

1-1-1975

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Richard A. Baer Jr.

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### Recommended Citation

Baer, Richard A. Jr. (1975) "Silent Worship, Glossolalia, and Liturgy: Some Functional Similarities," *Quaker Religious Thought*. Vol. 41 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt/vol41/iss1/4>

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## *Silent Worship, Glossolalia, and Liturgy: Some Functional Similarities*

RICHARD A. BAER, JR.

Among non-Pentecostals, much of the recent discussion of glossolalia, speaking in tongues, focuses on the strangeness of the phenomenon. But it is precisely this "strangeness" that may have blinded interpreters to a fundamental functional similarity between speaking in tongues and two other widespread and generally accepted religious practices, namely, Quaker silent worship and the liturgical worship of Catholic and Episcopal churches. Each of these three practices, I believe, permits the analytical mind, the focused, objectifying dimension of human intellect, to rest, thus freeing other dimensions of the person, what we might loosely refer to as spirit, for a deeper openness to divine reality.

Significantly, this goal is not achieved by a deliberate concentration on emotions as over against intellect. In fact, neither the silent worship of the Quakers, the practice of glossolalia, nor the liturgical worship of the Catholic or Episcopal church seeks to stimulate the emotions as such — in the manner of some revival meetings or some of the more contrived celebrations in certain avant-garde Protestant and Catholic congregations. Rather, the intent is to free us in the depths of our spirit to respond to the immediate reality of the living God.

Contrary to uninformed speculation and opinion, speaking in tongues is not a form of religious hysteria or Spirit possession.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it, except occasionally and quite incidentally, uncontrolled expression of emotion. Not only are glosso-

Originally published in *Theology Today*, October 1974, as "The Moods and Modes of Worship." Reprinted by permission.

lalics fully aware of what they are doing when they begin to speak in a tongue, but they also can stop at will. Although they may be moved by deep emotion, as indeed they often are in non-glossolalic experiences of prayer and worship, the act of speaking in tongues itself is not best characterized as emotional in contrast to intellectual. The actual speech can be only a quiet whisper or even sub-vocal, or, on the other hand, it can be loud and boisterous. At times glossolalics feel a singular *lack* of emotion while speaking in tongues.

For the most part, whether in private devotions or in public worship, glossolalics make use of tongues for praising God. But three other uses are also common, particularly in private devotions: (a) the expression of deep anguish or inner sorrow, (b) intercession, and (c) petition. In each instance there may be something deep inside the individual which simply cannot be expressed in words. For some people, and occasionally for almost everyone, silence seems appropriate at such moments. But others find that unpremeditated glossolalic speech best permits them to express their joy and sorrow. The use of tongues in such a case is similar to the fulfillment a person may find in spontaneous dancing, and, of course, the use of the dance for the expression of religious ecstasy is a well-known phenomenon. In petition and intercession one may not really know *what* to pray for. Even though there may be a deep sense of need or an acute awareness of distress, the one praying may possess little exact understanding of what is wrong, of what needs changing, or of what "solution" or healing would be appropriate. In such cases, praying in a tongue may well be the most satisfying religious response available (cf. Rom. 8:26-27 RSV, where Paul refers to the Spirit helping us in our weakness, interceding for us "with sighs too deep for words").

#### SILENT WORSHIP AND GLOSSOLALIA

Striking parallels exist between Quaker silent worship and the practice of glossolalia. At its best, Quaker silent worship involves a kind of letting go, a lack of strain or effortful attention, a willingness to "flow" with the leading of the Spirit and with the larger movement of the entire meeting. In the

course of the worship, Friends at worship may be led to speak to the gathered meeting but retain the freedom either to yield to this urge or to fight it. They are quite aware of what they are about and retain definite control over their speech.

However, it is not a strained or forced control but rather more like that of the skillful dancer or lover. What is said will, to be sure, have intellectual content, but not mainly this. One doesn't plan ahead of time what to say, just as one doesn't invent a tongue in which to speak. There is rather a sharing out of the depths of one's self, or differently described, a speaking that is prompted by the leading of the Spirit. It is almost universally felt in Quaker circles that rational analysis and argument over what is spoken "out of the silence" is inappropriate. One is not to analyze or judge but rather to listen and obey.

As in the case of glossolalia, the process of speaking out of the silence and listening in the silence involves a resting of the analytical mind, a refusal to let deliberative, objective thinking dominate the meeting for worship. Rather, one tries to "center down" and become open to the "inner light" within, to "that of God in every person," to the "leading of the Spirit."

Silence is common among Quakers both in private devotions and in public worship. Although what is spoken out of the silence in the meeting for worship needs no interpretation as such, others as led by the Spirit may add to what has been said, often in a manner not dissimilar to the Mishnaic commentary of the rabbis on the Torah. There is a rough parallel here to what is common practice among Pentecostals. The use of tongues in one's private devotions needs no interpretation. But in public worship one should not speak in a tongue unless there is present someone to interpret (1 Cor. 14:28). Significantly, the interpretation usually appears to be less a word for word translation of what has been said than a kind of paraphrase of the tongue with particular emphasis on reproducing its spiritual tone and general direction.

The phenomenon of quaking or shaking, which perhaps constitutes a religious and psychological parallel to glossolalia,

is virtually unknown among Friends today.<sup>2</sup> But there are other stylized physical manifestations which typically accompany speaking out of the silence. For example, one often speaks with a slightly lowered head and with little or no direct eye contact with fellow worshipers. Frequently the tone of voice has a decidedly subdued quality, reflecting what is probably the deep inner conviction among Friends that one does not try to persuade or convince others by human logic, emotion, or eloquence of the truth of what is said. Rather, one speaks out of the depth of silence by the leading of the inner light, the divine Spirit. It is only this divine Spirit that can bring true conviction and response on the part of the hearer. In other words, the truth of the communication or revelation is immediately self-authenticating. It is a word spoken not primarily in order to change the ideas of the worshipers or to rouse their emotions but rather to confront them in the inner depths of their spirit. It is noteworthy by comparison that in public Pentecostal-type worship what is spoken in a tongue, although usually more animated than the word spoken by Quakers out of the silence, nonetheless possesses something of the same quality. The speaker does not try to convince, persuade, or rouse people to action, perhaps in part because glossolalics are not rationally aware of the content of their speech. Also there frequently is a marked degree of inwardness on the part of the speaker, often reflected in the avoidance of direct eye contact, or in closed eyes, and in a tone of voice different from what would be employed in ordinary affairs.

#### LITURGY AND GLOSSOLALIA

Similarities between glossolalia and the classical liturgical worship of the church are less obvious than those we have noted in relation to Quaker silent worship. But they are also significant. Just as glossolalia and Quaker silent worship may at first be puzzling, frustrating, even irritating to the non-initiate, to many outsiders the practice of liturgical worship sometimes appears to be little more than a mechanical exercise in futility. What good can possibly come of the repetition week after week of the same prayer of confession, word of abso-

lution, intercessions, and petitions? And how can we even focus on what is being said when most of our attention is directed to turning pages and deciding whether to stand or to kneel? Even though we remember the advice, "When in doubt kneel," the non-initiate is so preoccupied with physical motions and the proper sequence and enunciation of prayers and other responses that it is almost beside the point to talk of the resting of the analytical mind and an encounter with God in the depths of the human spirit.

But all of this is not really surprising and is not unlike the experience of the person first learning to dance. At this point, even walking seems far more graceful than these awkward, contrived motions. But when one has mastered the dance steps, a kind of "wisdom of the body" takes over which indeed permits the analytical mind, the focused attention, to rest. One begins to "flow" with the beat of the music, the rhythm of the dance.

So with the liturgy. The very repetition Sunday after Sunday of the same prayers, responses, and creeds frees the worshipers from needing to focus consciously on what is being said. To be sure, our mind and heart are frequently stimulated by the theological content and the aesthetic movement of the liturgy. Also the total aesthetic impact of the environment — stained glass, wood carvings, Christian symbols, singing, organ music, incense, candles — helps produce a sense of awe and mystery.<sup>3</sup> But as beautiful and moving as all of these elements are, there is yet a deeper movement of the human spirit as it encounters the Spirit of God. The analytical mind is permitted to rest, and the human spirit is free to experience reality on another level. Also, the very formality of the liturgy and the fixed nature of the responses may save worshipers from undue introspection and thus help them center more fully on the presence of God.<sup>4</sup> And even though feelings are often heightened by liturgical worship, there is no conscious attempt to manipulate the emotions to achieve some desired effect. It is on the level of spirit that liturgical worship becomes most significant.<sup>5</sup>

### "BECAUSE IT'S FUN"

People frequently ask: "But what is the value of speaking in tongues?" One simple response is: "Because it's a lot of fun." More and more I am impressed with the element of playfulness in glossolalia, the sheer childlike delight in praising God in this manner. It is a contagious delight, and in many charismatic prayer groups people not infrequently break out in a childlike, spontaneous, almost irrepressible (but not hysterical) laughter right in the midst of prayers. Such laughter suggests an absence of a heavy super-seriousness about oneself and one's worship. It is not unlike the freedom a child has to burst into laughter even at an important family gathering. It reflects a lack of pomposity, an ability to see oneself, even one's serious praying, in perspective. It almost always has about it a releasing quality, and although it may sometimes be occasioned by some slight awkwardness of speech or action on the part of someone in the group, it is almost always a sympathetic and joyful laughter, thus ultimately healing and redemptive.

How fascinating then that Romano Guardini refers to the "playfulness of the liturgy." In his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy* he contends that the liturgy, analyzed according to its form, is far sooner a kind of play than it is work. The liturgy, he writes,

is life pouring itself forth without an aim, seizing upon riches from its own abundant store, significant through the fact of its existence. . . . It unites art and reality in a supernatural childhood before God. . . . It has no purpose, but it is full of divine meaning. . . . It is in the highest sense the life of a child, in which everything is picture, melody and song.<sup>8</sup>

Of all human activities such worship is the least goal-oriented. "The soul," Guardini concludes, "must learn to abandon, at least in prayer, the restlessness of purposeful activity; it must learn to waste time for the sake of God." One is immediately reminded of the beginning sentence of the Westminster Shorter

Catechism: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

#### LETTING GO

It is noteworthy that each of the three phenomena we are examining — glossolalia, Quaker silence, and liturgical worship — exhibits a kind of strangeness or peculiar style as over against more usual religious and secular activities. This is perhaps most often felt in the case of glossolalia, but it is not absent from the other two. Significantly, the non-initiate frequently manifests a good deal of resistance when confronted with this strangeness.

Various faith healers point to the resistance often encountered by those seeking healing, and John Sherrill, author of *They Speak with Other Tongues*, writes that "there seems to be a strange link between taking a seemingly foolish step — which God specifies — and receiving spiritual power."<sup>8</sup> Billy Graham refers to the same phenomenon and sees the value of the altar call at revival meetings as linked to this.<sup>9</sup> John Sherrill describes his own considerable resistance to the seemingly foolish step of raising his hands to God in praise. Only when he risked his middle-class decorum and respectability through actually praising God in this way did he break through to a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

There appears to be a principle of the spiritual life that as long as we insist on keeping full control we cut ourselves off from a deeper relationship with God. Apparently for many individuals a seemingly foolish or ridiculous action is required in order to be released for a genuine spiritual breakthrough.<sup>11</sup> Parenthetically, I would want to add, however, that not every foolish act or belief is valuable. Perhaps it is just foolish.

From time immemorial, saints and mystics have witnessed to the fact that a certain letting go, a being open to, is a necessary requirement for deeper experiences of the presence and power of God. But such a letting go is not easy for those of us today who have been profoundly influenced by Francis Bacon, Descartes, Leibniz, and others who viewed knowledge primarily as the ability to gain power over and control one's

environment. Moreover, as many today have increasingly lost faith in a transcendent God and in the reality of the resurrection of the dead, death is no longer seen as a rite of passage to fuller life, but rather as a confrontation with nothingness and the abyss and as the final loss of self-control. To let go in a world without God is to risk chaos and the destruction of the self.<sup>13</sup>

It is not surprising that the church has been influenced by this cultural framework and has also come to be wary of the loss of control, especially as this occurs in religious ecstasy. One of the few writers who addressed himself directly and consistently to this issue was the late Paul Tillich. He contended that the church "must avoid the secular profanization of contemporary Protestantism which occurs when it replaces ecstasy with doctrinal or moral structure."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Tillich viewed the entire Part IV of his *Systematic Theology*, entitled "Life and the Spirit," as "a defense of the ecstatic manifestations of the Spiritual Presence against its ecclesiastical critics."<sup>14</sup> The church's strongest weapon in this battle is the New Testament in its entirety. But, Tillich continues, "this weapon can be used legitimately only if the other partner in the alliance — the psychological critics — is also rejected or at least put into proper perspective."<sup>15</sup> But Tillich perhaps sensed how easy it would be to misuse these words, for he also insists that structure as well as ecstasy is needed in the church, and "the church must prevent the confusion of ecstasy with chaos."<sup>16</sup>

Tillich's comments cannot, of course, be used to validate glossolalia or other charismatic phenomena in the church. At the very least, however, they might encourage greater openness to such experiences among non-charismatics and also a more sustained attempt to understand these phenomena in relation to the totality of the church's thought and worship.

If there is an underlying functional similarity between glossolalia, Quaker silent worship, and traditional liturgical worship, as we have been suggesting, why have so many Catholics and Episcopalians and a smaller number of Friends sought and experienced glossolalia? Perhaps these three types of religious practice can complement and build upon each other. Not

a few classical Pentecostals, for example, have in recent years come to a new appreciation of liturgical worship, and Catholics are increasingly open to silence in public worship. Or it might be that for some people in our culture speaking in tongues represents a more decisive break with the hegemony of the analytical mind than either Quaker silence or the liturgy of the church and thus opens the way to spiritual growth beyond what has previously been experienced.

### Notes

1. Cf. H. Newton Malony, Nelson Zwaanstra, and James W. Ramsey, "Personal and Situational Determinants of Glossolalia: A Literature Review and a Report of Ongoing Research," presented at the International Congress of Learned Societies in the Field of Religion, Los Angeles, September 1-5, 1972.
2. From what little I have been able to learn about the phenomenon of quaking among Friends, one apparently has less control over the practice than does the one speaking in a tongue, and one cannot necessarily terminate the practice at will.
3. It is at this point that Quakers remain understandably cautious and choose for themselves utterly simple surroundings for worship. Their fear is that one can be so captivated by external form and beauty that worship will remain on the level of the aesthetic. This has been perhaps a necessary corrective within the total life of the church and reflects an austerity not unlike the Old Testament prohibition against making graven images. At its worst, however, Quaker worship sometimes suggests a Gnostic-like repudiation of the rich beauty and vitality of creation and of our somatic existence.
4. On the other hand, the fixed quality of the liturgy can be used to insulate from real change. In this case the regularity of the liturgy imprisons rather than frees the person. But it could be argued that roughly the same insulating effect can take place in Quaker silent worship and in glossolalic worship. Rather than using the silence to center down into a creative openness to the leading of the Spirit, the Quaker worshiper may simply become drowsy or retreat into a kind of numb withdrawal from reality. Likewise, glossolalic speech may be employed in a given situation to escape from a more reflective understanding of God's will or a specific decision of the will to be obedient to God's leading.
5. Although I have been greatly helped by Romano Guardini in *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (1935), I cannot fully agree with him that thought is dominant over feeling in the liturgy. To be sure, as he argues, emotion in the liturgy generally is "controlled and subdued" (p. 129), but I have difficulty with his statement: "The heart speaks powerfully, but thought at once takes the lead" (p. 129). The more accurate contrast, I believe, is that between thought and feeling, on the one

hand, and human spirit (the dimension of depth or self-transcendence), on the other. Thus neither feeling nor the analytical mind is the dominant or controlling factor in the liturgy but rather the reality of the Spirit of God addressing the human spirit.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 179-181.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
8. John L. Sherrill, *They Speak with Other Tongues* (1965), p. 116.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117, 123.
11. Cf. Mark 10:15 (and parallels) on receiving the kingdom of God as a little child; also 2 Kings, chap. 5, the account of Naaman the Syrian, who was required to wash in the muddy waters of the Jordan in order to receive healing.
12. In the secular-psychological context of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis the "letting go" motif is basic. If the client insists on censoring his thoughts and his speech, the therapist has little access to the person's repressed experiences and the realm of the unconscious. The therapist often encourages the client to "let go" and discover the powers of life emerging within. The operative assumption is that reality is such that it tends toward integration and wholeness. By trying too hard to become whole, the client may only impede the healing process. Some therapists and sensitivity group trainers, however, have perhaps over-reacted to our cultural bias in favor of control, and exhibit in their work a prejudice against clear ideas, conscience, will, and the analytical mind. My own position is that the individual must discover a balance between head and heart, mind and body, objectivity and subjectivity. Significantly, orthodox Christian theology has consistently held that the balancing, harmonizing, or centering of one's life is found outside of the self. It is realized only in the entrusting of oneself to God.
13. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III (1963), p. 117.
14. *Ibid.*, III, p. 118.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, III, p. 117. See the excellent discussion of Tillich's position in J. Rodman Williams, *The Era of the Spirit* (1971), pp. 85-91.