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## On Glossologia\*

Ch. 18. from *The Truth of Our Faith:: A Discourse from Holy Scripture on the Teachings of True Christianity*, By Elder Cleopa of Romania

*Inquirer:* What is *glossologia* or “speaking in tongues”?

**Elder Cleopa:** *Glossologia*, or “speaking in tongues,” as a gift of the Holy Spirit, is the ability to speak a foreign language without having to be taught it or knowing it beforehand. This is clear from the Holy Scriptures in which the events of Pentecost are described, and at which time this divine gift first appeared. The text is unabbreviated and unambiguous and recounts for us an actual event. Consequently, the text itself cannot be explained with some particular mystical or spiritual meaning alone, omitting the literal meaning.

Let’s allow the passage from the Acts of the Apostles itself to explain what the text means and what comprises the speaking of foreign tongues by the Grace of the Holy Spirit:

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that

every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:1-13).

From an examination of these thirteen verses that contain the key to the solution of the problem, we can educe the following conclusions:

- The speaking of foreign tongues or languages, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, manifested itself, as a miracle, for the first time in history. For this reason the reader is provided with an extensive description, that he may be able to learn what this miracle is and in what it consists.
- With this powerful gift of the Holy Spirit the Apostles began to preach in other languages, even 15 different local languages of other tribes and nations that had converged there for the feast of Pentecost.
- The Jews of other nations, who had as their mother tongue the language of the nation in which they lived, marvelled when they heard the Apostles preach in their own language, for the Apostles were simple men of Galilee and it was impossible for them to know another language except the Aramaic they had learned at home.
- The Jews of other nations understood everything from the divine preaching of the Apostles. They spoke to them with precision in their own language concerning the greatness of God, without needing a translator, and it is in exactly this that the miracle rests. The visitors to Jerusalem were unable to explain what they witnessed and were full of wonder.
- Among the listeners of the preaching there were also

some that did not understand anything that the Apostles said and subsequently mocked the Apostles, thinking that they were drunk. This group can be none other than the residents of Jerusalem, and perhaps those of nearby Palestine, who didn't know other languages except their mother tongue, Aramaic. For these men the preaching of the Apostles was completely unintelligible and they considered it simply sputtering.

Thus, the residents didn't understand anything from the preaching, unless someone translated it for them. For just as there is the gift of speaking in tongues or foreign languages, there also exists the gift of translation. This was given, as is apparent below, when those listening were only locals ignorant of other languages, as was, for example, the case in Corinth (1 Cor. 14). In Jerusalem, however, during this period there was not felt this deficiency. The gift of translation was itself also miraculous, just as was that of *glossologia*, on which it was directly dependent. Not having this gift the residents who were listening judged the work of the Apostles according to their personal determination and perception alone.

*Glossologia* was a sign of the power of God and, as a decisive means of proselytism, was manifested among men who ignored the Faith (1 Cor. 14:21-25). For, apart from this, what meaning does it have for someone to speak about Christ in a foreign language if he was taught, believed and lived his faith in Christ from his childhood years?

If there are those who speak foreign languages and they are not understood by anyone, how do they build up the Church or benefit it? For the purpose of *glossologia* was for the Apostles to be able to spread, via the transmission of the *kerygma* (preaching) in foreign languages, the Faith of Christians to all people and to make the Gospel known throughout the world, as it is written: "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Ps. 18:4).

If someone had this gift, we must not think that it was the greatest among the gifts of God. The Apostle Paul says that there are other, greater gifts of the Holy Spirit than that of *glossologia*. "I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edification" (1 Cor. 14:5). And elsewhere he also says, "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are

unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” (1 Cor. 14:23).

Consequently, the gifts of prophecy, of preaching and of interpretation of Scripture are much higher than the gift of *glossologia*, for with these the Church of Christ is built up and benefited much more than with the gift of linguistics or speaking different languages (1 Cor. 14: 2-4). More sublime and higher than all the gifts is love, about which listen to what the Apostle Paul has to say: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1).

*Inq.:* It is claimed by certain people that when the grace of the Holy Spirit comes to them and they begin to speak in tongues, they find themselves in a state of ecstasy. It is only at this time that they are able to speak certain inarticulate and incomprehensible human sounds, to have certain internal impulses or exclamations of joy, or to voice a certain remorse for their sins, as well as other movements of the body which are made by the action of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Saul had a similar spiritual manifestation when following David and going to Ramah. He was overcome by the prophetic spirit and with a flurry he prophesied, ripped his clothes off and went naked all day and all night (1 Sam. 19:22-24).

**EC:** It is incomprehensible for a healthy, clear and well-balanced intellect to reveal the great mysteries of God with inarticulate exclamations. Such a thing is not at all the same, as we know from that which was revealed through *glossologia* as a divine gift (1 Cor. 14: 2-4).

The Greek idol-worshippers of antiquity had similar exhibitions when they prayed to their gods Dionysus, Zeus and the others. When they were found before a diabolic idol they would fall into ecstasy or a trance, shaking and making rhythmic movements with their body, and tumble on the ground, with a few even foaming at the mouth like the demon-possessed of olden times. Next they would get up and sing rhapsodic melodies and make exclamations with demonic delight. The same happened with the Montanists, heretics of the first and second centuries after Christ, the Gnostics, and later the Methodists, the Quakers, the Pentecostals and others. These groups took to making uncanny and strange turns and movements of the body, had hallucinations and were in delusion, and thought that all of this came from God, when in actuality it comes from theologians of darkness who are familiar with Holy Scripture and who lead into delusion the unsuspecting, cheating them with words taken even from Holy

Scripture.

*Inq.:* These people also say that with the charisma of *glossologia* that they possess, they maintain unbroken the work of the Holy Spirit among men and within the Church of Christ as it existed in the beginning of Christianity. For, they claim, today, as also in the beginning, with this perceptible sign of the gift of grace, the Holy Spirit stirs wonder and amazement in those who as yet are not Christians. Furthermore, with this visible sign of the gift of speaking in tongues, it becomes known to the faithful that there still exists a work of the Holy Spirit in the Church as in the first period of Christians in Jerusalem.

**EC:** The gift of speaking in foreign tongues or *glossologia* was not given by God for all time, until the end of the world. It was a sign given to the Church only for a time, with the aim of making it easier for those of other religions to convert to Christianity. We see, in this respect, that the Jews of Jerusalem, who did not understand the preaching of the Apostles - *kerygma* given by divine grace - did not, in fact, believe but rather said that the Apostles were drunk. The Prophet Isaiah prophesied concerning their disbelief before this great gift of grace, saying, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear" (Isa. 28: 11-12). Indeed, in Jerusalem they spoke to them with lips of strangers, for the foreign Jews, or Jews of the Diaspora, heard about the wondrous works of God in their own languages and believed (Acts 2:11). And thus it is that the Apostle Paul prophesied that the gift of speaking in foreign tongues would cease (1 Cor. 13:8 , 1 Cor. 14:22-28).

The people of that time were spiritually in the age of infancy, for only just before had they left the worship of idols and their intellects were blurred, confused and insensible. They were still captives to the enjoyment of the fleshly pleasures and did not have knowledge of the divine gifts that one enjoys only on account of faith. It is for this reason that signs and wonders were then showered upon them.

Some spiritual gifts are invisible and become accessible to man via faith. Others, however, are visible on account of the unbelief of men. Here is an example: The forgiveness of sins is an invisible spiritual work. We do not see with our sensible eyes how we are purified of our sins. Why? Because neither is the soul that is purified visible to the eyes of our body. Speaking in different tongues or languages is also a work of the Holy Spirit, but it is a visible sign and more easily persuades those of other religions.

Hence, the reason Saint Paul says the following: “Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe” (1 Cor. 14:22). He who believes doesn’t have need of guarantees and signs. The first Christians would not have believed if they had not received signs.

*Inq.:* From those who I spoke to I learned that besides the gift of speaking in tongues, they have also the gift of the baptism of “the Holy Spirit and fire” (Lk. 3:16) which is totally different from baptism with water. This baptism showers upon them various miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially that of *glossologia* and the interpretation of Scripture, as happened also at Pentecost with the Apostles.

**EC:** Is it possible that there are two Christian baptisms? Doesn’t it say in Holy Scripture that there is one and only one? St. Paul tells us there is but “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all . . .” (Eph. 4:5; See also: 1 Cor. 12:13). The baptism of “the Holy Spirit and fire” (Lk. 3:16) of Pentecost is none other than the Christian baptism which was pre-announced by both Saint John the Baptist and the Saviour Himself (Mt. 3:11, Acts 1:5) and which He said would happen by “water and the Spirit” - baptism neither by water alone, as with the baptism of John, nor only by the Spirit (Jn. 3:5). These two elements, the one visible and the other invisible, constitute the two most necessary prerequisites for the one and only Christian baptism. If, with respect to the practice of this mystery, some still speak only of water or only of the Spirit as constituting the main element of this Mystery, let them know that the Mystery is one and only one and its two elements are inseparable.

*Inq.:* Each Christian should have within him the Holy Spirit. The members of a certain Christian brotherhood say that while they can give evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit within them through the practice of speaking in foreign speech, the Orthodox are not able to show this by any means. Consequently, they say that the Orthodox are not true Christians due to the absence of this work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

**EC:** It is true that each Christian should have consciously within himself the Holy Spirit. Yet, the presence of the Holy Spirit is not only made manifest via *glossologia*. The Apostle Paul tells us that “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance . . .” (Gal. 5: 22-23). Do you see, therefore, that among the fruits of the Holy Spirit the practice of speaking in foreign languages is not referred to anywhere? This is the case because it is a gift of the Holy

Spirit that was given for a certain period of time in the Church, while the gifts referred to here by the Apostle, all Christians, of every epoch, must have throughout their life. Whoever has the fruits of the Spirit has also the Holy Spirit within him. The gift of *glossologia* is not a common gift of grace but something special and not given to everyone (1 Cor. 12:10). How, then, can we consider it a precondition of salvation and a prerequisite for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life when it is not given to everyone? The Apostle Paul says, "Do all speak in tongues?" (1 Cor. 12:30). Consequently, then, those who do not speak in tongues can also be good Christians. In the community of true Christians everyone does not have the same gifts. The Apostles did not require this gift from all the Christians, and indeed, in quite a few it was revealed that this talent was profitless. The Apostles themselves did not use this gift, apart from exceptional cases when they had a certain aim, as on the day of Pentecost. So, therefore, it should be clear that they did not call upon every Christian to have this gift as a means of salvation.

*Inq.:* I would like, after all that we have said concerning *glossologia*, for you to summarize exactly the main points of our discussion.

**EC:** Listen, brother, and guard well within your mind: True *glossologia* as a gift of the Holy Spirit can be recognized only when it is combined with the following presuppositions.

1) If someone, by inspiration [of the Holy Spirit], speaks a language, it should be understood by all those who stand nearby, as happened in the case that we cited from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:1-13).

2) When someone speaks a language among the residents [of Jerusalem, Corinth etc.] that they do not understand, then another gift, the gift of translation of this language into the language of the people is necessary. Without this translation the foreign language is babbling and lunacy (1 Cor. 14:23).

3) *Glossologia* was not given to the Church forever, but only in the beginning of Christianity in order to awaken the idol-worshippers and Jews to belief in Christ. This is why the Apostle Paul said that the gift of *glossologia* would at some point cease to exist in the Church (1 Cor. 13:8).

4) Since we believe that Christ is our true God we no longer have need of *glossologia*, given the fact that

the knowledge of foreign languages by inspiration [of the Holy Spirit] is a sign (miracle) necessary only for the unbelieving and not for the faithful (1 Cor. 14:22).

5) From the beginning of Christianity the gift of *glossologia* was one among the lesser in the Church of Christ, while the others, such as that of prophecy, interpretation of Scripture, of love and the rest, were much greater.

6) It is totally out of the question for speaking in tongues, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, to mean a delirium in a non-existent and incomprehensible language, for then it wouldn't be speaking in languages, but our own [exclusive] language (Mk. 16:17). Moreover, it comes into clear contradiction with chapter two of the Acts of the Apostles.

7) The inarticulate voices, lunacies and incoherent utterances which we often hear from the self-proclaimed speakers of tongues very much resembles the scenes the idol-worshippers would make before their idols of Dionysus, as well as with quite a few of the Montanists, Gnostics, Quakers, and later Pentecostals, all of whom the true Church of Christ anathematizes (See the first and second Canons of the Sixth Oecumenical Council).

Thus, brother, foreign to the Spirit of God is the speaking in tongues of those who think they are grace-bearers and make bold to misconstrue the true *glossologia*, a gift of the Holy Spirit which existed at the outset of Christianity.

\* Translator's note: Literally, the Greek word translates as "linguistics." Due to a popular misconception among English speaking people, the translation of γλωσσολογία is troublesome. In this chapter the word has been rendered variously as "*glossologia*," "speaking a foreign language," "speaking a foreign tongue," "linguistics," and "speaking in tongues." The English dictionary gives for glossology: "The science of language; linguistics."

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Photos - Elders - Hermits from Mount Athos  
Father Cleopa: The Elder of Romanian Orthodoxy  
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