

Response

Dr M Odette Pinheiro

Principal, Seminário Nazareno de Cabo Verde, Mindelo, Cape Verde

Here and there speaking in tongues becomes an issue among evangelicals, especially in holiness circles, concerned as we are about the baptism with the Holy Spirit – that which ushers in the fullness of the Spirit, which in the Book of Acts and the Epistles is clearly the standard for every follower of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, the claim of our charismatic brothers in that speaking in tongues is *the* evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit makes us from time to time have to capitalize this issue in order to clearly explain why we are at odds with their doctrine, inasmuch as it tends to cause false feelings of inadequacy to some in our congregations. This causes them to start doubting their previous experience with the Triune God, thinking their spiritual life is suffering for lack of the kind of esoteric experiences claimed to be normative in charismatic circles. Therefore, Rev Katambu Balibanga's paper is timely, as periodically we need to revisit the issue, to teach truth to our people.

In order to make the paper stronger, there are a few issues I would like to point out. One is that the expression "baptism with the Holy Spirit" is preferable to "baptism of the Holy Spirit", used throughout the paper. Not only is it more in line with biblical terminology (Acts 1:5; Matthew 3:11-12, et al.), but it also avoids a wrong representation of the baptism, as originating with the Spirit Himself. Even keeping well in mind the unity of the Godhead, we need to teach that the baptism is not of the Spirit; neither is He the Baptizer, or its originator.

It is important to point out that Christ is the Giver. He is the One who baptizes with the Spirit. In fact, the fullness of the Spirit is the fullness of Christ, as the indwelling Spirit is Christ "in us." This understanding may help us keep a right perspective of the operation and manifestations of the Spirit in the believer and in the life of the Church as the Body of Christ.

The paper rightfully elaborates on the importance of the biblical foundation for the evidence of the baptism with the Spirit, and its points are well taken. However, we would get a much stronger case concerning our

position if we would consider the basis for our discussion to be not only I Corinthians 12 – 14 and the passages narrating the three instances of speaking in tongues in the Book of Acts, but all that pertains to the giving, action and nature of the operation of the Holy Spirit. When we see the global picture of the life and teaching of Jesus, and the life and teachings of the Early Church, we see how much is said about the Holy Spirit and His operation, and how little attention is given to speaking in tongues.

Therefore, I would suggest that in dealing with this issue we follow Jesus from the time of His baptism, even as the Spirit came down on Him, clothing His humanness, that state in which He was voluntarily found emptied out of the prerogatives of Deity, so that His identification with us would be complete, causing Him to need the Spirit as much as we do. Following Him through His endless vigils, watching Him teaching His disciples to pray, sitting at His feet throughout the discourses of the Paraclete, being under His anointing while He prayed His priestly prayer, staying close to Him in Gethsemane, and even listening to the words addressed to the Father in Calvary—through times of joy and grief, worship and thanksgiving, jubilation or deep supplication, teaching or simple conversation, there is not even a hint of what our charismatic brethren teach as the external sign of the infilling of the Holy Spirit! Neither is it mentioned as a prayer language nor as a sign of His fullness!

Further, in teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus gave a beautiful but sober model of pointed thoughts, and further warned them not to use vain repetitions (*battalogēsete*) like the gentiles (Matthew 6:7) – that is, empty words without intended meaning: therefore, even less a canopy of sounds meaning nothing! The instructions of our Lord on prayer are a clear disavowal of praying in an unknown tongue. Nowhere in Scripture are we instructed to pray in anything short of clear words directed by one's mind, heart and will, well connected and integrated, without any disassociation between one's mind and vocal utterances.

I would also suggest that we try to ascertain that which was considered normative in the Early Church. And we will be surprised, by the fact that, except for the three instances of speaking in tongues at Pentecost, Cornelius' house and Ephesus when probably there were circumstances

warranting inaugural supernatural displays,⁶¹ its absence from the Church everyday life is startling – exclusion made of the Corinthian phenomenon, a clearly unhealthy situation, which warrants special consideration.

We find Peter, immediately after Pentecost, explaining what had just happened, quoting the prophet Joel word for word, mentioning the gift of prophecy, visions and dreams, which would result from the outpouring of the Spirit in the “last days.” He states that the gift of the Spirit is for all called of God then and in the future. But there is an absolute silence about the inaugural signs which have just taken place. That is, immediately after those signs happened in history for the first time, there was not even a word explaining their importance, if any, for that generation, even less for others to come.

So, my suggestion is that we examine closely the meetings and prayers of the Early Church. At times, even the contents of those prayers are given. We find the Apostles and their associates preaching and conducting great revivals; we see Stephen being stoned to death and, filled with the Spirit, praying in everyday language; we watch Paul receiving the Holy Spirit as Ananias lays hands on him – and not a hint of the presence or importance of speaking in tongues, either as a sign of the infilling of the Spirit or as an intended help in one’s spiritual life, a prayer language. Not a word!

But this is not all. I also suggest a tour of the Epistles, including those of the Apostles who were at Pentecost (Peter, John and James, the Lord’s brother, Acts 1:14). Although many times they mention the ministry of the Holy Spirit, there is complete silence about the place of tongues in the Christian life. Five times Peter’s epistles mention different ministries of the Spirit (I Peter 1:2: sanctification; 1:11-12: prophetic ministry; 3:18: strength as opposed to the weakness of the body; 4:14: presence of the Spirit upon the believer; II Peter 1:21: inspiration of the Holy Scriptures),

⁶¹ (1) At Pentecost the era of the Spirit was inaugurated, and there was need for cross-cultural proclamation; (2) at Cornelius’, some ten years after Pentecost, it was the coming of the Spirit the same way as it had “in the beginning” that convinced the Jewish brethren the Gentiles could be baptized in water and join the Church (Acts 10:45-47); (3) in Ephesus, about 20 years after Pentecost, it might have been the need to assert the correctness of Paul’s teaching, when the eloquent Apollos had already taught them and knew nothing about the infilling with the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). We need to balance these happenings against the whole of the New Testament and see if there is support for a doctrine that makes speaking in tongues the normative experience of the Early Church. Definitely not!

but not speaking in tongues.

And the same is true of John. In his first epistle he explains that the norm for the Christian is a pure heart (1:7, 9; 3:3), a life without sin (2:1; 3:4-6; 5:18), obedience to Christ (2:3-5, 24; 5:3), love perfected in the heart (2:5, 10; 3:11, 14, 18, 23; 4:7-8, 11-12). And he states, “We know that we live in him and he is in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (4:13). We are taught to prove whether the spirits (teachers) are from God, and to learn to distinguish false teachers from true ones (4:1-3). But there is not a word of instruction on glossolalia either as evidence of the Spirit or a prayer language. Nothing!

Equally important is the silence in all of Paul’s thirteen epistles, except for his corrective teaching in I Corinthians 12-14, as Rev Balibanga well points out. Paul was responding to concerns about the disruptive practices taking place at the Corinthian church, and only faulty exegesis can lead some to think he was condoning speaking in tongues. A closer look, however, using either the Greek or a good translation purged of the many words inserted by the KJV, which muddle the issue, show that the contrary is true. Although Paul seems to have thought it wise not to simply forbid the practice (probably forbidding it would have caused more harm than good to the church), he comes very close to that (14:26-28). He proves its lack of usefulness in church gatherings (14:2, 5-11, 19), and also its little to no usefulness when the user or the listeners do not understand the tongue used as a prayer language (14:14-17). His long address is a mild rebuking from one who does not approve a situation, but for some reason decides to put up with it, although pointing out “the most excellent way”, that of love (12:13, and chapter 13). It is like he expects the issue to die out by itself as the Corinthians mature and become spiritual rather than carnal minded (14:20)!

Unfortunately, even if the issue died out at that time, it has been resurrected from time to time in Church history. May God help us to do what Paul advised: follow the most excellent way, that of I Corinthians 13, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. What is not found in Him, cannot, in any way, be lacking in us!

Therefore, it is incumbent on us to clearly teach what the Bible really says about the way the Holy Spirit operates in our lives, to comprehend what is truly important to the Godhead as evidenced in the Word as a whole, to

experience the Spirit of God moulding us into conformity to our supreme Model—Jesus Christ, and teach all of this to our people. In fact, more than simply teaching them, it is also incumbent on us to lead them into the experience of the fullness of the Spirit, so that they will be fully satisfied in Christ, the donor of the Spirit. And when the heralds of exoteric experiences arrive, they will not find potential customers—rather, a people who fully understand “the things of God,” and who sing, shout, preach, and live life in the Spirit, not craving anything else than perfect love, the likeness of Jesus Christ.