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TWO SIGNIFICANT BOOKS

G. J. POLKINGHORNE

SPEAKING WITH TONGUES *by* G. B. CUTTEN

Most authorities mention Cutten's historical and psychological study of speaking with tongues, published at Yale, U.S.A., in 1927 and now out-of-print, but still containing useful information and insights. Cutten is frank in stating his own view of the matter: tongue-speaking is a useless gift; it is inimical to true religion, by substituting an abnormal psychological experience for a changed life; and its Gospel foundation is textually suspect—Mk. 16.

However, he presents his evidence admirably. Whereas at Pentecost, recognisable languages were spoken, in Corinthians, the prototype of modern glossolalia, the speech was gibberish and the interpretation purely charismatic. Accordingly, Paul insists that tongues are primarily for use in private worship, to address God, not man. If used in public, decency, order and interpretation are imperative. His faint praise amounts to damnation! The Church Fathers are significant for the paucity of their mention of tongues and for Chrysostom's statement that tongues had ceased in his times. The Middle Ages have plenty of legendary material, but Cutten shows in the case of St. Francis Xavier how little fire there is beneath most of the smoke. Several later instances are reported at length—the Cevennes Prophets, Edward Irving, and the Mormons, together with two non-religious examples, those of Helene Smith and Albert Baron. Some twentieth century instances are given, and Cutten tried hard without success to verify claims that a known language had been spoken by a person ignorant of it.

When considering psychological explanations, Cutten states that in the development of man, speech came first and rational thought much later, so that tongue speaking, being speech without rational thought, is a reversion to the primitive. He cites in support of this theory that tongue speaking occurs under the pressure of excitement, which over-powers rationality; and is largely confined to lower intelligences and to the illiterate—statements not unlikely to be challenged!

Hypnosis is not an acceptable explanation, in the absence of rapport with another person. More probable diagnoses are ecstasy, catalepsy and hysteria, and he notes that the latter is most common in women, who are the most numerous tongue-speakers. Whichever is preferred, he sees glossolalia as a personal disintegration, with the verbo-motive centres subject to subconscious impulses, and as a childish reaction (cf. I Cor. 14: 20) particularly when pride in the gift creeps in. If conversion is to be valid, the phase of disorganisation (sorrow for sin etc.) should be succeeded

by a superior reorganisation (newness of life), but the automatic actions of glossolalia militate against this. Psychic contagion in Pentecostal meetings may account for the spread of the practices therein.

In contrast then to the frequently-heard claim that tongue-speaking advances true spirituality, we see here solid reason to expect that it will prove a stumbling-block to progress.

SPEAKING WITH TONGUES: An Experiment in Spiritual Experience, by MORTON T. KELSEY, (Epworth, 1964. 17/6d.)

The Americans occasionally launch a space rocket into orbit with great gusto, only to let it fall unceremoniously into the frigid Atlantic. Similarly, this book gets off the ground with pulsating enthusiasm for tongues; orbits through a New Testament, a Church History and an American scene resplendent with the practice, but ends with an apparently unintended ducking in cold water. The author is an Episcopalian clergyman in the U.S.A. Plainly, he is not an evangelical, as he believes that 'quiet regular attendance at Church services' is sufficient for godliness and dislikes the idea that 'unless there is conscious contact with God . . . the sacraments and services of the Church have no validity'. To him, 'revival techniques which emphasise guilt and sin and conscious conversion' seem liable to produce mental breakdown. Moreover, his views on Biblical inspiration are somewhat suspect (cf. p. 228). In more than one passage, it is difficult to see how Jung's 'collective unconscious' is distinguished from God—cf. p. 213 'God (or some archetypal element of the collective unconscious)'. The impression conveyed is of a man more concerned with psychology than theology, excited by religious behaviour which breaks away from the hum-drum routine of liturgy.

The launching consists in a personal testimony of a friend who spoke in tongues, followed by a sketch of the Biblical evidence, unsatisfactory for its failure to classify the texts and for its citation of many dubious passages, where tongues must be read into the text—e.g. Gal. 4: 6. A potted Church History follows, wherein the paucity of data is amplified by identifying prophecy with glossolalia, an unhappy contrast with Cutten's more objective treatment of the sources. A strange preference for the Eastern Orthodox Church is expressed, based on wholly inadequate proof of tongue-speaking amongst its members. More useful is the account of the development of American Pentecostalism and of its influence on members of other denominations, devoted to the thesis that two million American Pentecostals cannot be wrong.

The orbit continues with assessments of various explanations of tongue speaking. Rejected suggestions include emotionalism and any association with unbalanced mental states and demonism. Despite his later psychological statements, he refuses to recognise any similarity between Christian glossolalia and cognate phenomena in other faiths,

Hebrew or Greek. No more palatable is the idea that it is an initiatory sign, comparable to the scaffolding on a building.

A digression into philosophy discusses the contrasted world-views of Plato and Aristotle, with a strong preference for the element of irrationality in the former. Thus, he can accept that tongue-speaking is an irrational practice and yet need not be refused. A flaw in the rocket mechanism appears momentarily when it is stated on p. 208 that 'tongue speaking is dangerous for the weak ego and should never be forced on anyone', though earlier some space was devoted to descriptions of techniques for inducing tongue speaking and later its psycho-therapeutic value is asserted.

Of psychological explanations rejected are those of hysteria, exalted memory, and suggestion, hypnotic or otherwise. A similarity to dreams and visions is recognised. Here, the claim is made that many persons have been changed for the better by the experience of tongues, by virtue of a 'new integration of the total psyche' which is identified with sanctification without any attempt at Scriptural justification. It is noteworthy that the value of tongues is seen practically exclusively in the psychological benefit to the individual, not to the Church, much less to the Lord.

Now comes the plunge! Frankly facing the negative aspects of glossolalia, Mr. Kelsey becomes devastatingly revealing. 'Glossolalia', he says, seems to the onlooker 'an unattractive, irrational, automatic, non-conscious phenomenon, even in its most devotional atmosphere'. It is 'a deliberate attempt to abandon one's self to the irrational'. In Churches, it has caused conflict and division. Its exponents look down on other people as religiously inferior and act as though they have a monopoly of the knowledge of God. They press the experience on others, at risk of producing psychological illness, especially in children. Such over-emphasis of the gift can lead into a spiritual cul-de-sac and issue in repression, emotional instability and moral rigidity. In short, 'Christian wholeness gets lost' in a search for experience and 'kicks'. At best, glossolalia is one of the lesser gifts which needs restraint in its exercise. At worst, it appears as a menace to individual mental health and Church unity.

A balanced reading of this rather inconsistent and hastily compiled book thus leaves a very unfavourable impression of speaking with tongues.

A FURTHER REVIEW

HUGH THOMPSON

Morton T. Kelsey's *Speaking in Tongues* (Epworth; 17/6) should appeal to members of a RESEARCH fellowship. While more thorough Biblical *expositions* of the theme are available, the value of this work lies in its well-documented evidence that tongues (i) have persisted since Pentecost till now, and (ii) are spiritually beneficial. This weighs heavily against two main objections to the current charismatic renewal.