

Book Reviews

Tongues of Men and Angels. By William J. Samarin. Macmillan Co., New York, 1972. 277 pp., \$7.95, cloth.

Here is a book written by a former Brethren missionary on the linguistic, sociological, and psychological aspects of glossolalia. Dr. Samarin is now Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics at the University of Toronto and is well qualified to write in these fields. His is undoubtedly the most thorough study, and the most accurate description, from the linguistic aspect, of tongues to this date. This is not a Biblical study, nor a study of Pentecostalism, but a study of glossolalia.

Samarin demonstrates clearly that tongues are not a miraculous phenomenon. "No special power needs to take over a person's vocal organs; all of us are equipped with everything we need to produce glossolalia" (p. 211). There are no word meanings and no semantic system, he asserts (p. 211), though the sounds are not entirely random (p. 127). There is apparently some selection of sounds, or of the type of sounds, on a phonological rather than lexical basis. This selection maybe influenced by the nature of the audience or by the varying purposes of the speech, such as whether the speaker considers himself to be praying or delivering a message.

Samarin writes as a scientist and evinces a scholarly reserve in several points. He is very cautious in identifying non-Christian utterances as glossolalia. He believes that glossolalia is "rarely found in societies that have had no contact with Christianity" (p. 222), yet he does point to instances of tongues among non-Christians. He correctly observes that "contrary to common belief, it has never been scientifically demonstrated that zenoglossia (tongues speaking in foreign language) occurs among Pentecostals: people just do not talk languages they are unfamiliar with" (p. 227). He admits that "some alleged cases of zenoglossia might be explained by cryptomnesia," or "hidden memory" (p. 115).

Probably Samarin's major emphasis is that "glossolalia is not simply a product of dissociative states, like trance" (p. 226). It is "not aberrant behavior, only anomalous" (p. 228). It is "normal, not supernatural as the Pentecostal believes," and "normal, not abnormal

as the man-in-the-street believes" (p. 229).

The reviewer would raise several questions regarding very minor aspects of this work. First, he would question the aptness of the title. It is not likely that Paul was labeling glossolalia when he said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels." He was saying, in effect, "Even if I *should* so speak (even in angel-language, *which I do not*), even if...

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