that Pentecostalism is reshaping global Christianity, a recent study found that many classical Pentecostals don't speak in tongues, leading researchers to question whether glossolalia is still a Pentecostal distinction.

In a 10-nation survey of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, the Washington, D.C.-based Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that in six of the countries studied at least 40 percent of Pentecostals said they never speak in tongues. In the U.S., 49 percent of Pentecostals reported that they do not speak in tongues; among charismatics that figure was 32 percent.

The Pew researchers randomly surveyed Pentecostals and charismatics—broadly labeled “renewalists”—in Brazil,

Chile, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, South Korea and the U.S. Although the respondents attended churches that practice tongues and other sign gifts, the study found that experiences with diving healing were more common than speaking in tongues.

“I think that the classic Pentecostal belief that speaking in tongues was the real evidence of the second baptism of the Holy Spirit is, at least in practice, not widely accepted around the world,” said John Green, senior fellow at the Pew Forum. “I think these communities are defined more by other types of spiritual practices than by speaking in tongues.”

Although Pentecostal leaders say there has never been a time in history when all Pentecostals spoke in tongues, the study's

findings were surprising. “We could be seeing more and more people joining Pentecostal churches for the lively worship and preaching but not seeing the need to experience the baptism for themselves,” said Kenneth R. Bell, a spokesman for the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.).

The Pew study defined Pentecostals as those belonging to denominations formed out of the 1906 Azusa Street revival—which launched the Pentecostal movement—and charismatics as those belonging to independent or mainline churches that embrace Pentecostal theology.

Pentecostal denominations such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), Assemblies of God (AG) and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel consider tongues the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. But Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan, author of *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*, said the percentage of Pentecostals who pray in tongues has been declining for the last 30 years as charismatic leaders taught that tongues is not the initial evidence of Spirit baptism.

Ric Walston, Ph.D., a retired AG pastor and president of Columbia Evangelical Seminary in Buckley, Wash., believes all Pentecostals should embrace that view. Although he says he speaks in tongues both privately and publicly, he says the view “that the gifts of the Spirit are for today and that God still intervenes in the lives and affairs of mankind” should define Pentecostalism, not tongues.

“There is simply so much more to being a Pentecostal or a charismatic than simply whether or not you speak in tongues,” said Walston, author of *The Speaking in Tongues Controversy*, in which he argues that tongues isn't the initial evidence of Spirit baptism.

But Foursquare President Jack W. Hayford said no matter where theologians fall on the initial evidence debate, if tongues is not practiced, there is no reason to label the movement Pentecostal.

Hayford discusses glossolalia in his book *The Beauty of Spiritual Language* and says many Pentecostals don't realize the practical value of tongues—which he said includes “enablement beyond our own capacity” in prayer and worship and the “internal upbuilding of the soul”—because their pastors aren't addressing the topic. Other ministry leaders agree.

“I know this is a broad generalization, but I pray our desire to be progressive and relevant not erode the underpinning of why the Holy Spirit brought us into existence in this epoch of church history,” said Doug Beacham, executive director of Church Education Ministries for the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Pew director Luis Lugo said Christianity may be “well on its way to being Pentecostalized,” with at least a quarter of the world's 2 billion Christians embracing Pentecostalism. But renewal leaders say neglecting tongues could stunt that growth.

“Unknown tongues is the doorway to the supernatural,” said Rev. William Wilson, president of the Center for Spiritual Renewal and executive director of the Azusa Street Centennial held in April. “If we forsake that ... I think we will move away from what possibly could help us stay vibrant in the world in which we live.”

Vinson Synan notes that, historically, churches that embrace tongues have grown larger than those that rejected it. The AG has 10 times as many members as the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which in the early 1900s took a “seek not, forbid not” position on tongues.

And COGIC is the largest Pentecostal body in the U.S., with roughly 5 million members, while the Church of Christ (Holiness) USA, which split from COGIC founder C.H. Mason in 1907 over tongues, has roughly 20,000 members in the U.S.

Among the report's other findings were that renewalists are more likely to be sympathetic toward Israel and to allow women to serve as ministry leaders and that a majority believe God will grant good health and prosperity to those who have enough faith.

—ADRIENNE S. GAINES