

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ache soothed by giving the nauseous draught to him, it is very easy to see that such a system of medicine would soon attain a marvellous popularity amongst the sick and suffering, although possibly it would not find so many adherents amongst the strong and the healthy.

And no doubt many of the Socialistic proposals do seem to possess this character, and appear to proclaim that the poverty and the misery of the poor is to be remedied by the forcible curtailment of the property and luxury of the rich—that the emptiness of my pocket is to be met by an enforced contribution from the pockets of the well-to-do.

Obviously, such proposals are likely to prove popular; but, obviously also, the popularity of them will be more marked amongst those who are suffering from the disease of poverty than it is at all likely to become amongst those who are wealthy and have everything to lose.

There are, then, abundant reasons why Socialism should grow, quite apart from the intrinsic merits of those plans which the system has to propose for our adoption. To these plans, and to the relationship between Christianity and Socialism, we shall hope to draw attention in the next number of THE CHURCHMAN.

JOHN F. KITTO.



ART. VI.—DID THE APOSTLES POSSESS THE POWER OF SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT WILL?

A GENERATION or two ago most sober-minded persons would have been startled, and even shocked, at such a question as this being so much as raised. Possibly many may be startled even now.¹ The almost universal belief among members of our Church was that the promise of speaking with new (that is, as they understood it, with foreign) tongues was given by our Lord to His Apostles (St. Mark xvi. 17), and that the promise was made good on the day of Pentecost, when the power was for the first time exercised. They would probably quote, if questioned on the subject, the proper preface for Whitsunday in the Communion Service, where it is said that the Holy Ghost came down upon the Apostles, giving them the gift of divers (*i.e.*, as they suppose) foreign languages. But this is quite an assumption. By "divers languages" our compilers probably meant no more than to refer to 1 Cor.

¹ I doubt whether Olshausen is justified in saying (iv. 376) that the "old orthodox opinion" (as he calls it) "that the gift of speaking all the languages of the world was bestowed on the Apostles as a permanent endowment," is a view now abandoned.

xii. 10, where the A. V. also has interpolated the word "divers" to round off the passage. That this was their meaning is evidenced by the Latin version of the Communion Service, which simply gives "donum contulit linguarum," not "*diversarum* linguarum." All that the compilers meant was, that on the day of Pentecost "the gift of tongues" was bestowed on the Apostles—a fact which no one disputes—but does not touch the question as to what was the nature of the tongues bestowed.¹

It will be best to consider the question, first, philologically, examining the precise meaning of the words in which the gift is spoken of; and, secondly, historically, taking into consideration the light which the Scripture narrative, early Church history, and the writing of the Christian Fathers throw upon it.

I. The passage in which the promise of the tongues is first made has already been referred to. Our Lord says (St. Mark xvi. 17), *γλώσσαις λαλήσουσι καινὰς*; St. Luke writes (Acts ii. 3), *ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέροις γλώσσαις*; and in many other passages the phrase *γλώσσαις λαλεῖν*, without any adjective, is employed. Can any of these phrases properly, *per se*, indicate foreign languages?

First, as regards *καινός*—I am not aware that this word is ever used (unless metaphorically) to express anything but what is absolutely new. Bengel renders *καινὰς γλώσσας*, "linguas, quas nulla natio antea habuerat." So, too, we have (Mark i. 27; Acts xvii. 19) *καινὴ διδασχὴ*, "teaching never heard of before;" (2 Pet. iii. 13; Rev. xxi. 1) *οὐρανὸν καινόν, καὶ γῆν καινὴν*, "such as there had never been the like of before;" (St. John xix. 24) *μνημεῖον καινόν*, "a tomb never yet occupied," etc. Especially does this sense of the word appear to belong to our Lord's sayings. He it is (Rev. xxi. 5) who says *καινὰ πάντα ποιῶ*, "absolutely and wholly new;" who bestows (Rev. ii. 17) *ὄνομα καινόν*, "a name so entirely new that no one knows it but he who receives it;" "who makes him who becomes one with Him" (Gal. vi. 15), *καινὴν κτίσιν*; "who has opened for us (Heb. x. 20) a new and living way," *ἐνεκαινίσεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν*, etc. In view of these and similar passages, with little or nothing to urge on the other side, I should greatly doubt whether *καιναὶ γλῶσσαι* could be understood to mean foreign languages.²

¹ It would nevertheless be no unreasonable inference that the compilers of the Prayer Book thought that the *γλῶσσαι* of the Day of Pentecost were identical with the *γλῶσσαι* of the Corinthian Church—*unknown* tongues, that is.

² *καινός* is generally regarded by philologists as a primitive word. Schleusner suggests as a derivation, *καὶ νῦν*, "quasi nuperus, jam modo factus." This has, at least, some likelihood.

But Bengel remarks that St. Luke does not call the *γλώσσαι*, with which the Apostles spoke at the day of Pentecost *καιναί*, but *ἕτεραι*. "*ἕτεραι*," he says, "*erant linguæ prius usitatae variarum nationum, καιναί novæ, quas alius loquebatur, alius interpretabatur*"—the unknown tongues in fact, which, according to this view, had nothing to do with foreign languages. From this it would appear that Bengel did not consider that the miracle of the day of Pentecost was a fulfilment of our Lord's promise (St. Mark xvi. 17), but something quite unconnected with it. And this idea has been shared by others, because it removes one of the great difficulties in the way of supposing that the Apostles spoke foreign languages on the occasion referred to.

But surely, considering that our Lord was declaring what were to be the signs by which the professors of the truth were to be known, and not that only, but signs which were *παρακολουθεῖν*, to follow closely on the heels, as it were, of their first profession of faith—it is difficult to believe that He should have made no reference to the great and striking sign which was to be given in the course of a few days only, and would attract the attention of all men. Almost any theory would be more trustworthy than this. Why St. Luke did not write *ἤξεντο λαλεῖν καινάς γλώσσας* with a direct reference to our Lord's words it is, of course, impossible to say. But though *ἕτεραι γλώσσαι* may mean foreign languages—as *καιναί γλώσσαι* cannot—yet it by no means follows that it *does* mean it. "*Ἐτέρα γλώσσα* does not mean a foreign tongue in any other way than that it is *different* from the language usually spoken by a man. Without something in the context to fix the sense, *ἕτερα γλώσσα*¹ could hardly be rendered a "foreign language."

As for the third, and by far the more frequent, phrase, *γλώσσαι*, without any adjective to qualify it, it is almost needless to say that it can have no claim to mean more than simply "languages," unless there is something in the context to attach a special signification to it. So far as the philology of the question is concerned, therefore, it goes to prove that the gift of speaking foreign tongues at will was never bestowed on the Apostles—at all events, that there is no evidence that it was.

It may, indeed, well be asked why, if foreign languages were meant, the ordinary words signifying "foreign"—such as *ἀλλότριος*, *ξένος*, or more especially *βάρβαρος*—were not employed. The word *βάρβαρος* in particular, common enough in

¹ Aristot. Poet. 21 has been cited as showing that *ἕτερα γλώττα* may mean "a foreign language." But Aristotle does not in that passage speak of a language at all, but of a *γλώττα*, an obsolete or barbarous phrase.

ordinary Greek in that sense,¹ is especially so used in the New Testament. St. Paul writes (1 Cor. xiv. 11): ἔσομαι τῷ λαλῶντι βάρβαρος, καὶ ὁ λαλῶν ἐν ἐμοὶ βάρβαρος, "I shall be a foreigner to him that (so) speaks, and he will be a foreigner to me." So again (Rom. i. 14): Ἑλλησι καὶ βαρβάροις, i.e., "those who spoke Greek, and those who did not." Or, once more, ἀλλότριος; as (Heb. ix. 25) αἷματι ἀλλοτρίῳ, "foreign blood"; (Acts vii. 6) ἐν γῆ ἀλλοτρίᾳ, "in a foreign land," etc. It is difficult to understand why, if foreign languages were meant, one of these words was not employed.

Proceeding now to the historical aspect of the question, we have first to consider the occurrences of the day of Pentecost itself. Those who maintain that the Apostles then received the gift of speaking foreign languages, and that the entire miracle consisted in that ability, must suppose that each Apostle—or, it may be, each believer—spoke a different language, and that there was a corresponding number of nationalities to form a separate audience in every instance. But supposing that each preacher spoke a different language, and that that, and that only, constituted the miracle, we shall find ourselves obliged to believe that the whole of the various audiences must have been gathered, each round its own speaker, like the squares of a gigantic chess-board, or it would have been impossible, in the noise and confusion of so vast a multitude, clearly to distinguish anything. All the Parthians must have been grouped round the disciple who spoke Parthian, all the Medes round the Median, and so forth. But who can believe in the possibility of this; or, if so amazing an occurrence had taken place, that it would not have been recorded?²

But if we take notice of the language of St. Luke, we shall see reason to doubt whether the miracle was in this manner concentrated in the Apostles. "Every man" (εἰς ἕκαστος), writes St. Luke, "heard *them*"—not some one speaker—"discoursing in his own language." "How hear we," not "How *speaks* they," but "How *hear* we," they asked, "every man in his own tongue?" The marvel that struck them seems

¹ Cf. Soph. Ajax, 1263.; Herodt. ii. 158, etc. So Ovid Tristia, v. 10, "Barbarus hic ego sum, quia non intelligor ulli."

² Some theologians have maintained that only the twelve received the gift of tongues. But this is not only contrary to the testimony of early Christian writers, but to the wording of Scripture itself. Our Lord promised that the gift of tongues should follow, not the twelve, but "those who believed." Nor does there appear to be any distinction between the "all" of ch. ii. verse 1, and the "each of them" of verse 3. Again, there were certainly more than twelve nationalities present—probably a great many more—St. Luke's list being evidently not exhaustive.

to have been, that what sounded Parthian to the Parthian, sounded Medish to the Mede, etc.¹ If this was so, the great difficulty suggested in the last paragraph would be removed. It would not signify in what part of the crowd any man was standing. The orator who was nearest to him appeared to be speaking the hearer's own language, whatever that might be; and, what was stranger still, his neighbours, who belonged to different nations from his, understood the speaker as well as he did himself.

The same as regards the still greater difficulty, how all the multitude present could have understood Peter when he made his address to them (Acts ii. 14-35). Bishop Wordsworth would assume St. Peter's speech to have been made in the vernacular language of Judæa, and to have been intended for the Jews of Jerusalem only, the remaining eleven addressing other nationalities. But St. Luke's words disprove this, for he says that St. Peter invoked as his hearers, not the natives of Jerusalem only, but "*οἱ κατοικοῦντες*" (verse 5), *i.e.*, the foreign Jews temporarily sojourning in the city. Others suppose him to have spoken in Greek, which, they contend, was currently known all over the Roman Empire.² But it is more than doubtful whether this is even approximately true, many Romans even being unacquainted with it.³ And it is probable that many Jews were present who came from countries beyond the dominions of Rome—from Persia, Ethiopia, and even China. Besides, if any one language would have been intelligible to all present, where was the need or force of the bestowal of the gift of tongues at all?

The only theory that gives a clear explanation of the various phenomena of the Day of Pentecost is that which supposes a double miracle—a miracle in the Apostles, who spoke in a tongue they did not understand, and a miracle in the hearers, to whom the strange language sounded as if it had been their own.⁴ This also is in strict accordance with what we are told

¹ Some of the fathers, as Cyprian and Gregory of Nyssa and of Nazianzum, as well as Erasmus and others in modern times, have transferred the miracle *entirely* to the hearers. The Apostles, they hold, spoke their own language, but the spectators heard each his own. This, however, cannot be reconciled with *ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέρας γλώσσαις*.

² So Neander, p. i. 17.

³ Compare Acts xxi. 38, where it is evident that the chief captain was surprised at finding that even a person of St. Paul's culture was able to speak Greek.

⁴ It is, at least, a beautiful idea that the Day of Pentecost was the reversal of the day of the dispersion at Babel. "Then," writes Chrysostom, "the one language was divided into many, here many languages were united in one man." Similarly, Augustine and many other of the later fathers, and especially Theophylact in the twelfth century, who has put it with great force, *ὡσπερ ἐν καιρῷ τῆς πυργοποιίας ἡ μία γλῶττα εἰς πολλάς*

of the *γλῶσσαι* "unknown tongues," which were among the miraculous gifts bestowed on the first converts, and are treated of by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Corinthians. Whatever some theorists may hold as to "the tongues" on the Day of Pentecost being foreign languages, it is impossible that anyone who studies the subject, however cursorily, can think that the *γλῶσσαι* of the Epistle to the Corinthians were so. We are there plainly told that the strange tongue was not understood by the speaker, or the audience generally, or indeed by anyone, unless there chanced to be some person present, not who knew the language, but to whom the gift of interpretation of the unknown tongue had been given. If this was the case, he stood up and expounded it. If not, it remained a mystery. For this reason St. Paul seems to hold this gift of tongues as of comparatively little value, saying (1 Cor. xiv. 19) that he would rather speak five words which his hearers understood than ten thousand which they did not. The reader will see how irreconcilable this is with the notion that the gift of tongues was the power of speaking foreign languages; for these would be the very things which *would* make him understood by a foreign audience, and without which he would be speaking in an unknown, and therefore useless, language to them.

In truth, if the Apostles had possessed the power of speaking foreign languages *at will*—if when they encountered a Syrian they could address him in Syriac, and an Arabian in Arabic, and a Roman in Latin and the like—the gift would have been altogether different in its character from any other of the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on them. Thus they had the *δύναμις* "of discerning of spirits;" and by its aid St. Peter discovered the inward condition of Ananias, and St. Paul that of the cripple at Lystra. But they could not exercise this gift *at will*, but only when it was the Divine pleasure that they should do so. St. Peter only discovered the true spiritual state of Simon Magus when the latter put a question to him which would have disclosed the truth to any ordinary Christian. The same as regards Barnabas and Paul in their judgment of John Mark. One or the other must have been in error. The Apostles possessed also the power of healing the sick and raising the dead, but only when they received a Divine intimation that they were to exercise it. Such intimations were evidently given to St. Paul (Acts xiv. 9; xx. 10) and to St. Peter

διετίμετο, οὕτω τότε αἱ πολλαὶ γλῶτται εἰς ἓνα ἄνθρωπον ἦσαν. But that the one primitive lost language was, for the single Day of Pentecost, restored to the world, and was understood by all, is surely a wild fancy. Compare 1 Cor. xii. 10, where *γένη γλωσσῶν* are spoken of. This could not be descriptive of *one* language.

(ix. 40; x. 34). To suppose that the Apostles had the power of visiting a hospital (if they chose it) and sending all the patients home restored to health, or of entering the abode of any bereaved mourners and comforting their sorrow by raising their dead to life, would be a total misapprehension of the matter. Yet this would be only the same thing as regards the gift of healing, which the speaking foreign languages at will would be, as regards that of speaking with tongues.

Passing on from the narrative of the Day of Pentecost, we find later in the Acts of the Apostles what seems to be proof that sometimes, at all events, they were unable to understand what was passing in any foreign country from simple ignorance of the language. Thus at Lystra (ch. xiv.), when the people saw the cripple healed they raised a shout *in the (native) speech of Lycaonia*, that "the gods had come down in the likeness of men." The words "in the speech of Lycaonia" seem to be introduced by St. Luke in order to explain why SS. Paul and Barnabas did not at once protest against the blasphemous exclamations of the people. They evidently did not understand what the populace meant until they saw the victims led out. This is Chrysostom's account of the matter: Τοῦτο, he says ("the false inference of the Lycaonians"), οὐκ ἦν οὐδέπω δῆλον· τῇ γὰρ οἰκειᾷ φωνῇ ἐφθέγγοντο, ἐπειδὴ δὲ εἶδον τὰ σέμματα, τότε ἐξῆλθον (Chrys. Hom. Acts xxx.). Something of the same kind seems to have occurred at the meeting between St. Paul and the Maltese (Acts xxviii. 2). They, too, declared that St. Paul was a God. If he had understood what they said, he would certainly have warned them, as he did the Lycaonians, of their error.

Leaving Scripture, we shall find very little in early Church history to throw any light on the matter. It is urged by Bishop Wordsworth that there is no mention in any early Father of an Apostle having learned a foreign language before he went to preach in the country in which that language was spoken. But, on the other hand, neither is there any mention of an Apostle having gone to preach in a foreign land without having learned the language or secured an interpreter. And surely, as the natural and ordinary course would be for him to learn it, it is no wonder that no mention is made of that fact; while, on the other hand, as the other course would be a great and striking miracle, we *should* expect to hear it recorded. I make no use of the fact that some of the Apostles had ἐρμηνεύται¹ in their company, because though this word does

¹ Thus Papias calls St. Mark ἐρμηνευτῆς Πέτρον (Routh. i. 13), and Jerome says the same of Titus as regards St. Paul. But these could not have been interpreters in the modern sense of the word.

sometimes mean one who translates what is said in one language into its equivalent in another, it may equally mean an exponent of another man's doctrine and opinions, without any regard to the language in which they are expressed.

Wordsworth, again, insists that the Patristic evidence of the gift of foreign languages having been bestowed on the Apostles is very clear and decided. Yet, though nearness to the Apostolic times would be of overwhelming importance in this matter, he produces no writer of the first, second, or third century as bearing witness to the possession of the gift except Irenæus, towards the end of the second century, who only says that the Apostles spoke *παντοδαπαῶν γλώσσαις*, "all kinds of tongues;" and in the fourth century Cyril of Jerusalem, whose statement is that the Apostles "spoke with tongues they had never learned." But these expressions will apply to unknown, as well as to foreign, languages. Chrysostom, again, is quoted as upholding the Bishop's view; but, considering what has already been cited from him, it is difficult to believe he could have entertained such a belief. On the other hand, Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria have been quoted as favouring an opposite view. No doubt there are passages in writers of the fifth and later centuries which more or less clearly support Bishop Wordsworth's opinion. But they are too far distant from the Apostolic times to determine by their own authority the question.

To sum up the matter, the most reasonable conclusion appears to me to be (1) that "the tongues" of the Day of Pentecost were one and the same with the tongues spoken of by St. Paul (1 Cor. xii. 10) as being one of the special gifts of the Holy Spirit to the early Christians; (2) that then, as on other occasions to one (*i.e.*, the *ἅπαντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ὄντες*) were given *γένη γλωσσῶν*, to another (*i.e.*, the *ἄιδοις εὐλαβεῖς*) *ἐζητησία γλωσσῶν*, and that those alone failed to attain the gift who were not *εὐλαβεῖς*, but *χλευάζοντες*. There was no difference, in fact, between this exercise of Divine inspiration and its display at Corinth and elsewhere, except its magnitude and notoriety. What took place on the Day of Pentecost may well have occurred again and again on subsequent occasions, whensoever the Holy Spirit willed it. In foreign lands, in the presence of an audience who were desirous of learning the truth, the Apostles may have spoken, under Divine inspiration, what even they did not understand (*cf.* St. Mark xiii. 11), but which their hearers were gifted with the power of apprehending.

There is one remark which I desire to add which I have not found in any writer on this subject. If the Apostles had, indeed, possessed the power of speaking any foreign language

at will, they must also have possessed the power of writing it; and if they did possess this, how can we account for their not having exercised it? When we consider how slow and difficult is the process of translating a book into a foreign language, how imperfectly it is accomplished even where the greatest labour has been bestowed, how tamely in a translation passages fall on the ear, which in the original are full of life and power—we shall recognise the fact, of which none could ever have been more cognisant than the Apostles themselves, that no translation can ever really fill the place of an original work. If, then, an Apostle, when he went to preach in Gaul, in Scythia, in Abyssinia, could have written an original gospel in Gallic, in Scythian, in Abyssinian, which he could have left behind him to future generations, is it credible that he should not have done it? The labour would not have been very great. A week or two would have been the longest time it could have occupied; but its value would have exceeded all possibility of computation. One thing alone, I think, prevented their performance of this work—their inability to do it.

H. C. ADAMS.

Review.

Explorations and Adventures in New Guinea. By Captain JOHN STRACHAN, F.R.G.S., F.R.C.I., of Sydney. Pp. 300. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington.

THIS volume contains a good deal of graphic description, including many phases of native life, with a well-written narrative of perilous adventures, in three expeditions; and it has points of interest for readers of more than one class. To those who watch the progress of Missions the book will be especially welcome. The author, in a modest preface, remarks that it has been no part of his plan to aspire to literary renown; he has sought rather, in the plain, homely language of a British sailor, to tell his tale as simply as possible. Nevertheless, the record of his energetic and patient explorations, with hairbreadth escapes, is very readable; it shows the rough work of pioneering in the Papuan Group; and the sympathetic presentation of the work performed by the London Missionary Society, in Southern New Guinea, gives the book a distinct value.

On his first expedition, in 1884, Captain Strachan went up an unknown river. As to his adventures there, we quote a single sentence: "As I sat on the damp ground, nursing my rifle, reflecting on the fact that I had lost my fine little craft, and that within a mile of us were 1,200 cannibals, who were thirsting for our blood, my condition was not to be envied by the proverbial English gentlemen who sit at home at ease." In 1885, the gallant Captain, on the suggestion of some of the leading citizens of Sydney, prepared a second expedition, and sailed again. His third