

we should have done no more than begin to live *humanly*—having come into our own true nature; but who would guess what might happen then? After all, do we not believe, some of us, that the mystery lies with a man whose destiny was a death hanging between earth and sky?

# Teach yourself Tongue-speaking

by Antony Archer, O.P.

Glossolalia can be produced with great ease—hence the title of this consideration of it. The interesting question is why people choose to engage in this form of pseudo-language, and this can at least be partially answered by describing its essential features, how people become glossolalists, and some of the conditions that favour it.

Anomalous speech is not so uncommon as is often supposed. Speech ingredients are used in ways ranging from the rudimentary to the highly sophisticated in both secular and religious contexts. The pseudo-languages of spells, incantations, games, nursery rhymes, and scat-singing for instance; those attributed to spirits and Martians; and those sometimes invented by children and adults can be located on such a continuum. What they have in common is that, unlike language, their meaning is not found in the conventions either of their internal organisation or of their relationship with the perceived world. Tongue-speaking in religious contexts is an improvised language of the same kind. Samarin<sup>1</sup>, who makes these points and who has analysed glossolalia from a linguistic viewpoint, finds that it always takes the same form—the stringing together of syllables made up of sounds derived from a language known to the speaker. Its fluency is accounted for by the limited number of sounds employed by any particular speaker and the frequency with which the speaker tends to use the same sounds and sequences; its superficial resemblance to language is accounted for by elements such as rhythm, breathing pauses, intonation (sometimes varied for e.g. praise or intercession) and accenting. Its production improves with practice, and various garnishing can be added.

<sup>1</sup>William J. Samarin: *Tongues of Men and Angels*, 1972; Macmillan, New York.

The authority for glossolalia among Christians is to be found in references to speaking in tongues in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters. In recent times the phenomenon can be traced to the American Pentecostal movements of the early 20th century who made tongue-speaking mandatory evidence of the reception of the Holy Spirit—that we live in the age of the Spirit being one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity<sup>2</sup>. The Pentecostal movement's antecedents go back to earlier revivalism such as the Holiness Movements (personal sanctification movements), and in fact tongue-speaking seems to have taken place among the Irvingites in the 1830s and perhaps still earlier among the Quakers. By and large, however, we do not have the evidence to assess the incomprehensible speech of this period, any more than we know what Paul's letters are referring to, and the attempt which is often undertaken to fill in the gap between Paul's letters and the present by references to the reported groanings of religious people down the centuries is misconceived<sup>3</sup>. It is likely enough that they did not have the cultural context for learning to turn their groanings into glossolalia.

The Pentecostal sects spread very rapidly throughout the world taking glossolalia with them, and in the 1960s the use of glossolalia increased when it became a sign of the presence of the Spirit for renewal movements springing up within the churches, renewal movements which drew heavily on pentecostal doctrine and practice but which (so far) have remained within their official churches.

For these neo-pentecostal groups glossolalia is both the sign of the coming of the Spirit to an individual in the first place and later a technique of prayer employed in the prayer meetings which are characteristic of neo-pentecostalism and as part of the private devotions of the glossolalist. (Glossolalia is in fact used more frequently by neo-pentecostals than by traditional pentecostals.) In addition glossolalia is sometimes 'interpreted' (this is more common among traditional pentecostals than neo-pentecostals)—its message is presented by someone, other than the speaker, who has the gift of interpretation.

Glossolalia thus forms part of the expectation of anyone joining such a group<sup>4</sup>. What is unconventional to Western society at large is a religious convention of the group. The invitation to become a glossolalist is often built up with considerable pressure—continuous prayer for the coming of the Spirit (a new Pentecost, something amazing is going to happen, etc.), mixed with accounts of the great

<sup>2</sup>For an account of the spread of Pentecostalism and its theology see Hollenweger: *The Pentecostals*. 1972; S.C.M., London.

<sup>3</sup>Though it is a useful legitimization for glossolalists.

<sup>4</sup>Reflection on Paul's references to tongue-speaking undoubtedly played a part in creating the expectation among neo-pentecostals in the first place; and surely the highly dubious accounts of tongue-speakers producing language, unknown to them but genuine, in say, mission countries is largely the result of reflection on Acts 2. The credulity with which virtually all pentecostals and neo-pentecostals accept these stories is striking.

power found in the Spirit and as a climax the dramatic gestures of the laying on of hands<sup>5</sup>. Some instruction is usually given ranging from the laconic direction to just make sounds and the Lord will take over, to the actual suggestion of syllables to repeat until the Lord does take over.<sup>6</sup> Even if no explicit instruction is given there is plenty of opportunity for the skills to develop out of imitation and the constant repetition of phrases ('Praise Jesus') which is a feature of such prayer meetings. Glossolalia without previous contact with the phenomenon is very rare. The linguistic resources are already there. As Samarín puts it:

To produce such an utterance, all that the reader needs to do is draw some syllables from a language he knows and string them along realistically: it helps to try to *sound* as if one is saying something. The experiment is made a little easier by actually visualising some syllables. . . .<sup>7</sup> (It also helps to imagine one is talking to some particular person or group.)

When instructions are given they may misfire by causing doubt in the mind of the glossolalist as to the authenticity of the experience as one of the Spirit. There are mechanisms within the group for dealing with this (such as the chorus of 'Praise the Lord's following initiation) just as there are mechanisms for dealing with the hesitancy that may result from the unconventional nature of tongue-speaking. (We are—like Paul—fools for Christ's sake.)

The newly initiated may commence speaking in tongues for the first time immediately after hands are laid on them or later in private. In all cases a deliberate decision must be made—the would-be glossolalist must start making noises. Thereafter the skill once acquired can be exercised (or not) at will.<sup>8</sup>

Since glossolalia is unintelligible its meaning derives solely from the context of the group in which it takes place<sup>9</sup>. So, for instance, in

<sup>5</sup>The information contained in this necessarily cursory survey is based on the various books cited, personal observation and discussion with pentecostals.

<sup>6</sup>e.g. 'Say after me what I say, and then go on speaking in the tongue that the Lord will give you. Aish nay gum nay tayo. . . .'—Kildahl: *The Psychology of Speaking Tongues*; 'Following Jim's description of his own reception of the gift of tongues, I began to say quietly to myself, "La, la, la, la"'—Gelpi: *Pentecostalism: A Theological Viewpoint*. Samarín *op cit.* refers to the instruction given by The Way Inc. These are all American examples, English teaching methods are generally less direct.

<sup>7</sup>*op cit.* p. 101.

<sup>8</sup>It would be very rash to say the beliefs of the members of any religious group (or sect or church, etc.) were homogeneous. This is particularly the case with such a widely diffused phenomenon as pentecostalism. Many, perhaps more theologically sophisticated, neo-pentecostals (and some traditional pentecostals) teach that glossolalia is not a necessary sign of being filled with the Spirit. They also teach, however, that God will grant this gift to all who ask for it and since this is clearly a desirable gift this leaves them in the rather awkward situation of, in effect, affirming that glossolalia *should* happen.

<sup>9</sup>The meaning of privately exercised glossolalia is derived equally from the group context—a private repetition—and if a person ceases to be a member of such a group he usually ceases to exercise the skill at all, though obviously he does not lose it.

a group generally unfamiliar with the gift of prophecy (in English) no one realised that prophecy was happening until this was explained after the meeting by the prophet. When glossolalia is interpreted (usually not very interestingly) it takes on meaning in a similar way—an observer could produce an equally plausible interpretation. This dependance on the context is recognised by the group. Thus where a member of a prayer meeting continually exorcised the group in tongues (announcing this first in English) the other members of the group ignored it, attributing it in a very rational way to the personal hang-ups of the particular person.<sup>10</sup>

The function of glossolalia in defining the group is obvious: there could hardly be a neater way of distinguishing a group from wider society or from their co-religionists.<sup>11</sup> Its function in binding the group together in a shared, spontaneous and assured experience of the Spirit (spontaneity is both part of the experience and a guarantee that the experience is of the Spirit) is equally clear, as to a lesser extent is the fact that glossolalia and the (higher) gift of interpretation have a part to play in the way the group is controlled and power exercised within it. Of course, in the case where some members of a group already established for other purposes—church congregation, religious community, etc.—become glossolalists, then it can be extremely divisive.

It is the direct experience of God which is important to pentecostals. Glossolalia, as Samarin points out, symbolises this, a fact of which glossolalists are aware. It is for them both a conversion experience and dramatic and conclusive evidence of conversion—and thereafter proof of the direct and continuing support of God. As one of them writes, '... the Pentecostal insistence on the "physical sign of tongues" is far more satisfactory than Wesley's "most infallible of proofs, inward feeling".'<sup>12</sup> They are aware of being filled with supernatural power ('power' is frequently invoked to describe the experience) and glossolalia is evidence for this, for it is the result of the Spirit's presence, very often in fact seen as the miraculous result, produced in Kildahl's phrase<sup>13</sup> 'by direct mechanical movement of the vocal chords by the Holy Spirit'. The group function of glossolalia is also recognised by pentecostals—a good deal is made of

<sup>10</sup>An interesting example of this recognition can be seen working out in the opposition of a few extreme traditional Pentecostals to neo-pentecostalism in the Roman Catholic Church. As extreme Protestants they say they have been opposing Rome and its works all their lives. There is no change just because the great whore who corrupts the earth suddenly starts speaking in tongues. There is an ambiguity in recognising glossolalia as conclusive evidence of which most neo-pentecostals seem unaware.

<sup>11</sup>When making the latter distinction glossolalists have difficulty in avoiding elitism in marking themselves off from the non-glossolalic 'man in the pew', low keyed Christian, etc.

<sup>12</sup>Simon Tugwell: *Did You Receive the Spirit*, p. 87. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1972.

<sup>13</sup>*op cit.*, p. 71.

'communicability'. This concept, originally used by Hollenweger<sup>14</sup> to describe the direct and straightforward nature of traditional Pentecostal preaching and services, is increasingly used to describe the pentecostal experience itself. The very meaninglessness—or, more accurately, unintelligibility—of glossolalia is a powerful agent in establishing a sense of shared meaning, that one man is expressing what another really feels, and so on. In the same way this inherent unintelligibility assures the glossolalist when he does not know what to pray (cannot express his needs in intelligible prayer) that God is in fact praying appropriately through him.

Since the spontaneity of prayer meetings generally takes a highly repetitive and somewhat standardised form, the question naturally arises as to whether glossolalia should be considered as ritualistic behaviour, despite the avowed anti-ritualism of such meetings. Certainly there are elements which can be compared with ritual—notably this repetitious nature of prayers, gestures and singing with particular phrases, rhythmic patterns and conventional forms, all of which are part of the learning process for glossolalia (itself repetitive) and the setting for its improvisation. Such a comparison is mainly interesting, however, as revealing the absence of elements usually associated with ritual. No story is acted out or retold. There is no cycle of ritual variations. Nor is there any sense of taking part in something that has been handed down from the past and which is repeated as a memorial and renewal of past experiences. For a pentecostal each coming of the Spirit is a *new* event, a new descent of the Spirit. Though there are bound to be some elements of ritual when a group meets regularly to elicit<sup>16</sup> and express a particular experience, the fact that the neo-pentecostal's experience of the Spirit is a fresh event every time is highly significant for the character of the glossolalic experience and in distinguishing it from the experience customarily expected from ritual.

Consideration of the conditions facilitating the rise of glossolalia will be limited here to a few generalisations. Moreover these will be limited in application. Traditional pentecostalism is very widely diffused throughout the world and contains many varieties of belief, practice and political attitudes to the world. In America for instance this last can range between the extremes on the one hand of maintaining that the Spirit-filled businessman will be more successful, live in a better house, etc., than his competitors (and even be better at football) and on the other hand that picketing and political involvement are works of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup> Neo-pentecostalism within the official churches is equally widespread consisting in the main of loosely

<sup>14</sup>*op cit.*, p. 466.

<sup>16</sup>'Elicit' because the group is not the only source of the experience; glossolalia is not just a product of group dynamics—the element of deliberation in the participants' beliefs and actions cannot be neglected.

<sup>17</sup>Examples given by Hollenweger: *op cit.*

connected groups which are by no means homogeneous in belief and practice. Accordingly the comments that follow will be based on limited experience of neo-pentecostal prayer groups, Catholic and otherwise. They will also be drastically over-simplified. The fact as well that the concentration here has been on glossolalia rather than other aspects of pentecostalism has probably led to a rather restricted view.

The rise of neo-pentecostalism is generally considered to be part of the syncretic 'counter-culture' of the 1960s in America,<sup>18</sup> or as McDonnell has it:<sup>19</sup>

These movements belong to a post-literary culture which is experience-oriented, spontaneous, inward, almost atomistic in its concern for the now at the expense of history, pursuing illumination, dominated by a sense of presence, sure that somewhere there is ultimate worth. To a greater or lesser degree the movements represent a turning back to recapture the original unstructured experience of the meaning of life at a level which, like tongues, is unutterable.

This neo-pentecostalism has spread from America, though in a rather diluted form.

All observers are struck by the fact that the members of neo-pentecostalist groups are drawn primarily from educated and middle class people. This is in striking contrast to traditional Pentecostalism, at any rate at its inception. In fact the conditions in which traditional Pentecostalism arose were generally considered in terms of deprivation—traditional Pentecostalism flourished among people who were economically and otherwise deprived and powerless to change this. In many areas this is still, of course, the case. The deprivation theory, however, is clearly not applicable to neo-pentecostalism in this direct way, though as Hollenweger points out there are many kinds of deprivation. The extract from McDonnell quoted above is basically a description of middle class Americans in a condition of economic strength but deprived of other kinds of satisfaction.

By and large neo-pentecostals have remained within their churches.<sup>20</sup> Their 'world view' can be established by comparison with another, much smaller, group within the churches, the movement of politically radical Christians. Both movements criticise the institu-

<sup>18</sup>See e.g. Moore: 'The Catholic Pentecostal Movement' in Hill, ed: *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion* 6. S.C.M., London, 1973.

<sup>19</sup>In an article in 'One in Christ' quoted by Sullivan in *Can the Pentecostal Movement Renew the Churches?*, Study Encounter, Vol. VIII No. 4, World Council of Churches, Geneva 1972.

<sup>20</sup>Neo-pentecostals are drawn mainly from within the churches. They do not seem to convert non-Christians, though this question is complicated by the fact that many main-line churches (e.g. The Roman Catholic) have no concept of a conversion experience for members baptised as infants while, since glossolalia is a conversion experience, many baptised members of main-line churches see their joining a neo-pentecostal group as their conversion to Christianity. (e.g. 'I was a Catholic before I became a Christian'.)

tions of the official churches. The neo-pentecostals do so because the cerebral complexities of the churches' theologies and the 'dead' nature of their highly organised liturgies no longer provide direct and simple belief and experience of God. This is partly a reaction to the widespread debates within the churches about such questions as how one may speak of God at all, partly in the Catholic church for example<sup>21</sup> a reaction to the loss of the colourful, mysterious and triumphalist latin liturgy which clearly conveyed a sense of the direct presence of God. In this respect the old latin liturgy is comparable with glossolalia, though this must be said with reserve—latin is at least in principle intelligible. The main point of comparison is the emphasis in the general understanding of the latin mass that each mass was a *new* event, a fresh coming of God in a very direct and physical way. The political movement's criticism of the official churches on the other hand is based primarily on what is seen as the churches' surrender to the dominant political forces of society. In the one case (neo-pentecostalism) the emphasis is thrown on the direct and obvious presence of God here and now (often as a recovery of the state of the primitive church when this is considered to have been so); in the other case the emphasis is thrown on the future when God will be obviously present in what is seen as his future kingdom of peace and justice. Just as neo-pentecostals see glossolalia as the sign of the Spirit so the political Christians see seeking justice as the sign of the Spirit.

The two movements came together in conditions that can be considered within the framework of the deprivation theory. Neo-pentecostals often say that they had been unable to find and experience God in the institutional churches or in the world, or that they had not been able to see his power at work there. Many (largely middle class) radical Christians have abandoned their radicalism and joined the neo-pentecostals. It is arguable that one of the reasons (three are obviously others) for this is the recognition of their failure to effect any political change in their church or the world—and perhaps the realisation that in any case political changes in the church might well make little difference to the world. A realistic assessment of their achievements and of the likelihood of future political change has led them to channel their search for the experience and assurance of the presence of God (and the working of his power) into neo-pentecostalism.

Enthusiasm is not alien to the doctrines of the churches and with some hesitation they have given their blessing to neo-pentecostalism. Unlike political radicalism, a devotional movement is no threat to the churches. They could hardly do otherwise than approve—they do not have the sanctions against their members of former times and

<sup>21</sup>The Catholic church is only taken as an example, a similar loss of mystery is certainly happening in the Anglican liturgical reforms.



in any case they are not in a strong position vis a vis pentecostalism: pentecostals have a self-authenticating experience of God which in many ways renders the services of the churches unnecessary. Neo-pentecostal leaders committed to the churches have to work hard to keep neo-pentecostals aware of the benefits of church doctrine and membership and many neo-pentecostals in the climate of ecumenism do not care greatly what, if any, church they belong to.

Nor, as a devotional movement, does neo-pentecostalism constitute any threat to the present structures of society. Glossalalia is certainly deviant in the sense of unconventional and often therefore characterised (wrongly) as the result of mental instability but glossolalia might be taken as precisely that kind of private unconventionality which is acceptable in our society.

In protecting the experience of general well-being, devotional movements usually eliminate in one way or another the tensions inherent in Christianity. As to the world, they do not necessarily reject it (though often enough their unconcern eliminates that tension too), but their emotional and unreflective nature coupled with direct contact and guidance from God makes them peculiarly open to simply accepting the dominant values of society. Neo-pentecostalism is at present largely a devotional movement of this kind. Undeniably in its present form it confers a very real feeling of well-being and effective problem-solving for its adherents but arguably the experience is too well protected not to be somewhat trivialised. More bluntly (and abandoning the detached stance for a partisan one) it is often a middle class cop-out. As such it is indistinguishable from Billy Graham revivalism and the Divine Light Mission. Receive the Spirit, make a decision for Jesus, tune in on the divine knowledge, and forget what's going on in the world around us.

# Women and the American Churches

by Gary MacEoin

I have talked to many women around the United States who are establishing themselves in church positions hitherto exclusively male. They represent the principal Christian denominations and Judaism. Ages range from grandmothers to college students. Some reject the revolutionary label. But what they are doing adds up to a radical revolution. They are reformulating mankind's most basic assump-