

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE GIFTS OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES

本篇之作，乃因近幾年來原住民教會深受靈恩派之影響甚鉅，其中最受矚目的是方言運動的推展。尤其近年來有些原住民的教會，已過份強調方言之重要性，顯然與長老宗之信仰精神背道而馳。因此，藉著本篇研究使原住民教會能正確而合宜地使用方言，見證基督，榮耀上主。

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In recent years, the development of the charismatic movement spread from some Taial and Amis tribal churches to all of the Aboriginal Churches in Taiwan. One result was revival in many churches. The common characteristics or phenomena in this movement are an emphasis on baptism with or being filled with the Holy Spirit, an emphasis in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, healing, exorcism, and miracles, godly hysteria, prayer with crying and screaming, falling into trances, falling and jerking, holy laughter and dances. Because more and more pastors have become involved in this movement, many churches were involved in this movement.

Because those phenomena are quite different from practices in the Reformed tradition, confusion about them is inescapable. Because of these tensions, the result was often debates and splits within the church. But there is on doubt that the movement also caused church revival.

According to my own observation, most of those people who spoke in tongues did so after a very emotional prayer or after these groups pray for one particular person to exercise this gift. Moreover, most of time when they spoke in tongues, they lacked interpretation.

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues, glossolalia, is the most controversial and confusing aspect of the charismatic movement. Throughout the history of church no spiritual gift has occasioned as much continual controversy as the gift of tongues. The tongues' problem which occurred in the Corinthian Church also occurs among the charismatic believers in the Aboriginal Churches today. The critical issues and

resolutions will be discussed carefully.

A. Speaking in tongues is the evidence of being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

These believers believe that the gift of speaking in tongues is the clear evidence of being baptized by the Spirit.

Most Charismatic agree that glossolalia are the universal sign of being baptized by the spirit. However, they seem to go beyond them both in over evaluating them as a doctrinal aid and they expect that all Spirit baptized Christians will practice it regularly. Frederick D. Bruner deals with this problem at same length:

The gift of tongues is assigned special honor in the Pentecostal movement. This might be expected since the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit-the major Pentecostal phenomenon-is evidence, as we have seen, by speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues, whether understood as the crisis evidence or as a continuing gift of Spirit, occupies such a central place in Pentecostalism that it sometimes is known as the tongues movement.¹

Alasdair I. C. Heron also points out that:

They were distinctive especially in the place given the gifts of the Spirit, by the weight laid on baptism in the Spirit's second blessing manifested in glossolalia.²

Later he adds: "On which classical Pentecostalism laid such considerable weight. Speaking in tongues was treated there as the biblical evidence for baptism in the Spirit."³ Charismatic always wish to affirm, however, that they only stress the initial glossolaliaic evidence. Nevertheless, in the light of witness of Scripture, there can be no argument for this sign's being the only evidence of reception of the Spirit.

In answering this question I want to Propose two critical evaluations.

1. Is the gift of tongues truly evidence of being baptized by Spirit? What is the biblical evidence?

We have two answers to resolve in treating this question. First, there is no biblical teaching and evidence that speaking in tongues is the necessary evidence of being baptized by the Spirit. For example, (a) in First Corinthian 12:28-30 Paul avows that all do not speak in tongues. (b) There is no evidence that Jesus and his disciples, even some of the greatest believers, spoke in tongues when they were baptized by the Spirit. Therefore, whether you speak in tongues or not has nothing to do with holy,

¹ Fredereck Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, Reprinted 1987), p. 85.

² Alasdair I. C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), P. 130.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

heavenly baptism. The two are in no way connected: neither is one the evidence of the other. (c) There is no evidence either that speaking in tongues was a part of Jesus' experience or his disciples. Robert H. Culpepper points this out:

There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that Jesus spoke in tongues, and Mark 16:17 should not be used to say that he commanded it or expected it of his followers.⁴

He continues, saying:

We must oppose the extravagant, unbiblical claims of many contemporary glossolalists. When some of them suggest that if you do not speak in tongues, there is something wrong with your experience and you need the Holy Spirit, they go beyond the biblical evidence.⁵

John F. Walvoord has the same criticism:

Speaking in tongues is not inseparable from baptism of the Spirit. According to I Corinthians 12:13, every Christian is baptized by the Spirit, But it is obvious that all Christian is baptized by the Spirit, but it is obvious that all Christians do not speak in tongues. A necessary condition for baptism of the Spirit is one of many evils attending abuse of the Scriptural doctrine.⁶

I appreciate very much the principles concentrating gifts in the report to the 182nd General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America which says:

To insist that speaking in tongues is a necessary proof that one has been baptized by the Spirit is to overlook the clear statement of the apostle in I cor.12:13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (the church)".....It is unwarranted to teach that speaking in tongues is an indispensable sign of having received the Spirit.⁷

Merlin F. Unger points out that it would be an "error of connecting tongues as a sign or evidence with either the baptism of the Spirit or and the filling of the Spirit."⁸

Billy Graham, the famous evangelist, firmly says:

The gift of tongues is not necessarily a sign of the baptism of believer by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.....nowhere in the Bible do I find it said that the gift of tongues is a necessary evidence of being baptized with Holy Spirit.⁹

2. There is no biblical or historical evidence to support the idea that speaking in tongues is the proof of being of baptized in Spirit

⁴ Robert H. Culpepper, *Evaluating the Charismatic Movement: A theological and Biblical Appraisal* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1978), p. 86.

⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit at work Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), p.187.

⁷ Report of the Special Committee on the Work of the Holy Spirit to the 182nd General Assembly of the united Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New York: Office of the General Assembly, 1970), p. 46.

⁸ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Testament Teaching on Tongues* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), p. 150.

⁹ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit* (Waco Tex: Word Books, 1978), pp. 173-174.

In the years of my reading through Christian history and of my studying the lives of great servants of God, I have never once found an instance where a mighty hero of the faith spoke in unknown tongues. Preachers, missionaries, theologians, reformers, pioneers, all have come under review, but glossolalia is never a part of their lives. For example, in the case of Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich, Glossolalia is always outside the circle of the lives and experience of these great servants of God who lived in Christian history.

In the long history of the church, after the days of the apostles, wherever the phenomenon of glossolalia has never been accepted by the historical churches of Christendom. John F. Walvoord says:

This evidence seems to point to the conclusion that speaking in tongues is not a gift which can be expected to be exercised throughout the entire Church period.¹⁰

Therefore, it is obvious that there is no historical evidence to support the contention that speaking in tongues is the main evidence of being baptized by the Spirit. Billy Graham has the same viewpoint: “Some of the most Spirit filled Christians I have ever known had never experienced the gift of tongues, but they were no less filled with the Spirit.”¹¹

B. The so called in or of the Holy Spirit is not to be distinguished from regeneration or conversion.

These charismatic believers believe that baptism in the Spirit is an experience distinct from conversion which brings the fullness of the Spirit into the life of Christians and enables them to exercise certain gifts given by the Spirit.¹² This kind of belief has caused them to be baptized many times by their charismatic leaders. It has also led to the misunderstanding that they are more spiritual than other Christians when they have been baptized in the Spirit or when they have received the gift of speaking in tongues. The result is that it also caused divisions and two kinds of Christian levels, a top-class(spiritual) and a second class (non-filled with the Spirit).

1. Response concerning to the question of the baptism in the Spirit.

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, “The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*-Vol. 143(April-June 1986), p. 119.

¹¹ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, op, cit., p. 174.

¹² Concerning The teaching of Charismatic Movement, see Don Basham, *A Handbook on Holy Spirit Baptism* (Reading: Gateway Outreach, n.d), pp. 10-12. See also Anthony Hoekema, *Holy Spirit Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p.34.

I want to quote at length from the report of the Commission on Theology of the Reformed Church in America found in The Church Speaks:

Here is virtually no biblical support for the Neo-Pentecostal position on this matter. When the Scripture speaks of “the baptism in the Spirit” it refers to the overall work of the Spirit in the life of Christian community and the individual believer. The Spirit baptism should not be seen as a second work of the Holy Spirit which brings with it certain gifts. Holy Spirit baptism not only makes possible the gifts of the Spirit, but also faith and repentance, union with Christ and incorporation into his body, guidance for the work of the Church and boldness in witness, the fruit of the Spirit and the highest gifts _in short, “the baptism in the Holy Spirit”, is a metaphor describing the initial activity of the Holy Spirit among Christ’s People resulting in his continuing dynamic work in their midst. Every believer in Jesus Christ has been “baptized in the Holy Spirit”. Every Christian is eligible for every work and gift of the Holy Spirit.¹³

It is True that every one who has been converted and has been baptized in the name of the triune God is baptized into the body of Christ. It is unwarranted to teach that there are two stages of baptism. It is a once for all experience and does not require being baptized many times.

Concerning the so called baptism in the Spirit, “it is necessary to note that, the verb ”to baptize” is used in Scripture in connection with, the noun “baptize” is never used in the form “baptism of the Spirit”. The elaboration of the doctrine concerning the “baptism of the Spirit” seems to be a sectarian over interpretation, and to contrast it to baptism with water is contrary to the apostolic teaching that there is but one baptism.

We have two reasons why charismatic doctrine is incongruent with Scripture. First, the uniqueness of the disciple’s experience rules it out as a model for all later Christians. Second, this is not Luke’s interpretation of the event. He does not relate it to salvation, whether a first or second stage, but to service. Merrill F. Unger has taught us, “the baptism of the Spirit is not a second experience after salvation, but basic and inseparable element of salvation, since it is universal among God’s people in this age.”¹⁴

We can conclude that it is very clear that all believers have been baptized by the Spirit, not only charismatic ones. The baptism is no more repeated than is salvation, it is done and once for all.

2. They err in thinking that the baptism in the Spirit or the gift of speaking in tongues empowers them to be more spiritual than those who don’t have the so-called experience of baptism in the Spirit.

¹³ *The Church Speaks*, edited by James I. Cook, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 10.

¹⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Testament of Tongues*, op. cit., p. 83.

Their doctrine of the Spirit and baptism leads to the division of the church into first and second class Christians. Because of this some Christians have become disgusted with the institutional Church and have gone to other churches. I agree with Unger when he says: “Tongues today are a major source of divisions and misunderstandings in the Church.”¹⁵ This line of teaching is seriously against the apostolic teaching. We are all spiritual because we are all baptized in one Spirit (Eph. 4:4-6). Paul never treats glossolalia as an indication or any kind of higher spirituality.

John F. Walvoord criticizes this approach, saying: “...the gifts of speaking in tongues was no indication of spirituality. Of all the churches to whom Paul wrote, the Corinthian Church manifested the most carnality and gross sin, yet spoke in tongues....”¹⁶ W. A. Criswell makes the same point:

All that we have in the kingdom and patience of Jesus is given us by His gracious love. There is no room for personal boosting. The gifts are not bestowed as rewards. They are not an indication of spiritual excellence or superiority.¹⁷

Concerning the idea of two level Christians, Anthony A. Hoekema says:

How devastating this view of a two-level Christianity can be to the unity of the church. I am not charging Pentecostals with saying that a person cannot be saved without Spirit baptism, but I am observing that their theology leaves us with a great multitude of ordinary, garden-variety Christians, and a small group of elite Christians. How utterly untrue to Scripture.¹⁸

Therefore, we must beware of regarding this gift as the mark of per-spirituality.

3. Speaking in tongues needs the interpretation of tongues

It is very clear that many of these charismatic Christians speak known tongues in public. The nature of this speaking in tongues is soled praying in tongues. Most of them firmly believe that speaking tongues is the one way to prevent Satan from eavesdropping on their mysteries with God.

It is clear that Paul believes that speaking in tongues in public without an interpreter is an abuse of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Robert G. Gromacki warns us: Violation of these regulations would reveal that the phenomenon was not divine in origin.”¹⁹ Concerning this issue, Culpepper points out: “There seem to have been an almost endless number of tongues speakers, many of then speaking simultaneously

¹⁵ Merrill F. Unger, *Ibid.*, p. 83

¹⁶ John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit at work Today*, op.cit., p.187.

¹⁷ W.A. Criswell, *The Holy Spirit in Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), p.150-151.

¹⁸ Anthony A. Hoekema, *What About Tongue Speaking* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 119-120.

¹⁹ Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia N.J: Presbyterian and Reformed Company, 1974), p.129.

and without interpretation. The result was bedlam in the service of warship....”²⁰

Tongues have their value in private devotions, but not in a public service without interpretation. As Herman A. Hoyt observes: “ It is almost equivalent to say that speaking in tongues is practically worthless in public gatherings.”²¹

The idea that praying in tongues can stop Satan’s disturbance is an invented idea. There is no evidence in biblical teaching to support this notion. It is an error to maintain this kind of belief.

4. Concerning the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit

These Charismatic regard tongues speaking as the evidence of being baptized and filled with Spirit. However, some of the believers are trained and taught to learn how to speak in tongues. They repeat the word De De Da Da or Halilulah. After teaching a state of high emotion they then begin to speak unknown words.

I pointed out earlier that their manifestation of tongues is characterized by inarticulate sounds. There is much alliteration and repetition and many nonsense syllables. It is a serious error to force others to learn how to speak in tongues. It is dangerous if people think they can interfere with the authority and freedom of the Spirit. Every Christian has to remember that the Spirit of God is sovereignty free to work as he will, and that there is great diversity in the working of the Spirit.

Should we all have to speak in tongues? Certainly not, according to Paul’s teaching in I Corinthians 14:27-31. The inference here is that not all but a few of them would speak in tongues. Can we learn how to speak in tongues? This obviously contradicts Paul’s teaching. That is why we must take seriously Hoekema’s himself as an angel of light. “ For Satan often tries to imitate the genuine works of the spirit.”²²

How dangerous it is if we abused the gift and receive it by learning it from someone else and regard it as a personal. Remember that tongues today run the risk of inviting demonic deception and despoiling. There are three possibilities of the origin of tongues. Either glossolalia today is of the devil, or it is a genuine gift of the Spirit, or it is a phenomenon which, without being either primarily inspired by the devil by the Spirit, has been psychologically induced.

5. Ecstatic utterances

Charismatic believers are convinced that when the Spirit empowers them to

²⁰ Robert H. Culpepper, *Evaluating the Charismatic Movement: A theological and Biblical Appraisal* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1978), p. 86.

²¹ Herman A. Hoyt, “Speaking in Tongue” *Brethren Missionary Herald*, XXV(March, 1993), p. 157.

²² Anthony A. Hoekema, *What About Tongue Speaking*, op.cit., p.126.

speak in tongues, most of the time they lose their consciousness and self control and that this is not abnormal. Their hysteric piety includes jerking, screaming, rolling about, and holy laughing, holy dancing. Such ecstatic expressions have caused disorder or chaos in worship services. I agree with Watson E. Mills, when he points out that “glossolalia are a serious threat to orderly worship and Episcopal authority.”²³ I have shown instances here this practice has led to factionalism and divisiveness. According to the teaching of Paul, there are several regulations for tongues speaking.

First, Tongues should not be used in the assembly unless an interpreter is present (1Cor. 14:13-20). Tongues are primarily for private use (1Cor. 14:15).

Second, Tongues are declared to be a sign to unbelievers and are not intended primarily for the edification of believers (1Cor. 14: 23). Most of the believers who attend public services need not exercise the gift of tongues.

Third, Ecstatic utterances need not be uncontrolled or disorderly when the gift is exercised. Otherwise Paul would not command them to remain silent if there is an interpreter (1Cor.14: 28).

Fourth, Order is essential because God is not a “God of confusion but of peace”(1Cor.14: 33). He does not inspire chaos in the congregation. The Corinthians are urged to do everything decently and in order (1 Cor.14: 40).

Concerning ecstatic experiences, Paul Tillich has his own unique viewpoint. According to his opinion, he strongly emphasizes that there is no spiritual community without ecstasy, He says:

It is ecstasy, with all the characteristics of ecstasy; but it is an ecstasy united with faith, love, unity and universality, as the story elements show. In the light of the element of ecstasy in the Pentecost story, we must say that without ecstasy there is no spiritual community.²⁴

Tillich also shows agreement with Paul’s opposition to any situation in which ecstatic experience is separated from order or structure. Paul Tillich continues:

At the same time, Paul resists my tendency that would permit ecstasy to disrupt structure...and rejects ecstatic speaking in tongues if it produces chaos and disrupts the community....The church must prevent the confusion of ecstasy with chaos, and it must fight for structure.²⁵

It is clear that any gift which causes confusion or chaos will destroy the unity of the body and the witness of believers.

C. What are we to make of the Charismatic Movement ?

1. The Bible is the sole and only foundation and basis of our faith

²³ Watson E. Mills, *Speaking in Tongues-Let Us Talk About It* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1973), pp.

²⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. IV (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 151.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

It is undeniable that most of the charismatic believers in the Mountain Church lack a knowledge of the Bible. This is because their leaders come from people who do not have not sufficient biblical and theological training. They firmly believe that every word of their leader's is truly from the spirit. They are even afraid to examine their leaders word because they fear that then they will be resisting the Spirit.

The Bible is the final, absolute authority for our faith, Accordingly, it is a serious and dangerous thing if some one's word can be substituted for God's word. This leads to disastrous results. I hope that not only charismatic believers but also pastors and non-charismatic believers will humbly and carefully study the Bible and spend more time in studying the Bible. I. John Hesselink reminds us that "our norm and authority should not to be experience but the Word."²⁶

2. Deepening our understanding of Christian doctrine (theology) can also Help Prevent the abuse of the gifts

I once was insulted by a charismatic believer who cursed me and charged that theology is a human achievement and is not from the Bible. She continued to criticize me saying that the God which you Presbyterians worship is the God of the barbarians. It is hardly necessary to point out how superficial their doctrinal knowledge is. This certainly confirms Packer's criticism:

Charismatic theology by comparison looks loose, erratic and naïve, and the movement's tolerance of variations, particularly when those are backed by prophecies reviewed through player, suggests a commitment to given truth in scriptures that is altogether too fragile²⁷.

He also criticizes their theology as immature, even as children are:

But in any case, it can hardly be doubted that the immaturities of the charismatic vision of the Christian life can only be cured through a theological deepening that will result in an acuter self-awareness and self-criticism. It is to be hoped that such a deepening will soon come.²⁸

This is also my hope for the Mountain Church.

3. We need each other

It is true that charismatic believers have their shortcomings, but it is also true that they are not pagans, but brothers and sisters in Christ. I have an excellent constructive suggestion for both sides that Reformed-Presbyterians may be short on the experience of the reality, joy, and fullness of the Spirit. Pentecostals may be lacking in an

²⁶ John Hesselink, *On Being Reformed* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books, 1983), p. 84.

²⁷ John I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Old Tappan N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984), p.173.

²⁸ John I. Packer, *Ibid.*, pp. 185-191.

adequate biblical understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. If so, we need each other, and can complement each other. Coexistence, not a hot war or even a cold one would appear to me to be a logical and happy solution to our situation.

4. The danger of a spirit of Pride and selfish use of the gifts

Usually some of these so-called prophets earn money through their ministries and get involved in sexual problems. It is certainly a misunderstanding that they possess special authority from Spirit. We have to make sure that we are not the possessors of the gifts. The gifts are not our glory but for the glory of God.

CONCLUSION

A variety of Christian movements have taken place in our history. We acknowledge that each of these movements has usually had a good reforming and constructive function for the church. But at the same time these movements also frequently become radical and have various shortcomings. If the weak points are not discovered early and the radicalism is not checked, there are often disastrous results and the church suffers.

In evaluating the recent charismatic movement in the Mountain Church, certain positive aspects of the movement have been confirmed and identified. Our church has thereby been stimulated and strengthened.

I want to highlighted twelve positive aspects, which apply in many cases to our church: Christ centeredness, Spirit-empowered living, emotion finding expression, prayerfulness, joyfulness, every-heart involvement in the worship of God, every-member ministry in the body of Christ, missionary zeal, small-group ministry, a radical attitude toward the church structures, communal living, and generous giving. Unfortunately, however, the destructive results caused by the charismatic in Taiwan are also serious.

We certainly believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were poured out at Pentecost on the whole church and not just on isolated individuals. The Spirit gives his gifts as he wills to individual in the church members in order to build up the body of Christ for evangelism and service to the world. All the gifts given by the Holy Spirit are to be encouraged. They are not to be used selfishly, however, but for the good of the whole body and the glory of God.

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