

## QUESTION 176

### The Grace of Tongues

Next we have to consider the gratuitously given graces that pertain to speech (*de gratiis gratis datis quae pertinent ad locutionem*) (questions 176-177): first, the grace of tongues (question 176) and, second, the grace of the word of wisdom or knowledge (question 177).

On the first topic there are two questions: (1) Does a man acquire knowledge of all languages through the grace of tongues? (2) How does this gift compare to the grace of prophecy?

#### Article 1

##### Did those who attained to the gift of tongues speak all languages?

It seems that those who attained to the gift of tongues did not speak all languages (*illi qui consequerantur donum linguarum non loquebantur omnibus linguis*).

**Objection 1:** What is given to individuals by God's power is the best in its genus, in the way that, as John 2:10 reports, our Lord converted water into good wine. But those who had the gift of tongues spoke better in their own language; for a Gloss on Hebrews 1 says, "It is not surprising that the epistle to the Hebrews glows with more eloquence than the others, since it is natural for a man to have more command over his own language than over a foreign language. For the Apostle wrote the other epistles in a foreign language, viz., Greek, whereas he wrote this one in Hebrew." Therefore, it is not the case that through the gratuitously given grace in question the apostles received knowledge of all languages.

**Objection 2:** Nature—and, *a fortiori*, God, who works in a more orderly way than nature—does not do through many things what can be done through one thing. But God was able to make it the case that those who spoke a single language were understood by everyone. Hence, a Gloss on Acts 2:6 ("Each one heard them speaking in his own language") says, "They were speaking in all languages—or, rather, while speaking in their own language, viz., the Hebrew language, they were understood by everyone as if they were speaking the languages proper to each of them." Therefore, it seems that they did not know how to speak all languages.

**Objection 3:** All graces flow from Christ into His body, which is the Church—this according to John 1:16 ("From His plenitude we have all received"). But Christ is not said to have spoken anything other than a single language. Nor, even now, do faithful individuals speak anything other than a single language. Therefore, it seems that Christ's disciples did not receive the grace to speak all languages.

**But contrary to this:** Acts 2:4 says that they "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in various languages according as the Holy Spirit gave them to speak"—where Gregory's Gloss says, "The Holy Spirit appeared above the disciples in fiery tongues, and He gave them knowledge of all languages."

**I respond:** The disciples of Christ were chosen by Him in order that, going forth throughout the whole world, they might preach His Faith everywhere—this according to Matthew 28:19 ("Go and teach all nations"). Now it was unfitting that those who were sent forth to instruct others should need to be instructed by others about how to speak to others or about how to understand what others were saying to them—especially because those who were sent were of a single nation, viz., Jews—this according to Isaiah 27:6 ("Those who rush forth from Jacob will fill the face of the earth with their seed"). Again, those who were sent were poor and powerless, and they would not at the beginning have easily found individuals who might faithfully translate their words to others or explain the words of others to them—especially given that they were sent to non-believers.

And so it was necessary for them to be divinely provided for in this matter through the gift of tongues, so that just as, when the nations were falling into idolatry, the diversity of languages was introduced in the way explained in Genesis 11:7ff., so, too, when the nations were to be recalled to the

worship of the one God, the remedy to that sort of diversity might be applied through the gift of tongues.

**Reply to objection 1:** As is explained in 1 Corinthians 12:7, “The manifestation of the Spirit is given for our profit.” And so Paul and the other apostles were divinely instructed in the languages of all the nations to the extent that the teaching of the Faith required. On the other hand, as regards certain things added by human art for the sake of ornate and eloquent locution, the Apostle had been instructed in his own language, but not in any foreign languages—just as they had been sufficiently instructed in wisdom and knowledge to the extent that the teaching of the Faith required, but not with respect to all the things that are known through scientific knowledge, e.g., the conclusions of arithmetic or geometry.

**Reply to objection 2:** Even though it could have happened in either of the two ways—viz., that they were understood by everyone either by speaking one language or by speaking all the languages—it was nonetheless more fitting for them to be speaking all the languages, since this pertains to the perfection of their knowledge, through which they were able not only to speak but to understand what was being said by the others.

On the other hand, if everyone had understood their one language, then either this would have been through the knowledge of those who understood them as they spoke, or there would have been a sort of trick wherein the words of the one group were conveyed to the ears of the others in a way different from the way in which they themselves had uttered them. And so the relevant Gloss on Acts 2:6 says, “It was a greater miracle if they themselves were speaking all the languages.” And so in 1 Corinthians 14:18 Paul says, “I thank God that I speak all your languages.”

**Reply to objection 3:** Christ in His proper person (*Christus in propria persona*) was to preach to only one nation, viz., the Jews. And so even though He doubtlessly had in the most perfect way a knowledge of all languages, it was nonetheless unnecessary for Him to speak all languages. Thus, as Augustine says in *Super Ioannem*, “Since the Holy Spirit is even now being received, no individual speaks the languages of every nation; for the Church herself already speaks the languages of all the nations, and whoever is not in the Church does not receive the Holy Spirit.”

## Article 2

### Is the gift of tongues more excellent than the grace of prophecy?

It seems that the gift of tongues is more excellent than the grace of prophecy:

**Objection 1:** According to the Philosopher in *Topics* 3, “Things that are proper to the better things seem themselves to be better.” But the gift of tongues is proper to the New Testament; hence, we sing in the sequence for Pentecost, “On this day He granted Christ’s apostles a gift unwonted and unheard of in all ages.” By contrast, prophecy belongs to the Old Testament—this according to Hebrews 1:1 (“In times past God spoke in many places and in diverse ways to our fathers by the prophets”). Therefore, it seems that the gift of tongues is more excellent than the gift of prophecy.

**Objection 2:** That by which we are ordered toward God seems to be more excellent than that by which we are ordered toward men. But through the gift of tongues a man is ordered toward God, whereas by prophecy a man is ordered toward men; for 1 Corinthians 14:2-3 says, “He who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God ... but he who prophesies speaks to men for their edification.” Therefore, it seems that the gift of tongues is more excellent than the gift of prophecy.

**Objection 3:** The gift of tongues remains as a habit in the one who has it, and the man has it in his power to use it whenever he wants to; hence, 1 Corinthians 14:18 says, “I thank God that I speak all your languages.” By contrast, as was established above (q. 171, a. 2), this is not so with the gift of prophecy. Therefore, the gift of tongues seems to be more excellent than the gift of prophecy.

**Objection 4:** The interpretation of speech (*interpretatio sermonum*) seems to be contained under prophecy, since the Scriptures are explained by the same Spirit from whom they come forth. But in

1 Corinthians 12:28 the interpretation of speech comes after “the diverse kinds of tongues.” Therefore, it seems that the gift of tongues is more excellent than the gift of prophecy, especially with respect to one part of the latter.

**But contrary to this:** In 1 Corinthians 14:5 the Apostle says, “He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues.”

**I respond:** There are three ways in which the gift of prophecy is more excellent than the gift of tongues:

First, the gift of tongues refers to pronouncing diverse sounds that are signs of some intelligible truth, certain signs of which are likewise certain images themselves which appear in a vision in the imagination; hence, in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12 Augustine compares the gift of tongues to a vision in the imagination. Now it was explained above (q. 173, a. 2) that the gift of prophecy consists in the illumination itself of the mind for knowing intelligible truth. Hence, just as—and this was established above (q. 174, a. 2)—prophetic illumination is more excellent than a vision in the imagination, so, too, prophecy is more excellent than the gift of tongues considered in itself.

Second, the gift of prophecy involves the knowledge of things, which is more noble than the knowledge of sounds that the gift of tongues involves.

Third, the gift of prophecy is more useful. In 1 Corinthians 14 the Apostle proves this in three ways:

(a) First (verses 5ff.), prophecy is more useful for the building up of the Church, whereas an individual who speaks in tongues contributes nothing to this, unless an interpretation follows.

(b) Second (verses 14ff.), with respect to the individual himself who is speaking, if he were enabled to speak in different tongues without understanding them (for understanding pertains to prophecy), then his own mind would not be built up.

(c) Third (verses 21ff.), with respect to the non-believers for the sake of whom the gift of tongues seems mainly to be given, they would probably think that those who were speaking in tongues were insane—just as the Jews thought that the apostles who were speaking in tongues were drunk (Acts 2:13). By contrast, a non-believer would be convinced by prophecies if the secrets of his heart were being made manifest (cf. Acts 2:37).

**Reply to objection 1:** As was explained above (q. 174, a. 2), the excellence of prophecy involves an individual’s not only being illuminated by an intelligible light, but also perceiving a vision in the imagination. So, too, the perfection of the Holy Spirit’s operation involves not only His filling the mind with a prophetic light and the imagination with a vision of images, as was the case in the Old Testament, but also, exteriorly, instructing the tongue to utter various spoken signs. All of this is effected in the New Testament—this according to 1 Corinthians 14:26 (“Each of you has a song, has a doctrine, has a language, has an apocalypse,” i.e., a prophetic revelation).

**Reply to objection 2:** Through the gift of prophecy a man is ordered toward God with respect to his *mind*, which is more noble than being ordered toward God with respect to his *tongue*. Now it is said that “he who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men”—i.e., he speaks not to the intellect of men or to their profit—but only to God’s intellect and to His praise. However, through prophecy an individual is ordered *both* to God and to his neighbor. Hence, prophecy is the more perfect gift.

**Reply to objection 3:** Prophetic revelation extends to the cognition of *all supernatural things*. Hence, because of its perfection, it happens to be the case that in the state of imperfection that belongs to the present life, prophetic revelation cannot be had *perfectly* in the manner of a *habit* (*per modum habitus*), but can be had only *imperfectly* in the manner of *an instance of being acted upon* (*per modum passionis*).

By contrast, the gift of tongues extends to a sort of *particular* cognition, viz., *the cognition of human sounds*. And so the imperfection of the present life does not conflict with this gift’s being had *perfectly and as a habit*.

**Reply to objection 4:** The interpretation of speech can be traced back to the gift of prophecy

insofar as the mind is illuminated in order to understand and explain whatever is obscure in speech because of the difficulty of the things signified, or, again, because of the unknown sounds themselves that are uttered, or, again, because of the likenesses of things that are used—this according to Daniel 5:16 (“I have heard about you that you can interpret obscure things and resolve difficult things”). Hence, the interpretation of speech is more important than the gift of tongues; this is clear from what the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 14:5: “He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues if the speech is not interpreted.”

Now the reason why the interpretation of speech is listed after the gift of tongues is that the interpretation of speech extends to interpreting diverse kinds of language.