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Babel, Pentecost, Glossalia and Philoxenia: No Language is Foreign to God*

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It was ten minutes past six o'clock P.M. on a Saturday evening, 5 September 1936, as I lay on my belly perusing the script of a book, when suddenly the letters of the printed text made sense. I jumped up, ran to my Mother who was washing dishes in the kitchen, and exulted, "I can read! I can read!" and she had to stop to listen to me haltingly read aloud a few sentences. Thereafter I discovered a library in a neighbouring town where you could take out books about boys having adventures on the high seas. One time my Mother bought me a story book with, it looked to me like, a movie star on the wrap-around cover; but after I read it, *Tom Sawyer*, I knew I had now read a good solid book.

In the New York Long Island country high school where we lived I parsed Latin for three years, and was introduced to French. Mr. Heeter made a fool of himself and us, we thought—*eu, eu, eu*—but I learned to read French in two years and matriculated into second year college French as a freshman. At Calvin College I picked up Greek, corrected Latin quizzes in W.T. Radius' class for food money, and took two years of German, accelerating to struggle through Schiller's *Wallenstein* in my final senior semester. In my English Lit Master's program at the University of Michigan I explored Medieval Latin, and had a Greek class of two persons plus professor where we spent the whole hour three times a week translating Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* into English one semester and Thucydides' writings the next semester.

Next, as a U.S. Fulbright graduate philosophy student at the

Free University of Amsterdam you were expected to know Greek and Latin and be able to translate Plato into Dutch at oral colloquia—a legacy of Erasmus, I think, on Dutch educational culture still operative in the '50s—but I really learned to be bilingual Dutch writing love letters to the Dutch woman who became my wife, carefully consulting Kramer's Dutch-English/ English-Dutch dictionary before I sealed an envelope. One summer I hitchhiked over the Alps to Italy to learn Italian. As I walked across the border into an Italian village early one morning someone said to me, "Bon giorno." So I repeated "Bon giorno" to everyone I met, and in response they taught me new words. What fun to learn a people's tongue in such wanderlust fashion!

I finally learned German at the university in Basel—not the best accented place to do it—hearing French Alsace-Lorraine professor Cullman lecture in German with excellent enunciated clarity, and living communally with thirty some theological students in a kind of fraternity house there—"Kartoffeln, bitte" (Please pass the potatoes). That's where I studied Older Testament Hebrew, and am grateful to this day that my dictionary is Hebrew-German. It gives me wonderful, imaginative slippage time to render the biblical Hebrew into colloquial, literate American-English, by way of thinking German....

I took these three minutes to tell my thumbnail language-history because it explains why as Canadian I think I am more European than North American, I want to repeat my Calvin English prof Henry Zylstra's good advice to me in 1947, "Stay with a language long enough to get into its literature," and because I want to thank God from whom all blessings flow for what happened in the plains of Shinar long, long ago, which we know by the name of "Babel." God's historical act of "Babel" has blessed my life with colourful excitement and sanctifying wonder.

Let me read you about that act of God in Genesis 11:1-9. This is the Word of the LORD:

> All over the earth there was just one way of speaking, the same kind of talk. And as people [descendents of Noah's three sons and daughters, Genesis 10:32] migrated from the East they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled down there.
> Everybody said to one another, "Hey! Come on! Let's bake us some bricks! Let's burn up some crisps!" So they had bricks for

stone, and they used asphalt for mortar.

Then they said [to one another], "Hey! Come on! Let's build for ourselves a city and a skyscraping citadel! Let's make a Name for ourselves! Otherwise we are scattered all over the face of the earth."

The LORD God had to step down to see this city and [skyscraping] citadel which the sons of men were building. And the LORD God said, "Look at that! The people are all the same, and all of them have the one same manner of speaking. And this is [just] the beginning of their daily doings. Right now it's not impossible for them to do all that they intend— Hey! Come on! Let's step down and thoroughly mix up their way of speaking there, so that they cannot hear each other's speaking."

So the LORD God scattered them from there all over the face of the earth: they left off building the city. That's why its "name" is called "BABEL," because that is where the LORD mixed up [=had them bobble, Heb. *balal*] the way all the earth was speaking. The LORD scattered them from there all over the face of the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9)

The gracious LORD God likes creatural diversity.

Contrary to most readings of the Genesis 11:1-9 pericope, I think Christoph Uehlinger is correct to propose that it was the uniformity of speech, a kind of monotonic cant utilized by the human race several generations after Noah to stick together that angered God. In the wake of militarist strongman Nimrod (Genesis 10:6-14), the people devolved a single, approved communication lingo, a kind of clipped, pidgin talk that cemented the solidarity they needed to vaunt their consolidated power and build this one fortified city which would signal the monolithic worldly rule (*Weltreich*) they coveted. But, as Psalm 2:4 would say, God just laughed and simply mixed up their in-house speech so they couldn't understand one another, and therefore moved off in their little hard-bitten, monolingual enclaves, inadvertently doing—disobediently—what the LORD had first asked them to do: fill in the earth, flourish, make the whole earth fruitful (Genesis 9:1-7).

So the thrust of the account in Genesis 11:1-9 is, as Barbara Carvill and David Smith's wonderful new book says: "Babel" is God's judgment on uniformity and human empire building.[1] [The Genesis

11 incident is remarkably similar to the much later event where God puts Nebuchadnezzar down on all fours like an animal for boasting, "Is this not the great Babylon (Heb: "babel") I myself have built to house Sovereign Rule by the strength of my own power and for my own majestic glory!"? (Daniel 4:30, Aram. v.27)]

Two matters should be noted to crystallize this biblical orientation for discussing language:

(1) God's judgments on human sin in history always hold a loophole of grace. Instead of Adam and Eve's dying on the spot after eating from the Tree-of-the-knowledge-of-good-and-evil (Genesis 2:17, 3:2-3), God made them banished mortals with lives of pain and sweat, and outfitted them with clothes (Genesis 3:16-24). Pain is good warning of medicinal need; sweat—as Chaucer writes (*Canterbury Tales*, "The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue")—can be a joyful celebration of bodily exertion; and clothes not only protect human intimacy but can enhance our human limbs and lineaments. Also, after God saw the monstrous cultural abnormalities (*Nephilim*) born of conjoined godly and ungodly conception in the generation of Noah, and felt constrained to flood out the human race, the LORD still saved a remnant of animals and eight humans to start history over again, as it were, with leftovers under a rainbow in the sky (Genesis 6:1-9:17).

When humankind conspired to reduce speech to a monolithic technospeak in order to bolster a totalitarian grasp for World Power, God prevented such warlike violence and vanity by dispersing men and women across the face of God's earth (Genesis 11:1-9) so they would not be able to centralize and capitalize their own utter destruction (cf. Proverbs 1:10-19). The diversity of speech in the mouths of humans then is like another rainbow from God, not in the sky but within the human voice: a rainbow promise made good with a down payment at Pentecost.

(2) God likes creatural diversity. The bio-diversity of plant life and the incredibly numberless shades of green to foliage in almost any landscape, as well as the fantastic array of animal kinds, from dinosaurs to mosquitoes, rattlesnakes to Canadian geese, the Leviathan and butterflies, testify that the LORD's imaginative taste for colourful variety (Job 38-39, Psalm 104) is beyond question, it seems to me. And no matter how the multiple

nations and peoples developed, apocalyptic prophecies of Scripture, from Isaiah 60 to Revelation 21, detail the joy that the LORD anticipates in seeing the refined, variegated wealth of the various nations from near and faraway being finally assembled in service to the Lamb of God and the faithful body of Jesus Christ. It is sin that homogenizes or stereotypes differences into a banal sameness, and it is we middleclass who are more comfortable with what is usual and familiar. But God—this is what Jesus was trying to teach the slow-witted men who were his disciples upset by the woman who broke a whole flask of expensive, anointing perfume over the Christ's body (Mark 14:1-11): God likes surprises!

The marvelous gift of human speech and written literature.

The fact that God gave us humans (and also angels)[2] the special ability to relate to things by naming them and, as the Bible story tells it, waited in the beginning to see what Man would call the land animals (Genesis 2:18-20), hints at the marvelous inventive power hidden in human language. God said, "Let the earth bring forth creepy-crawly creatures!" and worms, ants, and chameleons came to be. The mother tongue of humans made to bear God's image enables a person not to "create" things, but to establish connections, to posit identities with vocal or gestural signs, to question matters and to clarify the relations of things with other persons. A human baby says, "Mama," and a mother bends her breast near to nourish the child with milk.

A child gradually comes to inhabit and voice a whole system of syntactically related phonemic words in verbal sentences with predicates, subjects and objects. Animals like cawing crows, trumpeting elephants, as well as piping dolphins, communicate with one another by sounds too, and God hears their animal noises as praise and requests for attention, says the Bible (Job 38:39-39:30, Psalm 104:24-30). But only human speech has the glory, I think, to bespeak themes that show a self-conscious stance and bearing toward the matters narrated which is more than reactive, and is able to give, as Shakespeare says about poetry, "to airy nothingness a name" (*As You Like It*). Human speech is peculiar in having the depth for one to use it to tell lies, or to articulate the predicament of "It's me, it's me, O Lord, standin' in the need of prayer."

A characteristic of human speech, and even language, which

seems important to me as philosophical aesthetician, is its inescapably multi-layered nature: *talk is always more than a lingual act which specifies something clearly (or unclearly).* Vocabulary, grammar, intonation, pace and accent, the tilt to adjectives, the tense of verbs, all undergird (spoken) language with thick or thin texture. Is there a fresh breath of imaginative air in the precise word choice? The dimensions of decorum, certainty, informativeness, how listener-friendly or not, also adhere a person's speech.

Whether the actual language be Hungarian or Mandarin Chinese, Castilian Spanish or British English: the actual language spoken indelibly stamps the speaker with a history, usually with a geographic location, and embodies a whole fascinating world of idiom, customs, and a people. Speech inevitably reflects one's education, sometimes one's dated age, and frequently a person's prejudices. Although the mother tongue one receives or adopts takes on each person's idiosyncratic torque, possibly a dialect, *every one's base language acts as a cultural gyroscope in their life.* One's original native tongue is the place where one feels more than semantically secure: *one's mother tongue is one's particular, complex cultural homestead.*

When language is heightened aesthetically, that is, when the connotative layer embedded in every language is given free play, so to speak, so that the metaphorical underside of language comes to dominate the utterance rather than just remain latent, then the speaking becomes poetic. In an oral culture the flowering of public speech as an art becomes story-telling, and that act becomes crucial for the transmission of that language community's traditions and prospects, shaping the way the elders lead the people. When a language is written, in a literate society, the artistic intensification casts language in literary form. And literature—composing, scripting, reading literature—demonstrates how language which reaches the maturity of textuality has enormous suasive power for shaping and channeling a vision which accompanies that language community.

I am not referring to "sacred texts" like the Bible, Qu'ran, or the Te Ching collection, but to "ordinary" literature like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, George Eliot and James Joyce, for giving English-speaking people a special literary inheritance. Luther, Goethe, Nietzsche, Kafka and Brecht do something to and for a German-speaking public that sets them apart. If you have been

raised on Racine, Pascal, Balzac, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Proust, I wager you will have a different *mentality* than if you are a generation who was bred on Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Checkhov and Gorki along with your mother's milk.

I know, I'm talking literary canon, which is in dispute, under review and polemical expansion today. But even if you settle for an ethnic *bricolage* of makeshift authoritative sources for the voices you want the rising generation to hear—if there be no settled, living literary tradition in force, one is apt to be prey to whatever is merely briefly fashionable—no teacher should fool oneself on the subliminal shaping power of what the rising generation reads or does not read of one's native language become literature. The writing down of aesthetically enriched language on papyrus, parchment, paper, some material, gives the spoken language a complicated, double whammy of permanence and a kind of imprimatur which simple speech, however eloquent, lacks.[3] Textual significance is outfitted with the warranty of additional affirmation to that of the author; a text demands slower, more considered interpretation to get at the congealed meaning than if you are just interactively taking in and responding to someone's live speaking.

This discrepancy is a grave problem when an oral culture like that of the Venda tribe in South Africa encounters literacy. Suddenly the older story-telling elders whose authority and wisdom reside in their memory and public ceremonial speaking are considered illiterate because they cannot read the forms and paper communications the government sends their tribal way. There is upheaval in the cultural leadership of a people. The most redemptive way I have seen to effect the traumatic transition from an oral culture to the literacy of our dominant civilization still in place is by a Christian Reformed World Relief Committee leader, Jan Disselkoen in Sierra Leone, who trained natives of the Kuranko tribe to write primers using the stories of their people for teaching adults and children to read, so that the text and the oral culture reinforced one another.

I think it is important not to set up a dialectical tension between the spoken and the (aesthetically enriched) written language, but to honour the different strengths inhering speech and literature, and discover how as language teachers we are to equip the next generation to handle both such precious gifts from God.

The history-impacted problem of teaching rhetoric.

Along with the systematic point I have just tried to make, that language in all its richness is shortchanged unless you also deal with its literature, comes the historical problematics of how rhetoric has fared in the educational institutions—seminaries, university, colleges, language schools—where the relation of language instruction to other disciplines needs to be adjudicated. The drift of institutions, as Foucault overstates, has a quiet way of favouring and handicapping various fields of study. Are you (foreign) language teachers at peace with your place in the academic curricular sun?

While recently doing research for a different occasion on the nature and formation of universities, from the oldest university in the world, Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt (begun c.700? AD by Muslim clerics), to Kosin University in Pusan, Korea (founded by American Presbyterian missionaries, 1946 AD),[4] I found out how certain long-standing feuds, rival orientations and mistrustful changes in the nature of advanced schooling have impacted what we Christian professors face today, as Babel is being rebuilt, but not in the plains of Shinar. Let me make just a few moot historiographic assessments.

The pagan Hellenic and Hellenistic civilizations left the Church which followed then with a standoff between rhetoric and (dialectical) logic for how cultural leaders should be instructed in humanity. A sophist like Gorgias taught the technique (*areté* = virtue!) of winning arguments by persuasive speech, whether the cause was right or wrong, thereby defining for Socrates the nature of commercialized sophistry.[5] Plato, however, promulgated philosophy, one could say, which was understood as never-ending devotion, search for wisdom (*philo-sophia*) and certified true knowledge (*epistémé*), which chore left you eternally critical and logically en route to speculative, definitive answers which were never reached. Aristotle allowed the practical ethical person to make approximating logical, phronetic judgments.[6] But it was Isocrates (436-388 B.C.) whose antisophistic and antispeculative idea of the *orator* (disciplined speaker) as the moral thinker showed the most promise to coax speaking and thinking together rather than keep them in competition. "To speak as one ought is the surest index of a sound understanding."[7] This thesis by Isocrates was adopted by Cicero and Quintillian as the better way to promote civic responsibility than to train youth in philosophical logical arguments.

Augustine esteemed the oratorical tradition of the *artes*

liberales, as did the Venerable Bede and Alcuin at Charlemagne's court who believed that civil officials should cut their teeth on a canon of texts which inculcate virtue and make you literate, ready to study the divine text. John Scotus Erigena and Pierre Abelard who championed the Aristotelian position of Boethius, however, came down on the side of logic as the key discipline to school theologians in making the necessary distinctions when faced with *contrarium* in disputes—Thomas Aquinas' *Summa* is the epitome of this tack which foregrounds logic. So different medieval universities took the rhetorical or the dialectical side of education for emphasis, even though ostensibly both the *trivium* and *quadrivium* were a common curriculum in the encyclopedia of university *studia*.

Matters between language and logic became more tense in the scholarly world in what followed: Christian Humanists like Petrarca, Lorenzo Valla, the Dutch Agricola and Erasmus, rediscovered Quintillian and Cicero's texts, and thrived on philological detective work (for example, Erasmus edited a better Greek text for the New Testament Bible), gleaning from classical literature the best that had been said and thought in the past in order to educate good citizens for today. Melanchthon, John Calvin, Beza, Comenius, and even Ignatius of Loyola, all felt at home in the rhetorical tradition which assumed that truth is preserved in classical texts, and education is to make that persuasive knowledge live again to form stable, learned leaders in society. Colleges in the American Colonial Virginia, Connecticut and Massachusetts took this rhetorical liberal arts tradition as guideline too.

But the Enlightenment spirit which followed up the secularizing trend called the "Renaissance," fascinated with Nature and the mathematical experimental method found in the work of Copernicus and Galileo: the European Enlightenment methodical scepticism of Descartes and John Locke's rationalistic empiricism claiming to have no apriori's aligned learning with logical, critical philosophy again captured in Kant's phrase *sapere aude* (dare to know whatever), which rejects canonic texts, the weight of tradition, and chases specialized projects with scientific analysis. Post-Colonial America shaded with Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Tom Paine, more toward this Enlightenment ethos too, but colleges and universities are conservative institutions, and old-fashioned "liberal education," even "classical" languages, hung on fairly well at least

until the War between the States (1861-65).

John Dewey's Darwinian pragmatism (refined at the University of Chicago, 1894-1904) balled together the Socratic process of endless search with an Enlightenment penchant for non-committal, practically engaged Reason, to wrench American education out of its Ivy League ways, with sanctified classics, into the bustle of being liberated! from any absolute standards and normed values and freed for a truly experimental thinking approach to every situation encountered in life. Charles W. Eliot, while he was president (1869-1909), introduced the laissez-faire elective system of courses at Harvard, and the practice spread to other universities. When lack of unity in college programs was recognized after World War I, the spot "survey course," like "Western Civ," came to be introduced, to provide cohesion.[8] But a pervasive democratic individualism worked like acid on American higher education to make vocational training paramount.

Perhaps your Christian college institution is not mainstream American, and you do not need Alan Bloom or Edward Hirsch, Jr. as apologists for a good old, of course, updated, "liberal arts" educational program that still has vestiges of the millennium-old rhetorical tradition jockeying with the pressures of professional analytic science requirements for what may constitute a "core curriculum." But next to the general businessification of college and university education by the rampant Pragmatistic spirit is another cultural dynamic conveniently misnamed "postmodern," which tries to honour what has for centuries been marginalized by the dominant Lie of Religious Fundamentalism, Scientific Rationalism, Eurocentric Colonialism, Patriarchal Chauvinism—its names are legion—and wants to manage human affairs with only *petits récits*, local stories, to avoid aggrandisement and totalitarian power plays. Such a diffident sophisticated spirit focussed intently on deferral of binding judgments may allow odd, new, Christian (queer) voices to be sounded for a time in the marketplace, but on the whole I find this deeply intelligent quasi-scepsis to play a corrosive or parasitic role in public leadership. And this revolutionary current of turning-things-upside-down is not able to stop, maybe it even abets! the disintegration of authentic human differences.

We are called to teach languages and literatures of different cultures, none of which are foreign to God, in a world where

differences are disappearing. Instantaneous communication on the net—for most of the world invariably in English—and jet plane travel around the globe for more and more tourists from all nations, allow the exotic to be familiarized or commodified as a collectible. The McWorld phenomenon is well known, and is not less imperialistic or neo-colonializing because its domination is a more invisible Commercialistic principality rather than an overt political one.

For example, as I stooped to enter the corrugated metal shack in a shanty town outside Potchefstroom in South Africa (1995), as a visitor I could not believe my eyes: in the dimmed interior of the hut on a small TV powered by a car battery played a sit-com made in USA! This is no "global village." Ours is a global high-rise with the uniformity-congestion of a Babel where, as Yeats would say, there is no centre holding things together, as the Beast slouches toward Bethlehem (cf. Revelation 12-13). And one does not need to share Ellul's jeremiad over cities or accept his unfair, dialectical diatribe against the "image" in his *Humiliation of the Word*, to agree that our pop culture does tend to be magnificently post-literate, indeed, is a visual culture.

What does that turn of events mean for redemptive teaching of languages and literature—verbal rhetoric—or, for that matter, being a Christian woman and man in God's world today, two millennia after Pentecost?

Let me read the brief account which is booked in Acts 2:1-13 as a conscious, God-breathed (II Timothy 3:16-17) supplement to Genesis 11:1-9:

> Now when the day of Pentecost had fully arrived, [the core of Christ's disciples] were all together in the same place. Suddenly there was a sound from heaven like the force of a rushing wind, and the noise filled the whole house where the disciples were sitting, and it appeared to them as if there were tongues of fire distributed and resting on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
>
> Now there were Jews who resided permanently in Jerusalem, pious folk from every nation under heaven. At the [strange] sound a large crowd [of them] came together and were bewildered [mixed-up], because every one of them heard the disciples

> speaking in his or her own peculiar dialect. The crowd was astonished and wondered, saying, "Wait a minute, are not these people who are speaking Galileans? How come each of us hear our own particular native dialect? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphilia, Egypt, the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, Roman visitors, Jews and proselytes, Cretans, Arabians: we all hear these Galileans speaking in our own (mother) tongues, declaring the great deeds of God!"
>
> And they were all astonished and perplexed, saying to one another, "What will this mean?" But other persons mocking said, "They're drunk on sweet wine." (Acts 2:1-13).

Historical Pentecostal development: united diversity.

Apparently God still enjoys the creatural diversity of speaking! Early in history, when the Babylon humans wanted to use a single language to make a Name for themselves, God stopped their vanity with the miracle of different ways of speaking, bewildering them with unintelligibility. Later in history, when the diverse speaking peoples of the world attended the inauguration of the Holy Spirit on earth, you might say, God surprised everybody, bewildered them again by having them hear clearly and understand people of a certain Galilean locality who were filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in these different, strange languages and dialects about *magnalia Dei*, the Great Deeds of the LORD. Different ways of speaking at Babel in the plains of Shinar was the LORD's gentle, backhanded way of hindering great evil and giving humankind a fresh start. Different ways of speaking at Pentecost in Jerusalem was the LORD's redemptive way of happily blessing cultural differences in their diversity united by praise of the Lord's acts of salvation.

Maybe Pentecost was a kind of foretaste of what conversation will be like on the new earth: you effortlessly speak the other person's language intelligibly. That special gift of the Holy Spirit to those Galileian believers at Pentecost, according to the Bible (Acts 2:4), also happened when the apostle Peter, as an elect Jew, finally caught on to God's message that an Italian soldier and uncircumcized Gentiles can be at home in the community of Christ's followers too.[9] So the biblical point of the same person's being gifted to magnify the LORD in different local languages is that the LORD does not pick favourites

in languages, and God's people also are not to consider "unclean" what is not foreign to God (Acts 10:34). God enjoys hearing "Hallelujahs!" sung indiscriminately in Arabic, Yiddish, Swahili, Frisian, Hangul and Fulani speech, just as the LORD is not partial, say the Scriptures, to the rich, to male adults, or classicists, but contrariwise honours especially the poor, selects lowly handmaids for high honour, and inducts those who lack a refined rhetorical training into bringing strangers good news.[10]

It is wrong for anybody locked into a nationalistic mentality to assert, "If Spanish-speaking people want to live in Texas, let 'em learn English—it's our country!" Or, "If the Quebecois want to be part of Canada, why should they hang onto their French dialect?"—as if the English language be the law of the land, the law of the peoples of the world. The uncharitable temper of such monolingual fundamentalism, like other monolithic fundamentalisms, is its Babel-Babylonic presumption to exercise a coercive conformity which is at core totalitarian. And that conformist evil, which Pentecost dispels, is present also among the "outsiders" who idolize English today as the road to jobs, money, and happiness. For example, in the very America-focussed South Korea (except for its food and the *kim chi* delicacy), the hot subjects in its high schools I am told are mathematics, electronics and English. Teaching ESL is a high calling, especially when done for refugees, trying to alleviate their cultural homelessness; but if ESL would be done Christianly, one may need to exorcize the fraudulent expectations which give it allure to many students.

I should mention *en passant* that Spirit-tongue-talk, *glossolalia*, that ecstatic vocalization of humans whose sounds are unintelligible until somebody translates them into ordinary language, is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to the Bible (I Corinthians 12-14); but *glossolalia* is a quite different phenomenon from what is reported to have happened at Pentecost and the time in Caeserea. *Glossolalia* is one of the *charismata*, like faithfully making God's Word known prophetically, or like teaching, says Paul to the Romans (Romans 12:3-8), or like the rare gift of cheerfully, generously giving away your money for the needs of neighbours (cf. also II Corinthians 9:6-15). But *glossolalia* is not directly intelligible.

Because the Corinthian congregation of believers misused *glossolalia*, that is, overvalued the personal edificatory use of this kind of mysterious, free-form prayer directly to God (I Corinthians

14:2), maybe even made it a test of whether you had been baptized by the Holy Spirit or not (Acts 10:15-16, I Corinthians 14:16), the apostle Paul carefully laid down liturgical guidelines limiting its place in a worship service. Paul instructed that someone with the *charisma* for interpreting Spirit-tongue-talk should be nearby to explicate the content of what was revealed (I Corinthians 14:6,26-28), and admonished the believers always to consult those with the *charisma* to discriminate between spirits (I Corinthians 12:10; cf. I John 4:1) to test whether the *glossolalia* manifested a building-up love of the brother and sister or was a show-off putdown.

The few times I have worshipped in England with a congregation that works *glossolalia* into its Sunday services, decorously orchestrated by the minister of music and musicians, it sounded as if a flock of birds had come to rest in a nearby grove of trees, chirping and twittering pleasantly for several minutes until the Spirit moved on elsewhere, and the keyboard, double bass, guitar and saxophone led us, I suppose you could say loosely, into an "interpretation" of what had just happened—individuals softly vocalizing a devout babble of syllables out loud—led us into an "interpretation" by a song of praise up on the overhead. I found it oddly edifying, as if people were individually releasing their pent-up troubles and petitions to God in a place where they felt safe.

One time my father was leading a Bible study in a public senior citizens rest home in Colorado, and something he said triggered a 90 year old Dutch woman to say, "I hated it when I had to memorize the psalms every week in school, but now when I can't sleep nights I'm glad I can recite them:

Hijgend hert de jagt ontkomen
Schreeuwt niet sterker naar 't genot
Van de frische waterstroomen
Dan mijn ziel verlangt naar God..."

As she went on for a bit, a large Afro-American woman sitting next to me threw up her hands, "Praise the Lord! Now I've heard speaking in tongues!"

I tell these anecdotes as comic relief to firm up two points about *glossolalia*:

With all our lingual-analytic philosophy and attention to

pedagogical methodology we need to remember the reality of human speech, which has marvelous qualities holding much more than will be dreamt of, Horatio, in our academic philosophy or theology.

The human tongue, which language teachers lay claim to teach, is a truly dangerous, wild organ open to tempting, respectable demonic ambition as well as able to provide peace-making wisdom between people (cf. James 3). That is probably why the Bible says (James 3:1): "Don't many of you become teachers, brothers and sisters, because we will receive a more strict judgment than other people."

However, the drift of my remarks is much more upbeat, and is gradually, I hope, becoming clear: the historical Pentecostal pendant to Babel is the biblical charter for the North American Christian Foreign Language Association. Because human language is so rich and embodies in the idiom of a people the cultural diversity God likes, foreign language teachers are pivotal in the Lord's undertaking to provide first of all understanding and possibly even reconciliation among the different nations of the world by celebrating in mixed chorus together the *magnalia Dei*. The diaconal service of foreign language teachers becomes ever more urgent the more the world at large succumbs to the creeping domination of American-English as the *lingua franca* of a Commercialistic Empire, making other local voices virtually extinct.

I should like to develop John Calvin's judgment that the highest calling an educated Christian might perform is to be a magistrate because then you can administer the Lord's justice to both unbelievers and believers.[11] Such true judges and lawyers in the last days will still need mouthpieces for those who have been silenced, translators of the foreign tongues that have become taboo or "dead" languages. Being able to hear and understand, read and speak foreign languages so one can mediate between people is almost as critical for the well-being of world society as doing legal justice because you can do cultural justice to your foreign neighbour if you are able to speak more than your own lingo. An ability to speak foreign languages is primed for neighbour-love and is one of the most shalom-filled occupations because, unlike science, it is prone to honour diversity. (Foreign language teachers may be out of a job on the new earth, along with homicide detectives, surgeons, and evangelists; but you

probably can quite easily retrain to be interpreters of *glossolalia.*)

In the meantime, foreign language teaching remains vital for helping all and sundry to obey the LORD's injunction to practise *philoxenia,* hospitality. (I shall be very brief on this matter since you can read Barbara Carvill and David Smith's exciting and insightful new book, *The Gift of the Stranger.*)

God's injunction to practise philoxenia.

The LORD's original command for us to love not only the neighbour but particularly the stranger, "because you once were strangers in the land of Egypt," is very stern (Exodus 22:21-24, Leviticus 19:33-34, Deuteronomy 10:12-21, 24:17-22). The Newer Testament carry-over enjoining believers to "practise hospitality" maintains the same strong directive (Romans 12:9-13), and generalizes the motivation, at least in the first letter of Peter to the Christian Jews living as exiles in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (I Peter 1:1-2): because you are currently temporary residents sojourning in lands foreign to the peace of God, deal nobly with your unbelieving Gentile neighbours and practise hospitality ungrudgingly with one another (I Peter 1:17, 2:11-12, 4:7-11).

What a breath-taking injunction for a minority community beset with the trouble of being displaced "outsiders" in "a crooked and perverse generation" somewhere (cf. Acts 2:40, Philippians 2:14-18; also Psalm 120). And what a stirring challenge and galvanizing encouragement from the Lord to persist against all obstacles—ignorance, indifference, budget cuts—to learn and teach foreign languages.

You cannot practise hospitality unless you are at-home somewhere and recognize the person at hand as a stranger in your home territory; and you cannot receive hospitality unless you realize you are a privileged guest with a host in a strange land. What we call "foreign" language is central to strangerhood.

I hear the Scriptures say this world belongs to God who created it all (Psalm 24:1-2), and the LORD God revealed in Jesus Christ is our permanent at-home (Psalm 90:1-2). Since humankind sinned, however, the LORD has historically called out a people to be a company of saints, sinning saints, to be sure, but a company of Holy Spirited persons who are at home in God's world but at odds with—strangers in—the reigning sinful culture of society. [I've wondered

sometimes, if I feel too much at ease in North American society, should I pretend to speak only Dutch or Hungarian, and see what happens, to simulate how God's people are supposed to experience the reigning culture?] The created world belongs to God; God's people are strangers in the reigning sinful culture; therefore—this is biblical logic for you!—knowing what it is like to be strangers in your own God-given home, as "a chosen kind of humanity, a royal priesthood, a holy peoplehood, a folk intended to be God's peculiar family...speak out the powerful glories of the One who called you out of darkness into God's wonderful light" (I Peter 2:9-10, Matthew 5:14-16). Do that by sensitively loving to welcome strangers, to share a meal with a stranger, provide the shelter of bed and lodging, to visit, listen acutely and talk slowly with the stranger in order to discover and celebrate the differences which will enrich each other together *coram Deo*. You never know, says Scripture, the stranger may be an angel, a messenger from God (Hebrews 13:1-11), or even, says Matthew 25:31-46 (especially v 35), Christ in disguise!

Having a sure command of your own tongue and adequately speaking the stranger's language is crucial to hospitality that will not remain truncated. Speech, I suggested earlier, is not just a skill to pass on the barest of information. Speech is the language of living persons who have a history, possibly traumatic, and a home, whose body language, etiquettical language, gendered language, ethnic language, a good host needs to pick up as the mulching ground for the peculiar lingual idiom in which the stranger articulates his or her being-there. The spoken language of a stranger, like one's own, is full-orbed, coming from a certain viewpoint—maybe from the other side of the tracks—often tentative, in process, expectantly dialogic or self-absorbed and taciturn. Hospitality begins by making the stranger feel at home, coaxing the stranger to relax into being who one is. And every human is most at home in one's language when you can speak about what you believe in and hold dear. So whoever hosts a stranger well begins by listening rather than by talking yourself. Often listening intently to a stranger talk is a good way, as Robbie Burns would say, "to see oursels as ithers see us!"

The writings of Claire Kramsch, Carvill and Smith, give choice professional advice on how to engage students beginning foreign language study in listening to a stranger, and in being a stranger yourself in a foreign land, where you respectfully question the

familiar—and learn most from your mistakes!—stay on hermeneutical alert! and do not try to understand everything too quickly[12] lest instead of enriching your own world you dictatorially impoverish both. Their detailed advice—which I will not relate here—is good because they know that strangers like friends are mutually so. If strangers, as host or guest, try to absorb what is foreign, they domesticate the other person and ruin the playful glory of hospitality. If strangers remain distantly foreign to one another, afraid to venture beyond one's parochial confines into what seems utterly exotic, then too there may be formal, awkward encounter, but not the mutual trust and stretching openness of genuine hospitality which enriches both, who remain strange to one another. Sinful power relations homogenize human differences: love allows differences to flourish.

That enigmatic point about *philoxenia* lets me close with an uncompleted comment on the art of translating literature, which I think has the opening to be practising hospitality in a far-reaching way. And I shall give an oral example of translated poetry.

The doxological fermentation of imaginative translation.

Once, trying to rouse an apathetic class from its consistent lethargy, Barbara Carvill handed out an assignment of several German poems with the instruction: "Don't translate everything. Just find one or two lines of German poetry tonight that you really like, and tomorrow tell us why."

I consider Professor Carvill a superb teacher of foreign languages, and this incident, not unlike that of the discouraged, imprisoned Paul who once wrote, "I'd really like to get out of here and be with Christ...but for your sakes..." (Philippians 1:15-26) I'll stay and prime the pump so you may grow in the joy of what God made possible for us, to talk face to face with a literate stranger: that incident carries the genial mark of trying to lift students out of their "shake-and-bake" attitude toward a foreign language so they might taste well-crafted bread from the best organic cereal grains leavened by love and surprise.

A foreign literary text has a fresh quality about it that can strip away your ethnocentric uniformity and egocentric fussiness if you give yourself up to its voice and charm. A good translator struggles to delve deep into the foreign literary text, learn precisely its

grammatical DNA, become infected by its spirit and vision and bloody vitality, probing intuitedly the surplus meaning metaphorically compounding the diction, rhythm and stresses. The norm for the translator's work is to present the original foreign text transformed, skillfully and imaginatively recapitulated, with its identity intact but now resident in the translator's mother tongue somewhat strangefied, so that the newly minted poetry is verbally translucent, showing through/echoing the original in its very contours.

Only purists think translations are necessarily the act of traitors. George Steiner may be correct that "Ninety percent...of all translation since Babel is inadequate and will continue to be so"[13]; but God calls us to be "helpmates" to one another, not purists.[14] Yes, a translation of poetry is as delicate as triple bypass heart surgery, and is a matter of interpretation, just as history-keeping and history-telling is a (communal) subjective reading of events. But the translating endeavour, when it is right, is a matter of truly doxological import, and should keep us foreign language teachers thankful for our helpmateful task also when we have to pass through the doldrums. With a good translation the translator's language-world is graced with fresh bread/new wine, and the original strange poetry has not been ignored or lost but is given a new format of significance, its life restored, as it were, with a different place, also in its strangeness, to be at-home. Praise God! Love of learning a foreign language can be blessed with multiples of meaningful fruit.

Although I have not been able to work it out in the time frame of this keynote lecture, I am interested in experimenting on translating foreign language poetry into English with accompanying commentary by graphic art and music for teaching the *philoxenia* of hosting "foreign literature."[15] In our veritably post-literate, very dominating visual culture, I am wondering too whether foreign language song might not be a way to bring words, camouflaged by melody, into the verbal language classroom, singing the folk songs and possibly good pop songs of the foreign culture.

Would it not help the teaching of certain *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857, 1861) of Baudelaire, for example, "Hymne à la Beauté" or "Les petites vieilles," to have them studied with selected "black" paintings of the later Goya, and hearing Henryk Górecki's sombre *Symphony no. 3* in the background?

How about showing Luca della Robbia's ravishing, innocent

children singing in his *Cantoria* from the cathedral in Florence with the translation of Gabriela Mistrale's "Canción de las Muchachas Muertas" or "Todas Ibamosa Ser Reinas" (from *Tala*, 1938) and be playing Johann Pachelbel's chaste *Canon* in the classroom?

Would not carefully chosen wood sculptures of Ernst Barlach reinforce a succinct translation of Geerten Gossaert's *Experimenten* (1954) while one also recalled the wiry "Passion" song of Heinrich Schütz? And so on....

I end now with a translation of my favourite psalm, 39, since it is Lent, and Psalm 39 also happens to deal with the themes of my remarks: the human tongue as voice of our deepest longings and recrimination; the strangeness of a God-breathed poet daring to call God a moth! and the incredible request to have the LORD practice what God preaches—*philoxenia.*

I probably would accompany the translation of Psalm 39 with a slide of the large memorial sculpture by Glid Nandor at Dachau (1960) which I photographed through my tears, of emaciated human figures stuck in barbed wire, and then add a painting of the crucifixion by Haitian artist William H. Johnson, *Mount Calvary*, where thieves next to Christ on the cross are men of colour, a comment on Roman-American justice. The music would be Genevan Psalm melody 51, with Claude Goudimel's harmonization of open fifths, followed by the Black spiritual, "Nobody knows the trouble I'se seen," and a few good gutteral, raspy acappella solo voice renditions of rural Blues laments heard in the 1920s from the Deep South of this country.

Psalm 39. This is the Word of God:

> Once upon a time I said to myself, "I have to watch my attitude or there will be sinning with my tongue; I have to muzzle my mouth as long as the wicked are nearby—or there will be sinning with my tongue."
>
> So I stopped my tongue from even moving. I kept still. But, instead of getting better, my vexation grew more agitated. I got hot inside; I started getting burnt up inside; I had to set my tongue loose and talk.
>
> So I said, "LORD God! LORD God...tell me...about the outcome, the end of the affair of me; and tell me how many days I still have left, so that I may realize what a perishable thing I am. Yes, You made the span of my days about as broad as a man's

hand, and my life-time is like nothing to you—a little hot air, that's all a man can make himself out to be; he walks along like a shadow, getting steamed-up about nothing; he tries to get everything stacked-up, under control, and doesn't even know who will take it over after him...

At the same time, Lord! now—what did I want? Oh yes, I want...my desire! my longing! what I hope for and expect! My request, which goes out to you, Lord, is:

Save me from all my sins!
Do not let me be made the laughing stock of the fools around me!
—I'll keep quiet. I won't open my mouth.
[I know] it is You who afflict me—
[But—but, Lord—] take away the vexing burden under which You weigh me down, for I have been wasting away under the pressure of your hand. You discipline a man by punishing him for his sins and, like a clothes-closet moth, You eat away at his most coveted prize—yes, a little hot air, that's all a man is....
[But—]
Hear my prayer, LORD, listen to my cry for help!
Do not be unmoved because I am crying.
Remember, I am a stranger here, a guest, just a sojourner
like all my fathers and mothers before me—
your guest, Lord.
Don't look at me that way!
Let me become a little more cheerful before I sink away and am no more....

* This article was originally the keynote address at the Ninth Annual NACFLA Conference, Point Loma Nazarene College, Point Loma, CA.

ENDNOTES

[1] *The Gift of the Stranger*, pp. 7-8, 209-216.

[2] Cf. For example, Isaiah 6, Job 1:6-12, Luke 1:26-38, 2:8-14. Also I Corinthians 13:1.

[3] Cf. Section IV on "History and history-keeping: tracking footprints" and "Writing and historiographic task" in my article, "Footprints in the snow," *Philosophia Reformata*, 56:1 (1991): 16-28.

Plato wrestles with the relation of scripting language well in *Phaedrus* 274b6-278b6; and Jacques Derrida spars further with Plato's *Phaedrus* on the matter of reading/writing in "La Pharmacie de Platon" (1968), translated as "Plato's Pharmacy" by Barbara Johnson in *Dissemination* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 63-171.

For a laconic, jesting macaronic treatment of getting conference speeches published in academic journals, see John Fisher's editorial in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38:2 (1979): 119-120.

[4] *Why should a university exist?*, pp. 6-17.

[5] Plato, *Gorgias*, 454e9-455a1, 463a6-463c7, 464e2-465a7; also *Phaedrus*, 262c1-262c4.

[6] *Nichomachaean Ethics*, book VI, 1138b18-1145a11.

[7] Isocrates, *Antidosis*, 256-257, 268-277, 304-305.

[8] For a fascinating account of how "C.C." (Contemporary Civilization") required at Columbia University (and Stanford) in the 1920s attempted to provide curricular order and meet the perceived need to educate the many immigrant students into (national) American citizenship, later crossed with the University of Chicago "Great Books" program (led by Robert M. Hutchins and Mortimer Adler), see chapter 6, "Between the wars: Aspiration to Order," in W.B. Carnochan, *The Battleground of the*

Curriculum.

[9] Acts 10:1-11:18, especially 10:44-48, 11:15-18.

[10] Proverbs 22:22-23, Job 31:13-23, Isaiah 61:1-4 and Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 11:2-6, James 2:1-7; I Samuel 2:1-10 and Luke 1:46-55; I Corinthians 2:1-5.

[11] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV,20:4,6.

[12] *The Gift of the Stranger*, pp. 67-73.

[13] George Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 396.

[14] In the very chapter Paul addresses the problem of tongue-talk, I Corinthians 12:28 includes "helpmates" (*antilempseis*) among those whom God has placed in the body of Christ to serve the other members.

Mary's song in Luke 1:54, which uses the "helpmate" verb (*antelabeto*) in alluding to Isaiah 41:10c (*'azartika*), firms up the connection of this (verbal) ministration of mutually accepting each other, of mutually receiving and giving in return diverse goods—"helpmates"—with the provocative revelation in the Older Testament of persons being a (*'azer*) "helpmate" (as woman; Genesis 2:18-24, as God, Psalm 10:14, 30:10, 46:1, 54:4; as man, Job 31:21-22).

Translators, it strikes me, are specially blessed with the calling to be "helpmates."

[15] Distinguishing a faithful translation from an insightful commentary instead of fusing/confusing these two distinct matters was a fertile point your keynote speaker at the 1998 convention of NACFLA, Ray C. van Leeuwen, made. Since I believe even the act of reading a textual passage is already hermeneutic activity, however, interpreting the text, the translation made or chosen to be read (especially a Scriptural passage in the circumstances of a confessing community gathered to worship the Lord) is already always more than a transliteration of an original text.

An excellent resource for the classroom to which Thea

Van Til-Rusthoven introduced me for teaching French language and literature in a culturally rich way, accompanied by graphic arts, is the *Collection Henri Mitterand, Littérature, Textes et Documents*, 5 volumes, each dealing with a century, sixteenth through twentieth century (Paris: Édition Nathan, 1986-89).

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