

A RESPONSE TO THE RESPONSES OF MENZIES AND CHAN

Max Turner

“UNIVERSALITY”?

Robert Menzies and Simon Chan have graciously given a generous amount of time and space to consider my awkward questions about the alleged potential universality of tongues, and concerning their significance. I have greatly enjoyed reading both eirenic and penetrating responses, and am most grateful for this further brief opportunity to reconsider the issue in the light of their comments and criticisms. In this rapid-response rejoinder, I will simply (and informally) address some particular points raised, first by Menzies, then by Chan.

I. R. P. MENZIES AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF TONGUES

It is clear that Menzies and I agree on significant areas. Not least (against a scholarly majority) we concur in a robust assertion of Paul’s confidence in tongues as a spiritual gift of value both to the congregation (when interpreted) and to the individual (in private prayer). And in case any readers were left in doubt, I should perhaps confess that I do regularly use the gift (very pale shades of 1 Cor 14:18!). It is on the claim that Paul affirms tongues to be *universally* “available” to believers that we differ. Even on this issue we agree substantially on the “shape” of the exegetical problem. Menzies fully recognizes that we cannot simply read into Paul a paradigm taken from elsewhere (whether from Luke-Acts or from our Pentecostal/Charismatic church traditions). He agrees that the only place in Paul where there is any hint of the claim to universality of tongues is 1 Cor 14:5 (though he thinks there is more than just a hint there!), and that 1 Cor 12:30 very clearly presumes that “*not* all speak in tongues” in the church, which he

takes to mean that only some exhibit the gift in times of public worship (hence, if 14:5 asserts potential universality of glossolalia, it must be of tongues for private prayer).¹ Menzies further agrees that the exegesis should make sense of “the problem at Corinth”, and broadly accepts my portrayal of it. With all that agreement, it is not surprising that our difference lies in subtle (over-subtle?) nuancing of the balance between 1 Cor 12:30, 1 Cor 14:5 and contextual factors. Specifically, he claims against my position:

1. The reconstruction of the situation may underestimate the size of the self-styled “elite” of tongues-speakers (and if I am right, Menzies argues, 14:5 would be explicable as a especially appropriate *counter-elitist* universalising statement).²
2. The connection with 1 Cor 12:27 makes it clear that 1 Cor 12:30b only concerns tongues speech *in the church assembly* (i.e., 12:30b is not denying a far more widespread, potentially universal, glossolalia outside that context).³
3. Structural and other considerations make it clear that 1 Cor 14:5a expresses a wish which Paul considers to be a genuinely realizable state of affairs.⁴

Menzies has been able, through his critique, to offer a much more detailed and sophisticated defence of the traditional Pentecostal understanding of the passage than has hitherto been offered. I venture the following brief reflections on his argument on these points in more detail, in the assurance that they will not constitute anything like the last word on the matter, and in the sure hope of some further illuminating contribution from Menzies!

¹ The way might be open, of course, to claim 1 Cor 12:30 merely speaks about actuality (not all *do* speak in tongues), while 1 Cor 14:5 states what Paul thinks *ought* to be the case (all should speak in tongues, albeit on different congregational occasions), but Menzies rightly eschews such a “solution,” which would be subverted by Paul’s whole argument for diversity and interdependence in the one body.

² Robert P. Menzies, “Paul and the Universality of Tongues: A Response to Max Turner,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2:2 (1999), pp. 183-95 (184-86).

³ Menzies, “Paul and the Universality of Tongues,” pp. 186-90.

⁴ Menzies, “Paul and the Universality of Tongues,” pp. 191-93.

1.1 The Problem at Corinth

I had argued (with Theissen and Forbes) that those dominating the assembly with (uninterpreted) tongues were doing so because they understood glossolalia in an elitist sense -- for them tongues was a badge of special spirituality; perhaps even demonstration of divine possession; which set them apart from “ordinary” believers. Menzies concurs. *But for them to be able to think this way would only be possible if they had reason to believe that many or most other Christians did NOT practice the gift* (whether in the congregation, or anywhere else).⁵ Menzies states,

It is certainly possible to envision the elitist group reveling in their public display of tongues, regardless of whether or not there were others who exercised the gift in private....This public display of “speaking mysteries” (14:2) would be sign enough of their special knowledge and position, superior to any private usage.⁶

I find that puzzling. It would be a strange mentality, surely, that would sense superiority and find gratification merely in doing in public something one knows most or all regularly do in private, and so *could* presumably do in public too at the drop of a hat. What could it really matter *where* one “speaks mysteries” in the Spirit (especially if they are

⁵ G. Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), pp. 267-342; Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995). To set the record straight, I was not implying that *only* those who spoke in the assembly had the gift of tongues; there may indeed have been others besides, and they may or may not have had an elitist view of their gift. And there were probably yet others who did not themselves speak in tongues, but nevertheless *accepted* that it was a mark of special spirituality (for only off such an understanding could the elitist ego feed). Fee may be right that the majority at Corinth fell into a hellenistic and elitist conception of pneumatikoī/ pneumatikāi but that does not mean they were most or all tongues-speakers. For more detail, see my “Tongues: An Experience for All in the Pauline Churches?” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1:2 (1998), pp. 231-53 (235-36). Still others in Corinth, however, were sufficiently unsure to ask Paul to clarify: hence 12:1.

⁶ Menzies, “Paul and the Universality of Tongues,” p. 186.

uninterpreted), compared with the *fact* of one's doing so? Indeed Menzies appears to concede this very point in the next sentence, where he continues, "In this case, Paul's words in 1 Cor 14:5 would serve to remind the elitist group of the larger reality reflected in their midst: ... all can be edified through the private manifestation of the gift."⁷ This, of course, could only be thought of as a corrective if Menzies is prepared to admit that it is *not the public display as such* that might attract superiority and pride amongst the Corinthians, but *glossolalia* itself, wherever experienced. Nor does it seem to me that 1 Cor 14:5 is cast as an anti-elitist corrective, affirming the (at least potential) universality of tongues; its function in the rhetoric of that passage is, I think, quite different -- but we shall return to that later.

Menzies is correct to note that we must distinguish between what was actually happening at Corinth -- where the elitist stance on the issue may suggest only a minority spoke in tongues -- and the possibility that Paul himself desired, and expected, a universal practice. But the reconstruction of the situation suggests that the Corinthians were entirely unaware that "all" could (or should be able to) speak in tongues. This would seem strange if one assumes either a) all regularly spoke in tongues at reception of the Spirit and/or b) Paul himself introduced tongues at Corinth. The strangeness of the former might be muted by suggesting that some "manifestation" of tongues (or prophecy) was merely considered as "initial" evidence, without any implication that the believer would continue to experience the gift thereafter (I have argued there are plausible analogies for such an understanding in Judaism). Were that the case, however, it would raise the sharp question why Paul should expect glossolalia to be generally (let alone *universally*) available *beyond* the initial moment of Spirit-reception, e.g., for use in private prayer. As for b), if tongues came to Corinth through Paul (which, with Forbes, I consider strongly probable),⁸ and if Paul commended it as

⁷ Menzies, "Paul and the Universality of Tongues," p. 186. It would be possible to argue that the elitist tongues-speakers did not know that others practiced the gift in private. But that would surely be special pleading. If the gift and its use were sufficiently controversial to bring the matter to Paul, then it will have been a subject widely spoken about within the church. And Paul shows no awareness that he is giving new teaching when he obliquely refers to private glossolalia in 1 Cor 14.

⁸ That is, *contra* the majority critical explanation, tongues was *not* simply a variant on hellenistic ecstatic speech, but a Jewish Christian novum: see

universal practice (in accord with Menzies understanding of 14:5a), it is difficult to explain how an elitist stance on the issue ever got off the ground.

The Corinthians' *experience* -- that only some spoke in tongues (and even fewer in the public assembly) -- would thus probably incline them to read Paul's question in 1 Cor 12:30b ("Not all speak in tongues, do they?") in a perfectly general way, rather than thinking the question was restricted in scope to the matter of glossolalia in congregational worship. It is to 12:30, and its co-text that we should now turn.

1.2 Paul's Rhetorical Question in 1 Cor 12:30

Here I suspect the perhaps convoluted and over-subtle presentation of my argument has led to some misunderstanding. That can only be my fault. I was attempting to argue that: a) a reader approaching 1 Cor 12:28-30 will recognize that Paul is not just speaking in that verse about the church at Corinth, and b) far less is he just speaking about what is the case when the church gathers *as a public assembly*, e.g., to partake together in the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, teaching, celebration of the Lord's Supper, etc. With respect to a), while in 12:27 he has assured them they are "the body of Christ" -- for Paul every local congregation is an expression of that -- in 12:28 he addresses Corinth from the more general perspective of what God has "set in" the wider body/church.⁹ This is signalled by the initial reference to a plurality of apostles (to which we return in a moment). Concerning b), I was attempting to point out that to talk about what God has "set in the church" (whether general or local) is *not* to speak exclusively of what happens in the formal congregational assembly of the church for worship. Rather it speaks of what is the case in the whole sphere of Christian -- essentially relational, corporate, and serving -- existence.

Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), pp. 75-84.

⁹ I do not hold quite the position Menzies implies when he says I argue, "Paul has here in mind the church universal *rather than* [I would say 'including'] the local assembly in Corinth" (Menzies, "Paul and the Universality of Tongues," p. 188). Similarly, I was not conceding any "weight of evidence" (as Menzies suggests) when I said "Even if Paul has the Corinthian church primarily in mind (cf. 12:27)...." I was making the one point: namely, that "in the church" does not simply mean "in a meeting of the local assembly for worship."

Certainly, God did not regularly, if ever, “set in the congregational *assembly*” at Corinth, a multiplicity of apostles, such as 1 Cor 12:30a indicates; and, I argued, it is important to Paul that he is an apostle in the church even when he is not in a congregational assembly. 1 Cor 12:28, then, takes the reader notionally from what is specifically the case of the Corinthian church (in *and* outside its activities “in assembly”), to what is true of the body of Christ more generally (both in Corinth and elsewhere), before later coming back to the question of meetings for public worship in Corinth itself. We do well to remember that the letter is not just sent to a single congregation at Corinth (there were probably several), but also to *all* the congregations in the area (1 Cor 1:2b; cf. 2 Cor 1:1). In the context of 1 Cor 12:28-30, to ask “not all are all apostles, are they?” (the first rhetorical question in 12:29) is not simply asking a question about what happens in any particular *assembly* -- far less about any one specific *Corinthian* meeting (or even some series of these). It is to illustrate from the implied Corinthian understanding of the *whole* being and activities of the church more widely, both inside and outside formal “assemblies” for worship. I might add, somewhat teasingly, I am surprised to read a missionary and Pentecostal scholar attempting to affirm that the things described in 1 Cor 12:28-30 are envisaged primarily if not exclusively as activities within “the assembly”, rather than distributed through the wide variety of Christian social engagements, intercourse and activities.

Now we come to the crunch - following 1 Cor 12:28-29, Paul cannot expect his readers to assume that 12:30b is a rhetorical question about whether or not “all” speak in tongues merely in the *context of public assembly for worship* -- that is, with some sort of qualitatively distinct “congregational” gift (for which there is no secure exegetical basis).¹⁰ The question appears to embrace *any* kind of glossolalia “in the

¹⁰ Nor is there any reason for supposing the question means something like: “not all have a specialized ministry of speaking in tongues [in the congregation], do they?” Such a position is sometimes argued on the basis of analogy with the earlier question in 12:29, “Not all are prophets, are they?” (“prophets” understood as a specialized group, compared with the broader class who are expected *occasionally* to prophesy [14:31]). But the analogy breaks down for lack of a distinctive phrase to distinguish those with a specialized/regular ministry from those who exercised the gift of tongues in the congregation much less frequently. On the assumption that many at Corinth were able to speak in tongues in private, or in informal meetings of Christians for one purpose or another, the latter group might be expected to be sizable - for it is not obvious

church”, whether corporate (e.g., in small groups, or households) or in “the assembly”, and cannot exclude “private” glossolalia, if there is a widespread assumption of that (either by the author or by the readers).¹¹ This should again be clear from the context of “the problem at Corinth.” The elitists are presumably not exercising what a traditional Pentecostal might regard as the special “congregational” gift of tongues -- for their usage is not divinely prompted and correspondingly orchestrated with an interpretation. They are simply vaunting in the assembly a gift God gave them for use in other contexts (mainly, but not necessarily exclusively, private).¹² But in that case, the question “not all speak in tongues do they?” (12:30b) cannot differentiate between “private” tongues and the real McCoy; because “private” tongues is manifest in the congregation too. Were the Corinthians to be asked by the apostle to identify those who “speak in tongues” at Corinth, their number would surely include

why anyone who could pray in tongues might not feel prompted to exercise glossolalia in the congregation. As argued earlier, Paul would need a more precise question -- mh; pante" diakonia" eçousin glwsswh? -- if he wished to make the distinction proposed.

¹¹ Menzies argues that with the shift in 1 Cor 12:29-30 from “people” to “gifts and deeds”, the thrust comes upon what is experienced in the church meeting. He adds “all of the functions listed here could and quite naturally would have taken place in the local assembly in Corinth and, especially in light of v. 28 (“in the assembly”), Paul’s readers most naturally would have viewed the list this way” (Menzies, “Paul and the Universality of Tongues,” p. 189). I did not dispute that these gifts were experienced in the assembly; nor that Paul is primarily concerned with such when he considers tongues, and its misuse. I merely maintained they were also widely experienced “in the church” (e.g., at Corinth), *outside* the formal “assembly.” Menzies’ translation of eñ th/ ekkhsia/ of 12:28 by “in the assembly”, of course, presumes precisely his own position on the disputed question in point. I agree too, with Menzies, that 1 Cor 12:28-30 mainly addresses gifts within the interdependent “body”, and hence primarily public, not merely private, gifts. But if the apostle anticipates the view that all can speak in tongues privately and that this edifies members of the body who use the gift (or if he wishes to commend such a view), then the question “Not all speak in tongues, do they?,” simply becomes potentially confusing. A more precise question, such as “Not all speak in tongues to/for the church, do they?,” would be more apt.

¹² Similarly, many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches expect spontaneous uninterpreted tongues (sometimes individual, sometimes corporate) in settings of informal worship, thanksgiving, intercession, counselling, etc.

those who used it “incorrectly.” 1 Cor 12:30b thus seems potentially to embrace *any* known kinds of tongues-speech at Corinth, not exclusively the manifestations Paul regards as most appropriate for the congregational setting. And if, as Menzies fleetingly hypothesizes, most or all were involved in the error, then Paul’s rhetorical question would simply elicit the *contradictory* retort, “But yes, Paul, virtually all *do* speak in tongues, even in the assembly.”

What appears to be the Corinthians’ experience -- that not all speak in tongues, whether in formal assembly, in smaller groups, or in private -- would privilege an inclusive reading rather than an exclusive one.

1.3 1 Corinthians 14:5

I argued that the expression “I would that you all speak in tongues, but rather...,” in 14:5, expresses a genuine “wish” (in the sense that such a state could be regarded as eminently desirable), but does not necessarily imply Paul’s belief that all can, will, or should, speak in tongues. He earlier asserts a similar desire -- “I would that all...” (1 Cor 7:7) -- but in that case it concerns a “wish” that all might be celibate, like himself. The reader will have appreciated from the co-text that Paul can express wishes that he certainly does *not* consider realistic. In 1 Cor 7, it is clearly a rhetorical device, used as an empathetic foil to introduce a preferred position. In 14:5, he is patently using the same rhetorical device -- he wishes to “prefer” prophecy in the church to tongues; so why should readers think he means 14:5a is a more realistic possibility than 7:7a, to the extent that it is for him a normative expectation? Menzies argues that the co-text *explicitly* negates the wish of 7:7a, and that this is not the case for 14:5a. But it could equally be replied that both the context and the co-text (12:30b) *implicitly* negate the wish of 14:5. Even if that were denied, the point remains that expressions of wishes/desires may, but do not necessarily, entail belief that the hopes they express should or will be realized. The fact that Paul does not explicitly negate the possibility raised by the “desire/wish” formula, does not tell us very much, if anything, about his concrete expectations. Had Paul wished to assert 14:5 as a *corrective* to an elitist misunderstanding that tongues was restricted to the “spirituals”, this would surely need to have been far less ambiguous. Something like, “I tell you, all *can* (pa" dunatai), and indeed each *should* (kai; dei; ekasto"), speak in tongues, if only in private -- that none of you may boast -- but I would rather...,” would be much nearer what Menzies requires.

Menzies argues that the co-textual structure of 14:2-5 clarifies the issue. He posits an interesting set of couplets, alternating between tongues and prophecy, that indicates the former as private and the latter as corporate. I am not sure the issues of “location” are nearly so clear-cut. Both 14:2 and 14:4 could as readily refer to (or at least include) uninterpreted tongues *in the assembly* (as in 14:5b) -- why assert people will not “understand” uninterpreted tongues (14:2, and that is the sense of ἀκούειν here, as Fee and Menzies agree),¹³ if Paul is simply talking about prayer in private, *away* from the assembly? And why in 14:5b say, “I would you speak in tongues, but *rather* that you prophesy” (and continue to compare the value of prophecy and tongues speech for edification), *unless* the tongues speech of 14:5a specifically *includes*, even focuses, tongues-speech in a congregation? There is a subtle rhetoric going on here that needs more fully to be teased out.

More particularly, I am not quite sure how the structure is supposed to assist the argument. He seems to be asserting that if Paul can encourage all to prophesy (14:1, 31; cf. 14:5b), the parallel couplets in 14:2-5 imply all can (potentially) speak in tongues in private for edification, and should seek the gift. But Paul encourages all to seek prophecy (for oneself? for the church corporate?) because it is of especial importance for the building up of the congregation, and there is no indication that he thinks all will prophesy regularly (that would be the mark of a “prophet”?); tongues, by contrast, is not demonstrably more significant in building up the individual than other works of the Spirit (e.g., most closely, Rom 8:26), and Paul does not explicitly commend that people seek it, nor does he imply that all should regularly experience it. In short, the “couplets” do not raise strictly parallel expectations; the one for the individual and the other for the congregation.

In sum, I consider 1 Cor 14:5a is far more ambiguous than Menzies’ account of it suggests. If one knew from *elsewhere* that Paul expected all to be able to speak in tongues, that would certainly clarify the exegetical issues; but 1 Cor 14:5a is itself the sole NT ground for assuming Paul thought in such a way.

¹³ See Menzies, “Paul and the Universality of Tongues,” p. 293.

II. S. CHAN AND NORMATIVE INITIAL EVIDENCE

My rejoinder to Simon Chan, must inevitably be much briefer.¹⁴ While our central interests still engage, what Chan means by glossolalia is evidently quite different from mine. He uses it as a symbol for all kinds of what he calls “extraordinary language,” within which he appears to include not only my mention of the “abba” prayer (Gal 4:6) and the spiritual songs of (e.g.,) Eph 5:19, but also my reference to *silent* adoration and to the *unarticulated* groans of Romans 8:26. I welcome his view that these things might be considered “initial evidence” (and “on-going” evidence) of deep spiritual encounter, but I am not sure I yet see quite why it might be helpful to treat these as types of “glossolalia.” And, even should good reasons emerge for its use in systematic theology or in the study of religions, it might still prove unhelpful for NT specialists (such as R. Menzies and myself) to adopt what in our field might prove so potentially confusing a sense.

I very much take the point that Christian life involves many “stages” or transformative encounters, any of which might be attended by Chan’s broad concept of “glossolalia”; for all involve encounter and “receptivity.” But I would offer three riders:¹⁵

First, from the NT perspective, the most crucial transformative encounter is that involved in conversion-initiation, seen as the transfer from the kingdom of darkness into eternal life, light, union-with-Christ, dynamic sonship, kingdom of God, new covenant, etc. This is certainly what John and Paul mean by receiving the Spirit, and I have argued the same applies for Luke-Acts. Conversion-initiation, then, is the crisis point which should par-excellence attract what Chan means by glossolalia. And, to judge by many Evangelical and missionary “testimonies,” many if not most Christian conversions are indeed

¹⁴ Not least because the version of his response to my essay is much shorter than that by Menzies, but also because I received an electronic copy that lacked his substantiating footnotes.

¹⁵ I have argued these in more detail in Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), chs. 10 and 20.

attended by such (very broadly understood!) phenomena (if only in awe, wonder and praise). Of course, things may be different for those who grow up in Christian households, and for whom a transition point is fuzzier.

Second, while agreeing there may be a series of transformative encounters in Christian life, it is unclear that there is any agreed set pattern, in church experience and spirituality, which could be taken as normative. It is even less clear that there is a unique one, subsequent to conversion-initiation, which one should legitimately call "Spirit-baptism", which can be mapped one-to-one onto Luke-Acts, and which should stand in privileged relation to glossolalia.

Third, I entirely agree with Simon Chan that unitary accounts of Spirit-reception -- ones which claim the NT gift of the Spirit is normally granted in conversion-initiation -- can lead to a nominal, formal christianity, which fails to press on into the christian life, and its dynamic experience. It need not be the case, however. Witness (*inter alia*) the early Puritan, Anabaptist, Baptist, Congregationalist, Brethren and contemporary Third Wave movements. Nor are churches with two-stage pneumatologies (conversion and Spirit-baptism) exempt from the dangers of formalism, and empty repetitive spirituality! But I suggest the key to active, experiential churches is dynamic expectation of *on-going* transformative and refreshing encounters with the God of grace, and of the experience of charisma (not a two-stage pneumatology as such). This needs to be held before us by the preaching of NT expectation and by enthusiastic modelling by our leaders and peers.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Once again, I would wish to express gratitude to Menzies and Chan for their searching contributions. The remarks above do not offer any knock-down arguments. They do perhaps highlight, however, that traditional Pentecostal teaching on 1 Cor 14:5 and its relation to 1 Cor 12:30 is far less than "clear" in Paul. The doctrine is rather a very delicate hermeneutical construct, that inevitably will seem more plausible to some than to others -- as is the doctrine of Spirit-baptism and initial evidence more generally. I suspect the latter more general issue *is* ultimately capable of resolution; for there is so much textual material bearing on the subject. But it is disturbingly difficult to see what sort of research/analysis might be able to settle the tantalising

questions raised by 1 Cor 12:30 and 14:5. Careful speech-act analysis may be expected to throw a little more light. But perhaps all hypotheses advanced are liable to meet that rather bleak Scottish verdict, “not proven.”

Not wishing to end on such a negative note, we might ask “Does it matter”? If exegesis cannot establish that 1 Cor 14:5 unequivocally asserts a universal expectation of tongues, what is lost? At least we know from the co-text that Paul warmly commends tongues, both in, and especially *outside*, the context of the assembly. Let he who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. He who seeks, finds ... and if Menzies is right, more will find than even I anticipate!