28. Spiritual gifts, tongues and healing

Often heard: "Tongues and healings ended with the apostles. Catholic healing shrines and charismatic prayer meetings are emotion, not the Spirit."
Also heard: "Paul wrote 'forbid not to speak with tongues.' Where does the Bible say the gifts would stop before Christ returns?"
The sharper divide here is not between one church and another but cessationist against continuationist, and it runs through several traditions, Baptists and the Reformed among them.

The sign gifts ceased with the apostles

HELD BY Reformed most; some open | Baptist divided

Cessationists hold that the sign gifts (tongues, prophecy, healing, miracles) confirmed the apostles and their message and ended with them and the completed New Testament; this is common among Presbyterians and the Reformed, and is the traditional view of Reformed Baptists and common among other Baptists, who are divided on the question. Continuationists hold that every gift in 1 Cor 12 may still be given, though most Baptist continuationists reject the Pentecostal teaching that tongues must accompany baptism in the Spirit. The Baptist Faith and Message (2000) says only that the Spirit "bestows the spiritual gifts" (art. II.C) and does not mention tongues or healing. The question divided the Southern Baptist International Mission Board: on 15 November 2005 its trustees adopted guidelines under which candidates who practise a "private prayer language" eliminate themselves from appointment, and on 13 May 2015 the trustees dropped that bar, while keeping the right to end employment for "persistent emphasis on any specific gift of the Spirit as normative for all." Most Baptist churches pray for the sick, following James 5:14–15, without claiming a gift of healing.

VERSES CITED

Cessationist: 1 Cor 13:8–10 ("whether there be tongues, they shall cease"); Heb 2:3–4 (the message "was confirmed unto us by them that heard him," God "bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders"); Eph 2:20 (the church "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets"); 2 Cor 12:12 (the "signs of an apostle"). Continuationist: 1 Cor 12:7–11; 14:39 ("forbid not to speak with tongues"); Acts 2:17–18; Mark 16:17–18. Prayer for the sick: James 5:14–15.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Cessationism draws on the Reformers. Calvin held that apostles, prophets and evangelists were "not instituted in the Church to be perpetual" (*Institutes* 4.3.4), and the Westminster Confession (1646) and the Second London Baptist Confession (1677/1689) both say, in 1.1, "those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased." Its classic modern statement is the Presbyterian B. B. Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles* (1918), which treats the miraculous gifts as "part of the credentials of the Apostles" that passed away with them. Continuationism among Baptists owes much to the

Pentecostal and charismatic movements of the 20th century (below), and reads "that which is perfect" (1 Cor 13:10) as the return of Christ rather than the completed canon.

The gifts continue, tested by the Church

HELD BY Catholic · Orthodox in sacraments and saints · Lutheran not ruled out; LCMS cautious · Anglican healing ministry · Methodist open, with guidelines

Charisms, "whether extraordinary or simple and humble," are graces of the Holy Spirit given to build up the Church and serve the world (CCC 799). The Catechism counts "the gift of miracles or of tongues" among them and says they "are at the service of charity" (CCC 2003). They are to be received with gratitude, but "discernment of charisms is always necessary," and no charism is exempt from being referred to the Church's pastors (CCC 800–801). The Second Vatican Council taught that the Spirit gives special graces to the faithful of every rank, but that "extraordinary gifts are not to be sought after," and that judging their genuineness belongs to the Church's appointed leaders (*Lumen Gentium* 12). Healing is given above all through the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, founded on James 5:14–15, though "the Holy Spirit gives to some a special charism of healing" (CCC 1508). Private revelations, even approved ones, do not belong to the deposit of faith and cannot "improve" or "complete" Christ's revelation (CCC 67).

VERSES CITED

1 Cor 12:4–11, 28–31; 14:1, 39; Rom 12:6–8; Mark 16:17–18; Acts 2:17–18; James 5:14–15; 1 Thess 5:19–21; 2 Cor 12:9 (healing is not always given).

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

Justin (c. 155–160) and Irenaeus (c. 180) report prophecy, tongues and healings in their own day; Chrysostom and the early Augustine treated tongues as signs for the Church's beginning that had ceased, though Augustine later recorded almost seventy healings at Hippo within two years (*City of God* 22.8). Quotations are below. Thomas Aquinas classed the gifts of 1 Cor 12:8–10 as "gratuitous graces," given to help others toward God, as distinct from the sanctifying grace that unites a person to God (*Summa Theologiae* I–II q. 111 a. 1, 4). Causes for sainthood require, in general, one verified miracle for beatification and a second for canonization (martyrs excepted), examined by a medical board of up to seven experts before theologians and cardinals; Pope Francis approved revised norms in 2016. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal began at a weekend retreat of Duquesne University students and teachers at The Ark and The Dove retreat house near Pittsburgh in February 1967. Paul VI addressed its third international congress on 19 May 1975, and in 2019 Pope Francis, paraphrasing him, called the Renewal "a great opportunity for the Church." By decree of 8 December 2018 the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life established CHARIS (Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service) as the Renewal's single international service; it began work at Pentecost 2019.

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 67, 799–801, 1499–1532 (esp. 1508, 1511), 2003; Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 12; Francis, Address to CHARIS (8 June 2019).

THE PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS

Pentecostals are not one of the seven traditions compared here, but they are the setting of this whole debate. The movement grew out of the Wesleyan Holiness movement and is usually dated to the Azusa Street mission in Los Angeles (1906–1909), led by William J. Seymour, a Black Holiness preacher who had studied under Charles Parham. The Assemblies of God, formed at Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1914, teaches that baptism in the Spirit "is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues" and that "Divine healing is an integral part of the gospel" (Statement of Fundamental Truths, arts. 8 and 12). From 1959 the charismatic renewal carried similar experiences into the older Protestant churches, and from 1967 into the Catholic Church. A 2011 Pew Research Center analysis counted about 279 million Pentecostals and 305 million charismatics, together about 27% of all Christians.

THE FATHERS ON THE GIFTS

Justin Martyr
c. AD 155–160

"For the prophetical gifts remain with us, even to the present time."

Dialogue with Trypho 82

Irenaeus of Lyons
c. AD 180

"...many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages."

Against Heresies 5.6.1

John Chrysostom
c. AD 392

"This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation."

Homilies on 1 Corinthians 29.1, on 1 Cor 12. Cessationists often cite it.

Augustine of Hippo
c. AD 407

"These were signs adapted to the time... That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away."

Homilies on the First Epistle of John 6.10, on the tongues of Pentecost

Augustine of Hippo
c. AD 426

"Even now miracles are wrought in the name of Christ."

City of God 22.8. He goes on to list healings at Hippo after the relics of St Stephen arrived; continuationists and Catholics cite it.

Wording follows the Ante-Nicene and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers translations; other translations vary slightly.

Across the traditions

How each major tradition answers this question, in its own words and from its own documents.

Catholic

Charisms, including tongues and healing, are genuine graces of the Holy Spirit given to build up the Church, to be received with gratitude and always discerned by the Church's pastors; healing is given above all through the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Catechism of the Catholic Church 67, 799-801, 1508, 1511, 2003; Vatican II, Lumen Gentium 12.

Orthodox

The Orthodox Church seeks healing above all in holy unction, "the sacrament of the spiritual, physical, and mental healing of a sick person," while teaching that physical healing is not always God's will. Tongues are "not ruled out" as a gift of the Spirit but are not counted among the more important gifts, following 1 Cor 14:19, and the OCA's catechetical series finds no sign that the saints propagated them. The Church instead honours miracles in its saints, several of whom it calls wonderworkers.

Sources: Orthodox Church in America, The Orthodox Faith, vol. 2, "Holy Unction"; vol. 3, History Answers and Reflections (Twentieth Century, no. 39); vol. 4, "Prayer in the Spirit" (oca.org).

Lutheran

The LCMS's Commission on Theology and Church Relations does not deny that God gives gifts "according to His good pleasure and the needs of the church," but rejects Spirit baptism as a second work beyond conversion, rejects tongues as its "indispensable sign," and holds that "the Word and the sacraments are the only means of grace." A 1977 report restated this

Reformed

The Westminster Confession says that God's "former ways" of revealing his will are "now ceased" (1.1), and Calvin held that apostles, prophets and evangelists were "not instituted in the Church to be perpetual," though God "still occasionally raises them up" (Institutes 4.3.4). Cessationism, classically argued by B. B. Warfield, is common among Presbyterians. The

with pastoral guidelines. Charismatic renewal has a place among other Lutherans, for example through the ELCA pastor Larry Christenson's International Lutheran Renewal Center.

Sources: LCMS CTCR, The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology (January 1972), sec. A.2, A.4, A.5; CTCR, The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement (1977); W. A. Maier, Concordia Theological Quarterly 53 (1989), 21 ff.

Christian Reformed Church (1973) holds that Christ gives "whatever gifts he judges necessary" in every age, but warns against excesses in tongues, faith healing and exorcism and rejects a second-blessing Spirit baptism.

Sources: Westminster Confession 1.1; Calvin, Institutes 4.3.4; B. B. Warfield, Counterfeit Miracles (1918); Christian Reformed Church in North America, position statement "Pentecostalism" (Synod 1973), crcna.org.

Anglican

The 1662 Visitation of the Sick asks God to restore the sick person "if it shall be thy good pleasure," and has no anointing. Common Worship provides prayer "focused through laying on of hands or anointing with oil," which should not reject "the skills and activity of medicine"; A Time to Heal (2000), a report for the House of Bishops, reviewed the healing ministry. The Alpha course, begun at Holy Trinity Brompton, London, in 1977, includes a weekend of talks on the Holy Spirit.

Sources: Book of Common Prayer (1662), The Visitation of the Sick; Common Worship: Pastoral Services, Wholeness and Healing, introduction (churchofengland.org); A Time to Heal: A Report for the House of Bishops on the Healing Ministry (Church House Publishing, 2000); Alpha, About Alpha (alpha.org).

Methodist

Wesley held that the extraordinary gifts were not "common in the church for more than two or three centuries" and blamed their decline after Constantine on love having "waxed cold," not on God withdrawing them (Sermon 89, 1787). The United Methodist guidelines on the charismatic movement, first approved in 1976, call it "closely related to the holiness movement and to the Wesleyan tradition," from which Pentecostalism grew, and ask that tongues not "hinder worship or cause distraction for others."

Sources: John Wesley, Sermon 89, The More Excellent Way (1787), intro. 2; United Methodist Church, Book of Resolutions, Guidelines: The UMC and the Charismatic Movement (approved 1976; readopted 2016 and 2024), umc.org.

Baptist

Baptists are divided between cessationists, who hold that the sign gifts ended with the apostles, and continuationists; the Baptist Faith and Message is silent on tongues, and the Southern Baptist International Mission Board barred candidates with a private prayer language from 2005 until 2015. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Baptist Faith and Message (2000), art. II.C; Second London Baptist Confession (1677/1689), 1.1; IMB trustee actions of 15 Nov 2005 (Huntsville) and 12-13 May 2015 (Louisville).

Where it gets contested: Much turns on 1 Cor 13:8–10: cessationists read "that which is perfect" as the completed Scripture or a mature Church, continuationists as the return of Christ. Cessationists can cite Chrysostom and the early Augustine, and point to the failures and abuses of modern faith healing; continuationists cite Justin, Irenaeus and the later Augustine, and note that no verse says the gifts would end before the Second Coming. The IMB's reversal in 2015 shows that Southern Baptists themselves no longer agree. Catholics are not simply on the continuationist side: the Church affirms charisms and miracles in principle but tests each claim through its pastors, its medical boards and its slow processes for approving apparitions and saints. Where there is no magisterium, as among Baptists, the question is who decides whether a gift is genuine; Catholics answer that this is exactly why discernment belongs to the Church.

See also: Seven sacraments or two ordinances? (anointing of the sick); Women pastors and priests; Where each tradition stands; Classic argument 51, 79; Glossary: cessationism.

Last reviewed November 10, 2026