

Earlier Years of the Modern Tongues Movement

by G.H. Lang

The author provides a critical examination of the Modern Tongues Movement, highlighting its positive and negative aspects, and emphasizing the importance of discernment and spiritual maturity.

Scripture: Luke 18:8, John 8:36, Acts 2:1, Acts 2:4, 1 Corinthians 12:31, 1 Corinthians 14:19, 1 Corinthians 14:27, 1 Corinthians 14:39

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Tongues Movement"

Description

G.H. Lang delves into the history of the Brethren and the modern Movement associated with speaking in tongues, aiming to provide a comprehensive and accurate account. He shares little-known facts and reflections on the Movement, highlighting the importance of understanding its origins and development. Lang emphasizes the need to approach the subject with an open mind, presenting various sources and personal experiences to shed light on the Movement's evolution. Despite acknowledging the legitimacy of speaking in tongues, he raises concerns about certain practices and manifestations within the Movement, urging believers to discern between the genuine work of the Spirit and potential deceptions.

Transcript

To be truly helpful, history must be as full and as accurate as is possible. It was in part to further this end, as regards the history of the Brethren, that I wrote my life of A. N. Groves, and the papers "Inquire of the Former Age" that appeared in the first three issues of The Disciple. To the same end I here put on record some little known facts connected with the modern Movement associated with speaking with tongues. I write with no initial prejudice against this Movement, even as I had none against the former, but would contribute facts not given in any account of the Movement known to me, as well as reflections formed when reading its own literature. In 1913 I issued a book entitled The Modern Gift of Tongues: Whence is it? A reviewer wrote at the time that "highly controversial, the spirit of love is never absent from these pages." I desire that this present book may win like praise.

My principal sources of information are these:

1. My own contact with the Movement and its literature go back to 1909, that is, to within three years of its commencement in Los Angeles, California, in 1906.

2. By the kindness of a friend in the U.S.A. I have read Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God, by C. W. Conn, being the official history of what arrogates to itself the title "The Church of God." It was issued in March 1955 at Cleveland, Tennessee.

3. With Signs Following: the Story of the Pentecostal Revival in the Twentieth Century, by S. H. Frodsham; Springfield, U.S.A., 1941. This writer was one of the earliest members of the Movement, in Bournemouth, England.

4. The Pentecostal Movement: a Short History and an interpretation for British Readers, by Donald Gee; Luton, Bedfordshire, England, 1941.

5. How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles. As it was in the Beginning, by Frank Bartleman. By the kindness of the same American Friend I have been able to read this rare and striking book. It is the best authority upon the first beginnings in Los Angeles, being by one who had a leading part in preparation for the outbreak, who described it from personal experience, and who wrote his account as early as April 1925, using notes made at the time.

6. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit, a Personal Testimony, by William Booth-Clibborn. First edition, 1929; third edition, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., 1944. This is of value as narrating the writer's "baptism" as early as November 1908 in London

I have consulted letters and smaller works found among my papers gathered in those early years. In addition, and of great importance, are:

7. A set of 140 issues of the leading early magazine of the Movement, entitled Confidence. It was published by Rev. Alexander A. Boddy, of All Saints Church, Monkwearmouth, Sunderland, where in 1907 the Movement commenced in England. The first number is dated April 1908: it was issued monthly till the end of 1916, then bi-monthly, then quarterly, and the last number I have is dated 1926. Mr. Boddy travelled in many lands visiting centres of the Movement; Christians from many countries visited Sunderland; and as a result reports and letters reached him from all over the earth. Conference addresses were published, articles explaining the Movement were included, and his magazine became the chief early organ of the Movement for the English-speaking world. To go through this collection is to gain a comprehensive view of the whole Movement and knowledge of its chief leaders in many lands.

In the first days of the Movement I was struck by the way its literature came to me from many quarters quite unsought. It was partly this that impelled me to write the book before mentioned. It seems noteworthy that when in 1955 I began to ponder the Movement there should reach me in quick succession items 2, 5, 6 and 7, full of information now very difficult to obtain. It will be observed that I have not used literature antagonistic to the Movement. Indeed, to keep my mind free from its influence I have not looked at what I have of such, and it is thirty or more years since I read it.

The Movement is considered here as recorded by its own leading representatives. A personal and esteemed friend of many years a pastor in the Movement, inquired why I spoke of them as the "Tongues" Movement instead of using their chosen title "Pentecostal"? I replied that were I to do so I should concede the very point I doubt. Why do I have this doubt? Speaking with tongues is certainly Pentecostal, nor do I question that the Spirit of God can grant this power today. I reject the theory that this and other such gifts were not intended to be permanent in this age.

On the contrary, the greatest gifts are to be desired earnestly, especially the power to prophesy and lesser gifts such as speaking with tongues, are not forbidden (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:39). Moreover, these brethren declare the true faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, redemption by His atoning blood is preached, there is most commendable zeal in spreading the gospel, which is owned by God to the conversion of sinners. I am privileged with the individual fellowship and co-operation of not a few ministers in the Movement.

Why then, should one have doubts about it as a whole, and sometimes utter a friendly caution? In my own case the answer, and the reasons for now writing upon the subject, will be best served by narrating some characteristic features of the Movement in its earlier period. My experience of it goes back to those days. Having no objection to the exercise of supernatural gifts, I did not look at the matter with prejudice or initial disfavour. But facts are stubborn and would not let me regard the Movement with complacency.

Facts learned later have confirmed that earlier attitude. I am aware that the picture here drawn of those early years may disquiet and distress some true children of God who, from lack of information, have felt confident that there was then nothing less than an irruption of the Spirit of God to awaken and quicken a sleeping church. It requires spiritual stamina to be able to look with a quiet and honest mind upon what disturbs cherished opinions. Such as, by the Spirit, have moral strength to do this will find that this book is not designed to withdraw them from the realm of things supernatural, but rather to enable them to discern more accurately between the divine and the human, the heavenly and the earthly, the workings of the Spirit of truth and the counter-workings of the great Liar and Deceiver.

"If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36); free to move safely in that higher region of the kingdom of God which Pentecost opened to all believers but with which many children of God have no acquaintance, but in the search for which many honest seekers have been misled into a neighbouring realm of the supernatural where counterfeits beguile and disasters overwhelm.

CHAPTER 2

The Church of God Community This extensive and highly organized Community had its rise in 1886, twenty years prior to the outburst at Los Angeles. It commenced in Tennessee, U.S.A., among a scattered farming people in rough country. They were mostly illiterate, with few books, yet in general were religious, though largely without the power of godliness. To read of the violent lawless deeds perpetrated with no restraint by authority, is a revelation of the backward moral and social conditions in country regions of the U.S.A. only seventy years ago.

A Baptist pastor became distressed in soul about the spiritual deadness prevailing. He devoted himself to prayer and study of the Bible. A few joined him. In 1886 these saw that no general awakening of the Churches was to be expected, so nine persons formed themselves into a Christian Union, with the laudable but in part Scripturally unwarranted objective "to restore primitive Christianity and bring about the Union of all denominations" (p 7). It is obvious that this latter hope was at variance with the plain and, united forecast of the Word of God that the course of Christianity would be persistent declension culminating in final apostasy, so that "When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8).

It is necessary to our present inquiry to note that this earnest group were from the start deficient in Bible teaching and therefore in power of discernment in things spiritual. In spite of fierce opposition their influence extended and their numbers increased. The few early evangelists were earnest and moving speakers. Their chief theme was personal holiness; but they did not teach, but plainly rejected, present

assurance of eternal life, and therefore, though there were conversions of openly evil men, and others gained some experience of holiness, they did not bring these into a deep and solid state of heart.

In consequence there was much spiritual emotionalism, and the historian tells that "the people felt a strange exaltation that intermittently overflowed in weeping and shouting. Their emotional expression frequently became even more demonstrative, for many danced in spiritual ecstasy or trance (p.20)... leaping shouting and other manifestations were much in evidence '(130)...shouting, dancing, talking in tongues, and praising God" This last sentence refers to public occasions even when walking to meetings.

We need not wonder that with emotion so high further uncontrolled ecstatic developments followed: "For ten years the Spirit of God had been preparing the hearts of the people for something extraordinary... in ecstasy they spoke in languages unknown to those who heard the utterances regardless of the place, time, or circumstances contingent to the experience, one manifestation was uniform in all: they spoke in tongues, or languages, unknown to those who listened in wonder and hope".

Examining the Scriptures, they concluded that what was taking place was a renewal of Pentecost, Caesarea, and Ephesus. "While the meetings were in progress, one after another fell under the power of God, and soon quite a number were speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" Both the subjects of these experiences and the historian took for granted that this was a genuine working of the Spirit of God. But is it wise to take this for granted? Twenty years later, in 1906, while these exalted ecstasies were still in progress, the similar events in Los Angeles commenced.

The leading pastor of the older Movement invited a preacher who had been "baptized" at Los Angeles to visit him. The pastor had himself long been seeking the "baptism" and this is his description of how it came. "On Sunday morning, January 12 [1908], while he [the visitor] was preaching, a peculiar sensation took hold of me, and almost unconsciously I slipped off my chair in a heap on the rostrum at Brother Cashwell's feet. As I lay there great joy flooded my soul." He wrote further that "he spoke in about ten languages unknown to him" .

Paul spoke with tongues more than others but declared, "howbeit in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor. 14:19). In the case before us there had been no interpretation. It was rather a case of ten thousand words in tongues and not even five spoken with the understanding. This was rectified in one instance on August 25th of that year. "The service was pregnant with the Divine Presence, and the altar was filled with sixty-five or seventy souls.

This young Christian, completely overcome, started to the altar but fell weakly under the passion of his soul into the sawdust aisle." He was carried to the "altar" and "...within a short time, the humble seeker was baptized in the Holy Ghost and began to speak in tongues. A quiet, retiring, unobtrusive personality before, he was now exuberant, overflowing, vocal. Under the spell of the Spirit, he arose from the altar where he had lain prostrate. Then how wonderfully the Spirit wafted him across the platform and up and down the aisles, during which time he preached powerfully and eloquently in other tongues...

" He "remained in this state of ecstasy for several hours." "Mexicans present testified that he spoke Spanish during his discoursing" (89, 90). The next day he went six miles to his father's farm and "sat on the front porch steps and endeavoured to tell them of the exhilaration and tranquillity he felt in his heart... He was immediately overcome with ecstasy and fell back across the steps, where he lay speaking forth

the praises of God in an unknown tongue, interpreting the messages under the afflatus of the Spirit" (91).

In addition to such demonstrations there were healings of the sick, singing in tongues, and, what seems a unique feature, persons who were not musical, playing well on piano or organ. A woman rose in a meeting and moved toward the piano. Her husband, knowing she could not play, shut the piano to avoid a fiasco. But she, though walking among the seats with her eyes tightly closed, reached the piano safely, opened it and played musically. It will suffice to give one more scene from those early days, in the year 1914.

It concerns one of the most renowned and effective of the evangelists of that Church. "The meetings were so emotionally pitched and the booming voice of the evangelist so sincere that people often fell into the sawdust as he invited them to the altar. He stalked the aisles pointing his finger at sinners and commanding them to seek God, many of whom fell screaming in either fear or ecstasy as they started toward the altar" (26). Does this describe Jesus preaching on the hillsides of Galilee or in the Temple courts?

Did Paul "stalk the aisles" in the synagogues or the temple on Mars Hill and make people "scream" with fear? It is to be borne in mind that the scenes and features here given are not culled from attacks by hostile critics, and are not false and regrettable extravagances of which sober-minded leaders of that Church now feel ashamed. They are recorded by the official historian of the Church, who selected them after fifty years as being the very features he, and his Supreme Council who highly commend his book, wish to offer as accurately exhibiting the proper character of their Movement.

Let the reader put together what is thus commended to him as workings of the blessed Holy Spirit of God. Walking about a hall and playing a piano with one's eyes shut: public weeping, shouting, dancing, leaping, lying in a heap on the rostrum before the congregation: falling backward across steps, constant speaking in tongues often simultaneously, tongues which usually no one understood and which mostly were not interpreted. Both these last two items are activities expressly forbidden in public (1 Cor 14:27-28).

Let the reader watch an estimable young Christian man, seeking the baptism," moving toward the "altar" (known elsewhere as the "penitent form"), suddenly becoming exhausted and collapsing in the sawdust of the aisle, carried helpless to the front, lying there prostrate, and then suddenly "wafted across the platform and up and down the aisles" preaching in tongues. Let him further study the vigorous, vociferous evangelist, using his powerful voice as he strode up and down among the audience, frightening some until they screamed.

Let the serious Christian with a fair knowledge of his New Testament, try to fit such extravagances into the public gatherings of The Acts of the Apostles or make them to harmonize with the sobriety and order demanded in I Cor. 14. Dull, lifeless routine in Divine worship is indeed unscriptural: the Spirit of life will infuse heavenly life and vigour into gatherings where He has true liberty, bringing fervour of spirit and spontaneity of utterance, but if it is He who produces such unrestrained excesses as are above reviewed. then have we read our New Testament to little purpose.

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