

Session to Session

... promoting the strengthening and
growth of Biblical Presbyterianism
in America ...

August-September 1991, Vol. 5, No. 4

What Did the Assembly Do? A Ruling Elder's Report

by Philip Fanara, Jr.

We met in Birmingham, Alabama, to *review* and *direct* the work of the church. The PCA has over thirteen agencies, including: Mission to the World, Mission to North America, Covenant College, Covenant Theological Seminary, Christian Education and Publications, Ridge Haven, the PCA Foundation, Insurance and Annuities, etc.

The General Assembly carefully reviewed how these agencies have complied with the directives of previous General Assemblies and directed them in how they should go forth and do Christ's work. The work done over the year by each of the 49 presbyteries was also reviewed.

We also heard greetings and reports from our sister reformed churches, such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Korean Presbyterian Church, and the Japanese Presbyterian Church.

I cannot speak for all commissioners of the General Assembly, but I can relate the activities of some commissioners whom I observed. A number of those on committees specially assigned to review in detail each of the agencies and permanent committees worked from 8:00 AM to 10:00 PM much of the week. A few I observed started their day as early as 5:00 AM and worked until 10:00 or 11:00 PM. Ruling elders and teaching elders who were not assigned to committees spent most of their time on the floor of the Assembly. For those who take His work seriously, it was a grueling schedule.

During the week your General Assembly acted upon well over sixty bills, resolutions, and recommendations. However, two issues were of overriding importance at this General Assembly. First, an issue which affects our church more externally than internally was the resolution passed on sex and marriage. Its importance came home to me before the General Assembly when a number of my colleagues and even several of my local church members confused our General Assembly, with that of the PCUSA. This confusion definitely needed clarification. The recommendation which we passed (with no debate concerning its substance) definitely did that. It is as follows:

In light of the current focus on sexuality and the public confusion generated through the recent controversy on that subject within the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), a distinctly different denomination, strongly reaffirms its commitment to the Bible's teaching on sex and marriage.

The PCA reaffirms that sex is a gift from God which should be expressed only in marriage between a man and a woman. Therefore all sexual intercourse outside marriage, including homosexuality and lesbianism, is contrary to God's Word (the Bible), and is sin. We acknowledge that the Bible declares that those who continuously and unrepentantly sin shall not inherit the kingdom of God, and we sorrow for their plight. Yet we also joyfully acknowledge that God in the gospel of Jesus Christ forgives repentant sinners and welcomes such forgiven, cleansed and changed sinners into the Church of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

We can thank God that our General Assembly was composed of Godly men who were willing to stand firmly on the Holy Scriptures and declare His full teaching and the gospel to the world. And I thank Him that I could stand in unison with such a body of men.

Continued on page 2

Tongues Today? Part III

by O. Palmer Robertson

One view that has been promoted widely in recent days must be rejected, not for its initial points but for its rather unexpected conclusion. This particular viewpoint begins by affirming that the tongues described in the New Testament were for public usage in the church. It is furthermore asserted that the tongues of today must be regarded as something other than the phenomenon of tongues described in the New Testament scriptures:

But in the end it is proposed that the tongues of today, though not of the nature of New Testament tongues, are nonetheless a gift of the Spirit to the modern church. Though admittedly not the same as the tongues of the New Testament, they nonetheless have a proper role in the life of God's people today. Because of the frantic pace of modern life, God's Spirit

Continued on page 2

Session to Session

Issues before the Assembly, continued from page 1

The second major issue was reflected in a number of proposed resolutions and rule changes which were defeated. These changes would have tended to give more power to the central administration in Atlanta, and the permanent committees, at the expense of local churches and presbyteries. While these bills were well intended, they would have moved us away from the Biblical model of church government. It is natural to wonder, "Is the form of church government really that important to the spiritual state of the church?" But if we are to be true to the whole counsel of God, we must answer this question strongly in the affirmative. Moreover, as we look back on the causes of the declension of Presbyterian denominations, we can often trace the pattern of declension to first, an altering of church government to one that is more centralized, second, abandoning the inerrancy of scriptures, third, discarding or de-emphasizing the Westminster Confession. We must not be deluded by the arguments of efficiency or expediency when it comes to church government. The Church of Jesus Christ is not an organization of this world. We do not do what seems efficient in our own eyes, when it is contrary to His word.

Though not all things are perfect within the PCA, the Lord blessed our General Assembly, and continues to bless the PCA in many ways. However, let us continue to be ever vigilant for Him and the peace and purity of His church.

Finally, on a personal note, this Yankee would have to say that he enjoyed Birmingham immensely. Southern hospitality is all that I have been told it was. I was greatly impressed by the friendliness and helpfulness of the people of Briarwood and Birmingham. I also learned that those beans I enjoyed so much were black-eyed peas. I learned this only after commenting, "Boy, these beans are delicious." This brought hilarious laughter from my Southern brethren at the table, who thereupon designated me a "True Yankee."

Philip Fanara, Jr., is a ruling elder at Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church in Hyattsville, Maryland.

R. B. Kuiper on the Church's Ministry

There are whole denominations, some of them large, which have impressive missionary programs but do next to nothing for the building up of their own membership in the faith. . . .

He who would evangelize those without the church while neglecting the building up of those within the church is a good deal like the head of a family who is moved with deep compassion for the emaciated children of his neighbor but neglects to feed his own, forgetting the startling warning of the inspired apostle: "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel (I Timothy 5:8).

—from *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Banner of Truth, 1966)

Tongues Today? continued from page 1

has devised this means by which the modern-day stressed-out Christian may find emotional and psychological relief.

Through "speaking in tongues," an answer may be found to the tensions associated with living in today's world.

Obviously this conclusion cannot arise from an exegesis of scripture, since the position affirms that the tongues of the New Testament are not the same as modern-day "tongues." Instead, it is being proposed that the public assemblies of God's people be opened to a most spectacular phenomenon on the basis of psychological observations concerning the possible effects of tongue-speaking. Modern-day tongues are presented as a legitimate element in worship today on the basis of a hypothesis about the way God might decide to meet the special emotional stresses of the modern world.

But is it to be supposed that the Apostle Paul had no need for emotional relief from the tensions associated with his "care for all the churches" (II Cor. 11:28)? Should it be concluded that Martin Luther had no need of the "psychological relief" that comes from the supposedly modern gift of tongues? With kings and governors constantly seeking his life, did Luther have a less stressful situation than Christians in America today?

Many activities can function as psychological reliefs. Going out to eat, watching a video, or playing a game of golf can serve to uplift the spirit. Yet none of these things should be viewed as a "gift" of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts are special administrations of the Holy Spirit by which members of Christ's body nourish and minister to one another. To suggest that the modern tongues phenomenon is not of the same nature as the tongues of the New Testament and yet is a gift of the Spirit for the church today could open the door to almost any kind of experience-centered rather than scripture-centered phenomenon.

It would appear much more consistent with the biblical evidence to acknowledge that because the tongues of the first century were foreign languages, the tongues of today, which do not appear to be foreign languages, must be regarded as a phenomenon not endorsed by the New Testament scriptures.

Thirdly, New Testament tongues were for public consumption. All gifts of the Spirit were for the benefit of Christ's church. A "gift" in the New Testament was bestowed on an individual so that he might provide a blessing for the people of God. By a "gift" of the Spirit, one person is enabled to minister to others. Rudimentary to the whole concept of gifts is the fact that they are not for private consumption, but are given for the sake of edifying the body of Christ. Paul starts:

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given *for the common good* (I Cor. 12:4-7, emphasis added).

It is with this understanding in mind that Paul proceeds to

develop the image of the church as a body. Each part of the body is given a ministry by which it may aid the rest of the body. The eye keeps the body from stumbling. The mouth feeds the body its nourishment. The ear hears for the rest of the body. All the various gifts enable the members of Christ's body to minister to one another.

With this larger picture of the public nature of spiritual gifts in mind, consider more closely I Corinthians 14:18, 19. Paul says:

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than speak ten thousand words in a tongue.

Now at first glance it seems that Paul intends to contrast private tongues with public tongues. Is not Paul saying, "I thank God that (*privately*) I speak in tongues more than all of you, but (*publicly*) in the church I would rather speak intelligible words that instruct others?" The contrast between private words spoken in a tongue and public words spoken in prophecy seems to be underscored by his usage of the phrase "in the church" only in conjunction with the "intelligible words" of prophecy.

But the interpreter must be very careful about introducing words or concepts that actually do not appear in the original text of scripture. As a matter of fact, the word order of verse 18 in the original language makes quite plain the true contrast intended by Paul in these verses. It is not a contrast between private and public utterances. Instead, it is a contrast between Paul's experience of speaking in relation to those promoting tongues and Paul's experience of speaking in relation to the church as a whole. "More than all of *you*", he says, "I speak in tongues." Paul's emphasis is made plain by the order of his words. "In relation to *all of you*, I speak more in tongues" (v.18). The comparison is between Paul and those of the Corinthian church that are so interested in promoting tongue-speaking. Perhaps to their surprise, Paul affirms that he speaks in tongues more than the whole lot of them.

Then in the next verse he introduces his contrast. "But *in church*, I prefer to speak five words for understanding" (v.19).

What is Paul's contrast? It is not a contrast between private tongues and prophecy spoken in the church. Instead, the contrast is between tongues as they relate to those who are promoting tongues among the Corinthians and tongues as they relate to the church as a whole. Paul says, "In relating to *you*," my record is plain. Recognize this fact. Don't talk to me about speaking in tongues as though I know nothing about the matter, for I have spoken in tongues more than all of you. I know first-hand about speaking in tongues. *But*, with reference to the church, I would prefer to speak clearly in a language that will edify. Although I do as a matter of fact speak in tongues more than all of you, my concern is for edification.

That's the contrast in verses 18 and 19. No mention is made of private tongues in contrast with public tongues. For New

Testament tongues never were meant for private consumption. Like all other gifts of the Spirit, they were intended for the whole body.

With this perspective in view, it becomes clear at the outset that a vast majority of tongue-speaking activity today could not be the same as New Testament tongues. Private tongues are not New Testament tongues. If tongues are a gift for the church, then they should be brought out into the open for the benefit of the church.

Endorsement of the idea of a "private" gift of tongues may lead to a peculiar situation. Suppose a man affirms his sense of call to the ministry. The church responds by indicating its desire to test his gifts. He affirms that in his judgment he has the gift of preaching, so the church tests that gift. He says he senses in himself the gift of administration. So the church tests that gift.

But what if this candidate for the gospel ministry declares that he also has the gift of tongues? Shall the church also test that gift? Or shall it be concluded that tongues are a "private" gift that cannot be tested? Strange indeed would be such a circumstance. A person concludes that he possesses a gift meant for the body, and yet his gift cannot be tested. Every other gift of the Spirit must be tested publicly by the church. But a category of gifts is being introduced that cannot be subjected to the testing of the brothers. This kind of circumstance in the church would be strange indeed.

Yet one further verse must be analyzed carefully with respect to the possibility of "private" gifts in the church. For I Corinthians 14:28 states that if no "interpreter" is present to provide the meaning of an utterance spoken in a tongue, then the speaker must keep silent in the church, and must "speak to himself and to God." Does not this statement appear to endorse a private gift which does not function publicly in the church?

If approached in a certain way, this verse admittedly would appear to endorse the privatization of the gift of tongue-speaking. If no interpreter is present, the tongue-speaker should speak to himself and to God.

But further consideration would not appear to lend support to this position. For the whole point of the passage is to provide orderly control of multiple gifts as they function in the church. "Two or at the most three" should speak in tongues, and someone must interpret (v. 27). In a similar way, "two or three prophets" should speak, and the others should discriminate (v. 29). The whole context deals with the orderly functioning of gifts within the assembly. In the context of this precise discussion, Paul makes the point that the tongue-speaker without an interpreter is to remain silent, speaking to himself and to God (v. 28). The two actions are simultaneous. As he restrains himself until an interpreter is present, he speaks within himself while communing with God. The question is not whether the gift of tongues should function in private or in public. Instead, the question is *when* the gift of tongues should function in the assembly, and the answer is that tongues may function properly in the church only when an interpreter is

Session to Session

present. From the comment in verse 31 that "all can prophesy" in due time, it may be assumed that the same principle would hold for tongues. As soon as an interpreter is present, the utterance may be delivered. But in the meantime, the tongue-speaker must manifest patience in the assembly, just like the prophet. For the spirits of all prophets are subject to the orderly control of prophets.

In any case, the context presumes the public functioning of the gifts. The verbal gifts of tongues and prophecy are intended for the whole community, not merely for an individual to exercise in private.

Don't miss a single issue of *Session to Session*!
Mail this coupon to *Session to Session*
Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church
7201 Sixteenth Place, Hyattsville, MD 20783-4399.

☐ Yes...

Include me as an individual supporter of *Session to Session*. Enclosed is \$10.00 for the first year.

☐ Yes...

Include us as a "supporting Session" for *Session to Session*. Enclosed is \$100 for our Session members for the first year. Also enclosed is a list of the names and addresses of our Session members.

_____ name _____
_____ address _____
_____ city _____ state _____ zip _____

Make checks payable to
Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church

A person may justify the private exercise of "tongues" from personal experience. He may testify to the fact that he derives great relief from tension through letting his vocalizations in prayer run ahead of his rational processes. His "prayer-language" is to him a "gift" from God that helps him cope with life today.

But in the end, experience must be judged by scripture, and not vice versa. It may be that the groanings of prayer sometimes express such deep emotions that they are not easily framed into rational expressions. But these kinds of experiences should not be identified with the tongues of the New Testament unless a convincing exegetical argument can establish that point.

To be continued

Session to Session is dedicated to promoting the strengthening and growth of Biblical Presbyterianism in America. It is published bimonthly by the Session of Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church, located in the Washington, D.C. suburb of Hyattsville, Maryland. Individual subscriptions are available for \$10.00 per year. Church Sessions donating \$100 per year will receive subscriptions for all elders. Send all inquiries to Session to Session, Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church, 7201 Sixteenth Place, Hyattsville, MD 20783-4399.

8-9/91

Executive Editor: O. Palmer Robertson
Managing Editor: Kenneth A. Myers
Advisory Editors: George E. Devlin, F. Kingsley Elder, Douglas A. Felch, Sinclair B. Ferguson, W. Robert Godfrey, Joseph H. Hall, Norman E. Harper, William B. Herrington, Glen C. Knecht, Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., Robert R. Rich, and William H. Smith

Session to Session

Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church
7201 Sixteenth Place and Erskine Street
Hyattsville, MD 20783-4399
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
■ NON-PROFIT ORG ■
■ U.S. POSTAGE ■
■ PAID ■
■ HYATTSVILLE, MD ■
■ PERMIT NO 95 ■
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

PCA Historical Archives
Mrs W J Starnes
12330 Conway Road
St. Louis, MO
63141