

TONGUES OF MEN

By Allon Maxwell

One perplexing feature about the Pentecostal experience of speaking in tongues, is that this modern "gift", is clearly not the same as on that first occasion, when foreign Jews recognised the actual languages spoken, as their own "mother tongues". On that occasion about fourteen different recognisable languages were spoken by the disciples and understood by the hearers, without an interpreter.

In contrast, this modern experience is so rarely a recognisable language, that few claims are ever made that it is.

I do have a book on my shelf which claims to document some seventy or so incidents in which a known language was spoken and recognised. ("Spoken by the Spirit", Ralph W. Harris, Gospel Publishing House, 1973.)

Whilst I am totally unable to personally verify these reports, some of them at least, bear the marks of what we might expect in a genuine occurrence. About these cases I maintain an open but cautious attitude, which neither believes nor rejects. But I do feel constrained to comment that even if they are true, seventy is not many at all, is it, amongst the millions who now claim this experience.

In my own search for such an event, I did, a number of years ago, make the acquaintance of a linguist who speaks seven languages, including a native dialect from his former South American homeland. He is also (for reasons which will become clear), a former Pentecostal Pastor.

This man claimed to have heard a language which he recognised, in a Pentecostal church, here in Melbourne. I do believe him. However, on that occasion it was clearly NOT the Holy Spirit.

Although the "message" was in fact "interpreted" by the Pastor of the church in "comfortable" terms, what my friend heard was quite different!

The message was composed of blasphemies and obscenities, in the South American dialect which he spoke! When he challenged the Pastor about this, he was angrily and dishonestly rejected.

This was one of several incidents in which he recognised in himself and in others, false prophecies, false claims of healing, and other things which could not be from the Holy Spirit. These things led him to forsake his ministry and the Pentecostal movement altogether.

Tell me, was it any coincidence that this man was present on that occasion, when he was possibly the only man in this city who understood that language?

Was it coincidence that it happened at a time when he was honestly questioning the true nature of his own experience?

Was it coincidence that God led me to this man when I was praying and asking God my own questions about the reality of the Pentecostalism I had encountered?

I think not!

This was one of a number of similar clear warnings from God, that I should exercise caution in evaluating Pentecostal claims, and that I should indeed *"test the spirits to see whether they are from God"*. (1 John 4:1-3)

To this day, after 20 years of honest and prayerful enquiry before God, with a heart open to believe, I have not yet found one instance which I can verify at first hand, as exactly the same as what happened on the day of Pentecost. Perhaps, one day God will show me what I seek.

I remain open, but cautious.
