

## Speaking in Tongues (Glossolalia)

One of the defining characteristics of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity is the phenomenon of speaking in strange languages. It is believed that this is a miraculous gift from the Holy Spirit, that it continues a practice of the Apostles themselves, and that it is even a sign of God's favour. People who speak in tongues consider it to be an experience of connecting with God, a superior form of prayer in fact. Some will even go so far as to say that Christians who do not speak in tongues are seriously deficient as Christians.

All of these beliefs are highly suspect. But don't take my word for it; here is the evidence and you can make up your own mind. You will find much of the information below in the Wikipedia entry on "Glossolalia", where it is quite well referenced. I have separately referenced information from other sources.

Firstly, if speaking in tongues were truly a gift of the Holy Spirit, one would expect it to be unique to those who believe in the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit. But in reality, speaking in tongues or *glossolalia* was not only practiced by pagan cults well before Christianity began, but continues to be practiced by non-Christians today. Gerald Overton<sup>1</sup> documents instances of the ancient pagan practice of glossolalia dating back possibly as far as 2000BC, and including the cult of the Greek god Dionysius: "outbursts ranging from the articulate calling on the name of the god, to inarticulate ejaculations of mere sounds involuntarily voiced. Proclamations, exclamations and unintelligible utterances flow from a delirious mouth under the spell of the god"<sup>2</sup>.

In modern times, one can find glossolalia being practiced by Hindu *fakirs* and *gurus* in India and even, worryingly, by *voodoo* practitioners in Haiti among many others that have been documented. It turns out that glossolalia is quite widespread across the non-Christian world. It might be argued that the devil can mimic gifts of God in order to confuse us. But it would seem strange that the pagans began speaking in tongues first, for then it seems that it is the Christians who are mimicking the pagans! And that is likely to have been the case. First century Christians who were not Jewish were pagans before they converted. We know from many other sources that they sometimes brought pagan ideas and practices into their newfound faith. It is interesting to note that the Church in Corinth, the Church in which glossolalia was so prominent that St Paul had to write to them about it, was a Church composed mostly of wealthy pagan converts<sup>3</sup> struggling with hedonism, a Church struggling to sort out how it should deal with the prevalent idolatry of its wider society<sup>4</sup>. It is quite possible that the Corinthian Christians imported into their new found faith the pagan

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Overton. "Speaking in Tongues: The New Testament Evidence in Context". Continuum International Publishing Group (2002).

<sup>2</sup> Overton op. cit. page 15.

<sup>3</sup> "You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led." 1 Corinthians 12:2.

<sup>4</sup> Orthodox Study Bible: Introduction to 1 Corinthians, Thomas Nelson, publishers (2008); and Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Revised Edition) 1 Corinthians, Introduction: Leon Morris, IVP (1985).

practice of glossolalia along with all the other pagan ideas and practices that St Paul addresses in his letters to them<sup>5</sup>.

Secondly, we must not confuse *glossolalia* with *xenolalia*. When the apostles spoke with different languages on the day of Pentecost, those who heard them understood what they were saying. This is a crucial difference to what was going on at Corinth, and what goes on in Pentecostal Churches today. “Xenolalia” is the miraculous ability to speak in a real language that one has not learned. “Glossolalia” is the ability to speak in something that sounds like a language, but is not actually any known language, and that often, no one understands. Xenolalia is quite rare. It is virtually impossible to explain by invoking any natural process – a person who does not know Swahili cannot possibly accurately imitate it. On the other hand, glossolalia is quite common, and there are many good theories that explain it as a natural psychological phenomenon (we will consider some of these below). Since no one can understand what is being said, anyone could make sounds with the tone and rhythm of real language and sound like they’re speaking a real language when in fact they are just speaking gibberish.

I know of at least one case of post-apostolic xenolalia in Coptic history. The story goes that St Pachomius, the Father of Communal Monasticism, was visited by a foreign monk one day and felt ashamed that he was not able to converse with him to welcome him and to share spiritual experiences with him. So he went to another room and prayed for God’s help. He suddenly found a scroll in his hand which apparently gave him the ability to speak the foreign monk’s language, thus allowing them to communicate with each other.

The gift of xenolalia was given to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost for the specific purpose of allowing a largely uneducated group of people to preach the Gospel of Christ to visitors to Jerusalem whose foreign languages they did not know. It would seem that as converts to Christianity with the natural knowledge of foreign languages became evangelists, the need for this gift soon died out. And that indeed is the picture we find in the ancient record of the first centuries of Christianity. There appear to be five direct references to speaking in tongues in the New Testament. It is worth considering each of these in turn.

#### **A. Mark 16:17**

*17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*

These words are spoken shortly before the Ascension of Christ, which was followed ten days later by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples on the

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<sup>5</sup> See also: Ekaputra Tupamahu “Glossolalia Phenomenon in Other Religions - Part 1”. Posted 24th May 2008 at <http://tupamahu.blogspot.com.au/2008/05/glossolalia-phenomenon-in-other.html> accessed August 2012. This is a very well referenced article written by a Christian who practices glossolalia and in fact believes it to be beneficial. And yet, admirably, he honestly documents the pagan origins of the practice.

day of Pentecost. It would be reasonable to assume that the Pentecost gift of the Spirit is being referred to.

### **B. Acts 2:1-13**

*1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

*5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"*

*13 Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."*

This is clearly a case of *xenolalia*, not *glossolalia*. The visitors from other lands heard, "each in our own language" (verse 8) the words of the apostles. They did not hear a language they could not understand, but were surprised by the very fact that they could understand and indeed recognise languages like Parthian, Median, Egyptian and so on. And the purpose of this gift is also clear: "We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God" (verse 11) – the relatively uneducated apostles were now empowered to preach to all nations, just as Jesus had commanded them (Matthew 28:19). And the miracle of their gift was in itself an impressive sign of the power of God.

Had this event been merely *glossolalia* instead of *xenolalia*, the hearers would not have been nearly so impressed. What is so impressive about someone uttering gibberish that no one understands? Not only that, but if they had any experience of pagan religious practices, as they surely must have, they would have recognised *glossolalia* immediately and dismissed it as a pagan practice. But they did not, and their reaction emphasises that difference between this genuine Pentecost gift and the practices St Paul dealt with in the Church of Corinth, which we shall see below.

### **C. Acts 10:44-48**

*44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.*

*Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.*

This event occurs not long after the day of Pentecost. If we read it in context, we find the aim of the passage is to show that the Gentiles are just as worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit and of being baptised as Christians as the Hebrews. This of course was a bone of contention in the earliest days of the Church, since all the first Christians were Jewish and some of these thought that, like the Old Testament, they were still God's chosen people. Here God emphasises that He has accepted *all* races as His chosen people. In this rare occurrence, the Gentiles present receive the gift of the Holy Spirit *before* they are baptised, not after. Those who doubted that these Gentiles were worthy of baptism had to eat their words when they saw them speaking in tongues just as the apostles had shortly before. God was intervening personally to prove this point.

This point would not have been made had they been speaking unintelligible sounds. The pagans do that anyway, so why should that convince the Jews that God had given them His seal of approval? Further, we are told that those who heard them, heard them "magnify God" in tongues (verse 46), so they must have actually understood what they were saying. Without a doubt, this too was a case of xenolalia and not glossolalia.

#### ***D. Acts 19:1-7***

*1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples 2 he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"*

*So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."*

*3 And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?"*

*So they said, "Into John's baptism."*

*4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."*

*5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. 7 Now the men were about twelve in all.*

We have now moved forward in time, some years after that day of Pentecost. The events in this passage are generally dated to some time in the 50s AD, around twenty to thirty years after the Resurrection of Christ. Churches have been established all around the Mediterranean Sea, and this appears to be St Paul's second visit to Ephesus and part of his third missionary journey. Having only been baptised with the baptism of repentance of St John the Baptist, the twelve men were now baptised sacramentally by St Paul with the Christian baptism, after which they received the sacrament of the laying on of hands and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them. There does not seem to be enough evidence in this text to distinguish definitively whether their subsequent speaking in tongues was xenolalia or glossolalia, but the former would be more

likely, given that the descent of the Holy Spirit at the hands of an Apostle was seen as continuing the work of Pentecost. The number – twelve – may also be a reference to the disciples who received this gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, though that is mere speculation.

So far, the four references in the New Testament have all been to xenolalia (although one is uncertain). We have certainly not seen anything so far that would make us think that glossolalia was practiced anywhere in the New Testament Church. In fact, the only thing that does make us think this is the last of our references from the New Testament, the controversial passages in the St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

### ***E. 1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13 & 14.***

*12:2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.*

*12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: 8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

*12:28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.*

*13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*

*13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

*14:1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. 5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.*

*6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? 7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? 8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle? 9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. 11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a*

foreigner to me. 12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. 16 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? 17 For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; 19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

21 In the law it is written:

"With men of other tongues and other lips

I will speak to this people;

And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord.

22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. 23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

This long passage is agreed by all to be directed at those who had been causing disorder and confusion among the Corinthians at their church gatherings. It is part of a letter which also addresses not only disorder in gatherings, but many other undesirable trends that had developed in this Christian community. Now it is easy to take verses out of context and use them to support the modern practice of glossolalia, but we do not want to do that. We want to understand the true

purpose of St Paul's words as accurately and as objectively as we can. What is the essence of what St Paul is saying?

1. In contrast to the other New Testament references to speaking in tongues, this was definitely not xenolalia but glossolalia: "For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him" (14:2).
2. St Paul is not commanding them to stop speaking in tongues: "I wish you all spoke with tongues" (14:5); and "do not forbid to speak with tongues" (14:39).
3. Yet there was clearly some disagreement over whether people should speak in tongues in their gatherings: "do not forbid to speak with tongues" (14:39) implies that some Corinthians wanted to forbid speaking in tongues, and St Paul was not supporting them.
4. St Paul himself was not only able to speak in tongues, but he excelled at it: "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all" (14:18).
5. However, St Paul also quite clearly is not happy with the way the Corinthians understood this practice, nor with the way they were practicing it, and wanted them to make some drastic changes:
  - a. He saw their current practices as confused and confusing, and as such, not inspired by the Holy Spirit of God: "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace" (14:33).
  - b. He wanted them to limit the number of people who spoke in tongues to two or three at the most; "If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn," (14:27).
  - c. He did not want them to go on all night.
  - d. He did not want everyone doing it: "Do all speak with tongues?" (12:30).
  - e. He did not see it as the 'main attraction', but merely a side-show. If it never happened, he would have been quite happy: "yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (14:19).
  - f. He insisted that being able to do amazing things like speaking in tongues counted for nothing in itself. It is only when an act comes from genuine *agape* love that it becomes valuable: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (13:1).
  - g. He insisted that if someone spoke in a tongue, someone had to interpret what was said into a language that everyone could understand. Otherwise, they should not speak in tongues: "...and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God" (14:27,28).
  - h. If no one understood what was being said, then speaking in tongues was to be a private matter: "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church" (14:4). The speaker should not disturb the rest of the gathering with his utterances.

The overall picture we gain then, is of a church where people were trying to outdo each other in the spiritual gifts and using things like speaking in tongues for their own pleasure rather than for the building up of their fellow Christians in love. The tenor of the passage is one of admonition. Speaking in tongues may be nice between you and God, but you will have to stop speaking in tongues or at least severely limit it if you are just going to do it for your own benefit. In fact, to make sure no one does speak in tongues selfishly, if you speak in a tongue you must interpret what you said so everyone can understand it. If you can't, then stay silent. The net effect of St Paul's words would tend towards the complete eradication of public glossolalia from the Church, particularly if there was no one who could interpret what was being said. As we shall see below, it is one of the characteristics of glossolalia that the sounds have no meaning (I wonder if St Paul knew this himself, but didn't want to discourage the Corinthians?).

Most Pentecostal Churches today seem not to heed St Paul's advice. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of glossolalia as a sign of the favour of the Holy Spirit upon the person who can practice it. Christians who do not speak in tongues are told they are not complete Christians. Pressure is put on Pentecostal teenagers, often in very subtle ways, until they begin to speak in tongues. If they don't, they are made to feel somehow deficient or inferior. And contrary to St Paul's quite explicit command, very little interpretation goes on. What interpretation does occur may be frankly fraudulent<sup>6</sup>. What one sees mostly is a multitude of people, all apparently in an ecstatic state, all speaking at once and lolling their heads about in complete self-absorption. They would do well to heed St Paul's advice!

So what is going on when today's Pentecostal Christians speak in tongues? What is the cause if it is not the Holy Spirit? There are any number of theories around, but clearly some are better than others. Some have speculated that glossolalia is a genuinely supernatural phenomenon, but rather than being from God, is instead a trick of the devil intended to confuse and distract Christians from the things that really matter. But in general, if a natural explanation for something can be found, that is preferable to a supernatural explanation. Are there any natural explanations?

Tongue speakers often look like they are in a hypnotic trance. Could glossolalia just be some kind of hypnotic state or state of altered consciousness? One study tested this hypothesis and found that twelve experienced tongue-speakers were able to speak in tongues while wide awake, with eyes open, and even performing voluntary body movements<sup>7</sup>. They conclude: "Findings are consistent with non-trance formulations that conceptualize the acquisition and maintenance of glossolalia in terms of social-learning variables". In other words, they weren't hypnotised, but they have probably learned to copy others.

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<sup>6</sup> Anecdotal evidence from a servant (now a priest): he and two friends attended a Pentecostal meeting in Egypt. When the audience was invited to come forward and speak in tongues, the servant came forward and purposely made nonsense sounds. Upon finishing, the pastor gave an eloquent "translation" of what he had said!

<sup>7</sup> Spanos, Nicholas P.; Hewitt, Erin C. "Glossolalia: A test of the "trance" and psychopathology hypotheses." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Vol 88(4), Aug 1979, 427-434.



Some have suggested that glossolalia is evidence of mental illness. It is important to note that some who practice glossolalia, though by no means all, or even the majority, progress to more extreme forms of expression. Holy Laughter is a well-documented phenomenon among Charismatics and Pentecostals, where the worshipper laughs uncontrollably often for hours on end. Even more disturbing is the phenomenon where the worshipper will begin to emit animal noises, grunts and caws and moos, all supposedly under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In fairness, most Pentecostals would consider these activities to be some kind of demonic trick rather than a genuine movement of the Holy Spirit. Others might consider that such behaviour could only be explained by mental illness.

However, it would seem that recent research has ruled that explanation out, at least for the more common practice of glossolalia<sup>8</sup> (I have not researched the laughter or animal sounds in detail). In fact one study found that people who spoke in tongues were actually more emotionally stable than those who did not<sup>9</sup>. Pentecostals leave their churches and go on to live perfectly normal lives, holding down jobs and looking after families and being generally good, law-abiding citizens in their communities. It seems highly unlikely that glossolalia is sign of any kind of pathology, disease or dysfunction in the brains of those who practice it.

But an important clue as to the true nature of glossolalia may be found in a landmark study published in 1986<sup>10</sup>. Researchers took sixty people who had never spoken in tongues or even heard tongues being spoken before and tried to teach them to speak in tongues. They found that 20% of the subjects could speak in tongues after listening to just 60 seconds of audio of someone speaking in a tongue! After two sessions of training, 70% of the subjects could speak fluently in tongues, and their fluency improved with more training. The researchers conclude that, "Our findings are more consistent with social learning than with altered state conceptions of glossolalia."

What is more, other studies have found that not all people speak in tongues the same way. Different people tend to prefer repeating certain sounds or syllables more often than others. What is interesting is that it has been shown that a congregation will tend to adopt the same style as a leader to whom they listen speaking in tongues for a period of time. This is powerful evidence for glossolalia being a natural process that simply involves copying others<sup>11</sup>. In other words, glossolalia can simply be learned by mimicry and does not need any supernatural cause to explain it. This explanation certainly fits better with the

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<sup>8</sup> Psychopathology was one of the explanations ruled out by the study above (Spanos et al, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Referred to in Benedict Carey. "A Neuroscientific Look at Speaking in Tongues". New York Times, November 7, 2006. Found at:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/07/health/07brain.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/07/health/07brain.html?_r=1) accessed August 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Spanos, Nicholas P; Cross, Wendy P; Lepage, Mark; Coristine, Marjorie. "Glossolalia as Learned Behavior: An Experimental Demonstration". *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Volume 95(1), February 1986, p 21–23.

<sup>11</sup> John P Kildahl; Paul A Qualben. "Glossolalia and mental health : final progress report". Behavioral Sciences Research Branch, National Institute of Mental Health, Washington, D.C. (1971), referenced in the Wikipedia article on Glossolalia.

evidence that glossolalia occurs across a multitude of cultures and religions than does the explanation that glossolalia is a unique gift of the Holy Spirit.

Why would people want to speak in tongues? A valuable clue may be found in the words of one exponent, a born-again Christian, who was co-author of a study that looked at scans of people's brains as they spoke in tongues. She says of her experience, "You're aware of your surroundings, you're not really out of control. But you have no control over what's happening. You're just flowing. You're in a realm of peace and comfort, and it's a fantastic feeling."<sup>12</sup> The actual study tellingly found that the part of the brain that is associated with pleasure and positive emotions was highly active while speaking in tongues<sup>13</sup>. This would explain why people who practice it like it so much! But it also means that glossolalia belongs not in the category of supernatural miracles performed by the Holy Spirit, but of natural experiences that make you feel good, like eating chocolate or having a hot bath when you're tired.

Taking all of this information together, we are justified in concluding that glossolalia is a natural phenomenon and not a supernatural manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. It is certainly not essential in the life of the Christian, anymore than is the eating of chocolate or the taking of hot baths. In fact, its emotional allure can easily distract Christians from the things that really matter, like practical faith, hope and especially love. When one is speaking in a tongue, one is focused on the pleasure they are experiencing within and ignoring others around them. This may be acceptable when one is worshipping God in private, but it is not what communal Christian worship should be like. Communal worship involves sharing – many people singing and praying with one voice; listening to each other and harmonising with each other. It involves exchanging the kiss of peace with other, and bowing side by side; humbly coming forward to partake of the One Body and One Cup, united in the mystery of the sacrificial love of Christ. It is the sharing of the experience of God with those around you and thus being drawn into a deeper and closer relationship of love through that shared experience. None of this fits with the self-focused, unintelligible utterance of sounds in glossolalia.

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<sup>12</sup> Benedict Carey. "A Neuroscientific Look at Speaking in Tongues". New York Times, November 7, 2006. Found at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/07/health/07brain.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/07/health/07brain.html?_r=1) accessed August 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew B. Newberg, Nancy A. Wintering, Donna Morgan, Mark R. Waldman "The measurement of regional cerebral blood flow during glossolalia: A preliminary SPECT study". *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, Volume 148, Issue 1, 22 November 2006, Pages 67–71.