

REPACKAGED EDITION

THEY SPEAK
with
OTHER
TONGUES

A SKEPTIC INVESTIGATES THIS
LIFE-CHANGING GIFT

JOHN SHERRILL



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To Tib

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Foreword

I was weeding the vegetable garden behind my home in Holland one summer day in 2003 when the telephone rang. The garden is where I go when facing a problem too big for me, and I didn't welcome an interruption. The phone kept ringing, though, and at last I went in, dropping my wooden outdoor shoes at the door, and picked up the receiver.

It was my friend John Sherrill, calling from New York to hear how my trip had gone. John and his wife, Elizabeth, are two of the people who pray for me as I travel in the Muslim world today. I had gotten back from Palestine the previous night.

"It was the toughest trip yet," I told John. "Everyone's set on revenge; no one wants to hear the other side."

Old, personal friends, I went on—Christians, Jews and Muslims alike—are threatening to blow each other up, and the rest of the world, too.

John's voice had the hint of a smile in it. "It's not the first time, Andrew, that you've stood in the middle of clashing worldviews."

Indeed it was not. My mind went back to the days when John and "Tib" traveled with me behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains at another time when enemies threatened the world with

annihilation. Then, as now, we needed a language that knew no borders, no racial or cultural limits—the language of a Love that surpasses understanding.

Whenever John and Tib and I found ourselves in a “hopeless” situation behind these Curtains, where fear and mistrust made ordinary communication impossible, we would quietly, secretly pray “in the Spirit” and watch locked doors open, barriers vanish, forbidden friendships form. It is my most constant form of prayer today, behind the curtains of religious division and hatred across the Middle East—God’s own words of peace and hope spoken into the babble of angry voices.

As John and I continued to reminisce, I knew that in all history there has never been a more important role for this prayer language than to intercede for today’s polarized world. Because bringing a new dimension into any needful situation is what speaking in tongues is all about. It is the language of Love, using God’s own vocabulary—the perfect idiom for bringing to any problem the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

Brother Andrew, author of the international
bestseller *God’s Smuggler*; July 2003

Prologue to the 40th Anniversary Edition

W ithin the past thirty days no fewer than four people have asked me the same question: “Can we talk?”

All had just finished reading *They Speak with Other Tongues* for the first time and all wanted to know what had happened in the forty years since this book was written. I will bring the story up to date in the final pages, but it was these four people’s questions, and not my answers, that have given me a new perspective.

The first questioner was a young computer programmer from California who wanted to know where he could find a charismatic prayer group in his area. I had a few suggestions, but when he tried to thank me, I thanked him for helping me. If a new, fresh and exciting life in the Spirit is going to be more than a phenomenon of the ’60s, I said, then it must speak to each generation in its own language. The eagerness in the voice of this 26-year-old told me that the Holy Spirit is always up to date.

The second questioner was a plumber who had come to our house to repair a broken pipe. A copy of *They Speak with Other Tongues* was on my desk as I worked on the update and he seemed intrigued with it. I gave him a copy, and a week later he appeared

at the door bursting to talk. “Most of the people in it were not professor-types, but guys like me,” he said. Again his comment gave me new insight, this time about the wide educational spectrum of people whose lives are being transformed by an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

The third person wanting to talk was a young woman from the Caribbean. She had seen *They Speak with Other Tongues* discussed on a television show and wanted to know more. In her home church she had never heard about the charismatic renewal and felt that her family there would resist it. The Pentecostal movement of today, I told her, began in an African-American church in Los Angeles. The determination in this bright young person’s eyes told me the Spirit leaps racial, cultural and geographic divides as readily as educational ones.

And the fourth conversation was initiated by a deacon in the Episcopal church. “Let’s have lunch,” he said. Reading the book, he had wanted that kind of life in his home parish. Because I have always felt that the renewed life in the Spirit should never be the province of splinter groups or a denominational label, but be integrated into the work and worship of all churches, the deacon’s inquiry especially delighted me. *Never worry that I will divide*, the Spirit seemed to be telling me. *My work is always to bring together*.

So, four questioners, four encouragements. Now let me narrate how this all began.

John Sherrill,
2004

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The Leap

I still remember that I whistled as I strode up Park Avenue in New York City that spring morning in 1959, on my way to a follow-up visit at the doctor's. I stepped through the door of number 655 and nodded to the receptionist—she was an old friend by now. I'd been coming to Dr. Daniel Catlin's office every month since a cancer operation two years before, and it was always the same: the doctor's skilled fingers running down my neck, a pat on the back, "See you in a month."

But not that day. This time the fingers stopped, prodded, worked a long time. When I left, I had an appointment at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Hospital for surgery day after next.

What a difference in a spring morning! I walked back down the same street in the same sunshine, but now a cold, light-headed fear walked in me. I knew this fear; all cancer patients know it. But we keep it down, we stay on top of it with various mental tricks. Mine was the notion that one operation was all right; it was only if they called you back that you had to worry.

Now I could no longer hold the fear down. It rose up, scattering reason before it. I dove into the first church I came to, looking for darkness and privacy more than anything. It was St. Thomas Episcopal, on Fifth Avenue, and as I walked in, the noon sirens were blowing. To my surprise, a white-robed boys' choir was filing into stalls down in front, and a few minutes later a young seminarian mounted the pulpit. A card in the pew told me I had stumbled into a Lenten noonday meditation.

I didn't know it then, but this brief address was to hold the key to the most astonishing experience of my life.

At the time it seemed wretchedly irrelevant to my problem. The young man gave a short talk on Nicodemus. Many of us try, he said, to approach Christ as Nicodemus did: through logic. "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God," Nicodemus said, and then he gave his reason—a logical one: "No one could perform these signs of yours unless God were with him" (John 3:2 NEB).

"But, you see," said the seminarian, "as long as Nicodemus was trying to come to an understanding of Christ through his logic, he could never succeed. It isn't logic, but an experience, that lets us know who Christ is. Christ, Himself, told Nicodemus this: 'In very truth I tell you, unless a man has been born over again he cannot see the kingdom of God'" (verse 3 NEB).

At the time, as I say, all this meant less than nothing to me. And yet the very next morning, I was to hear these same words again. My wife, Tib, and I were having coffee after a sleepless night, when the telephone rang. It was our neighbor, author Catherine Marshall LeSourd.

"John," she said, "could you and Tib get in the car and come over here for a few minutes? I've heard the news, and there's something I've got to say to you."

Catherine met us at the door dressed in a housecoat, wearing neither makeup nor smile, which said more than words about the concern she felt. She led us into the family room, shut the door and, without polite talk, began.

“First of all I want to say that I know this is presumptuous of me. I’m going to talk to you about your religious life, and I have no right to assume that it lacks anything. After all, you’ve been writing for *Guideposts* for ten years; you respect religion, you’ve studied it from many angles. But there is so much more to it than that. . . .”

I looked at Tib: she sat still as a rock.

“John,” said Catherine, “do you believe Jesus was God?”

It was the last question in the world I’d expected. I’d supposed she’d have something to say about God being able to heal, or prayer being a wonderful uplift when you’re afraid—something to do with the crisis I was facing.

But she’d put the question to me, so I considered it. Tib and I were Christians, certainly, in the sense that we wrote “Protestant” on application blanks, attended church with some regularity, sent our three children to Sunday school. Still, I knew that these were habits; the fact was I had never come to grips with this very question: Was Jesus of Nazareth, in fact, God? And now, when I tried, there were mountains of logic that halted me. I started to map them for Catherine, but she stopped me.

“You’re trying to approach Christianity through your mind, John,” she said. “It simply can’t be done that way.”

There it was again. Catherine went on. “It’s one of the peculiarities of Christianity that you cannot come to it through intellect. You have to be willing to experience it first, to do something you don’t understand—and then oddly enough, understanding often follows. And it’s just that which I’m hoping for you today . . . that without understanding, without even knowing why, you say ‘Yes’ to Christ.”

There was silence in the room. I had an eternity of reservations. And at the same time I had a sudden desire to do precisely what she was suggesting. The biggest reservation of all, I stated frankly: it just didn’t seem right to shy away all these years and then come running when I had cancer and was scared and had my back to the wall.

“I’d feel like a hypocrite,” I said.

“John,” said Catherine almost in a whisper, “that’s pride. You want to come to God in *your* way. When you will. As you will. Strong and healthy. Maybe God wants you now, without a shred to recommend you.”

We talked for perhaps half an hour more, and when we left I still had not brought myself to make that step that was apparently all-crucial. A few moments later, however, just as the car was passing a certain telephone pole on Millwood Road in Chappaqua, a pole that I can point out to this day, I turned to Tib and said aloud, “What do they call it: ‘a leap of faith’? All right, I’m going to make the leap: I believe that Christ was God.”

It was a cold-blooded laying down of my sense of what was logical, quite without emotional conviction. And with it went something that was essentially “me.” All the bundle of self-consciousness that we call our ego seemed somehow involved in this decision. It was amazing how much it hurt, how desperately this thing fought for life, so that there was a real kind of death involved. But when it was dead and quiet finally, and I blurted out my simple statement of belief, there was room in me for something new and altogether mysterious.

The first hint that there was something different about me came rather inelegantly at the hospital. Shortly before the operation a snappy young nurse came in to give me an injection. Since army days, I have had a morbid horror of needles, whether wielded by pretty girls or not. Yet this time it aroused no terrors at all.

“All right, let’s turn over,” said my nurse in her most professional tone. But when she had finished, her tone changed. “My, you’re the relaxed one! You act like you’re here on your vacation.”

It wasn’t until after she had left that I realized how true and how curious this was. I *was* relaxed, deeply and truly, and lying in my hospital bed I began to suspect that something very remarkable was happening to me. It was as if in some secret and undefined part of myself I knew that, no matter how this operation turned

out, it was only an inconvenience in an existence that was new and strange and quite independent of hospitals and surgeons, illness and recovery.

A little later some orderlies came in and I was taken out of my bed and put on a stretcher. I remember the orderlies' faces looking down at me, and a crack in the corridor ceiling gliding past overhead. The fluorescent light in the mammoth elevator wasn't working properly; it blinked on and off. Then there were other lights, blinding ones directly overhead, and out of them appeared the green-capped face of Dr. Catlin. I smiled at him and he smiled back and asked if I was ready.

"Ready and waiting."

There was another injection, and it seemed only an instant before I was awake again, in a room I had never seen before. It was nighttime. I had gone into the operating room at eight o'clock in the morning. Why had it taken so long? Rubber pipes were sticking out of both sides of my chest and out of a hole in my throat. Some sort of machine whirred and gurgled out of sight behind the bed.

And pain. The worst I had ever known. It was in my chest, where the pipes were. A nurse, seeing that I was awake, came over and took my pulse. I tried to talk but could not. I gestured wildly at the pipes.

"Doctor will see you in the morning. Try to get some sleep."

I would like to be able to say that—having made my leap of faith—those hours in the recovery ward were a triumph of soul over body. They were not. Pain demoralized me completely. Something had gone wrong on the operating table, and I was not practiced enough in the Christian life to find much else to think about.

In the morning I woke up in still another room. Bit by bit I pieced together the ceiling and window and sliding curtains of my original hospital room. The pipes were still sticking out of my chest and throat, machines still bubbling away somewhere behind my bed. But at least I got a little information. Dr. Catlin came to

see me. He leaned over the bed, and in my half-conscious state I caught the words: “You’re doing fine now. There was a little trouble on the operating table. Lungs collapsed. Tracheotomy. Everything on your neck looks good, though. Get some rest now.”

For another day I lay semi-drugged on the bed, aware occasionally of a visit from my wife, or my mother, or the doctor. Toward the end of the second day I became aware, too, of other patients in the room. One was an older man who was having a lot of trouble with a cough. Another was a youngster, who had also just come down from the recovery room and was in pain.

That night for the first time I was able to think about praying. I tried talking to this Christ I had stated a belief in, but it was like talking into the air over my bed. In no sense was there a feeling that I was in contact with anybody. I was worried about my roommates, the man with the cough and the boy in pain. I tried praying for them, but nothing happened. After a while I drifted into sleep, aware more than anything else that each of us in that room was very much alone.

It was the middle of the night, and I was awake. Fully awake, without transition from sleep. A little light came in from the hall and from the windows. A nurse passed the door on rubber-soled shoes. Both of my roommates were restless, the one coughing, the other moaning softly.

I don’t know how it was that I first became aware of the light. It was there, without transition, as my awakening had come. It was different from the light that came in through the door and window—more of an illumination than a light with a defined source. But there was something remarkable about this light: it had, somehow, a center of awareness. I was awed, but not at all afraid. Instead there was a sense of recognition, as if I were seeing a childhood friend, physically much changed so that what I recognized was a totality rather than a particular feature.

“Christ?” I said.

The light moved slightly. Not really moved: it was just suddenly closer to me without leaving where it was. I thought for a moment

that the pain beneath my bandages was going away, but it did not. Something happened with that encounter, though. It was as if I were bursting with health through and through.

My roommates were still tossing, still coughing and groaning. “Christ,” I said moving my lips only, “would you help that boy?” The light did not leave me, but in some strange way it was now at the bedside of the boy in pain. A little “Ohhh . . .” came from him and he was silent.

“And my other friend?” The light was instantly centered on the bed of the old man who was in the middle of a spasm of coughing. The cough stopped. The old man sighed and turned over.

And the light was gone.

I lifted my head as far as I could from the pillow and searched the room, but there was only the yellow light from the hall and the window. The nurse came back down the hall. A car honked outside in the night. The machinery behind my bed whirred and wheezed. Everything was as it had been. Except that, lying there in a bed in Memorial Hospital, with bandages around my head and neck and chest, with pain still slicing through me, I was filled with a sense of well-being such as I had never known. I cried for a long time, out of joy.

I stayed awake until dawn, thinking that perhaps the extraordinary light would return. All that while, my two roommates slept quietly. When the morning nurse came in with the tray of thermometers, she found me still awake.

“You look rested,” she said.

“I am.”

She turned to my roommates. “Well that’s good. And they’re both sleeping. I think I’ll do this room later.”

I was out of the hospital a full week earlier than Dr. Catlin had predicted, so rapidly did my body mend.

For several days after I returned home I tried to tell Tib about the encounter in the hospital. But to my embarrassment, every

time I opened my mouth to begin, the same thing happened: I'd feel tears rush to my eyes and know that if I said one more word I'd be weeping like a child. It was only when I decided that Tib would have to know about the experience, tear or no, that I managed to get it out.

"Do you think it was a dream?" I asked, when I'd rather soggily finished.

"I don't believe a dream could affect you this way."

"Neither do I."

There were two other people I felt should hear the story: Len and Catherine LeSourd. I warned them that the experience might be difficult to talk about, and sure enough, the same phenomenon repeated itself—I started off matter-of-factly and halfway through choked up.

"You see what you're in for?" I said, trying to laugh off my embarrassment.

But Len said, "It's those tears, John, more than anything else that make the thing real to me. Take your time."

So I told them. "And did you see the light again?" Catherine asked when I was through.

"No."

"I don't think you should expect to either," she said. "This kind of face-to-face meeting with Christ usually happens just once. It happened to me in a way very like yours. With Len it was entirely different. But it's that certain recognition of Christ that's the amazing thing, however it happens."

And then Catherine said an interesting thing. As it turned out, it was a kind of prophecy. "I'm glad you told us. It will help fix it in your own mind, for the time when it no longer seems real." She smiled a little wistfully. "I wish there were some way to feel always as you do now. As far as I know, there isn't. Once we lose the freshness of that first meeting, we just have to walk by faith."

It took me a while to understand what she meant. Then and for weeks afterward I lived in the glow of that encounter. The report

from the doctor, when it finally came, was encouraging as far as the cancer went. But I found to my surprise that it didn't matter as much as I had expected. Something more engrossing occupied my mind. I wanted to get to know this Christ I had met.

For a while it was easy, thinking often about Him. It happened automatically, in fact. Reading the Bible was a brand-new experience, because I could understand for the first time a lot that had puzzled me. How Jesus, for instance, could have recruited disciples simply by saying, "Follow me." That was easy to believe now: that Presence I'd felt was something you'd follow to the ends of the earth. The stories of healing were like reliving that night in the hospital. John's statement, "God is love," was for me now a description rather than a principle.

But as the weeks and then the months passed, the first sharpness faded. After a while, it was not quite so easy to pick up the Bible; going to church slipped back slowly, yet certainly, into routine; and one day, visiting a friend in the hospital, I told him about my experience and got through the recital dry-eyed. That, more than anything, convinced me that what I had was a memory, no longer a living reality.

And was this all, now, that I would ever have? I felt a little as the disciples must have felt when, after Christ had walked beside them for a time, He was suddenly gone. I felt a deep sadness, a yearning to get back in touch with Him but, as Catherine had predicted, there was nothing much I could do about it except to "walk in faith."

In talking with other Christians I found that this was a very, very common experience. There was a mountaintop meeting, a period when the reality of Christ was unmistakable and then a slow drifting away. There was a brief moment of intense love, of joy and deep-running peace, a period of real wholeness when without straining for self-control you found that you were patient, kind, gentle. It was a time of believing. And then a dull dryness took over.

Was this the way it was meant to be? Were believers supposed to live on a memory? I somehow doubted it: memories fade and become confused.

And then, about a year after that hospital encounter, I met a man who told me an intriguing story. It caught my attention at first simply because it was so bizarre. Certainly I did not dream that it held the answer to my question.