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as⁴ 'I want you all to speak in tongues'

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"I Want You All to Speak in Tongues" (1 Cor 14, 5)

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THEY sit in a circle with heads bowed and hands folded: a group of priests, religious and lay people are gathered for charismatic prayer. One person comes forward and kneels down in the middle. The prayer-leader and others impose their hands on the person's head. They intercede for him. They invoke the Holy Spirit on him. The whole assembly joins in calling down the grace of His presence on the person concerned. This person rises and says a spontaneous prayer of thanks. All of a sudden his words may turn into an enthusiastic, but unintelligible succession of syllables: "Kadambarambalullapidam....", etc. What we are witnessing is a so-called "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" with its visible manifestation through the "gift of tongues".

There is nothing so refreshing in the Church today as the charismatic wind that is stirring our dried up bones. But some aspects of our new Catholic Pentecostalism give rise to both theoretical and practical questions. One of these questions concerns the revival of the gift of tongues. Let us be frank about it: for centuries this gift hardly existed in the Church, or, if it did exist, its presence was hardly noticed. Superficially speaking one would have the impression that the Church has done quite well without it. The majority of our canonized saints anyhow seem to have managed to live exemplary Christian lives without the practice of glossolalia.

What Is the "Gift of Tongues"

Before we proceed it may be good to give a more precise description of what we mean by the gift of tongues in this article. From a scrutiny of New Testament passages it is apparent that two different realities existed in the early Church. One we might call the "missionary" gift of tongues. It consists in the ability to proclaim the message of Christ in a foreign language without having had to study

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it. This gift was experienced on the first Pentecost itself when everyone was hearing the apostles speak in his own language (Acts 2, 11). It is probably meant in the promise of Mk 16, 17 that Christ's missionaries will "speak in new tongues". The other form of the gift of tongues is the spontaneous praise of God expressed in sounds and words unintelligible to the speaker himself. Modern charismatics express it by saying: "Strange syllables begin to tumble out of my mouth"; "Spontaneous sounds bubble up in me"; "I don't know how it happens, but somehow I start uttering a flow of new words". It is this second form of the gift of tongues that is being considered here.

What do modern charismatics say about the gift of tongues? All of them link it, in one way or other, to the "baptism of the Holy Spirit". Most of them consider the gift of tongues as a natural, if not the most natural, consequence of the "baptism". Many contend that every Christian who experienced the action of the Holy Spirit is able to pray in tongues. Robert C. Frost admits that the gift of tongues and the presence of the Spirit are not *necessarily* linked. Yet, the gift is meant for all.

Will everyone who is filled with the Holy Spirit always speak in tongues? . . . Following the pattern found in Holy Scriptures, one of the first signs that should follow our baptism in the Holy Spirit would be a tongue of praise. It is my conviction and experience in praying with hundreds of individuals that God always will follow this pattern when candidates are willing to simply respond in faith to the Spirit of praise. . . . God's Word declares and experience confirms that this meaningful manifestation (of the gift of tongues) is for all Spirit-baptized believers.¹

Stephen B. Clark takes the same stand. There may be people who have received the Spirit and yet do not speak in tongues. But the experience of tongues is the normal and first sign of His presence.

From experience I would say that a person is not fully in the Spirit unless he has yielded to this kind of prayer. . . . The scriptures do not say that every Christian must speak in tongues. But the implications of the Acts passages (Acts 2, 4:11; 10, 45-46; 19, 6) is that speaking in tongues is very common: perhaps the implications of 1 Corinthians 15, 5 is that it is for everyone, and my own personal experience is that it *can* be for everyone. . . . When people are well prepared and are prayed for with the laying on of hands, it is rare for them not to experience the Holy Spirit coming to them and it is rare for them not to speak in tongues.²

1. R. C. FROST, *Aglow with the Spirit*, Logos, New Jersey, 10th revised edition 1971, p. 67.

2. S. B. CLARK, *Baptized in the Spirit*, Dove, Pecos 1970, pp. 27, 40.

Should every Christian experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in a tangible and visible form? What is the place of such a "baptism of the Spirit" in our traditional Catholic belief and practice? Should we consider the gift of tongues a normal concomitant of the Spirit's action in us? These are some of the questions we have to deal with.

Baptism and the Holy Spirit

It may be good to reiterate the well known doctrinal truth that baptism can only be received once during a life time. In its discussion of the first centuries the Church ruled out re-baptism. A person is either baptised or he is not. The act of baptism is not repeatable. There can be no question of a series of baptisms in the strict sense of the term. When we study the Scriptures it is apparent that baptism is a definite event by which a non-Christian becomes a Christian. It has been such from the beginning of the Church. Although Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, he became a Christian after having been baptised by Ananias (Acts 22, 16). In his letters Paul often refers to baptism as such a definitive event which marks the transition to becoming a Christian (Rom 6, 3; Col 3, 27; Rom 8, 29). That the early Church looked on baptism as a ritual of initiation is also clear from the fact that baptism is taken to replace circumcision which had a similar function in Judaism.

One of the essential elements of Christian baptism is that it gives the Holy Spirit. Whereas John the Baptist only baptised with water, Christ baptised with water and the Holy Spirit (Mt 3, 11). The reception of the Holy Spirit is indeed the characteristic mark of a true Christian baptism. The Jewish believers in Ephesus who had been baptised with the baptism of John, but who had not received the Holy Spirit, were re-baptised by Paul in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19, 2-7). Christian baptism is a true baptism because it leads to the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament affirms this connection. Those baptised have been "sealed with the Holy Spirit" (Eph 1,13). The gift of the Holy Spirit is promised as a part of the saving action of baptism (Acts 2, 38). Being baptised simply means "being born again of water and the Holy Spirit (Jn 3, 3-5). Although we are baptised "in the name of Jesus" (Acts 8, 16), or in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28, 19), St Paul can also simply state that all of us were "baptised by one spirit into one body" (1 Cor 12, 13).

All this goes to show that according to New Testament theology the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and baptism are necessarily con-

nected. Baptism is not true in the Christian sense of the word if it does not give the Holy Spirit. In this sense a separate ritual by which the Holy Spirit is given in distinction from the sacramental rite would be out of place. However, the outpouring of the Spirit cannot be entirely identified with the sacrament itself. Cornelius and his family at Caesarea experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit before they had been baptised with water. In fact, it is this anomaly which moves Peter to brush aside whatever scruples he may have had about admitting uncircumcised Gentiles into the Church. "Can anyone forbid water for baptising these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have"? (Acts 10, 44-48). The question that arises is: if the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is an essential part of baptism, can it be separated in time from the washing of the water?

The question is also relevant on account of our practice of baptising persons as infants. It is clear that the full reception of the Holy Spirit requires a personal awareness of His work in us, a true experience of His presence (1 Jn 4, 13). But a small child of a few days old who cannot yet recognise his parents is equally incapable of experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit. It would seem natural therefore that the experiential reception of the Holy Spirit take place in later years when the person is mentally and emotionally mature enough to experience His presence.

The question is intimately connected with the sacrament of confirmation. In the earliest Christian practice baptism and confirmation were so closely intertwined that they were looked upon as two aspects of the one rite of initiation. Only gradually was confirmation separated from baptism and this under two influences: confirmation became more and more the exclusive task of the bishop; it was found pastorally undesirable to confer confirmation on infants. As a result the rite of initiation was split into two visible steps, baptism with water and confirmation with the laying on of hands.

Is Baptism a One-time Event?

In our thinking about the sacrament of baptism we have grown accustomed to focus attention so much on the ablution with water that other aspects of the sacrament may have been overlooked. There are many indications in Scripture, however, which justify the view that baptism, in spite of its pinpoint beginning through the sacramental ritual, should not be considered as a single act of God limited to that initial moment. In fact what we have seen about the emergence of a separate confirmation rite proves the possibility of a process of explicitation.

night, with the sprinkling of baptismal water on the congregation, is surely more than a mere dramatisation of a past event

Obviously, I do not want to deny that there *is* a once-for-all aspect about baptism. The point is that the "once-for-all-ness" of the sacramental ablution does not exclude the aspect of progressive sanctification also given in the sacrament. Confirmation itself may be considered a further (sacramental) explicitation of the graces given in baptism. The renewal of our baptismal vows is another form of explicitation. Within this framework the experiential awareness of the Holy Spirit may be looked upon as an "explicitation" of what had already been conferred by baptism and confirmation. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not another baptism distinct from the washing with water: rather it brings to fulfilment what was hidden in the sacrament. Baptism in the Spirit is a new reality, not in the sacramental sense, but in a psychological sense: by making us *feel* the Spirit who was already there.

Is the Gift of Tongues for All

The gift of tongues was recognized in the Early Church as one form in which the presence of the Spirit was felt. This is a historical fact. Theologically we may add that also today the gift of tongues *can* validly express an experience of the Spirit's action. But I doubt if we may go further than that. As far as I can judge, there is, not enough ground to maintain either that glossolalia is the *most privileged* or that it is a *universal* sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit. In some cases speaking in tongues may be an undesirable anachronism.

Let us begin with the sober exegetical observation that the whole of 1 Cor 14 is aimed at "reducing glossolalia to size". Of course, St Paul does not reject it altogether and, diplomatically, acknowledges its function. But his general assertion in the chapter is that speaking in tongues should not interfere with other, more important business in the Christian assembly (read esp. 1 Cor 14, 27-28). Even more telling is Paul's intention in 1 Cor 13: "If I speak in tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13, 1). His entire hymn on love was inserted to make his readers "desire the higher gifts" (1 Cor 12, 31). In other words: Paul thinks it would be harmful to overstress gifts such as the one of glossolalia. What matters is *love* and not the "speaking in tongues of men or of angels".

The Johannine writings are the most outspoken document of the Church's faith in the indwelling of the Spirit. Christ's words at the Last Supper (Jn 14-16) and John's first letter postulate an experiential

awareness of the Spirit. This awareness is always linked to the experience of love (Jn 14, 21; 1 Jn 4, 12), never (at least explicitly) to speaking in tongues.

From the point of view of comparative religion, speaking in tongues is just one phenomenon of mystical *possession*:

The essential factor in possession is the belief that a person has been invaded by a supernatural being and is thus temporarily beyond self-control, his ego being subordinated to that of the intruder.³

Forms of trance and possession are usually bound to well-defined cultural groups. It was natural in New Testament times that the experience of *possessing* the Holy Spirit found expression in forms of trance accepted in the Hellenistic world of those days. I am not hereby denying the validity of the experience itself. What I want to say is that the religious expression of it through glossolalia was an adaptation to contemporary culture. It seems to me quite unnecessary to infer from this that *possession* by the Holy Spirit should be felt and expressed by the secular-minded twentieth century citizen in the same way.

Paul accepted slavery as a social reality and admonished slaves to be obedient to their masters (Eph 6, 5-8; Col 3, 22-25). Does this mean we should introduce slavery into Christian society? Paul wanted men to uncover their heads while praying, but objected strongly to women doing the same (1 Cor 11, 4-6). Are we with our own rules of politeness bound by the same prescriptions? Paul recommends a little wine as being good for the stomach (1 Tim 5, 23). Should we listen more to that than to the advice of a contemporary doctor? Paul demanded Bishops should be husbands of one wife (Tit 1, 5-7; cf. 1 Cor 9, 5). Does this force the Church to give up celibacy in the case of Bishops? In other words: the fact that Paul discusses glossolalia, does not prove that speaking in tongues is a privileged expression of receiving the Holy Spirit, natural and almost essential for Christians of all times.

That every Christian should be aware of the action of the Holy Spirit is clear (cf. 1 Jn 4, 12). Such an experiential approach to our Christian commitment was sadly overlooked in the past. It certainly may be strengthened or even made present by a "baptism in the Holy Spirit". By opening our hearts to this experience we are actualizing what we already received in baptism and confirmation. But it would be wrong to postulate that the gift of tongues is a normal.

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3. I. M. LEWIS, *Ecstatic Religion, An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*, Penguin 1971, p. 65.

Priorities

The following priorities were selected for immediate execution all over the country:

- The biblical apostolate should become a mass movement. Therefore *Bible Associations* should be formed at the parish level.
 - The biblical apostolate remains too much the work of zealous individuals. *Coordination* should be fostered at the diocesan and regional levels by the constitution of active Bible Commissions.
 - A great means to unite all Christians in gratitude for God's Word is the celebration of an annual *Bible Sunday*. Such a celebration should be organised in every parish and institution. It will also be a special occasion to contribute generously for the spreading of the Good News through the Scriptures.
 - The Liturgy of the Word has no effect on the hearing Community unless the Scripture readings are proclaimed in a clear, meaningful and inspiring manner. Special care should be given to *train readers* for their important ministry.
 - The worship and life of the Church is being nourished by the Holy Scriptures. The *Bible should pervade all forms of prayer and devotion* and thus imbue the believing community with the powerful presence of the Spirit.
 - In view of the vast potentiality of Religious Sisters in our country and the effectiveness of their services, major superiors and local superiors of women religious are requested to set apart at least one or two sisters for the biblical apostolate.
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expression of this experience, valid for all persons and all times. Those who deny this should reflect on their own prejudiced reading of St Paul's letters: while giving such weight to his word in 1 Cor 14, 5, do they give equal stress to his request that women "should keep silent in the assembly" (1 Cor 14, 34)? Both seem anachronisms. What is not an anachronism is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of his presence through love.