

# Clarion



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*The historical event  
of the resurrection  
has been well attested  
and documented!*

## Inside this Issue

- *He Lives! The Reality of the Resurrection*
- *Comfort for Those Who are Sleeping*







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# He Lives! The Reality of the Resurrection

*To believe in the resurrection and to accept it as reality one needs to be delivered from the blinding strictures of the current limitations of sin and death and see the glorious work of our Saviour*

The idea of a dead body literally becoming alive again goes against all reason and common sense. It's simply impossible, says our secular society. And even some theologians agree. Rudolf Bultmann wrote: "The resurrection itself is not an event of past history." All we know is that the disciples came to believe in the resurrection (*Kerygma and Myth*, 42). In a sense such dim views of the reality of the resurrection are understandable, for who can comprehend this? And our risen Lord was sympathetic to this problem. After all, the resurrection simply does not fit into the worldview of a fallen creation. To believe in the resurrection and to accept it as reality one needs to be delivered from the blinding strictures of the current limitations of sin and death and see the glorious work of our Saviour.

It is instructive and encouraging to see how the Lord Jesus made the truth of the resurrection known to his disciples. He guided and accompanied them in such a way that they were enabled to become bold proclaimers of the reality of the resurrection. We today may be the beneficiaries.

## The end?

It is striking that on the morning of the resurrection, Christ did not immediately appear to his disciples. An earthquake and the appearance of an angel shocked the women who had come to the tomb into the realization that something great and wondrous had happened. Their thoughts needed to go beyond what is possible in a fallen creation. The angel announced that Christ is risen! The tomb is empty (Matt 28:1-8)!

Tell the disciples! But the disciples did not believe their testimony. It was so out of this world. It was simply unbelievable. The words of the women "seemed to them like nonsense" (Luke 24:11).

The risen Christ was patient. He did not yet appear to his disciples to remove all doubt. They first needed to fully realize that something out of this world had indeed happened. Their minds needed to be prepared for the confirmation of the resurrection. Peter and John ran to the empty tomb in the belief that the body had been stolen (John 20:2-4). When prepared for burial, the body of the Lord had been wrapped in linen which had been heavily treated with about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39-40). Linen so saturated with ointment would have retained its shape even if there was no body in it anymore. All the linen used would have formed one unit around the body of Jesus. When John saw the strips of linen, he did not bother to go inside the tomb for all seemed to be well. The linen was there and apparently appeared undisturbed. It seemed the body was still inside the wrappings.

Peter soon followed. He, however, barged right into the tomb and then made a remarkable discovery. "He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen" (John 20:6-7). What did this mean? Since the head cloth was separated from the rest, there was no more body – just an empty wrapping! What had happened? Clearly no robber had been involved. In that case the linen would have been torn and ripped. God in his sovereign





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wisdom made these disciples think beyond the point of death. John also entered the tomb. "He saw and believed" (John 20:8). The text does not specify what he believed. There is a beginning of seeing beyond the grave. The disciples did not yet "understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead" (John 20:9).

**Christ appears**

After the disciples left, Jesus appeared to Mary with the instruction that she tell the disciples (John 20:10-18). In this way the Lord continued to prepare the disciples for the full reality of his resurrection. And then, "on the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (John 20:19-20). The disciples now saw with their own eyes that their Master who had died on the cross was indeed alive. There was no mistaking who he was. The marks on his hands and side bore testimony to his identity as the crucified one. To these startled witnesses (cf. Luke 24:37), Christ commanded

**What's Inside**

As we celebrate the resurrection of Christ in our Easter issue, we begin with an editorial from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam. He writes about the reality of the resurrection and what this glorious news means for us today.

This issue contains the fourth part in a series by Dr. Wes Bredenhof on liturgical changes in the Christian Reformed Church. The final installment will appear in Issue 8.

Dr. James Visscher writes about baptism of the Holy Spirit and the importance of speaking in tongues as taught by the Pentecostal movement in his article entitled "The Spirit and Tongues." Are we missing out on something in the Canadian Reformed Church? What do we believe about speaking in tongues?

Issue 7 contains an Easter meditation in the Treasures New and Old column. You will also find the Education Matters in this issue.

Laura Veenendaal

his peace and joy filled their hearts. Yes, they could receive the true peace now that Christ's sacrifice had been made and accepted by God, the Father (Rom 4:25; 6:4; cf. John 14:27). This new reality led to their being commissioned.

## Commissioned apostles

Christ repeated the words: "Peace be with you!" The Lord Jesus had finished his earthly task – the true peace with God had been accomplished. Now the disciples must be witnesses to the Lord's finished work and the glorious reality of his resurrection. Christ therefore said: "'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21-22). The solemnity of the occasion is underlined by the Lord using the same language as he used of his Father commissioning him (John 17:18).

### *His resurrection means that our own glorious resurrection is assured*

For this apostolic mission they will need the Holy Spirit. Christ symbolically assured them that they would be so empowered. His command was a sure promise that the Spirit would be given. There are no obvious gifts of the Spirit as yet. The disciples were, for example, still frightened and continued to meet behind closed doors (John 21:26). But that would change on the day of Pentecost! Peter would loudly proclaim the resurrection (Acts 2:24-32)!

## He has risen!

The risen Christ had charged his apostles to proclaim the good news. They certainly did so. It formed the central message in Peter's preaching (Acts 4:8-12; 10:34-43) and all four gospels end with the resurrection. It was at the core of the message of the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 15:14). The risen Christ not only showed himself to his eleven disciples but also presented himself outside that circle (Luke 24:13-35). He even appeared to more than five hundred at a single occasion (1 Cor 15:6). In other words, the historical event of the resurrection has been well attested and documented! Not only was the tomb empty, but many were witnesses of seeing the risen Lord. There was to be no doubt about it. And so the proclamation of the resurrection shook the world. God and man can now be legally and in justice reconciled! The sacrifice for sin has been accepted!

This proclamation was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. It went against all reason and the harsh reality of ongoing burials. Even a disciple of Christ, Thomas, doubted, in spite of the fact that he had heard the testimony of the others who had seen him. When Christ appeared to him and he saw the physical evidence of the risen Lord, Thomas had to confess: "'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:28-29).

What a gift of God's grace to have the apostolic testimony in various written forms handed down to us in the Bible. These first hand authentic and inspired reports and proclamation constitute the apostolic foundation of the church (cf. Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14). What a blessing to believe the resurrection of Christ! It means being right with God (Rom 4:25) and being daily empowered by his resurrection power to a new life (Rom 6:5-11). His resurrection also means that our own glorious resurrection is assured. After all, our risen Lord is the first fruits and the first born from the dead (1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5). More will follow! As the Apostle Paul wrote the Philippians, we eagerly await our Saviour from heaven who "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil 3:21).

This is of enormous encouragement and comfort, also when a loved one dies in the Lord and a new grave is dug. Because of Christ's resurrection, the day of the resurrection to glory of all those who believed in him comes! What a glorious prospect!

*Christ has risen! Hallelujah!*

*He is our victorious head.*

*Sing his praises! Hallelujah!*

*Christ has risen from the dead.*

*He has conquered sin and Satan.*

*Where, O death is now your sting?*

*Jesus Christ alone is King!*

*Christ has risen! Hallelujah!*

*He is our victorious head.*

*Christ has risen from the dead.*

(Hymn 31, *Book of Praise*)

*It is not always easy to bring together the different accounts of the resurrection as relayed in the gospels. For an excellent discussion, see Jakob van Bruggen, Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History (1987) 275-287, 302.*







MATTHEW 13:52

# Comfort for Those Who are Sleeping



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*"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." (1 Thessalonians 4:14)*

Sleep is essential for a person's health and well-being. We spend almost a third of our lives sleeping, and most people would not consider it a waste of time. We are thankful if we are able to enjoy a good night's rest. It makes us anxious if we lie awake in bed and cannot get to sleep.

Several New Testament passages describe death as falling asleep. Prior to raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up" (John 11:11). The Apostle comforts the believers at Corinth by telling them, "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:16-20).

Similar words are spoken to the church at Thessalonica, "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thess 4:13-14).

Describing death as "falling asleep" provides God's people with tremendous encouragement and hope. We need not fear death any more than we fear going to sleep. Just as we say to our children: "Hope to see you in the morning!" so we bury our loved ones in the hope of a resurrection morning. Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and in him those who have fallen asleep have the assurance that their bodies will come forth from the grave. The trumpet will sound and the dead will wake up to hear the music of heaven.

When children say "good night" to their parents, they do not go off to bed afraid that either they or their parents might never wake up again. That's the way we are to view the death of our loved ones as well. We do not grieve as if we are without hope. Since Christ has been raised we can be sure that our loved ones will get the wake-up call. At God's appointed time, the alarm will go off. The "good morning" call will come when Jesus calls us to "rise and shine!" As the prophet announced, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you" (Isa 60:1).

Since our Lord Jesus Christ is already up from the grave, we can know with absolute certainty that those who have fallen asleep will rise again. He will call all his family to come to the table in the kingdom of his Father. Our bodies will be raised and reunited with our souls.

The gospel of Christ's resurrection should send a tingle down our spines and put a smile on our faces! When we are hurting and tears stain our faces; when our spouse, child, parent, grandparent, or friend lies lifeless in our arms; when we face our own mortality, let's not forget the gospel of the resurrection. As we gather around a hospital bed to pray with the sick and dying, when we comfort the afflicted, remember to speak about the gospel of the empty tomb. Those who have fallen asleep will wake up. They will rise to face the new day of eternity.

In God's time the realm of the dead will have to surrender the bodies of all those who have died in the Lord. Death cannot hold back any body from being raised. Unbelievers will go to the place of eternal doom, but the bodies of all believers will be raised to glory – freed from death and freed from the bondage of sin.

Christ is risen! One day our Lord Jesus will come again and he will call out to all who have fallen asleep, "Sleepers awake! Hear the wake-up call: the trumpet is sounding." The alarm clock of history is already set, and the ringtone for that final day is: "Sound the trumpet!"

As you get ready to go to bed tonight, remember to thank God for the gospel of Christ's resurrection, and have a good sleep!





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# Liturgical Change in the Christian Reformed Church (1964-1985) Part 4 of 5

In the 1970s, some in the CRC began pushing the boundaries of Reformed worship. In our last instalment we took note of the 1973 report of the Liturgical Committee which made some radical proposals, especially regarding the second service. While this report was not well received at Synod 1973, the tone was being set for further developments in the 1980s.

## Synod 1985 – Let's go dancing

Acting on a request of some local churches, the 1982 CRC Synod gave the Liturgical Committee a mandate to study liturgical dancing. Already in 1966, one can find experimentation with liturgical dancing at Calvin College. In 1969, a creative dance group participated in a chapel service at Calvin. In 1975, Donald Postema led a vesper service at Calvin Seminary in which he demonstrated how various arts (including liturgical dancing) could be incorporated into worship services. For a number of years before 1982, dancing as an art form was being taught at Calvin College and it appears that those teaching it had grand ambitions for its use in worship. There is also evidence of this a little bit later. In 1983, dance instructor Ellen Van't Hof appeared at an annual Ministers' Institute and gave a lecture and a demonstration.

Obviously the report at Synod 1985 did not fall out of the sky. This report had been mandated to investigate "the implications and feasibility of the implementation of liturgical dance in the worship services." By speaking of "feasibility," the mandate was already tipped in a positive direction. Throughout the report, liturgical dance was uncritically accepted. This is not surprising since this was already the conclusion of Synod 1982: "It is biblical and altogether fitting that

God's people use appropriate liturgical dance forms for the expression of their deep feelings of praise to their God."

The report presented to Synod 1985 began with a consideration of the CRC position on dancing in general, dealing with the historical developments. Synod 1982 had reversed a long trend of synodical decisions inveighing against dancing in general, this despite the fact that it had been taking place at Calvin for quite some time in various forms. As already noted, Synod 1982 came to a positive view of liturgical dancing, however this view was not without its detractors. Thus the committee had been mandated to investigate the matter further.

The report went on to discuss the terminology. At this point, the report also drew on 1968 with its dialogical emphasis: "Liturgy and worship shape the meeting between God and the congregation as a dialogue. The various elements in the worship service constitute this dialogue between God and his people." With that in mind, and following the positive approach of Synod 1982, the Liturgical Committee wanted to discuss the question, "Where is liturgical dance appropriate in our Reformed worship services?" Note the question carefully. The question is not *whether*, but *where*. The answer leads us back to dialogue: "Careful examination leads to the conclusion that, in the worship service, dance may function in two ways. It may stress the Word of God to man, or it may stress man's response to God." Under the overarching principle of dialogue, liturgical dancing can therefore have its place in a Reformed worship service. Moreover, liturgical dancing can take the place of just about any element in the worship service, except (quite notably) the sermon.

With that being determined, the report then turned to liturgical dancing in the Scriptures. It's remarkable that they did it at this point, after the determination was made that liturgical dancing may have a place. The impression is given that justification is being sought after the fact. Nearly all the references were to the Old Testament. The report asserted that, "This is not surprising, since the New Testament gives us only the very beginning of the New Testament church history. Apparently the Holy Spirit did not want to bind the church to certain models, customs, or orders of service." That last statement seemed out of place. It sounds like an afterthought intended to ward off criticism. Again we must ask whether this reasoning is sound. When we lay it out, the specious character becomes evident:

- The Old Testament tells us all about liturgical dancing
- The New Testament says next to nothing
- Therefore, the Holy Spirit does not want to bind us to certain models, customs or orders of service.

Again, this manner of reasoning is not confessionally Reformed. It reflects a departure away from the principle of worship found in the Three Forms of Unity.

We cannot discuss every Scripture passage brought forward in the report, nor is it possible to discuss all the historical evidence for and against liturgical dancing. What we should note here are the types of principles that were used. The main principle is dialogical. Dialogue is the one and only thing that matters in Christian liturgy. A corollary – though it remains unstated – is that the confessions have nothing to say on this matter. Another element in the discussion is an appeal to existing CRC practices which had previously been discouraged by synods, such as choirs. The unofficial practices came into the discussion and influenced the outcome. If we allow choirs, then why should we not allow liturgical dancing? As long as it fits into the "enduring structure" of dialogue, virtually anything is permissible in Christian worship.

Just like in 1973, the Liturgical Committee had the brakes put on by the CRC Synod in 1985. Classis Hamilton made an overture to reject the report on liturgical dancing. The reasoning of this overture was taken over by the synodical committee in its observations. There was hesitation in the synodical committee and that is reflected in this excerpt:

The report provides numerous biblical references to dancing which are said to point to a significant

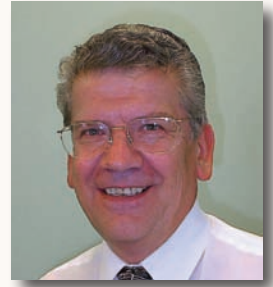
place for liturgical dance in worship. We note that many of these texts refer to processions or to spontaneous festive responses to God's saving acts. We question whether the committee has demonstrated a transition from festive dance to liturgical dance that warrants the conclusion that "liturgical dance has a significant place in Scripture."

The final decision of the Synod was to receive the report as information and refer it to the churches. Furthermore, the Synod decided to withhold action on any implementation of liturgical dancing in the churches. It is important to note that this decision was taken at a time of increasing turmoil in the CRC over the issue of women in office. It appears that the Synod wished to avoid provocations which would further fracture the church. One of the grounds for the decision on liturgical dancing reads, "This is in the best interest of promoting unity within our denomination at this time." While no positive decision was made, no judgment was issued on the matter either. As a consequence, Synod 1985 left the matter in the hands of local consistories, even if some question marks were placed behind it. The end result was that the doors were open not only for liturgical dancing in the CRC, but also for further liturgical changes.

*Next time: Conclusion.*







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# The Spirit and Tongues

## A new movement

Back in 1901 in San Francisco, California, a new movement arose in Christianity that has had a profound impact on many, many churches in the USA and around the world. It was in that year that Pentecostalism began with its insistence on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In other words, ordinary water baptism, received either as a child or as an adult, was not enough. It was just a first step. You needed to experience another baptism. You needed to be baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Now, what is that all about? Simply put, it's about a closer, bolder, and more enthusiastic walk with God. Sounds good! Who can argue with that? We can all make use of that!

But it's also about more. It's also about miracles, about prophecies, and perhaps more than anything else, it's about tongues. After an absence of almost 2000 years, tongues were said to be making a comeback – big time! Of course it was admitted that in the past tongues had been present among various heretical and fringe groups in the Christian church, but now it was going mainstream. We are told that for 2000 years the church had been sinning against God but now at the beginning of the twentieth century, a new era had dawned – the era of the latter rain, the era of the Spirit. Tongues are the proof!

## Missing out?

So where does this leave us? As Reformed believers we do not teach that you need to experience a second baptism, called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Neither do we insist that you need to strive and pray for the gift of speaking in tongues. Are we wrong in this? Are we in error? Are we missing out on something that is really very important and essential to the Christian life?

## Looking for answers

To answer these questions we need to go back to the Scriptures and especially to those parts of the Scriptures that deal with tongues. To what parts are we referring? The parts that you can find in the book of Acts and in Paul's first letter to the church of Corinth. Of particular importance in this regard is what the Apostle writes in chapter 14.

Well, what does Paul say there? In addition, what does the book of Acts tell us? Are modern Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals in step with the Apostle Paul and the book of Acts? Is it true that for almost 2,000 years the Christian church has either missed out on something very important or has purposely neglected it? What are we to make of these claims and what implication does all of this have for us as believers today?

## Places to look

In his first epistle to the church of Corinth, chapter 14, and even before this chapter, the Apostle Paul makes reference to speaking in tongues. In chapter 12 he writes about the various gifts given to the New Testament church and says: "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom ... to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues" (v. 8, 10). Later on in that same chapter he asks, "Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (v. 30) In chapter 13 Paul also makes a reference to tongues, saying, "Where there are tongues, they will be stilled" (v. 8).

Yet it is in chapter 14 that by far most of the references are to be found. Indeed, there are so many that we will not list them one by one, but refer you to that chapter as a whole.



## Surprise

Now, after reading all of these passages, we may decide to turn elsewhere in the New Testament looking for more references to tongues. Yet when we proceed to do just that we meet our first surprise. It is found in the fact that only in his letter to the church at Corinth does Paul mention tongues. In his letters to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Thessalonians, as well as to Timothy and Titus, Paul says nothing at all about them.

Is that not strange? Does this not raise all sorts of questions? If tongues are so essential, as Pentecostal believers claim, why is such a spiritual gift not mentioned more often and promoted vigorously by Paul? Why, for example, is it not included among the fruits of the Spirit or among the qualifications for being a pastor, elder, or deacon in the church of Jesus Christ?

## The book of Acts

But if Paul mentions tongues only in his first letter to Corinth and leaves us with some unanswered questions, there is another part of Scripture that gives prominence to the phenomenon of tongues as well, namely the book of Acts. Tongues are mentioned in chapter 2 in connection with Pentecost. In verse 4 and following we are told: "All of them (meaning all the disciples or the 120) were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. . . ."

It would appear that through the power of the Holy Spirit the believers began to speak in foreign languages that they had never learned, with the result that those who spoke those languages exclaimed "we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues" (Acts 2:11).

In addition to Acts 2, Luke also mentions it in Acts 10. There Peter has arrived in Caesarea and is meeting together with Cornelius, the Roman centurion, as well as with his relatives and friends. And then we are told that while Peter was speaking the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message and they began to speak in tongues.

Why did it happen then and there? The answer is in verse 45: "The circumcised believers who had come

with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." It would appear that the Spirit came and used tongues to show that the Gentiles were now part and parcel of the church.

But that is not all. For there is one more reference to the gift of tongues in the book of Acts, and you can find it in chapter 19:6. "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

Apparently these twelve men had been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist and had not even heard about the Holy Spirit. In other words, they had missed out on Pentecost! As a result, Paul proceeds to fill in the blanks. They believe what they are told about Jesus, are baptized, and the Holy Spirit comes to them as well in terms of tongues and prophecies. In this way they too may know that they are part and parcel of the Christian church.

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*Are we missing out on something that is really very important and essential to the Christian life?*

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So, when we sum up what happens in the book of Acts, we have three clear references to tongues in the book of Acts. On three occasions the Spirit causes believers to speak in tongues.

## The meaning of tongues

Yet having noticed this, we also need to ask, "What is meant by tongues? What precisely are they?" The answer that the book of Acts gives us is that all of these references have to do with the Spirit enabling believers to speak real, actual, known, human languages, languages that they had never learned or been taught. In Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Ephesus, the Spirit gave the believers this special miraculous ability in order that people from other lands might hear and learn about "the wonders of God" (Acts 2:11) in their own tongues.

## Disagreement

Nevertheless, it is here that we are greeted with another surprise, for when we now turn to the writings of Pentecostal scholars and commentators, we see that

they cannot decide among themselves as to whether or not what happened in Acts and what Paul refers to in Corinth are one and the same thing.

Some of them insist that what happens in Acts and what Paul is referring to in his letter to Corinth is exactly the same phenomenon. Most others, however, disagree. They insist that what happened in Corinth was different. It was a different kind of tongue. They have even given it a certain name: "glossolalia" (speaking in verbal patterns that cannot be identified with any human language).

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## *Prophecy has to do with communicating God's Word and will to his people*

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And so they allege, in the book of Acts believers are speaking unlearned, human languages; whereas in the letter to Corinth, they are speaking an unlearned, unique, and unheard of Holy Spirit language. In this regard, some speak about the Corinthians being carried away by "ecstatic utterances."

### **Evaluating**

What are we to make of this assertion? Are "tongues" a reference to real, actual human languages? Or does the word "tongues" denote some sort of special and unusual Holy Spirit language? What are they?

While recognizing that there are differences between Acts and 1 Corinthians in terms of the usage, purpose, and circumstances of tongues, it has to be said that the burden of proof lies with those who say that the Corinthian tongues are fundamentally different. If all the references in Acts come first in time and are said to refer to real human languages, on what basis is it any different in 1 Corinthians 14? If, as well, the Greek terms used are the same in both places, on what basis can anyone assert that the Corinthian situation was different?

So, what are these tongues that Luke describes in the book of Acts and that Paul refers to in his first letter to Corinth? They are a reference to the fact that the Holy Spirit empowered believers to speak in real human languages, languages that these believers never knew before and had never learned. Instantly and miraculously, they receive power from on high in order that the great deeds of God might be proclaimed in many tongues and among many people.

### **The abuse and limitations of tongues**

And that, we need to admit, was quite the gift! In a way it is no wonder that the Corinthians zeroed in on it and put a lot of stock in it. As a matter of fact, the Corinthians seemed to have developed a hierarchy of spiritual gifts and, as far as many of them were concerned, tongue speaking was number 1. Those who spoke in tongues soon prided themselves on their spiritual superiority.

Here then we also have the case of a spiritual gift going to people's heads and inflating their egos. It is for this reason that Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 13, "If I speak in the tongue of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." Tongues? The Apostle says – fine! But then, tongues need to be used in humility and spoken in love!

Nevertheless, that is not all. For all through this next chapter of 1 Corinthians 14 Paul makes another important point. It is not so much about love, as it is about the nature of tongues. Indeed, he states that while tongues have their place in the church, they also have their limitations. In particular, they have their limitations when it comes to the area of understanding.

- Read v. 2 – "For everyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit."
- Read v. 5 – "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but. . ."
- Read v. 6 – "Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you. . .?"
- Read. v. 11, 12 – "If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. So it is with you."
- Read v. 14 – "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful."

### **A problem here**

Do you grasp what Paul is saying? He is saying that there is a problem with tongues. Suppose that you were in a church meeting and all of a sudden someone stood up and gave a speech in Swahili. Now, that would be interesting, even neat, perhaps a bit boastful too. But beyond that, what would it do? The audience would hear foreign sounds but no more. To them it would be nothing more than gibberish, noise, sounds, and vocalizations. God would know what that person is saying, as well as any and all Swahili speakers who



happened along, but everyone else would be in the dark. It might be an impressive display, but at bottom it would be a totally unfruitful exercise.

Now, that is also what Paul is getting at when he refers to flutes, harps, and trumpets in the verses 7 and 8 of 1 Corinthians 14. Hand one of those instruments to a person who reads no musical notes and does not know how to play, and what do you get? You get noise! Not notes, not music – noise – ear-splitting, headache-causing, nerve-grating noise!

### **The need for an interpreter**

So, is there a solution to all of this? Yes, there is, and Paul says that it is to be found in an interpreter. Turn to 1 Corinthians 14:13, “For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.” Later in verse 27 he adds, “If anyone speaks in a tongue, two – or at the most three – should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.”

Surely, the point could not be any clearer. Paul is saying that if the Corinthians want to speak publicly in tongues, fine, but they should only do so if there is someone present who can interpret. If there is no interpreter present, he should keep his tongues private – between himself and God.

In short, then, the public use of tongues requires the presence of an interpreter. Without one, silence is better. As Paul remarks, “In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (v. 19).

### **Something better than tongues**

But then, if the Apostle Paul sees a place for tongues in the church of his day, he also makes it clear that there is something which is far better. What is better than tongues?

It is something called “prophecy.” In 14:1 Paul states, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” Thereafter, he proceeds time and time again to tell us why prophecy is superior to tongues. In verse 3 he says that “everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” In verse 4 he says, “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.” In verse 5 he adds, “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies

is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.”

### **The superiority of prophecy**

In all of this it is plain that Paul is making a case for the superiority of prophecy over tongues. He knows, of course, that the Corinthians are in love with tongues. Tongues are mysterious! Tongues are exciting! Tongues are intoxicating! Tongues are dramatic! On the other hand, prophecy is much more plain and down to earth.

For what is prophecy? What does Paul mean with prophecy? Many of us hear that word and we immediately think that it has to do with predicting future events. In connection with it, we think of Agabus (Acts 21:10), who predicted both a famine in Jerusalem and the imprisonment of Paul.

Still, prophecy is so much more than mere prediction. Prophecy has to do with communicating God’s word and will to his people. Prophecy has to do with encouraging, instructing, guiding, teaching, warning, and edifying God’s people. Indeed, at its very heart and centre prophecy is all about Jesus Christ. Do all the Scriptures not testify about him? Do all the Scriptures not find their fulfillment in him? Do all the Scriptures not point to him?

### *We have the rich and abiding Word of God*

So why is prophecy greater? You can say that it surpasses tongues because it has immediate, obvious, and comprehensible content or substance. It is filled with meaning and instruction. It has to do with understanding.

### **A tug of war**

Tongues, on the other hand, are more about experience and feelings. You see there is a tug of war going on here in 1 Corinthians 14. It is a contest between what will triumph in the church. Will it be feeling or will it be understanding? Paul pleads eloquently for the latter.

And this is something that should get us thinking too. We live in a day and an age where we are constantly being told that true religion is not so much a matter of what you know or understand or comprehend. No, it’s about feelings. It’s about religious experience.

It's about our emotions. People are much quicker to say "I feel. . ." than to say "I believe. . ." Emotion is much more appreciated than confession.

Yet Paul warns us here about all of that. It is not so that he sees no place for emotion and feelings as expressed in tongues, but it is rather that he sees much more profit in understanding and prophecy. Remember: five intelligible words to instruct others carry much more weight than ten thousand words in a tongue (v. 19).

### Remember this

Perhaps this is also the thing that we need to remember in this whole controversy about tongues. Those who insist today that you and I need to speak in tongues often fail to take what Paul writes here seriously and apply it. They ignore the superiority of prophecy. They ignore the requirement of an interpreter being present.

In addition, they are divided among themselves as to what it is that really constitutes a tongue: is it a matter of real language or a matter of a special Holy Spirit language? Just what is it? How can you insist on something and turn it into the test of being truly spiritual when you are not even agreed among yourselves as to what it is that you are insisting upon?

The Spirit gave the gift of tongues in terms of real languages to the church long ago. He gave it in a time when the Scriptures were still in process. The Old

Testament was present but the New Testament was in formation. In such a time the church needed special help. It received it too in many ways, also by means of the temporary gift of enabling believers to preach the gospel in languages they had never learned.

### The gift today

Does he still give this gift today? If 2000 years of church history is any indication, then the answer is "No!" If the confusing message that we get today about the nature of tongues is any indication, as well as the fact that so many Pentecostals now insist that it is Holy Spirit language, then the answer is "No!" If we add up all of the dubious tales, the testimonies, the experiences that we hear about, and weigh them carefully, then the answer is "No!"

Is that sad? Is that distressing? No, for we have a much more abiding gift in the church today. We have the results of the gift of prophecy in the rich and abiding Word of God. We have the testimony of Jesus in written form and we have the Spirit who takes that testimony and still edifies the church with it today. Ponder the majestic opening words of the letter of the Hebrews, "In the past God spoke to our forefather through the prophets in many and various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. . ." (1:1, 2).

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# The Medium is the Message: Speaking with Grace

(Based on a speech at the Fall Convention of the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association in October 2011)

We don't often think about language as language. It's something that comes naturally to most of us, something that we use to get the job of communication done. When we do stop to think about language, we quickly realize that it is not merely a tool that we pick up and put down as the task requires: language seems to be deeply embedded in who we are as human beings, from the earliest responses to our mother's voice to the last words breathed to our loved ones. People who study language have all sorts of explanations for why this is so, from the purely naturalistic to the more humanistic. But there may also be a biblical explanation for why language is important to who we are as human beings, an explanation that should make us all think about language carefully--especially teachers.

We begin with the biblical doctrine of man being made in the *image of God*. The Heidelberg Catechism highlights righteousness and holiness, right knowledge, hearty love, and desire to live to God's glory as the characteristics by which Adam and Eve are images of the Creator (LD 6). If you were to ask the question in a different context, you could add rationality, dominion, and creativity to this list. A number of evangelical scholars would make the case that the human *capacity for relationship* is perhaps the most important way by which we reflect the image of the triune God. Anthony Thiselton, for instance, notes that "differentiality and relationship" describe the diversity and unity of God – three persons, one God. It's not surprising, then, that creatures who are made in the image of the triune God are relational and covenantal in their very being, made with the capacity to enter into covenantal relationship with God and with one another. Right at the beginning, God graciously established a relationship with Adam and Eve; and right at the beginning, Adam and Eve form a relationship as man and wife, a creational ordinance of differentiality and relationality.<sup>1</sup>

Then we note in Scripture that the covenantal character of the triune God and of human beings as his image-bearers finds its expression *in language*. In speaking the words of creation, God speaks in the fellowship of his tri-oneness: "And God said, Let us make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness." This "language" of the triune God may be metaphorical, in the sense that it stands for communication among the three persons of the Godhead rather than a literal speaking with words. In fact, some view the role of language in the creation of the world as an example of Scripture accommodating itself to human limitations. Nevertheless, the prominence of language in the opening chapters of the Bible would indicate that language is not merely metaphorical here: God speaks creation into existence; Adam names the animals; God speaks with Adam in the garden and then calls Adam and Eve after their fall. That language is the means by which God establishes his relationship creation is not accidental or incidental: it is the historical means by which God in time and space fulfills his eternal decree. Language then is not just a thing that we use; it is an expression of being created in the image of God, with the capacity for relationship and communication.

Having established that language is basic to being human, we can also see that language itself is structured to function in a covenantal manner. Almost all theories of language agree that language is inter-personal, social, and communal; there is no language without other human beings. Some theorists believe that language is internally structured for communication, whereas others believe that language is a merely "social construct" that human beings have developed over time. The covenantal model likewise approaches language as inherently relational but as a system of *promise and obligation*. Every time we engage in verbal communication, we are operating on the basis of trust: the speaker promises the truth-value of the words spoken, which the listener is obligated to receive in trust. In this way, a conversation between equals is a mutual exchange, going back and forth,

between offerings of trust and receiving in trust. Human beings are not only covenantal by nature; their language is also structurally and functionally covenantal.<sup>2</sup>

We speak of Reformed education as being covenantal in the sense that education is the responsibility of parents who have promised to nurture their child in the fear of the LORD, and that the covenant community is one of the means by which parents fulfill this vow. The teacher's relationship with the children in the classroom is therefore one of a fellow member of God's covenant, both recipients of the covenantal promises and obligations. At the same time, the fifth commandment places the teacher above the children in a position of authority. This gives the teacher's language a certain power that a Postmodernist view of education would view with some suspicion, even when such power is wielded responsibly and ethically. In the covenantal model, the teacher uses language to reflect a relationship of promise and obligation, giving and receiving, opportunity and responsibility.

To teach covenantally is to present the blessings of knowing God, positively in leading the students into knowledge of his world and negatively in speaking words of punishment as the consequence of not honouring God through learning. The teacher's language is offered in love of the truth and of the student, in a manner so as to elicit a faithful response. Then language in covenantal education isn't merely about doing something with words or simply relating with the students; it's about calling the child, the teenager, or the college-aged student to respond to God's goodness in his Word and world. That's why language in covenantal education is always a matter of the heart – both the heart of the teacher and the heart of the student. Then the medium of language is itself the message of grace.

Think about it: language is the means by which God created the universe and thereby he entered into a faithful covenant with all that he made; language is the means by which he promised redemption to Adam and Eve after the fall; language is the means by which God created an elect nation, a chosen people, speaking words of promise to Abram and his descendants, speaking words of promise to Moses at the burning bush by his covenant Name, but also speaking words of covenant obligation to the people of Israel at Sinai, calling his people out of their apostasy through the prophets. When we recognize that the Word that is "in the beginning, that was with God and that was God. . . was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14), and when we recognize that this Word-made-flesh poured

his Spirit upon the church at Pentecost, then we see just how much the goodness of God is expressed as language and not only *through* language.

But, despite this recognition, language is sadly not always a means of grace. Every instance of bullying is a denial of the covenantal structure and direction of language use. Teachers, too, can fall into the sin of verbal abuse, publically in the classroom or privately outside the classroom. When language is not a medium of grace for teachers and students, then Satan is at work, disfiguring the image of God in us by turning the relationship of language into an abuse of power. The image that we reflect when we turn a covenant relationship of grace into a corrupted relationship of control is not that of the triune God but of Satan: "You belong to your father, the devil. . . who does not hold the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. . ." (John 8:42-47). When we see language as being structured like a covenant, then we also see that Satan's native language is a distortion of such relationship. To lie is to establish a false relationship between or among things; to break trust by falsehood; to abuse power through speech; and to destroy another by words, thereby turning the good inherent in relationships allowed by language into evil.

On the other hand, when we view language from a covenantal perspective, we may see it as the gift that it is: conveying knowledge, encouraging learning, fostering community, establishing order, delighting in beauty, practicing accountability, engendering discipleship, and eliciting faithfulness. With a renewed appreciation that God's grace can be experienced in the very medium – language – of his dealings with his creation and his chosen people, we can be agents of his covenantal goodness in any context.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Thistelton, "Being Human: Image of God, Relationality with Others, and Bodily and Temporal Life," *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 223-256.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, "From speech acts to Scripture acts: the covenant of discourse and the discourse of the covenant," *After Pentecost: Philosophy and Theology of Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 1-49.

