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SIGHS TOO DEEP FOR WORDS: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF GLOSSOLALIA

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Abraham Heschel told of how a Rabbi Alter about a hundred years ago pondered over the question of what a certain shoemaker should do about his morning prayer. The shoemaker's customers were poor and only owned one pair of shoes each. He needed to work through the night in order to have their tattered shoes available before work the following day. Should the shoemaker be allowed to miss his morning prayer every now and then in order to serve his customers well, only raising his hammer with a sigh, 'woe is me'? Heschel answered with the comment, 'Perhaps that sigh is worth more than prayer itself'.[1]

How can a sigh be worth more than prayer? Could it be that prayer as a rational, articulated response to God does not exhaust the human response to the divine reality in worship? In a sense, the church has always answered this question in the affirmative. Poetry, song, dance and silence have always been offered as examples of in-depth responses to God that transcend prayer as rational and verbal communication. Glossolalia is certainly one such response to God, although one that has been quite controversial in nature.

Research on glossolalia has centered on exegesis, historical investigation and psycho-social studies. In his guide to research on glossolalia, Watson Mills also mentions the role of theological reflection, but he includes only one brief paragraph discussing this approach in

1. A. Heschel, *Quest for God* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 3-4.

contrast to the rich and lengthy discussions of the other approaches.[2] Mills recognized this lack of theological reflection available on tongues in his doctoral dissertation on this subject, stating that 'pentecostal groups need to be more creative in developing and articulating a theology of glossolalia'.[3]

There has been considerable ambiguity involved in what glossolalia has meant for those who experience it. Most Pentecostals have referred to tongues as a gift to be used in the body of Christ by some for the 'edification' of all (if followed by an interpretation). This use is distinguished from a devotional and potentially universal use of tongues among individuals.[4] Controversial is the widely held assumption that tongues is the necessary evidence of Spirit baptism, though there are Pentecostals who have not held rigidly to this doctrine.[5] It would seem that this doctrine arose in relation to a combination of factors, such as an accent of turn-of-the-century revivalism on 'signs and wonders' and on experiences of God in the book of Acts as patterns and precedents for religious experience.[6] The supreme sign or wonder that seemed to represent the *sine qua non* of the Acts 'pattern' for an in-depth encounter with God appeared in Pentecostal interpretation to be tongues. Beneath the dogma of tongues-as-evidence was the assumption that tongues symbolized an encounter with God that may be termed 'theophanic', or as spontaneous, dramatic and marked by signs and wonders.

Donald Gee recognized that not all Pentecostals held to the necessary role of tongues as evidence of Spirit baptism, but he took comfort in the fact that all Pentecostals believed this experience of the

2. W.E. Mills, 'Glossolalia: A Survey of the Literature', in *Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research on Glossolalia* (ed. W.E. Mills; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 13-31.

3. W.E. Mills, 'A Theological Interpretation of Tongues in Acts and I Corinthians' (PhD dissertation; Southern Baptist Seminary, 1968), pp. 224-25.

4. E.g. G.H. Williams and E. Waldvogel, 'A History of Speaking in Tongues and Related Gifts', in *The Charismatic Movement* (ed. M.P. Hamilton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 61-62; R. Spittler, 'Glossolalia', in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (ed. S.M. Burgess and G.B. McGee; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 335; W.J. Hollenweger, *enthusiastisches Christentum* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1969), pp. 389-90.

5. Spittler, 'Glossolalia', p. 335.

6. Also prevalent may have been the pietistic quest for assurance of genuine experiences of God through empirical evidence.

Spirit to be 'marked by an immediate supernatural manifestation to the senses'.[7] Gee elsewhere compares Pentecost with the theophany of God at Sinai. He presents a drawing illustrating how the 'supernatural manifestations' of Sinai fulfilled the slaying of the Passover lamb (Old Testament) and how the supernatural manifestation of tongues at Pentecost fulfilled the slaying of the Lamb of God in the crucifixion (New Testament).[8] Similarly, Carl Brumback argued that tongues was of central importance to Pentecostals because it symbolized an experience with God that was 'tremendous' and 'overwhelming'.[9] Of importance to Pentecostals has not been tongues *per se*, but what tongues symbolizes for them, namely, a theophanic encounter with God that is spontaneous, free and wondrous.

This understanding of tongues among Pentecostals requires critical theological reflection if it is not to degenerate into a sensationalistic and uncritical quest for 'signs and wonders'. Furthermore, the 'evidence' doctrine may degenerate into a dogmatic and rigid set of criteria for religious experience that betrays the impulse of Pentecostalism toward spontaneity and freedom in our encounter with God. Tongues can also form an emotional euphoria with no impulse toward others in the church or in society. What glossolalia means in the context of the rich theological presuppositions surrounding the experience in Scripture has been neglected. Devotional reflections on glossolalia concerning feelings of 'power', 'surrender', 'enlightenment', 'deeper praise', or 'greater wholeness' may have great value for those who experience them. But such descriptions lack content and direction without a richer theological context within which to interpret them.

We must be reminded, however, that this lack of theological attention to tongues and other forms of dynamic pneumatic experience is not peculiar to Pentecostalism. Emil Brunner referred to the Holy Spirit in his *Misverständnis der Kirche* as the 'step child' of theology. This is because theo*logy* has accented the *logica* of faith and has thus been ill-equipped to respond to the kind of dynamic pneumatic

7. D. Gee, Address to the World Pentecostal Conference, 1952.

8. D. Gee, *God's Great Gift* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, n.d.), p. 17.

9. C. Brumback, *What Meaneth This?* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1947), p. 131.

experience that borders on the non-rational. Theology has served only to shun and stifle the creative manifestations of the Spirit, which continue to be a 'bug-bear' for theologians. Brunner claims that the dynamic manifestations of the Spirit 'must not be soft-pedaled by a theological Puritanism'. Hendrikus Berkhof also referred to the 'water-tight' wall of partition between charismatic experience and academic theology, which he wishes could be removed.[10]

A Pentecostal theological reflection on tongues can serve a twofold purpose. First, such reflection can help Pentecostals understand what is most distinctive about their view of religious experience. Although Pentecostalism is a great deal more than a 'tongues movement',[11] it is the first movement to focus attention on this gift as being of crucial importance for understanding the nature of the divine–human encounter. This certainly must mean something to Pentecostals who wish to understand what a Pentecostal theology might look like. Secondly, Pentecostals can serve academic theology by suggesting creative ways in which the gap between charismatic experience and academic theology might be bridged.

Contemporary Theological Views of Glossolalia

There have been scattered attempts to deal creatively with the theological meaning of glossolalia. Interestingly enough, most who have attempted this have come from outside the Pentecostal movement. A number of scholars refer to speaking in tongues as an example of the inability of rational and consciously articulated language to exhaust

10. E. Brunner, *Misverständnis der Kirche* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 3rd edn 1988), ch. 5; H. Berkoff, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964), pp. 87-89.

11. Some assume this: J. Tinney, 'Exclusivist Tendencies in Pentecostal Self-definition: A Critique from Black Theology', *Journal of Religious Thought* 36.1 (1979), pp. 32-49; Anderson's introduction to Pentecostalism in the first chapter of his history of the movement consists solely of an introduction to glossolalia (R.P. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1979]); the fact that D. Dayton could write an astute history of the roots of Pentecostal theology without more than a passing reference to tongues should caution us against associating Pentecostalism merely with glossolalia (D. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987]); this was criticized, with some justification, by Olson in his review of Dayton's book, *Christianity Today* (12 August 1987), p. 67.

our response to God. Watson Mills views tongues as a symbol of our inability to express the inexpressible, namely, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Mills makes a distinction between the formal and symbolic aspects of glossolalia. Since the formal aspect of tongues as a speech phenomenon is no longer meaningful for most modern believers, it would be profitable for them to 'demythologize' this way of responding to God and to search for more meaningful ways of expressing the inexpressible. Mills is tolerant, however, toward those who wish to cling to archaic glossolalic expressions.[12] This assumption concerning the pre-modern nature of tongues is problematic, especially in the light of the rising dissatisfaction in the West with the domination of the rational in religious experience.[13] But Mills is correct in assuming that the significance of tongues is in what it symbolizes theologically. Yet he does not credit Pentecostals with this same intuition, nor does he develop what tongues symbolizes for them.

Jacque Ellul finds tongues to be a meaningful response to God across cultural boundaries, since it symbolizes the essentially noncommunicative nature of all prayer. Ellul makes a brief but provocative reference to glossolalia in response to those who feel that prayer is no longer meaningful due to its outmoded sacred language. Ellul counters that prayer is not verbal communication, which includes an agreement between persons about the meaning of the verbal signs used; prayer consists rather of a response of the total self to the prior and ineffable self-disclosure of God. Ellul views prayer as a way of 'being' with God that transcends words and may be expressed in tongues, bells, dance and incense.[14] Ellul would have agreed with Abraham Heschel's remark that prayer is not speech, for 'the purpose of speech is to inform; the purpose of prayer is to partake'.[15] For Ellul, prayer is a striving 'with the One who is unknowable, beyond our grasp, unapproachable and inexpressible, asking that he be *hic et nunc*, the One he promised to be'.[16]

Scholars such as Morton Kelsey have attempted to make a connection between the nonrational aspect of glossolalia and deeper access to

12. Mills, 'Theological Interpretation'.

13. E.g. O.R. Whitelcy, 'When You Speak in Tongues: Some Reflections on the Contemporary Search for Ecstasy', *Encounter* 35 (1974), pp. 81-93.

14. J. Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), p. 58.

15. Heschel, *Quest for God*, p. 9.

16. Ellul, *Prayer*, p. 58.

the divine reality. Kelsey views tongues as a relaxation of rational and conscious defenses in order to have direct access to the spiritual realm, or, in Jungian terms, the corporate unconscious. He compares tongues to a dream state, 'a kind of somnambulism while awake, a sleepwalking with one's vocal chords'. Although Kelsey warns against premature or unguarded access to the spiritual realm, it can be a healing and transforming experience for those who are ready for it. Kelsey locates the theological significance in all of this in the recognition lost to modern theology that one can have direct, unmediated access to God.[17]

In a similar vein, Richard Baer refers to tongues as a playful relaxation of the analytical mind, 'thus freeing other dimensions of the person, what we might loosely refer to as man's spirit, for a deeper openness to divine reality'.[18] Like Kelsey, Baer is not advocating emotionalism, but rather a freeing of the spirit to respond to the immediate presence of the living God. He finds analogies to this process in Quaker silence and Catholic and Episcopal liturgy. This line of thinking does contain certain helpful insights. However, associating God with the 'spiritual' realm to which we may have access through the unconscious is a problematic assumption. One may argue that Pentecostals have tended to view God as sovereign over both the material and spiritual realms with the initiative in the divine–human encounter belonging on the side of the divine. We can agree, however, with Barth's statement about the Holy Spirit: 'The whole man, right into the innermost regions of the so-called "unconscious" is taken in claim'.[19]

In a more general intercultural approach to glossolalia, Cyril Williams refers to tongues theologically as a 'mysticism of sound', by which the utterance of sounds from the depths of one's being can symbolize an encounter with the divine reality. Like Sufi chants, mantras, the Namo-o-mi-to-fu of Buddhism, or the Jesus Prayer of Eastern Orthodoxy, tongues conveys nothing to the rational mind but awakens 'echoes which ordinary language cannot reach'. Such

17. M. Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking: An Experiment in Spiritual Experience* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 218-33.

18. R. Baer, 'Quaker Silence, Catholic Liturgy, and Pentecostal Glossolalia: Some Functional Similarities', in *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (ed. R. Spittler; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 150-64.

19. K. Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press, 1958), p. 139.

mystical sounds are 'as sonorous forms of the divinity, as icons composed of sounds'. Williams speculates that tongues may consist of a mixture of pseudo-sounds and certain symbols of the numinous drawn from our corporate human memory. But Williams warns that tongues is different from other analogous forms of verbal mysticism in that tongues has no semantic meaning, is less structured, and occurs in a different theological context than that of mysticism in general. In tongues, the I–Thou relation with God is not transcended or blurred over by mystical union.[20]

In a movement away from an emphasis on religious experience, anthropologist William Samarin offers the interesting understanding of glossolalia as a 'linguistic symbol of the sacred' in corporate worship. This represents a theocentric point of departure that has always been important for Pentecostals. Glossolalia for Samarin shifts the attention away from the language or the person speaking to the divine presence. Tongues says 'God is here', in the same way a Gothic cathedral says 'God is majestic'. He further defines this symbolic function of tongues as 'sacramental', that is, as the turning of human utterances into a manifestation of the divine presence. Since glossolalia is an anti-language for Samarin, it relativizes the significance of literate expression in worship, offering us a new perspective on the nature of religion and the place of language in it. Unfortunately, Samarin does not proceed to elaborate on these insights. But they do provide us with a background for understanding Hollenweger's provocative remark that glossolalia represents the 'cathedral of the poor'.[21]

Most of the ideas shared thus far assume that tongues represents unintelligible language. J. Massyngberde Ford has taken the minority view that Paul agreed with Luke in viewing tongues as an unlearned foreign language. Ford finds significance in the weight that ancient Jewish writings placed on humans as created to be speaking beings who can receive falsehood or truth and communicate the same. Pentecost and glossolalia became symbols of a new creation whereby the language of truth unites persons with God (and one another) and

20. C. Williams, *Tongues of the Spirit: A Study of Pentecostal Glossolalia and Related Phenomena* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981).

21. W. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), esp. pp. 154, 232; W.J. Hollenweger, *Geist und Materie, Interkulturelle Theologie*, III (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1988), pp. 314-15.

edifies the believing community.[22] Although tongues is related to prophecy in Acts 2 as a form of inspired speech, it does not appear that Pord's analysis has grasped all of the nuances of the biblical understanding of tongues in relation to language. But Pord offers important insights into tongues in the context of new creation.

Murray Dempster accents the function of tongues in a most insightful theological analysis of glossolalia in the life of the primitive Christian community as portrayed in the book of Acts.[23] He stresses the communal and ethical significance of tongues and Spirit baptism. Glossolalia, as the 'remaking of language', was a sign of the Spirit's work in the remaking of history. Unlike Conzelmann, who has Luke replace the early church's eschatological motive with salvation history,[24] Dempster sees the remaking of history in Acts as set in motion by the eschatological context of the church's identification with Christ's new redemptive order. This eschatological context for Spirit baptism set the early church against the prejudices and divisions of the old order. Dempster emphasizes the presence of glossolalia in the breaking down of racial, religious and economic barriers in the growing missionary outreach of the church.

Any theology of glossolalia will need to take the creative work done thus far with utmost seriousness. Much work is still needed to reach for an integrated vision of glossolalia that would draw out the most distinctive features of Pentecostal thought in a way that is accountable to the diversity of voices in the Scriptures and relevant to contemporary Christian experience and mission. This brief paper can only outline one direction which such a theology of glossolalia can take. My task in particular is to work toward a theology of tongues that would critically develop the theological implications in the theophanic experience of God that most Pentecostals feel tongues symbolizes.

22. J.M. Ford, 'Toward a Theology of Speaking in Tongues', *Theological Studies* 32 (1971), pp. 3-29.

23. M. Dempster, 'The Church's Moral Witness, A Study of Glossolalia in Luke's Theology of Acts', *Paraclete* 23.1 (1989), pp. 1-7.

24. H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke* (trans. G. Buswell; New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

Glossolalia as Eschatological Theophany

Largely missing from the theological reflections on tongues mentioned above is the Pentecostal understanding of this phenomenon as part of the theophanic signs and wonders of the divine self-disclosure. Pentecostals have always found in the book of Acts an encounter with God that is free, spontaneous and dramatic. In ch. 2, the Spirit fell 'suddenly' (2.2) and in the midst of a whirlwind experience of God with fire and a great sound; in ch. 4, in the midst of an earthquake and after prayer; in ch. 8, with visible signs and long after preaching and baptism; in ch. 10, with tongues and during the sermon but before baptism; and, in ch. 19, with tongues and prophecy, directly after preaching and baptism. The elements of spontaneity and wonder in such theophanic encounters with God have always been the heart-throb of Pentecostal spirituality and attraction to tongues.[25]

Interesting in this context is a recent Pentecostal contribution by Russell Spittler to a dialogue on views of spirituality that was written with only a passing reference to the topic of sanctification. Even more interesting was the Wesleyan response by Laurence Wood to the Pentecostal essay. While believing that Pentecostals should require more of an emphasis on sanctification, he admitted that Wesleyan holiness 'could easily degenerate into a lifeless, formal concept of ethics' without the dynamic infilling of the Holy Spirit sought among Pentecostals.[26] We are reminded here of Paul Tillich's reference to the profaning of Protestantism by replacing ecstatic experience with doctrinal and moral structure.[27]

The Pentecostal understanding of the experience of God in Acts bears some affinity with the earlier 1879 classic on the Holy Spirit written by German biblical scholar, Hermann Gunkel.[28] Gunkel found in Acts an experience of the Holy Spirit that was 'mysterious,

25. I agree here with Williams, *Tongues of the Spirit*, pp. 199-201.

26. L. Wood's response to R. Spittler, in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (ed. D.L. Alexander; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988), pp. 162-67.

27. P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, V. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 117.

28. H. Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

powerful, and unrestrainable'. This overwhelming experience of the Spirit succeeded faith and was 'most clearly and conspicuously present in glossolalia'. Glossolalia was to Gunkel 'the most striking' characteristic of the Spirit's activity in the primitive church. It witnessed to an experience of God that was overwhelming, empirically felt and inexpressible with articulate speech. According to Gunkel, Paul's teaching on glossolalia altered the popular view described in Acts by anchoring the experience christologically and granting it a communal and ethical goal.

More recent biblical scholarship has altered Gunkel's views in a few significant ways, finding christological, eschatological and ethical motifs in Acts. A Pentecostal elaboration of Gunkel's insights, however, may begin with the connection that has been made by a number of scholars between Pentecost and the theophany of God in the giving of the law at Sinai (a connection made also by Donald Gee). An early Jewish connection between the feast of Pentecost and the Sinai event is noticeable in the second century and may have existed in the time of Jesus. Luke's description of the divine theophany at Pentecost does resemble early Jewish descriptions of the theophany at Sinai. Wind and fire in Acts 2 resemble the Old Testament description of Sinai. Meredith Kline emphasized the characteristic loud voice or sound found in Old Testament theophanies. This resembles the 'sound of a mighty wind' at Pentecost. Philo wrote that the mighty voice at Sinai was *seen* by everyone, resembling Luke's depiction of the tongues taking visible shape in flames of fire. Luke's language miracle, in which the tongues were understood in major languages among the Jews from around the world, is paralleled by the rabbinic speculation that the voice at Sinai was heard in every language of the world.[29]

The New Testament descriptions of both Pentecost and the parousia have been tied to Old Testament theophanies. The final coming of God in the 'day of the Lord' was pictured in the Old Testament as a final theophany accompanied by a disruption of the natural elements as portrayed in previous theophanies such as Sinai. T. Glasson argues that descriptions of the parousia in the New Testament as a cataclysmic event with the Son of Man descending with fire, saints and

29. S. Currie, 'Speaking in Tongues: Early Evidence Outside the New Testament', in Mills (ed.), *Speaking in Tongues*, p. 91 n. 3; Mills, 'Theological Interpretation', p. 105; M. Kline, 'Primal Parousia', *WTJ* 40 (1978), pp. 245-80.

clouds of glory was shaped after the imagery of Old Testament theophanies (particularly the vision of the final theophany) and not (as Weiss and Bultmann assumed) from early Jewish apocalyptic literature.[30]

The implicit association of both Pentecost and the parousia under the rubric of theophany is apparent in Acts 2, in which Peter connects the theophany of God at Pentecost with the final theophany or parousia, in which the Lord comes in judgment surrounded by wonders of nature in 'blood', 'fire' and 'smoke' (2.19-20). In this sense, Pentecost is a foretaste and an inauguration of the final theophany of God about to come in the parousia. Brevard Childs noted a reshaping of the Sinai tradition in highly eschatological language in Hebrews 12. The Qumran community also pictured itself as standing before the final judgment in the language of Sinai.[31] The description of Pentecost in Acts 2 must be seen in this light. Pentecost was viewed there as an eschatological event that referred back to previous theophanies (which were fulfilled in the Christ event) and pointed ahead to the final parousia. Pentecost may be termed an eschatological theophany of God. Tongues were part of this theophany, as a kairos event that included the transformation of language into a channel of the divine self-disclosure.

But how are we Pentecostals to reflect critically on this theophanic aspect of the divine self-disclosure symbolized in tongues? At the heart of the theophanic tradition in Scripture is the still neglected notion of the freedom of the Holy Spirit to encounter us in dramatic and unforeseen ways that change our outlook and broaden our horizons. Pentecostals have not found the encounter with God to be 'too deep for words' primarily because it gripped them in the depths of their being. They have paid little attention to the depths of the psyche. The neo-Pentecostals have introduced that element into Pentecostal piety, with largely positive results. The crisis of language for classical Pentecostals, however, has appropriately been rooted primarily in the freedom, mystery and power of the divine action.

I recall being struck as a graduate student by Rudolf Otto's depiction, in his *Idea of the Holy*, of one's encounter with the *mysterium*

30. T.F. Glasson, 'Theophany and Parousia', *NTS* 34 (1988), pp. 259-70.

31. B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 376.

tremendum et fascinosum. Otto wrote of the awesome, overwhelming and alien mystery without which one misses the heart of religious experience. Significant in this context is Ellul's reference to our loss of mystery, awe and dynamism in our life of worship and prayer. He wrote,

> If prayer is indeed a speaking with God face to face, how could we remain forlorn inmates of commonplace? Why does not this presence of God work a transformation within us? We are not changed by our own prayer for the reason that we think about God with too great familiarity. We are vaguely, tritely accustomed to him. We treat him casually.[32]

Most significant is Kenneth Leech's statement that in the church 'there has been a decay of symbols, those powerful mysteries which swallow us whole, and through which we gain new insights beyond words. There is a loss of wonder.'[33] Glossolalia is a symbol of the mystery of God, a mystery that can 'swallow us whole' and grant us 'insights beyond words'.

No author has developed this direction of thinking with more force than religious sociologist, Robert Bellah.[34] For him, worship is to 'break through the straight profane world of everyday pragmatic common sense' and 'break the hold of the ordinary and the usual' as a 'departure from the place of the mundane'. The problem with most worship is that traditional aesthetic manipulations do not serve to move us into an altered state of consciousness, not in the sense of a trance state, but in the sense that cognitive frameworks are broken through in order to put things in a new perspective. In much Christian worship today, however, we 'see nothing in the service but the literal, which may be instructive or not, but which is seldom religiously transformative'. Worship must provide a 'symbolic reordering of experience' and a 'shift in the definition of the boundary of the self'.

This notion of transcendence through spontaneity and ecstasy in worship does not necessarily contradict the eschatological motif developed earlier. An eschatology that is dominated merely by a responsibility to 'history' can become oppressive, making us passive recipients of a historical legacy and robbing us of our ability to

32. Ellul, *Prayer*, p. 10.

33. K. Leech, *True Prayer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 61-62.

34. R. Bellah, 'The Dynamics of Worship', in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), ch. 12.

introduce something new into the historical process.[35] But a Pentecostal eschatology will need to combine transcendent experience with a commitment to a liberating historical future. Glossolalia serves this function in Acts, representing both transcendent experience and a symbol of the growing outreach of the church. Such an eschatology rooted in the free movement of the Holy Spirit through the church in history would contradict the rigid and predetermined dispensationalist scenario of the future.

The eschatological understanding of glossolalia is truly significant. One can examine Paul's statements about glossolalia in this light as well. In 1 Corinthians 12–14 Paul appears to be responding to pneumatics who felt that glossolalia was the supreme sign of an exalted spirituality, a 'realized' eschatology. In ch. 12, Paul relativizes glossolalia by placing it in the context of a broad diversity of gifts. In ch. 13, Paul radically relativizes all gifts (including tongues) in the context of love as a relationship with God eschatologically conceived. The analogies of childhood, knowing imperfectly, and seeing in a mirror dimly (13.11-12) are meant to make glossolalia a part of our eschatological yearning after God. The paradox of encountering the divine reality as present but not yet, as near but still out of reach, as revealed but still veiled is essential to glossolalia as a spoken mystery (14.2).

Most Pentecostals have rightly understood glossolalia as the 'sighs (groaning) too deep for words' in Rom. 8.26. They have not been alone in this interpretation. Origen and Chrysostom are the earliest commentators found tying tongues to Rom. 8.26.[36] Modern scholars such as Hermann Gunkel, Julius Schniewind, Ernst Käsemann, Krister Stendahl and John A.T. Robinson have also interpreted Rom. 8.26 as a reference to glossolalia.[37] Käsemann in particular has noted that the

35. I am indebted to Murray Dempster of Southern California College for this insight.

36. U. Wilkins, *Der Brief on die Römer*, II (TB; Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1980), p. 161 n. 712.

37. Gunkel, *Influence*, p. 80; J. Schniewind, *Nachgelassene Rede und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1952), p. 86 n. 1; E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. G. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 230-44; *idem*, 'The Cry for Liberty in the Worship of the Church', in *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 122-37; K. Stendahl, 'The New Testament Evidence', in *The Charismatic Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 50;

groans of 8.26 are 'unutterable' not unuttered. As Käsemann has pointed out, 'unutterable groanings' is meant by Paul as a paradoxical statement. To view these groanings as deeply felt unuttered desires misses the paradox that Paul often uses in his treatment of our response to God in an eschatological context.[38] Just as 'knowing' the love of Christ passes all 'knowledge' (Eph. 3.19), so Paul refers to expressed sighs that cannot be uttered. That Paul refers here to glossolalic cries as being involved in our eschatological weakness and in our yearnings for the redemption and liberation to come is highly significant. Here we have an eschatology that incorporates transcendent experience with the realities of our creaturely and historical existence, transforming this existence with the promise of redemption, a promise that includes all of creation. We also have a way of developing the theophanic element in the Pentecostal attraction to tongues that avoids a self-centered emotional euphoria or a sensationalistic quest for signs and wonders. I will return to this theme later.

Glossolalia as Language Coram Deo

The discussion thus far has featured the role of glossolalia from the angle of the divine self-disclosure. This approach is different from the common method of treating glossolalia primarily from the vantage point of the dynamics of human experience. As Pentecostalist Harold Horton claimed, the first purpose of tongues is to serve as a miraculous communication from God to humanity.[39] This means that glossolalia theologically understood cannot be viewed as a human potential utilized at will to achieve some religious end. Like all genuine encounters with God, it takes place primarily as the result of the divine decision to act. As Hans Balthasar said concerning prayer, there is a *quid* to glossolalia that escapes our grasp until it is granted us in the divine act of self-disclosure.[40]

J.A.T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans* (Philadelphia: Portress Press, 1979), p. 104.

38. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 237-38 and 241. See also Käsemann, 'The Cry for Liberty', pp. 130-32.

39. H. Horton, *What Is the Good of Speaking in Tongues?* (London: Assemblies of God Publishers, n.d.), pp. 10-11.

40. H. Balthasar, *Prayer* (trans. A.V. Littledale; New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), p. 11.

Yet once this is granted, glossolalia can be seen as revealing something very profound about human existence *coram Deo* (before God). It is interesting that Jesus spoke of the Spirit as a mysterious and free wind. It is more interesting that he followed this with the phrase, 'so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (Jn 3.8). If glossolalia symbolizes a divine action that is mysterious and free, it implies the same concerning human existence that is open to God. What Buber wrote about the meaning of ecstasy applies to tongues:

> I am the dark side of the moon; you know of my experience, but what you establish concerning the bright side is not valid for me. I am the remainder in the equation which does not come out even; you can put a sign on me, but you cannot dispel me. You would pluck the heart out of my mystery?[41]

In glossolalia is a hidden protest against any attempt to define, manipulate or oppress humanity. Glossolalia is an unclassifiable, free speech in response to an unclassifiable, free God. It is the language of the *imago Dei*. It is, according to Käsemann, 'a cry for freedom'.[42]

According to authors such as Buber and Ellul, language as rational communication cannot follow one into the depths of the encounter between the mystery of God and the mystery of the self before God. Nor is language adequate in expressing the depths of our encounter with God to others. This insight relates to the role of theophanic imagery in describing our encounter with the divine. Ernst Cassirer argues that mythological imagery develops from the inability of language to express thought and experience.[43] The theophanic imagery of the Pentecostal encounter with God, along with tongues, develops from the same crisis of language. Helen White said of the poet, 'He is from the beginning haunted by the paradox that, while he cannot resist the urge to expression, what he has to say is ultimately beyond expression'.[44] Tongues has been compared to an art form, to other creative means of symbolizing the inadequacy of conventional forms

41. M. Buber, *Ecstatic Confessions* (ed. P. Mendes-Flohr; New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. xxxi.

42. Käsemann, 'The Cry for Liberty'.

43. E. Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (New York: Dover Publishers, 1946).

44. H. White, *Prayer and Poetry* (Latrobe, PA: Archabbey Press, 1960), pp. 21-22.

of expression in relation to the inexpressible, such as abstract art or scat music.[45]

Tongues, however, locates this attempt in prayer, for, as Heschel stated, 'in no other act does humanity experience so often the disparity between the desire for expression and the means of expression'.[46] The closer one draws to the divine mystery, the more urgent it becomes to express oneself and, concomitantly, the less able one is to find adequate expression. This is the crisis out of which tongues breaks forth. Any attempt rationally to communicate the experience ends it, for to reflect upon and rationally communicate an experience is to distance oneself from it already. Tongues is a way of expressing the experience without ending it. The experience and the expression become one. This does not mean that rational and literate theology and worship is thereby made insignificant. If this were so, a *theology* of glossolalia would be a contradiction in terms! As Heschel has pointed out, an abandonment of the language game in our encounter with God does not imply unfaithfulness to the mind, for the struggle to express the inexpressible is at the root of all creativity in art and scholarship; 'for the world of unutterable meanings is the nursery of the soul, the cradle of all our ideas'.[47]

Although glossolalia is unclassifiable language, biblical scholarship is quite divided over the attempt to classify and define the nature of tongues in the New Testament. The popular view has been that glossolalia in the primitive church constituted ecstatic, unintelligible speech, similar to ecstasy in ancient Greek religion or prophetic ecstasy in the Old Testament. Luke's depiction of glossolalia as unlearned foreign languages in Acts 2 is viewed as a reworking of older material to symbolize the universal appeal of the gospel. But the presence of scoffers who accused the apostles of being drunk in 2.13, and the absence of any further use of miraculously learned foreign languages by the apostles elsewhere in Acts, reveal that the older sources that described the original glossolalic event as ecstatic and unintelligible

45. K. McDonnell, *Charismatic Renewal and the Churches* (New York: Crossroad, 1976), p. 9.

46. Heschel, *Quest for God*, p. 39.

47. Heschel, *Quest for God*, p. 39.

may still be detected beneath Luke's symbolic reshaping of the material.[48]

At the other extreme, W.D. Davies and Robert Gundry have argued that glossolalia was at no time identified with ecstatic, unintelligible speech. Paul's reference to 'kinds' of tongues (1 Cor. 12.10) and to various unknown human languages (1 Cor. 14.10-11) imply that he was dealing with the same phenomenon as Luke, that is, unlearned foreign languages.[49] However, if Paul had meant to deal with the miraculous ability to testify of God through unlearned foreign languages, we could hardly expect him to claim that tongues is mysteries spoken to God not to humans (1 Cor. 14.2) nor to state that without an interpretation unbelievers would interpret the speech as utter madness (14.23). The statement in 1 Cor. 14.22, that tongues is a sign for unbelievers flatly contradicts vv. 23-25 which state that it is prophecy not tongues that will convict the unbeliever. This contradiction is best solved by B.C. Johanson, who takes 14.22 as a Corinthian slogan that Paul rebuts in the verses which follow.[50]

There are those who believe that tongues in the primitive church was a mixed phenomenon consisting at times of a degree of intelligibility. This would explain the mixed response of the Jewish audience in Acts, consisting of some who heard intelligible utterances in their own tongues and those who could interpret the speech as drunken babbling (2.13). Vern Poythress has made the same conclusion concerning the speech at Corinth, claiming that it consisted of no fixed pattern. He stated that, 'for the Corinthians, anything that *sounded like* speaking in tongues and *functioned like* speaking in tongues *was* speaking in tongues'.[51] In fact the whole question of the precise nature of the 'languages' uttered under the term glossolalia is a modern

48. E.g. Mills, 'Theological Interpretation', pp. 129-31; G. Johnston, 'Spirit', in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (ed. A. Richardson; New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 238.

49. W.D. Davies, 'Pentecost and Glossolalia', *JTS* 3 (1952), pp. 228-31; R. Gundry, '"Ecstatic Utterance" (N.E.B.)?', *JTS* 17 (1969), pp. 299-307.

50. B.C. Johanson, 'Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers?', *NTS* 25 (1979), pp. 180-203.

51. F.F. Bruce, for example, viewed the tongues of Acts 2 as a mixed phenomenon (*The Book of Acts* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954], pp. 56-57); V.S. Poythress, 'The Nature of Corinthian Glossolalia, Possible Options', *WTJ* 40 (1977), pp. 130-35.

analytical question that would not have been of concern to members of the primitive church. What was important was the function and impact of the tongue.

The whole question of tongues and 'ecstasy' needs to be explored. Ecstasy, which literally means a 'coming out' of oneself, usually involved a kind of frenzied activity in various forms of Greek religion, involving wild dancing, various bodily contortions, possession or a Platonic flight into union with the divine, and the possibility of inducing this state of mind through drugs or music. The ecstasy of early Canaanite prophecy and the roving bands of prophets who fell under its influence was similar in nature.[52] I agree with Kelsey[53] that one must distinguish the ecstasy of tongues from the kind of trance experiences described in ancient Greek religion. Ecstasy may be a meaningful way of transcending one's situation without losing conscious control of oneself. Karl Mannheim's definition of ecstasy applies here:

> It is that achieving from time to time a certain distance from his own situation and from the world that is one of the fundamental traits of man as truly a human being. A man for whom nothing exists beyond his immediate situation is not fully human... We shall designate this ideal by the term ecstasy.[54]

Heschel stated that prayer is that event in which humanity surpasses itself.[55] Tongues can be viewed as such an event.

Glossolalia and Sanctorum Communio

As has been pointed out, Paul viewed tongues as one spiritual gift among others in the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. John Koenig has pointed out that the charismata are not only gifts of God, but the

52. E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 11-17, 64-77, 209, 272-74; E. Andrews, 'Ecstasy', *IDB*, II, pp. 21-22; B.D. Napier, 'Prophet, prophetism', *IDB*, III, pp. 896-98.

53. Kelsey, *Speaking in Tongues*, pp. 142-45; see also, Kelsey, *Discernment: A Study in Ecstasy and Evil* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 25.

54. K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Culture*, p. 240, quoted in P.H. Ennis, 'Ecstasy and Everyday Life', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (1967), pp. 40-48.

55. Heschel, *Quest for God*, p. 29.

daily giving of God to us.[56] Yet, since no single individual participates directly in all of the gifts, the fullness of God can only be experienced in solidarity with others in koinonia. As Paul stated, 'If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the smelling be?' (12.17). Paul said elsewhere that we are filled with the fullness of God 'with all the saints' (Eph. 3.18, 19) and that through the gifts we grow 'together' into the fullness of Christ (4.10-13). This is not to deny the validity of tongues in private prayer nor the value of individual experience with God. But there is a basic connection between spiritual fullness and koinonia in the New Testament that cannot be denied.

The charismata reveal that human existence *coram Deo* is never fulfilled in isolation. As Bonhoeffer stated in his *Sanctorum Communio*, 'the Christian concept of the person is real only in sociality'. Heinrich Ott stated by way of commentary that 'reaching out' belongs to the reality of one's being. It is part of the *Jemeinigkeit* (Heidegger) of one's existence. In this sense, relation is not secondary but original to one's being.[57] Hence, spiritual fullness is only realized in conjunction with koinonia. Glossolalia is then a corporate as well as an individual experience. Along with interpretation, it is a shared experience revealing that the mystery and freedom of our being *coram Deo* is not only a freedom for God, but a freedom for one another.

Paul implies in 1 Cor. 12.22-24 that the fellowship of the saints does not follow social custom in how individual members are valued. Those who might seem less honorable or respected are to be granted an abundance of honor and respect, not in a patronizing fashion, but by a genuine identification by the socially worthy with those who are reckoned as unimportant in the outside world in order to recognize their freedom and worth before God. After the Spirit fell at Pentecost, Peter described the meaning of the speech miracle evidenced there by stating that young and old, free and slave, male and female now have equal right to minister for God (Acts 2.17-18). Wherever glossolalia is experienced in Acts barriers are broken down

56. J. Koenig, *Charismata: God's Gifts for God's People* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 23.

57. H. Ott, *Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 194-95.

between people: between rich and poor (ch. 2), between Jew and Gentile (ch. 10) and between Christians and the followers of John the Baptist (ch. 19).

Glossolalia in this context is to be seen as an unclassifiable language that points to the hidden mystery of human freedom before God, a mystery that cuts through differences of gender, class and culture to reveal a solidarity that is essential to our very being and that is revealed to us in God's own self-disclosure. It is the lowest common denominator between people who might be very different from one another, revealing a deep sense of equality that cannot be denied and that challenges any discrimination based on gender, class, or race. It is indeed interesting that inter-racial fellowship and female ordination to the ministry in early Pentecostalism were both justified as results of the latter-day experiences of Spirit baptism and glossolalia.[58] The fact that both inter-racial fellowship and female participation in the ministry have waned in Pentecostalism should be a matter of grave concern to us.

In the light of this integral connection between spiritual fullness and koinonia, it is indeed puzzling that Paul should appear to make such a sharp distinction in 1 Corinthians 14 between tongues as self-edification, and prophecy as edification of the church body. Such a distinction has led many to interpret glossolalia as a kind of individualistic psychological or spiritual therapy that one enjoys in isolation before God. One cannot deny that there may indeed be therapeutic value to private devotions in tongues. But we must take note of Ellul's warning that any form of prayer that is viewed primarily as therapy is subject (with all other therapeutic techniques) to be replaced by other more preferable ones.

The term 'edification' in 1 Corinthians 14 was taken from the act of building a physical structure. It referred to a building up.[59] This concept must be seen in the light of Paul's emphasis elsewhere on being built up into the fullness of Christ with the help of all the saints (Eph. 4.12-13). It is not a self-centered euphoria of good feelings but a

58. E.g. C.H. Barfoot and G.T. Sheppard, 'Prophetic vs Priestly Religion: The Changing Role of Women Clergy in Classical Pentecostal Churches', *Review of Religious Research* 22 (1981), pp. 2-17; A.A. Allen, 'Miracle in Black and White', *Miracle Magazine* (August 1958), p. 10.

59. BAGD, pp. 560-61.

being conformed to the image of Christ so that we might move out as channels of God's grace to others. Glossolalia, even practiced alone, must have implications for one's ability to reach out to others in koinonia, having at least indirect value for the edification of the body of Christ. Paul implies this in 1 Corinthians 13 where he states that without love *I am nothing* though I should speak with tongues of humans and angels! This implies that no gift, even those enjoyed in private devotions, is separate from the goal of reaching out to others in the body of Christ. Ultimately, there is no separation between self-edification and the edification of others.

How does tongues relate to other more structured ways of physically responding to God in worship, such as in communion? Richard Baer has made the interesting observation that both tongues and communion represent physical ways of responding to God that transcend rational communication. But tongues is unstructured and spontaneous while communion is structured and planned. The elements of spontaneity and freedom in the divine self-disclosure are explicitly present in the event of tongues. But these elements are not unrelated to communion, since spontaneity and freedom in the divine self-disclosure are also meaningful in the context of structured rituals. We cannot presume an automatic encounter with God in the context of any liturgy. As Karl Barth stated, 'A presupposed Spirit is certainly not the Holy Spirit, and a foolish church presupposes his presence and action in its own existence'. He declared, 'only where the Spirit is sighed, cried, and prayed for does he become present and active'.[60] Similarly, Hans Küng stated concerning the Spirit, 'No church order in teaching and practice, no dogma and no rite compel him now to act and now not to act'.[61] Yet, that God does act in the midst of planned and structured rites is a sober reminder to Pentecostals that the divine reality is not restricted to, nor always present in, the unstructured and unusual. What makes something revelatory, structured or not, is whether it becomes a transparent medium for an encounter with the God who freely acts.

60. K. Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963), p. 58.

61. H. Küng, *The Church Maintained in Truth* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1982), p. 23.

Glossolalia and Theologia Crucis

The mystery and freedom that glossolalia symbolizes with regard to God and humanity *coram Deo* are not without content and a concrete existential context to grant them meaning and direction. Individual piety and koinonia in the church are not the only contexts in which glossolalia has meaning. If we were to limit ourselves to private devotions and church koinonia, we would be guilty of creating a 'Jesus-as-Lord' cult among ourselves that is not at all faithful to Christ as the universal Lord and *Cosmocrator*. We would also be less than faithful to the Kingdom of God that has broken in through Christ and the work of his Spirit and (as the Blumhardts so forcefully argued) calls us out of our self- and church-centered piety to serve in the world. There is an important christological qualification of pneumatic experience and glossolalia here that is often neglected or misunderstood among Pentecostals. This christological qualification is more profound than the shallow and sentimental Jesus piety that is often blended with glossolalic experience among Pentecostals.

It has become popular within Pentecostalism radically to separate conversion to Christ and the baptism with the Holy Spirit, as though these represent two different stages in one's spiritual growth. We have an internalization here of something similar to Joachim of Fiore's movement from the *ordo clericorum*, belonging to the dispensation of Christ, to the *ordo contemplantium*, belonging to the age of the Spirit. It is not that Pentecostals have excluded Christology from their piety and theology, but the God of power experienced and described in Spirit baptism is rarely defined according to the God revealed in the incarnation, life and death of Jesus Christ. The power of the Spirit is thus defined among Pentecostals more as a triumphalistic domination of the natural order through the realm of the supernatural than as Paul's 'strength in weakness' under the shadow of the cross.[62]

Yet the theophanic quality of God's self-disclosure reminds us that a theology of the cross cannot imply a divine action that is entirely hidden, without felt changes in our concrete situations. But these changes have their roots in the Christ event. The Pentecost event was not simply one theophany of God in a succession of theophanies

62. Note M. Duggan, 'The Cross and the Holy Spirit in Paul: Implications for the Baptism with the Holy Spirit', *Pneuma* 7 (1985), pp. 135-46.

described for us in the Old Testament. Something decisive had happened through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that brought the Kingdom of God near and made the theophany of Pentecost possible as an eschatological event. There is a parallel in Luke–Acts between the descent of the Spirit at the baptism of Jesus followed by his inaugural address to preach the good news and set the captives free (Luke 3–4), and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost followed by Peter's address to proclaim that Jesus' 'tongue was glad' because God will deliver him from Hades and make him 'Christ and Lord' for the salvation of the world (Acts 2.26-27, 36). It is interesting that the 'glad tongue' of Jesus referred to by Peter in Acts 2 speaks from Hades after the crucifixion. The glad tongue was at the same time a tongue uttering a cry for deliverance from Hades, not just for Christ himself, but for the world. Since Peter mentioned Jesus' glad tongue from Hades as a parallel to the glad tongues at Pentecost, the praise of glossolalia is not a praise isolated from the suffering of the world. It is also a word of yearning for the deliverance of the suffering creation (Rom. 8.26).

This means that glossolalia is not simply a celebration of a dynamic encounter with God that cannot be classified or manipulated, that reveals our freedom as humans *coram Deo*. The freedom of God has been a freedom *pro nobis* (for us), to deliver us from bondage and death through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence, our freedom *coram Deo* must also be a freedom committed to the liberation of suffering creation, as we seek to imitate Christ as 'crucified brothers and sisters'.[63] Glossolalia cannot bypass the cross as a direct, glorious experience of God. Paul testified of a glorious experience of God but found that the power of God was really experienced in the weakness of suffering for others (2 Cor. 12). In response to the pneumatics at Corinth, Paul would know nothing but Christ and him crucified, and he spoke the word in power despite his presence in weakness (1 Cor. 2.2-5). The same message can be found in Rom. 8.26, where the ecstatic cries of the pneumatics are viewed as a yearning for the liberation and redemption to come.

Johann Blumhardt interpreted Jesus' cry of abandonment from the

63. Zinzendorf, *Zinzendorf und die Herrnhuter Brüder, Quellen zur Geschichte der Brüder-Unität von 1722 bis 1760* (trans. H.C. Hahn and H. Reichel; Hamburg: Fr. Wittig Verlag, 1977), p. 200.

cross as a 'groaning' with the suffering creation for the sake of its liberation from bondage. When we groan we share in the sufferings of Christ for the liberation and redemption of the world. He stated, 'Your prayer should always be the expression of the entire groaning creation, so that you stand as its representative... In this way you pray as a child of the kingdom'.[64] St Mary of Jesus, a Carmelite nun, stated correctly, 'It is the prayer of agony that saves the world'.[65] Bonhoeffer saw in Jesus' cry of abandonment from the cross the supreme moment of Christ's surrender to God for the sake of the world and, paradoxically, as the moment when God was most profoundly present.[66] How can we as Pentecostals signify the fullness of God's presence among us through glossolalia apart from the surrender of self in the spirit of the cross for the sake of the world?

Enlightening in this context is Heschel's desire to replace prophetic ecstasy with prophetic sympathy. The prophet, according to Heschel, is gripped by God and moved, not to a frenzied state of ecstasy, but to share in the pathos of God for the world.[67] If there is to be a noble place for ecstasy in glossolalic worship, as I have argued there is, it is not to be an enthusiasm devoid of our passion to share God's pathos for the world. Balthasar wrote of our 'assent to being wholly possessed by God for His purposes, it is "ecstasy", indeed, but the ecstasy of service, not of enthusiasm'.[68]

Glossolalia and the New Creation

Glossolalia is not only a yearning for the liberation and redemption to come, it is an 'evidence' that such has already begun and is now active. This evidence of God's transforming and liberating activity is an essential element of divine theophany in Scripture. In Murray Dempster's words, tongues is the 'remaking of language' as a sign that

64. J.C. Blumhardt, *Blätter aus Bad Boll* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), I, p. 52.

65. Quoted in D.G. Bloesch, *The Struggle of Prayer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 136.

66. Quoted in G. Wainwright, *Doxology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 42-43.

67. B. Uffenheimer, 'Prophecy and Sympathy', *Immanuel* 16 (1983), pp. 7-24.

68. Balthasar, *Prayer*, p. 64.

the gospel of Jesus Christ is remaking history. Wherever glossolalia is evidenced in Acts, social relationships are transformed. Like divine healing, glossolalia among Pentecostals is a sign that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not just for the liberation of the soul, but also for the liberation of humans in every aspect of their being: soul, mind, body and social relationships. Karl Rahner has noted in his provocative essay, *Über die theologische Problematik der neuen Erde*,[69] that there is a contradiction between a belief in divine healing on the level of individual eschatology and an apocalyptic eschatology that offers no hope for a healing of social relationships through the ministry of the church. If glossolalia is 'the initial physical evidence' of God's transforming work in the world through the gospel, we as Pentecostals need to rethink our fascination with a dispensationalist eschatology.

Perhaps we ought to rethink what we mean by tongues as 'evidence'. This should not mean, 'You have the Spirit now'! It should mean that the Spirit *has us* as a visible sign of a new creation taking place in our midst and through us among others! It is interesting that many Pentecostals have used creation motifs implied in the breathing of God into Adam and Jesus' breathing upon the apostles (Jn 20.22) as prototypes of glossolalia at Pentecost.[70] They have also referred to the 'new tongues' of Mark 16, which implies a new-creation motif. Ernst Hänchen has described Pentecost as a new creation, and Meredith Kline has noted that the Spirit is sevenfold (e.g. Rev. 1.4) as a symbol that the Spirit of the original seven days of creation is now the Spirit of the new creation in Christ.[71] In Pentecost, 'Das Ganz Andere' became 'Das Ganz Aendernde!'[72]

Hollenweger refers to the 'Spirit of creation' as a criticism of the tendency in Pentecostalism to interpret God's actions only as supernatural or from outside of creation. He wants to view the miraculous as the uncommon and unpredicted actions of God both within and through creation.[73] Kilian McDonnell has protested the 'zap theory' of tongues among Pentecostals that ignores the human participation

69. Rahner, in *Schriften zur Theologie*, VIII (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1967).

70. E.g. Meyer Pearlman, quoted in Kelsey, *Speaking in Tongues*, p. 141.

71. E. Hänchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), pp. 169-70; Kline, 'Primal Parousia', p. 263.

72. This is a play on words in German, changing 'the Wholly (Entirely) Other' to 'the One who transforms all things entirely'.

73. Hollenweger, *Geist und Materie*, ch. IV.

involved and views tongues merely as otherworldly or supernatural.[74] Pentecostalist Russell Spittler also refers to tongues as being a natural human form of expression that is transformed by God into a spiritual gift.[75] This means that glossolalia and divine healing in Pentecostalism are signs that human participation is a vital part of the renewal of society and creation. Not only preaching the gospel, but medical help, social action and ecological measures can also be signs of God's presence to make all things new. There has been a tendency in the West so to stress our historical destiny that nature is neglected, even exploited.[76] A Pentecostal eschatology, if in line with the basic impulses of tongues and divine healing, will understand the role of liberation in history in the context of new creation.

Conclusion

In a sense, glossolalia is a highly personal experience and will contain varying nuances of meaning among those who experience it. Yet there are theological contexts drawn from Scripture that grant us general directions for understanding tongues. The quest of Pentecostals for divine theophany cannot be allowed to capitulate to a sensationalistic quest for literal signs and wonders. Beneath the theophanic quality of the experience of tongues in Scripture is a divine self-disclosure that is free, unpredictable and mysterious, yet is felt, known and evidenced in our midst. The theophanic tradition surrounding tongues can be a context for Pentecostals to develop a theology of freedom, of God and of humanity. The divine self-disclosure puts us in touch with the mystery and freedom of our own beings *coram Deo* and evokes a response where classifiable language cannot follow. But this theophany of the divine self-disclosure does not justify an empty and self-centered emotional euphoria. This encounter with God that glossolalia signifies is to be understood christologically. Hence, the cross becomes the path to glory; glossolalia as groaning for the bound creation becomes the path to glossolalia as praise. This entire experience must he understood eschatologically. Glossolalia as the yearning for the

74. McDonnell, *Charismatic Renewal*, pp. 83-84.

75. Spittler, 'Glossolalia', pp. 340-41.

76. E.g. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 124-26.

liberation and redemption to come is also the evidence that such has already begun, not only among us, but through us in the world. Let the shoemaker friend of Rabbi Alter sigh. We will sigh with him.