

# How Does the Act of ‘Speaking in Tongues’ Contribute to a Theology of Place?

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This paper attempts to define how the practice of ‘speaking in tongues’ regulates a place to develop a framework that adheres to an act of free expression, a preliminary that requires space to exercise interplay upon the concept of the Spirit. This idea necessitates a place to construct identity, security and a sense of belonging.

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## Introduction

Pentecostals attempt to relate their interpretation of experience as closely as possible to the biblical scriptures (Parker 2015: 203). For example, as seen through the practice of speaking in tongues, or the more technical term ‘glossolalia,’ derived from the Greek words *γλῶσσα* (tongue) *λαλέω* (to speak) (Warrington 2008: 84). The act of speaking in tongues is first exhibited in the book of Acts in chapter two, during the feast of Pentecost. Again, it is presented in Saint Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthian church: ‘For he who speaks in tongues does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries’ (1 Corinthians 14:2).

Keith Warrington points out that speaking in tongues can be seen as an expression of worship or prayer leaving many Pentecostals with emotional and spiritual benefits (Warrington 2008: 88). Hence, the practice of speaking in tongues is all about intention, as the practice itself is a form of interplay. Although the individual may not fully comprehend the activity, the intention is key to the understanding of why one would engage in such a practice. For example, this activity provides a sign to those that do not believe, as it serves a purpose to confirm a deeper intimacy with God (Warrington 2008: 95). Speaking in tongues is essential in developing the preliminary requirements to establish a ‘place’ in the Spirit for Pentecostal worship.

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## Defining 'Place' from 'Space'

According to Walter Brueggemann, 'place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations' (Brueggemann 1977: 5).

The significance of the transition from a space to a place lies within the construction of a practice that determines its own identity, security and a sense of belonging. Therefore, the formation of a group, such as a church structure, should include these three aspects and can be traced to the primal horde instinct (Freud 1921: 84), an innate need to congress and form an order in which to serve public interest by its specific focus on charity and self-sacrifice. Within this context, formation and order are the preliminaries that give the state of space a licence to transform to a distinguished place. This suggests that there is an instinct to fulfil a primal desire. Freud refers to McDougall's dynamic of 'the principle of direct induction of emotion by way of the primitive sympathetic response' (Freud 1921: 84) in order to demonstrate group formation. The greater the number of people that observe a simultaneous affect, the stronger the automatic compulsion grows.

The common identity allocated to the specific object construed through the paradigm of space is a collective event and requires further construction to validate a cause for the purpose of defining a place within that space. Place, then, is a modification and function of distance (Casey 1998: 164), more specifically, however, speaking in tongues creates a situation of variance by producing a place to express and develop through engagement with the Spirit. The renewing of the mind is taken further to include the dynamic of the collective group: 'Be of the same mind toward one another' (Romans 12:16). In this case, the principle of emotion by direct influence is paramount for the collective group to regulate a system of identity.

Within this provision, order yields to a practice and doing becomes confirmation of what 'I am' or what 'I belong to'. Clancier and Kalmanovitch suggest that it is through the process of integration that the individual is led to a state of unity (Clancier & Kalmanovitch 1987: 29). Hence, the meaning of a place can empower the individual. For example, Brueggemann states that order yields identity through the practice of the Sabbath. The book of Amos qualifies that the people of the land wait until Sabbath is over to continue in their wicked ways (Amos 8:4–6). The practice is kept, the identity is not lost, but the intention in how the practice is carried out is of particular value. Not what or where, but why and how the practice is considered seems to be the important factor. The emphasis is on intention, suggesting that practice alone is not worthy of the land, and its influence consequently reflects the condition of the land.

There now is a situation that respectively demonstrates intention as well as practice in

meeting the criteria in order to fulfil the pre-requisites of developing a place.

According to Bruggemann, God intends to restructure the land and people (Bruggemann 1977: 19). This may suggest that a definable act must first take place. Through interplay within space the Jewish community may find its place, the Promised Land. Thomas O'Meara conveys that this restructuring consigns itself to 'the Christian communities that comprised the Body of their risen Lord, and they saw themselves as their temple, replacing the holy spaces of physical temples', and in turn, 'sacred space is where the divine Spirit dwells – that lay in the community of the Lord' (O'Meara 1999: 56). There is clearly a re-defining moment that places a shift between the traditional localisation of land that the Jews were promised to the accomplishment of the promise within a metaphorical expression of God's reason, which many Christians believe to be the death of Jesus for the redemption of Mankind's sins.

For Pentecostal theology, the 'Christ event' is crucial, as 'place' takes on new meaning, a shift from locality to reality. Through assigning meaning to the symbolic, Israel finds her place through the identity of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The original reason for the search for the Promised Land is as a response to needing somewhere to call home. Inge refers to Brueggemann's exposition of the 'land' as addressing, 'the central human problem of homelessness' (Inge 2003: 35), and further suggests that Brueggemann's insight into the Old Testament includes a history of Israel summed up in terms of hope as a response to a promise (Inge 2003: 37), which requires faith in a journey where God is the guide. Therefore, meaningful action provides the criteria for discovering a distinctive place that reflects the current of the individual's imagination. Inge refers to the 'geography of our imagination' (Inge 2003: 130) to convey how a place can function not only to produce an identity but also an expression of the people that occupy it. The poet Jeremy Hooker illustrates place as 'particular identities belonging to a network, which continually extends with our perception, and beyond it' (Matthias 1992: 47). Therefore, place is unique and offers an insight to 'a space dense with images' (Inge 2003: 130). It is clear to see how a practice can contribute to developing a meaningful place.

## **Speaking in Tongues as a Form of Creative Play**

The place of Pentecostal worship sets the cue for a desire to express oneself, a continuation of the mood and emotion that is felt within the atmosphere it creates (Parker 2015: 78). The primary objective is to feel the spirit move and to act out its interpretation in a symbolic form. Therefore, the place of the Spirit is the interplay that is required to develop a 'self-world structure' (Parker 2015: 165) that qualifies the individual's place in proximity to other entities (Casey 1998: 164). In this way,

discovering a sense of belonging through the practice of speaking in tongues offers a place to express oneself in a safe way.

According to Sigmund Freud, the origin of religious attitude can be traced back to the feeling of infantile helplessness (Freud 1927: 72). Of that feeling of helplessness a sense of belonging is attributed to the behavioural patterns of the individual seeking a refuge, whereby a collective order can place value on the individual's psychological sense of wellbeing. Hence, this demonstrates purpose-directed behaviour, where free expression through interplay provides opportunity for creativity. In this case, speaking in tongues has value in developing a theological reflective account of imaginative thinking as it transcends language within symbolic interactive play.

Play is essential in the process of creating, and being creative is essential for the individual's discovery of the self (Winnicott 1971: 72). This is in line with what forms Christian identity: 'It is the script of Christian identity, and its patterns of movement and thought are the patterns that comprise the essence of our Christian practices' (Healy 2003: 288). This enables the individual to discover a sense of being in relation to a place of symbolic interaction. Speaking in tongues is the real product of creativity by interacting with the Spirit.

In line with what is viewed as the Pentecostal tradition, John Inge postulates that contact with the Spirit is important as 'space has been Christified by the incarnation' (Inge 2003: 57). This further suggests that the Spirit defines the 'real subject' of the Church's core practice, which is not governed by human agents. Furthermore, it is the Spirit's work that is constitutive (Healy 2003: 297). This brings meaning and value to the effort of the Church; practices may vary but the objective in service to God remains the same.

The significance of a practice that employs a method of free expression, such as speaking in tongues, serves as a mechanism which aligns displaced material within the psychical apparatus in an order that reinforces the individual's stance within his or her belief in the Spirit. This displays that speaking in tongues holds value in the act of qualifying a system of faith in a concept that requires full submission of intellect and language. A free-flowing system is designed to develop a practice of interplay whereby the ideology of the Spirit is in relation to the self and in proximity to the concept of God.

## **Developing an Identity and a Sense of Belonging**

Place, for Pentecostal theology, is identifying with the Spirit as well as observing the Spirit's involvement with the individual in a freely expressive way that manifests itself in the form of utterances of the tongue (Acts 2:4), in other words, speaking in tongues.

Accordingly, this practice offers little to nothing of a step-by-step logic but rather submits to an aesthetic practice (Parker 2015: 212). This further suggests that the place in which speaking in tongues is practised produces creativity mediated through the individual administering similar traits that are expressed through art and poetry.

A good example that demonstrates the value of free expression within a place that adheres to a framework of a step-by-step procedure is the sport of amateur boxing. All amateur boxing clubs in Great Britain are regulated and commissioned by a Governing Body. The Amateur Boxing Association of England (ABAE) is considered the largest and most established boxing association in the United Kingdom. It requires its clubs to work within a certain framework that follows guidelines that include health and safety as well as the rules and procedures of the sport, according to the *Rules of Boxing* (2012). The ABAE style is very distinctive and unique (Blower 2007: 21–23). However, although there is a step-by-step methodology, free expression of the art form of amateur boxing is equally important, otherwise all you have are set forms to a practice with no passion, and it is within the passion that the execution of action is at its best. It is up to the boxer to express his or her own personal style within the confines of a place where performance is executed, such as a regulated contest. Nevertheless, the space where the boxer develops his or her personal style is within training. Training provides the space essentially needed to develop an associative identity to the form of amateur boxing. Through this, the boxer can then confidently develop a distinctive style that represents the place where he or she trains, such as a club that holds its own identity and style.

This analogy corresponds well with how speaking in tongues might contribute to the construct of a theology of place as it defines its locality within the Spirit. In like manner, the place of ministry varies according to variables that determine culture, tradition, and belief. However, just as the discipline of boxing has its own Governing Bodies so too do established churches. Accordingly, there should be a constitution that verifies the position of any particular church. Saint Augustine of Hippo's understanding of the Christian faith is that the Church should resemble a Hospital (McGrath 2011: 381). In this respect the Church has a spiritual duty of care and its function is to serve according to a framework that is defined by Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. Saint Paul distinguishes the Christian walk as adhering to an ethical framework that, upon close examination, yields to a framework based on human emotion and intellect: '[...] be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2). This places an emphasis that something needs to happen before proceeding in the light of understanding the perfect will of God. A transvaluation of internalised material to assign meaning and value to the outside world is a crucial aspect of this process.

A primary goal within Pentecostal worship is found within emotional experience. This perspective can imply that emotionally led discernment and decision making

adheres directly to the Spirit and furthermore lays claim to a personal relationship with the Spirit, hence the term 'led by the Spirit', which is extensively used within Pentecostal theology.

An example of how literally the International Pentecostal Church of Holiness takes the practice of speaking in tongues is seen within their statement of Sanctification in Article Eleven (Kay & Dyer 2004: 139). An attempt is made to replicate the original practice of Spirit baptism as it is referred to in the book of Acts 2:3–4 and Corinthians I, 14:2. Spirit baptism is defined as the 'sudden receiving of entire sanctification' (Dunn 2010: 2), and this is commonly associated with speaking in tongues. Thus, speaking in tongues sculpts the place of Spirit baptism. The importance of developing a place from an act of free expression is similar to what was previously said about the significance training has within boxing regarding the execution of action. Speaking in tongues serves as a self-developing practice that allows room for the Spirit to manifest and lead. By the practice of speaking in tongues, the place of the Spirit can operate with a firm foundation, as it strengthens the faith and the collective identity of the congregational church.

The New Testament directly vindicates the position of the Spirit and how it directs the Church: 'However, when He, the spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come' (John 16:13). Henceforth, throughout Saint Paul's ministry he refers to the Spirit of God and how that should be the vehicle of the Church. Within this context, speaking in tongues is generally considered as an event that takes place under the direct instruction of the Spirit. It is within this phenomenon that the transition from the process of interplay contributes to constructing a theology of place.

## **The Function of Speaking in Tongues**

Speaking in tongues facilitates a place of free expression which offers engagement with the Spirit. This reinforces the notion of the 'relationship between expressions of the self' (Parker 2015: 166). However, identifying the functionality of an order for this place to serve this notion should include the intention of serving a purpose.

It can be suggested that the Christian faith, as seen through Spirit baptism, offers a set of values and principles that serves to contribute to the development of coming to know a reality of the self in proximity to the Spirit. Alister McGraph conveys that the 'Christian faith thus offers a way of seeing reality that brings about a transformation and a transvaluation of our understanding of the world, and our place within it' (Ward 2012: 108). It is with this understanding of the world that freedom of expression serves a purpose, whereby interplay upon the object of that belief system defines

meaning through reflection.

Laurie Green introduces a methodology that accounts for a reflective theology within a cyclical framework (Green 2009: 103). Green's dynamic adheres to the constraints of the psychical apparatus by asserting a model where exploring experience leads to reflection. This denotes that reflection of experience is a productive response to a new situation. However, there are limitations to Green's cyclical framework as it fails to consider the influence of unconscious material in the form of regression, which is, for the most part, felt rather than consciously perceived, hence, Freud's theory of neurosis (Hitschmann 2012: 7–14). Speaking in tongues offers an insight into unconscious material and places value on it as it manifests as the discharge of emotion. The defining characteristic of speaking in tongues is in the notion of impulsive-driven faith, which is led by creativity. Hence: 'Pentecostal discernment and decision making cannot be reduced entirely to a step-by-step logic' (Parker 2015: 212). However, theological reflection within Spirit baptism provides the space to exercise belief and expresses transformation of the self. This also offers a form of security as a defence mechanism through the process of familiarity, as the group learns to represent the original sign of what it represents in ways that resemble a language or code that the group uses to identify its members. The identity of this place is now reflected through the terminology and images that the group chooses to use. The social boundaries are defined as metaphors and the original sign as its nucleus. The symbolic interactions between the members act as interplay, which defines a place of significance for those members to express this interplay as meaningful behaviour.

Through this process we discern that a place can express character, which contributes to constructing an identity. Associations to place as repeated encounters develop into a story, an association-based identity (Inge 2003: 83–84). Identity is construed through common interaction and familiar circumstance. Interplay, by speaking in tongues, constructs the ideological formation of belonging.

Therefore, speaking in tongues creates transitional space, essentially assigning a cross-cultural value that expresses the celebration of the Spirit in order to allow the Spirit capacity to move and lead in accordance with its fruits: 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law' (Galatians 5:22–23). Saint Paul acknowledges that being set in the fruitful ways of God is being free by the virtues of the Spirit, speaking in tongues expresses this notion as it transcends culture, tradition and language.

Thomas O'Meara suggests that the Church is one united body of Christ and is ministerial through action (O'Meara 1999: 49): although there are many varieties of service, there is one God (O'Meara 1999: 54). Expression is subject to experience and

therefore those that share the Spirit should do so accordingly with one mind: 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:5). This places an emphasis on perceiving information and how one looks at the world in a new light: 'This is why it can be claimed that what is in a place expresses that place: it not only reflects the circumambient world from its point of view, but it reflects that point of view itself' (Casey 1998: 173). Healy strengthens this case as he conveys the Church as the working mechanical component that adheres to a set of instructions which God requires all participating attendees or members of the congregation to obey in order to adhere to the internal movement of the Spirit (Healy 2003: 306). It is based upon this assumption that the practice of speaking in tongues is essential in establishing a place where the individual can develop through the process of interplay. This concept places an emphasis on the unconscious processes that regulate internal symbolisation that is executed by verbal means. This provides evidence that the practice of free expression through speaking in tongues, within the context of Spirit baptism, is necessary to facilitate a sense of doing with a sense of being. The very nature of what this symbolises defines a place where speaking in tongues provides identity, security and a sense of belonging.

Stephen Parker claims that Pentecostal theology essentially develops as part of a reflective account of experience (Parker 2015: 2). Here the individual expresses an internalisation of what he or she might perceive as a manifestation of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues. Parker's understanding of this phenomenon, as too the general practice of Pentecostalism, is expressed within his work as a psychological function that serves as an escape from the negativity of life (Parker 2015: 10). However, this phenomenon does serve a noticeable function that scaffolds faith by a process that encourages reflection through experience. Expressive behavioural actions and utterances within the context of a theological belief system of 'encounter' provides the necessary space in order for 'place' to develop its collective identity.

The ideology of Pentecostalism provides the space for the Spirit to be actively involved with the individual in order to address the nature of epistemology and hermeneutics by an expressive attitude, which seeks to apply meaning and free expression through speaking in tongues. This would imply that speaking in tongues encourages interplay within the transitional sphere of what Pentecostalism offers as a methodological tool to explore the experience of reality. In this way, interplay is the fabric of a process of coming to know a place in the Spirit through the lens of a Pentecostal practice.

This type of interplay with the Spirit resembles practices that can be interpreted as meaningful behaviour. According to Nicholas Healy, practices are not mere behaviour patterns but intentional informed actions performed by human agents (Healy 2003: 292). This provides meaning to behaviour, as practice 'fixes the meaning of an utterance' (Healy 2003: 293). Therefore, practice is motive driven and the individual



in communion with the group determines its significance.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to put forward the idea that speaking in tongues develops a place to experience a theology based on emotion. Of particular interest, one may discover commonality where dialogue might form between two worlds of discourse. On the one hand, we have a practice that encourages verbal expression in the form of utterances and nonsensical words. On the other hand, we have a form of play that stems from the desire to be creative. Both of these themes provide an insight as to what the appeal of personal expression might be in the light of attaining a sense of self.

Furthermore, it might reasonably be claimed that the Pentecostal theology of place adheres to a practice that necessitates free expression to experience the Spirit. Through this, speaking in tongues serves a function of re-aligning displaced material from the psychological apparatus through the constructive procedure of interplay. This procedure requires the preliminaries that define a place in proximity to the self as expressive reflection wherein expression provides opportunity to develop identity, which reflects the place of the Church and through the belief system of the Spirit there is a sense of belonging. This therefore provides the security to grow and introspectively continue spiritual development.

In sum, the place of speaking in tongues is more than just a set of practices and unknown utterances, it is flexibility in action and opportunity to develop a place in the Spirit that is totally given over to creative play.

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