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The Gift of Tongues

The Scriptures relating to speaking in tongues are examined. The tongues of Acts 2 actual languages; and similarly at Caesarea, Ephesus and Corinth, though in the last instance the circumstances of their exercise were different.

The threefold purpose of the gift: for worship and self-edification as a sign to unbelievers; and when coupled with the gift of interpretation, for the edification of the Church.

The testimony of the early Fathers cited.

The present-day exercise of the gift examined, and found to conform to the Scriptural pattern both in its nature and in its use.

The nature of the gift—not ecstatic, nor emotional.

Modern views examined, with special reference to the psychological school.

The possibility of simulating tongues.

The Scriptures a sufficient guide to the subject.

‘THE whole question of speaking in tongues urgently needs at this time unbiassed, scholarly, historical and exegetical reinvestigation by capable, trained men, and by our larger Protestant groups corporately.’

This quotation is taken from the *Moody Monthly* (December 1955). If such a task is to be undertaken, the first step must be to establish some foundation of fact, and to remove some of the strange and often fantastic misconceptions which have clustered around the subject. It is the aim of the present article to assist towards this end. It is not that there is not already a vast literature concerning it. But the widespread recurrence of the phenomenon in our day, and the attempts by some writers to apply to it the criteria of the new psychology, together combine to demand a revaluation.

We begin, as we must begin, by examining what the Scriptures have recorded of speaking in tongues.

The Evidence of Scripture—Acts

There are three instances of speaking in tongues recorded in Acts, and two others may be inferred. There was, firstly, the speaking in tongues by the assembled company when the Holy Spirit was first poured out on the Day of Pentecost (chap. ii), then in the house of Cornelius (chap. x), and at Ephesus (chap. xix). Then it is clear that there was audible or visible manifestation when the Spirit was bestowed at Samaria (chap. viii): ‘When Simon saw that through the laying on of the Apostle’s hands the Holy Ghost was given . . .’—What did he

see? As the only such manifestation which is mentioned elsewhere is the speaking in tongues, it is reasonable to infer that this was the case here; indeed, Augustine plainly says that it was so.¹ Finally, there is the case of Paul (chap. ix). We know that in later days he spoke with tongues (1 Cor. xiv. 18), and it is natural to infer that he first did so when Ananias laid hands on him—‘that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost’ (Acts ix. 17).

That the speaking in tongues in the house of Cornelius was of exactly the same character as on the Day of Pentecost is expressly stated by Peter: ‘The Holy Ghost fell on them, *as on us* at the beginning’ (xi. 15). The instances of speaking in tongues in Acts give a single consistent picture.

Of what then, did this speaking in tongues consist? According to the narrative in Chapter ii, it was the utterance by those on whom the Spirit fell of languages which they did not know and had never learned, but which were understood by those that heard them; and that in these languages they were declaring ‘the wonderful works of God’. It is strange that this should ever have been questioned. The ancient writers, whatever their views on other points, were united in this (Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory Nazianzen, Augustine, Chrysostom, Jerome, etc.). The only question that ever arose in their minds was whether the miracle consisted in the *speaking* by the Apostles and those with them, or the *hearing* by the audience in their own languages what was being said in the native tongue—a view attributed by Alford to Cyprian and Gregory of Nyssa. According to Gregory Nazianzen,² the point turns on the punctuation of ii. 11, as though it were made to read, ‘we do hear them in our own tongues, as they are speaking’. But he does not accept this interpretation on the ground that it transfers the miracle from those who were filled with the Spirit to the unconverted multitude. Such an interpretation also overlooks verse 4, which states that the speaking in tongues began before there was any audience at all. We need not deny the possibility of such a miracle of hearing—it is said to have occurred with St Vincent Ferrer, and two modern instances have been reported during the recent revival in the Congo;³ but this is not what happened on the Day of Pentecost.

Dean Alford, after considering all the alternative explanations which had been suggested of the nature of the gift, will have none of them: ‘There can be no question in any unprejudiced mind that

¹ *Enarratio in Psalmum CXXX.*

² *Orat. XLI, x, In Pentecosten.*

³ *This is That* (Christian Literature Crusade), p. 49.

the fact which this narrative sets before us is, *that the disciples began to speak various languages, viz. the languages of the nations enumerated below, and perhaps others.* All attempts to evade this are connected with some forcing of the text, or some far-fetched and indefensible exegesis.¹ These words are as valid today as when they were written. Dean Alford is followed in this, with equal emphasis, by the Speaker's Commentary (Canon F. C. Cook) and the Pulpit Commentary (The Rt Rev. Bishop Hervey).

But what were the languages spoken? Some commentators, fastening on the word *dialektos* in verses 7 and 8, and the fact that, with few exceptions, the hearers were all Jews, and presumably spoke or could speak the current Aramaic, have contended that they were simply local dialects, or variations of the same language. But can we believe seriously that if this were all, it would have excited such wonderment, and that these dialects were 'our own tongues wherein we were born'? The whole tenor of the passage forbids it. And, chapter ii apart, the whole explanation falls to the ground as applied to chapters 10 and 19. The word *dialektos*, moreover, was not limited to the present meaning of 'dialect'. Luke himself uses it (Acts xxi. 40) of the Hebrew language. It has been attempted to support this interpretation by reference to the question 'Are not all these which speak Galileans?' from the known fact that Galileans have a dialect of their own; but the point may be that, being Galileans, that is, provincials, they could not be expected to have acquired that knowledge of foreign languages that might be found in a more cosmopolitan centre.

The view that *glossa* is used in the sense of *glossema*, 'unusual, archaic, figurative speech', put forward by Bleek, Ernestin and Baur, is no more satisfactory, nor yet Meyer's suggestion that the tongues were a new spiritual language, of which the *glossai* were merely the varieties. These explanations do not fit the narrative. Paul's rhetorical mention of 'tongues of angels' in 1 Corinthians xiii. 1 is no evidence that any such tongue was ever in fact spoken.

It is admitted by most commentators that Luke intended to show that the tongues spoken were actual languages, and that they included those languages of the peoples represented in the audience, whether or no they are willing to admit that this really took place.²

¹ *Commentary on Acts* (ii).

² See Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church* (T. and T. Clark, 1854), vol. i, p. 238: 'That this is clear, indisputable, literal sense of the narrative is admitted even by rationalist interpreters.'

The Evidence of Scripture—I Corinthians

From Acts we turn to I Corinthians, where, in chapters xii to xiv, a gift of speaking in tongues is included among other *charismata*, and detailed regulations are given for its public exercise. The first question is: are the tongues at Corinth of the same nature as those recorded in Acts, that is, were they actual languages? If not, wherein does the difference lie?

Many, if not most modern writers, profess to find a difference, and speak often as if Corinthian tongues were not respectable. It has become fashionable to speak of Paul as 'depreciating' the gift, and that, in spite of the fact that he attributes it to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. xii. 10, 11), he regards it as conducing to profit (verse 7), wishes that all spoke with tongues (xiv. 5), and thanks God that he himself possesses the gift (xiv. 18), and finally says (verse 39), 'Forbid not to speak with tongues'. Brumback¹ lists fifteen statements in these chapters commendatory of tongues. Theodoret's comment on xiv. 5 is, 'I do not, he says, belittle the gift; but I seek its proper use'.²

This attempt to make a difference between the tongues of Corinthians and those of Acts is wholly artificial. There is a distinction in the circumstances and mode of operation, but not a difference in kind. As Robertson says, 'There is no possible doubt that the phenomena of the Church of Corinth are homogeneous with those that meet us at Caesarea (Acts x. 46) and at Ephesus (xix. 5). These two passages are linked together by the reference to baptism, and the close relation of tongues to prophecy connects the latter passage with the phenomena of Corinth.'³ Alford supports this view that the Corinthian tongues are actual languages, though here the Speaker's Commentary (Canon Evans), and the Pulpit Commentary (Archdeacon Farrar) do not. These Corinthian chapters are, as we shall see, vital for the understanding of the nature and purposes of the gift.

We said, however, that there was a distinction between the gift of tongues in Acts and the exercise of the gift at Corinth. The chief difference was that in Acts ii those upon whom the Spirit fell 'began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance', and the occurrences recorded in chapters x and xix are similar; whilst in Corinth the exercise of the gift was under the control of the person possessing it. A further distinction is that in Acts ii at least, the tongues

¹ *What meaneth This?*

² *Commentary on 1 Cor.*, xiv. 5.

³ Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 'The Gift of Tongues'.

spoken were understood by the hearers, without an interpreter, which was not the case at Corinth.

On the Day of Pentecost, the utterance was wholly due to the operation of the Spirit, but it would seem that the speakers were wholly conscious of what they were doing. How far they continued to speak in tongues on subsequent occasions we have no means of knowing, but analogy would suggest that many, if not most, would do so. It is also implied that the hearers could also participate in this experience (verses 38 f.) and this is admitted by Augustine.¹ But at Corinth we have not the account of an initial experience, but of a continuing 'gift' or faculty of speaking in tongues, largely at the will of the speaker, who could speak or keep silence as he would. It is this only to which the term the 'gift' of tongues properly applies.

We must recognise the difficulty of understanding how such a gift could be exercised in such a way; for it is inconceivable that a man should be able to command the operation of the Holy Spirit. Alford points out the difficulty, but he suggests no answer; he says, 'I would not conceal the difficulty which our minds find in conceiving a person supernaturally endued with the power of speaking, *ordinarily and consciously*, a language which he has never learned. I believe that difficulty to be insuperable. . . . But there is no such contradiction, and to my mind *no such difficulty*, in conceiving a man to be moved to utterance of sounds *dictated by the Holy Spirit*.'² If, however, we recognise, as we shall see later, that the primary purpose of the bestowal of the gift is for use in worship, the difficulty 'largely disappears.

But there is another use of the gift, in the Church, where, with the help of the gift of interpretation, it is equivalent to prophecy. Paul says in 1 Corinthians xiv. 29, 'Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge', or, as in the R. V. 'let the others discern'. Whatever it is that is to be judged—whether the message is inspired, whether it conforms to the truth of Scripture, or as to its present application—it is clear that the utterance is not infallible. Inspired it may be, but the inspiration is of an entirely different order to that of the Scriptures. On this Donald Gee well says, 'It is a pleasant dream held by some people that all exercise of the gifts of the Spirit is necessarily perfect, and beyond abuse or mistake. Such an idea can only come from a

¹ *Sermo CCLXVII*: 'Whosoever received the Holy Spirit, suddenly, when filled with the Spirit, began to speak in the tongues of all men, not only the hundred and twenty.'

² *Op. cit.*

very careless reading of the New Testament. . . . Paul's treatment of the subject in I Corinthians xii, xiii and xiv arises solely out of the Corinthian assembly using certain gifts wrongly . . . the imperfections in them arise from the "earthen vessels" through whom the manifestation flows.¹ We shall return to this when we consider the present-day exercise of the gift.

The Purpose of the Gift

The purposes of the gift as enumerated in I Corinthians xiv are threefold. The primary purpose is its use in private worship: 'He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God, for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries' (verse 2)—'He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself' (verse 4). It was so on the Day of Pentecost, for there the gift was not used for preaching to the people, though the people who were present heard them; but they were declaring the 'wonderful works of God'.

Then there is the use of the gift in the capacity of a sign: 'tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not'—as again they were undoubtedly used on the Day of Pentecost.

And, finally, there is the use of the gift on the Church, when accompanied by the gift of interpretation; it is then equivalent to prophecy. That this use was intended is shown by the very fact that the gift of interpretation was added, so that the utterance could serve to the edification of the assembly.

Testimony of the Fathers

Both Chrysostom² and Gregory Nazianzen³ saw in the tongues of the Day of Pentecost a counterpart to the curse of Babel, whilst Augustine saw it as symbolising the unity of the Church.⁴ There is doubtless truth in both these conceptions, but not the whole truth. Origen regarded the gift as having been bestowed for the preaching of the Gospel,⁵ and so did Chrysostom,⁶ though there is no instance

¹ Quoted by Brumback, *op. cit.*

² *De Sancto Pentecoste, Homil. II.*

³ *Orat. XLVI.*

⁴ *De Civitate Dei XLIX; Sermones CXLXXV, CCLXVII, CXLVIII, CCLXIX, XXI, LXXXVII, Enarratio in Psalmum CXLVII.*

⁵ *Comment. in Epist. Ad Rom.*

⁶ *Homil. XXV, Cor. xiv*

recorded of the gift ever having been used for such a purpose, and indeed, it has been pointed out that never in the history of the world would it have been less necessary than in the first century of the Christian era. Bishop Wordsworth¹ also supports the idea, but Alford says that it only originated after the gift ceased.

Some curious reasons have been advanced for the cessation of the gift. Chrysostom² regarded it as having been bestowed in the first instance because the heathen converts had need of some tangible sign as an aid to their faith, which was no longer necessary. Augustine refers frequently to the question, and his explanation is always the same; that the tongues were an expression of the unity of the Church, which was to proclaim the gospel in all languages. But at the beginning there was only a small company of believers, all of one nation and one tongue; so that in order that the gospel could be expressed in all languages, they had to be distributed among this small company. But later, with the spread of the Gospel, the praises of God were being sounded forth in all languages, and the special gift was no longer needed. 'I venture to say that I speak in the tongue of all men. I am in the body of Christ; I am in the Church of Christ; if the body of Christ now speaks in the tongues of all men, then I too have the tongues of all men. I have Greek, I have Syriac, I have Hebrew, I have the tongues of all nations, because I am in the unity of all nations.'³

It is perhaps curious that these early writers took the disappearance of the gifts for granted; they never seem to have asked themselves whether they were intended to cease, or whether perchance they were missing something they should have possessed. The Scriptures say that the gifts should cease (not the gift of tongues only) 'when that which is perfect is come'; and so long as the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom are in evidence, we should expect the gift of tongues to be in evidence also.

Tongues in Later Times

Whilst the early Fathers with few exceptions speak of the gift as one which has ceased in their days, the phenomenon has recurred all down the ages, particularly in times of revival. Justin Martyr⁴ mentions the gifts in general as in operation, but does not specifically refer to

¹ *Commentary on Acts ii.*

² *De Sancto Pentecoste, Homil. I.*

³ *Enarratio in Psalmum CLXVII.* (See also note 5, p. 64.)

⁴ *Dial. c. Tryph. 88.*

tongues. Irenaeus speaks of tongues as something which he has known,¹ and Eusebius² quotes the evidence of Irenaeus. Then comes a long silence, unless we are at liberty to include the Montanists, which for reasons already mentioned is somewhat doubtful. But it is said to have occurred among the Franciscans of the thirteenth century, and among the 'little prophets of the Cevennes' in the seventeenth, amongst the early Quakers, during the Methodist revival, and in the well-known Irvingite revival in the nineteenth century. More recently, it occurred sporadically during the Welsh revival of 1904, though it attracted little attention. How far these occurrences conformed to the Scripture pattern may at times be difficult to determine; some of the records read rather strangely, persons speaking in tongues behaving in strange ways, and appearing exhausted afterwards; John Wesley on one occasion witnessed the prophetic utterance of one of the 'French prophets', without being able to arrive at any conclusions; but the probability is that for the most part the phenomena were genuine, but perhaps with a certain admixture.

At the present moment the phenomenon has become very widespread in the various branches of the Pentecostal movement, but it is by no means confined to them, and has appeared spontaneously in other communities, as the revivals in Korea and the Congo show. Individual persons too have testified that they have spoken in tongues without ever having heard of others doing so, and often without recognising it for what it was. Thus Pastor Pethrus of Stockholm has told how he spoke in tongues in 1902, and as he quaintly puts it, 'I felt it was not right to be speaking in a language I did not know, and especially when speaking to God'. It was only four years later that he heard of others having the same experience.

The question has now to be put, Are these modern 'tongues' the same as those recorded in Scripture? For the period between the Apostolic age and the recent past we have no direct evidence, and can only reason by inference and analogy, but for the present time there is abundant material. We have to ask ourselves:

1. Are the tongues actual languages?
2. Are they under the control of the speakers?
3. Are their uses the same as those described in Scripture?
and perhaps
4. Are they susceptible of the same misuse as at Corinth?

¹ *Contra Haereses*, V. vi. 1.

² *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, V. vii.

First, are they languages? There is abundant evidence that they are. They possess all the characteristics of language. They are not formless, but have a homogeneous structure, with a definite system of syllabification and accentuation, generally quite different from those of the speakers' native tongue. Occasions when actual languages have been recognised are relatively few, but this is not surprising when we remember how many languages there are (1,200 in New Guinea alone); the chance of any person being present who would recognise a remote or obscure language is very small. Nevertheless, a large number of cases have been recorded where the languages spoken have been recognised. In some instances a person has heard the secrets of his own heart revealed in his own tongue, or in some other with which he was familiar. (Cf. 1 Cor. xiv. 25.) T. B. Barratt¹ recounts many instances where the language was recognised. Mr W. F. P. Burton, co-founder of the Congo Evangelistic Mission, says, 'I have heard ignorant natives again and again, speak in tongues which they did not know, but with which I myself was familiar, the wonderful works of God'.² Barratt tells of two Telugu women who were able to speak to Moslems in Hindustani, which they did not otherwise know.³ An American missionary was once cornered in a cannibal village in Africa where he had gone in an attempt to rescue one of his bearers who had been seized by the tribe, and was in imminent danger of sharing his fate, when the Spirit fell on him, and for an hour he addressed the people in their own tongue, at the end of which both he and the bearer were allowed to go free. Subsequently a Christian church was established there. Thulin gives a circumstantial account of the way by which a gentleman with the gift of tongues was able to assist some refugees passing through Sweden, who were in difficulties because they did not know the language; but such an instance is altogether exceptional, and perhaps unique.⁴

But even if we admit that actual languages are spoken on occasions, this is not sufficient to prove that languages are in question. Thulin quotes Andrae as distinguishing between glossolalia and xenolalia, the latter consisting of actual languages and the other not; but there seems no ground for any such assumption. To quote Alford again, 'On the question whether the speaking was *always* in a foreign tongue we have no data to guide us; it would seem that it *was*; but the conditions

¹ *In the Days of the Latter Rain* (Elim Publishing Co.).

² Tract, 'My Personal Experience of Receiving the Holy Spirit'.

³ Op. cit. pp. 87, 166.

⁴ *Den Kristne*, June 1923, p. 176.

would not *absolutely* exclude rhapsodical or unintelligible utterance. Only there is this objection to it; *clearly languages were spoken on this occasion* (the Day of Pentecost), and we have no reason to believe that there were two distinct kinds of the gift.¹ Alford is, of course, referring to the tongues spoken of in Scripture, but the argument is equally applicable to the tongues of today. And the idea of two different kinds of the gift is contrary to the accepted principle of avoiding the unnecessary multiplication of hypotheses.

Is the tongue always under the control of the speaker? Here it will make for clarity if we distinguish between the initial speaking with tongues and the continued exercise of the gift. When a person first receives the gift he may to a large extent be oblivious of his surroundings, but not always so. He is wholly occupied with the worship of God, and it may not be easy to say how far he is conscious of what he is doing, or whether there is an element of ecstasy. Many who thus speak may never speak in tongues again, but many, perhaps most, will continue to do so. Some may only be able to do so on special occasions, particularly during prayer, but others will be able to speak in tongues as and when they will. In all circumstances they are fully conscious of what they are doing, and have complete control of the gift. They can speak or be silent at will.

The circumstances in which the gift is employed are precisely the same as at Corinth. First and foremost comes the use in private worship. Many use the gift in private devotions who never exercise it in public; and it is when a person is engaged in worship, especially when this takes the form of praise or adoration, that the gift seems to come most naturally and spontaneously into action. St Paul says, 'He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself' (I Cor. xiv. 4). It is perhaps difficult, perhaps impossible, to put into words exactly how this comes about; but none who have ever experienced it can ever doubt it. It seems to lift the soul into the presence of God, whilst the conscious mind, for the time being at rest, falls into a state of tranquillity where it becomes receptive to the promptings of the Spirit. It can thus pave the way for real and intelligent worship and prayer. Lewi Pethrus says, 'I would like to say that during the last seventeen years this gift has brought me more blessing than I can express in words. This gift Paul depicts primarily as a means by which one edifies himself. It is, so far as I am concerned, a palpable and living experience, and I would not lose it for any price. By speaking in tongues, even though

¹ Op. cit.

one does not understand what he is saying, *the human spirit comes into a secret place of fellowship with God*, and one experiences in truth what Paul says, 'He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself.' Another has expressed it more briefly, 'It is a way of touching God'.

We may not be able to say how and why such a gift should be given for this purpose; but it may be perhaps that the conscious mind is apt to interpose its own limitations which the spirit desires to transcend, and so a mode of communication is provided whereby the conscious mind is bypassed. But it need not always end there. Paul also says, 'Let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful' (1 Cor. xiv. 14). Thus by interpretation that which has been spoken in the tongue may be imparted to the mind, which is able consciously to participate.

Some instances have already been cited to show that the tongue can be used as a sign to unbelievers. But there is a third use, and that is for the edification of the Church. But the tongue cannot do this alone, for it is unintelligible to those who hear it. Another gift is provided, the gift of interpretation, so that the meaning of the message may be conveyed, and then it becomes equivalent to prophecy. According to 1 Corinthians xiv, prophecy is to be preferred, but the very fact that there is a gift of interpretation at all is a proof that this use of the gift of tongues is intended. It is necessary to observe the regulations laid down by the Apostle, both for prophecy and tongues, lest the exercise of these gifts should run away with the meeting, or confusion follow rather than edification.

There is no need to doubt that the interpretations are, for the most part, real, that is, apart from the instances that occasionally occur when a person mistakenly thinks he has the interpretation. Apart from those instances, which from the nature of the case are rare, where the real language spoken is recognised, it often happens that two or more persons receive an identical interpretation, though only one gives it out.

Utterances of this kind are usually in the form of exhortation, containing warning or encouragement, and most often with an application to the present circumstances. Occasionally there is an exposition of some Scripture, and sometimes the message takes the form of a parable. Prediction of events is rare but not unknown.

Why this strange method of conveying a message should be employed when there is also a gift of prophecy it is not easy to say. But apart from the fact that prophecy demands a much deeper spiritual

insight, it may be that the double witness of tongues and interpretation may provide some safeguard against the very real possibility of the intervention of the human mind into a prophetic message.

The Nature of the Gift

From the circumstances that the gift was under the control of the speaker, it follows that the experience was *not ecstatic*. This does not mean that an utterance in tongues can never take place in a state of ecstasy; the Day of Pentecost may well have shown some degree of ecstatic movement; but this was not inherent in the gift. The important thing on the Day of Pentecost was not that the assembled company spoke in tongues, but that they were filled with the Holy Ghost, of which the speaking in tongues was only one of the consequences. Another consequence was that the onlookers said, 'These men are full of new wine'—a remark which is easy to comprehend if we remember the testimonies of men such as Finney, Wesley, and Moody; but this had nothing to do with the fact that they *were* speaking in tongues.

But the normal exercise of the gift of tongues, as at Corinth, was fully conscious. This point is seized upon by Jerome in his criticism of the Montanists, who claimed to possess the gift: 'The apostle commands that if, whilst some are prophesying, others receive a revelation, then those who were previously prophesying should hold their peace. And further: "For God is not", he says, "the author of confusion, but of peace". Whence it follows that when anyone lapses into silence and gives place to another to speak, he is able both to speak and be silent when he wishes. But he who speaks involuntarily, that if, in an ecstasy, has it in his power neither to speak nor to be silent.' Chrysostom remarks of the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost that 'they were not in an ecstasy, like the soothsayers, for they were not under the compulsion of any restraint' (Hom. iv in Acta Apost.). The gift is not ecstatic. Neither is it emotional. An emotional person speaking in tongues will show emotion, and a nervous person exhibit nervousness. The result may be an utterance in a strained or unnatural voice, perhaps rapid and high-pitched; or there may be other signs of emotion.

The normal utterance of tongues is perfectly spontaneous, easy and natural. It can be subdued to a whisper; indeed, it is not absolutely necessary that there should be any audible utterance at all. Thulin says, 'The

habitual glossolalia is not the result of a subjective attempt to produce it. For him who has the gift of speaking in tongues it is just as easy and natural to pass from Swedish to glossolalia when the Spirit comes, as it is to pass from Swedish to a foreign tongue that one may possess.¹ It is quite normal for a person engaged in worship to alternate between a tongue and his own language.

The gift operates most powerfully in a state of tranquillity.

If the gift really belongs to the realm of 'pneumatika', where Paul places it, we should not expect it to be susceptible to psychological investigation. The persons using the gift may be, that is another matter.

Pastor Lewi Pethrus, than whom none is in a better position to judge, says that after forty years of experience he has come to the conclusion that lack of control is no evidence of a person being filled with the Spirit, but rather a sign of inner conflict and lack of surrender, and that persons showing such lack of control are not those whose subsequent Christian experience is such as to commend them.² This accords with the views of John Wesley regarding certain physical manifestations in his day.

From Paul's words, 'The spirits of the prophets are subject unto the prophets', and 'Let the other judge', we infer that the utterance is not necessarily and at all times inspired. Mr Stafford Wright cites an instance he heard: 'the tongues were weird to listen to, and the interpretation that followed was pious, but innocuous.'³

It must be sadly admitted that this is no isolated case; utterances can be trivial and platitudinous. Not that the utterances are unscriptural or false, but they seem devoid of any valuable content. Mrs Oliphant cites some instances of this from the Irvingites; they do not impress, yet she is constrained to admit that 'there was a real something in the movement'.⁴ But when a real message is given, there is no doubt of its power and effect. One is conscious of the moving of the Spirit even before the interpretation is given, and the mind is alerted to wait for the interpretation.

Modern Views Regarding Tongues

The early Fathers, as we have seen, were unanimous in regarding the tongues as being languages. This consensus of opinion seems to us

¹ Op. cit. May 1953.

² *Speaking with Tongues, Historically and Psychologically considered*, p. 10.

³ *What is Man?* (Paternoster Press), p. 171.

⁴ *Life of Edward Irving*, vol. ii, p. 188.

important, and not lightly to be disregarded. Being closer to the time of the Apostolic age, they are likely to have preserved some tradition; and even if they had not, they at least show how they understood the meaning to be attached to the Scriptures.

But modern writers have been loth to accept this evidence. A stream of conjectures has flowed forth, mostly emanating from the German school of the nineteenth century. More recently, attempts have been made to apply the criteria of psychology; Cutten is an example of this. What we may call for convenience the 'German' view has been very trenchantly criticised by Alford, and by A. Robertson.¹

In dealing with these various views, we shall assume that, as we have been maintaining, the phenomena of the present day are identical in kind, both with those of Acts and 1 Corinthians, so that the same criteria will apply to all. But this view is by no means universally, or even commonly, accepted. There is a strange reluctance to accept the plain and natural meaning of the Scriptures. This one can perhaps understand, but not the extreme language in which this reluctance is sometimes expressed. There is a statement attributed by Cassels to Neander, but by Cutten to Meyer, 'The instantaneous bestowal of facility in a foreign language is neither logically possible nor psychologically and morally conceivable'; thus placing *a priori* arguments above actual evidence. Cutten himself says, 'it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a more useless gift'—strange language indeed concerning a gift for which St Paul thanks God, and which he attributes to the operation of the Spirit.

There are first those who are ready to admit that language is in question, but not that actual foreign languages are involved. But the prevailing view of modern commentators, generally advanced without a shred of evidence or any attempt at proof, is that tongues were inarticulate; a sort of meaningless gibberish, sometimes intermingled with a few real words. Thus the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines tongues as 'a faculty of abnormal and inarticulate utterance, under stress of religious excitement', and other national Encyclopaedias follow the same line. Thouless defines them as 'a stream of meaningless syllables, sometimes mixed with a few real words, poured out under the influence of intensive emotion'.² But Alford defines the word *aphonon* in 1 Corinthians xiv. 10 (A. V. 'without signification') as meaning 'inarticulate', so that in his view the tongues are not inarticulate.

¹ Op. cit.

² *Introduction to the Psychology of Religion.*

Those who hold this view have sometimes described how they imagine the sounds to be produced. Thus Eichhorn, Wiesscher, Meyer and others take the word *glossa* (tongue) in its literal sense of the physical organ, which is moved to produce involuntary sounds. This makes nonsense of the term *heterais glossais* (other tongues); a man cannot use a tongue other than his own. An attempt to get over this by suggesting that the 'other tongues' were the tongues of fire, makes no better sense.

J. B. Pratt attributes the phenomenon to 'the presence of an overpowering emotion in excess of ideas'.¹ He says, 'Under pressure of great excitement, one or more individuals begin to express their emotions by pouring out a broth of meaningless syllables, which they and those around them take to belong to some unknown language. This gibberish of syllables and new-made sounds is of course not invented on the spur of the moment. Try to talk nonsense for five minutes and you will see why. Some real words will now and then come out. Especially will this be the case with those who think they are speaking some language not their own, who happen to know a few words of another tongue. In the volley of meaningless sounds, they will be pretty sure to include specimens of whatever foreign tongue they know, and then a word of their own language. This being the case, it naturally happens that bystanders, who are thoroughly convinced that this collection of sounds really means something, and is inspired by the Holy Ghost, will recognise a word occasionally and interpret the meaning of the whole accordingly; and the interpretation is of course still more due to intonation, gestures and the general expression of emotion, and the conventional ideas uppermost in the meeting. All this is very ingenious; but the fact is that whilst a person consciously attempting to talk nonsense will almost certainly include some real words, the speaker in tongues never does; and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, there are no gestures either. In over forty years the writer has never heard anything in the least degree resembling what is here described. If it has ever occurred anywhere—which one may beg leave to doubt—it has nothing whatever to do with the gift of tongues. Wright well says "the simple emotions are expressed by sounds which can be comprehended. Laughter, crying, sobs, sighs, huzzas, the shrieks of frenzy and the groans of despair, are either identical in all languages, or at least require no interpretation."'²

¹ *The Religious Consciousness*, chap. lx, p. 183.

² *Some New Testament Problems*, p. 283.

Pratt further says of the events of the Day of Pentecost, 'It was a time of intense religious excitement and suggestibility'. There had been days of oppressive strain and waiting, and at last the floodgates of emotion were opened and a great revival occurred. Under the influence of this intense emotion, some of the individuals started expressing their new found joy, either in some real language which they knew, but which was not their own, or else in the same sort of meaningless syllables that are used by their imitators today. Jerusalem, it must be remembered, was a decidedly polyglot community, and nearly every individual in this first Christian revival knew a great many words of languages not his own. This seems a very inadequate explanation of the narrative, and overlooks the fact that those who first spoke in tongues were not a very polyglot community, being Galileans. Thulin remarks that when the Pentecostal movement first began to spread in Sweden, the cosmopolitan centres were relatively little affected compared with the rural areas where no one knew any language but his own.¹ Cutten's view is the same as Pratt's.²

Probably the most exhaustive study on the gift from a psychological standpoint is that of Cutten. It is impossible in the compass of the present paper to deal adequately with his arguments, but his general view can be made clear by a few quotations. He seeks to explain the whole phenomena on psychological grounds. 'As far as I know there is no case of speaking in strange tongues which has been strictly and scientifically investigated that cannot be explained by recognised psychological laws.'³ (It would be interesting to know something of these investigations, and the conditions in which they were undertaken). Again, 'When . . . speech continues after thought is exhausted, a series of meaningless syllables results'⁴—'The emotional energy generated by excitement tends to inhibit thought and to facilitate some primitive reaction which the circumstances suggest'—'A state of personal disintegration, in which the verbo-motor centres of the subject are obedient to semi-conscious impulses.'⁵ 'The phenomenon was ecstatic, and the result of the dominance of the lower brain centres under great excitement, which cause lack of self-control.'⁶

Cutten lists various steps in the production of tongues: (1) inarticulate sounds, (2) sounds which simulate words, (3) fabricated or

¹ *Den Kristne*, May 1953.

² *Op. cit.* and *Psychological Phenomena of Christianity*, chap. v, 'Glossolalia'.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 181.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 160.

⁶ *Psychological Phenomena of Christianity*, chap. v.

coined words, and (4) actual speaking of some words in a foreign tongue; 'but the tongue is always one with which the subject has come in contact, even if he can consciously speak no words in that language'.¹

Here he is touching on something to which he devotes some attention, which calls for a little more notice. After considering a theory of inherited memory, which he dismisses, 'because this explanation leads us into more difficulties than the original problem causes', he quotes Wright as saying, 'That whilst the explanation of inherited memory is not necessary, that of greatly exalted memory is, for the Apostles would have to remember the language heard incidentally on the market place or in the street, and reconstruct it into a message'.² But of this theory Cutten says very truly, that it seems 'beyond the range of probability, if not possibility, that exalted memory to such an extraordinary degree could become so common. The cases of exalted memory approaching this which have been carefully and scientifically examined so as to preclude imposture have been isolated cases, and very few in number.'

One can understand exalted memory, or hyperamnesia, resulting in the repetition of passages which had been overheard, or of a series of disjointed fragments; but it is impossible to conceive of the language being built up into something entirely new, such as 'declaring the wonderful works of God'.

Rust, quoted by Thulin,³ divides tongues into various categories and sub-categories, from explanations like 'Praise the Lord' and 'Amen' to actual languages, with intermediate stages. His grouping is: actual languages; tongues simulating languages, including artificial language, and the language of fantasy; and stammering tongues, either in the form of words or syllables.

The commentators almost without exception are handicapped by their lack of any first-hand knowledge, and are left to draw on their own imaginations. In doing this, they are often, unconsciously to themselves, arguing in circles. If their views are coloured by psychological presuppositions, they are apt to find it easy to discover a psychological explanation. They mostly agree that the phenomena arise in some way from the subconscious (they may be right), but they can give no adequate explanation of how they got there.

¹ *Speaking with Tongues*, p. 170.

² *Psychological Phenomena of Christianity*.

³ Hans Rust, *Das Zungenreden, eine Studie zur Kritischen Religionspsychologie*.

Another and more serious objection, already quoted, is that these theories involve the rejection in whole or in part of the Lucan narrative. Thus Cutten says, 'There seems to be no better solution than to follow Paul and exclude Luke's Pentecostal narrative';¹ whilst the writer in *Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Art. 'Charismata') goes further: 'The author of Acts could never have witnessed the phenomenon himself. It seems a very poor and far from scientific solution to offer an explanation which depends for its validity on a rejection of an essential part of the evidence, when the acceptance of all the evidence at its face value is sufficient to account for all the facts.'

In conformity with his view of the nature of tongues, it is not surprising that Cutten should say, 'Those who speak with tongues are almost without exception devout, but ignorant and illiterate people'.² Clark likewise: 'The congregation is composed of men and women from the lower walks of life.'³ This is fantastically wide of the mark: among those who speak in tongues are to be found men and women who have attained eminence in every sphere.

Equally untrue is Clark's statement that the gift is 'never a gift in solitude—the crowd is necessary'. There are far more who enjoy the gift in solitude than ever exercise it in public.

Simulated Tongues

Thus far, we have been considering only the actual speaking in tongues as recorded in Scripture, or as found amongst certain evangelical circles at the present day. But it would be foolish to contend that all that passes for tongues really is so in fact, though the exceptions may be, and almost certainly are, much less common than one might believe. It is impossible to deny the possibility that a sort of 'tongues' can be induced by suggestion or unconscious imitation; or even a process of auto-suggestion. We are not aware that this has ever been proved to have happened in any particular case, but we cannot altogether exclude the possibility.

Then there is the view of Olshausen, quoted by Alford,⁴ which we have not mentioned hitherto, that there is a sort of magnetic 'rapport' between speakers and hearers: something in the nature of thought transference. In rare instances something like this may have occurred,

¹ *Psychological Phenomena of Christianity*.

² *Speaking with Tongues*, p. 168.

³ Elmer T. Clark, *Small Sects in America* (1937), p. 119.

⁴ *Op. cit.*

but it cannot possibly apply as a general explanation, even if we consider such a theory as a deep level at which all minds are in contact.

Apart from what we may call simulated tongues, one occasionally finds a person whose 'tongue' consists of a repetition of a single sentence or phrase. How are we to account for this? Probably it is a fragment of what was originally a genuine tongue, that has remained in the sub-conscious memory, so that it comes readily to the surface again. It need not be regarded as at all spurious. This may occur more frequently than we recognise.

We were once informed that the Lestadians of Lapland, at their preaching meetings, often indulge in something resembling tongues. Our informant, a Lutheran priest, suggested that it was probably genuine in the first instance, but degenerated into an artificial imitation.

With similar phenomena said to occur among some pagans, Spiritists, Mormons and so forth this paper is not concerned: we have no information to enable us to decide whether, and how far, they are similar to the gift of tongues described in Scripture.

Conclusion

There are many questions connected with the gift of tongues still unsolved, and perhaps insoluble. Any approach to the question demands careful and prolonged observation, and hasty deductions should be avoided. But we would suggest that the normal and spontaneous or, if we dare use the term, inspirational use of the gift arises from a deep level, where the spirit of man is in touch with, or interpermeated by, the Spirit of God. It does not seem to be subject to the brain centre of speech control. A person who was temporarily deprived of the power of ordinary speech through concussion was still able to speak in tongues. Also, sounds can be uttered which the speaker cannot normally produce. Two missionaries who had had some linguistic training recently heard a tongue containing glottal stops and click sounds that were quite foreign to the speaker; and a person who had a congenital difficulty in sounding the letter 'l' had no such difficulty when speaking in tongues.

But the fact that the tongue can be used consciously and at will must also be taken into account. It would appear as though the conscious mind were able to plunge into the sub-conscious; but beyond that perhaps we cannot go.

In the writer's view, the Scriptures contain, either directly or by inference, all that is known or can be known about the gift; all beyond is speculation. But full weight must be given to the Scriptures and everything in them taken into account. Human theories and speculations that can only be maintained by rejecting or modifying some part of Scripture stand self-condemned.

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