

## Praying in tongues: 1 Corinthians 14.12-40

Some do ... some don't ... so what! Praying in tongues – a personal reflection from Rachel

**“For those who speak in a tongue, do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation.” 1 Cor 14:2-3**

Last year, the Archbishop of Canterbury made headlines by revealing that he regularly prays in tongues in private as part of his daily devotion. His candid revelation lifted the lid on one of the more bizarre and mysterious expressions of Christian spirituality.

Praying in tongues, otherwise known as glossolalia, refers to the practice of praying in a “Spirit-inspired language” that is unknown to the speaker. It is generally associated with the Pentecostal or charismatic arm of the church. The reality, however, is that it is a gift exercised by Christians across the spectrum of traditions and denominations.

Justin Welby’s revelation was a moment of liberation for Christians like me who feel more at home in the traditional body of the church than in the charismatic one, and yet, who in private, pray to God in a tongue they do not understand. In the Archbishop’s revelation, I found acceptance for an aspect of my spirituality I hardly ever speak about, something I find equally hard to write about. Let’s face it, praying in tongues still has that aura of a rather taboo subject.

It is a subject that arouses strong feelings within the church and has led to deep hurt among Christians on both sides of an unnecessary divide ... And that makes me profoundly sad.

I don’t know why some pray in tongues and some don’t, but I do know that

all Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit.... And I also know from experience that it is no badge of spiritual maturity ... far from it! Paul makes it clear in today's reading that prophecy is a greater spiritual gift as it builds up the church while praying in tongues only builds up the individual. It was the book of Acts and ... curiosity, that got me started. I could not help noticing the numerous references to it and started asking questions. It took me on a journey which marked the transition from my teenage years to the start of my adult life of faith.

Now many years later, praying in tongues is an integral part of my prayer life. Sometimes it feels like praise ... and sometimes those prayers just pour out of me like a torrent of consciousness. They give me courage and peace and help me pray when words fail me. At times I am conscious of some divine spring-clean taking place in the inner parts of my being, bringing to the surface unresolved issues. And then sometimes I just feel a bit stupid ... And yes, there are times, but by no means always, when they are accompanied by an overwhelming sense of well-being.

These encounters through prayer are precious to me but then all experiences of prayer are just as precious. We encounter God through prayer in a multitude of different ways which are after all not so dissimilar. And surely that is what is most important.

I long for a time when our approach is more along the lines of: Some do.. some don't ... so what!

I long for a time when the subject of praying in tongues is no longer such a minefield of division and hurt ...when it is neither airbrushed out of our reading of Scripture nor portrayed as some contrived model of spiritual attainment.

I dare to hope that we can move on, not because of ignorance or disregard ... but move on because there are more important things to focus on such as building one another up through words of encouragement and compassion.

And then yes... there is the humongous subject of prophecy but that will have to wait for another time.

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