

2009

# Signs and Wonders (The Associate Editor's Desk)

Gerhard Pfandl

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Pfandl, Gerhard (2009) "Signs and Wonders (The Associate Editor's Desk)," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol14/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).



Gerhard Pfandl

**D**uring my recent travels in Africa, I learned that Herry Mhando, a successful Adventist evangelist from Tanzania who has baptized tens of thousands, has left the Seventh-day Adventist Church and started his own Adventist Pentecost Church in which he emphasizes the power of healing.

For several decades, the Christian world has been in the grip of a signs and wonders craze. People are looking for an experience, for a manifestation of the presence of God in their lives. Millions of Christians eagerly desire to receive one of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, physical healing, or prophecy. Thousands flock to healing services all over the world. On television, people can be seen standing in line waiting for the evangelist to touch them. And when he does, they fall over like tenpins and catchers behind them lay them out on the floor like fence poles.

Jesus warned us in Matthew 24:24 in regard to false christs and

## SIGNS AND WONDERS

prophets. And Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9, NKJV).

Ellen White predicted, "Before the final visitation of God's judgments upon the earth, there will be, among the people of the Lord, such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. . . . The enemy of souls desires to hinder this work; and before the time for such a movement shall come, he will endeavor to prevent it, by introducing a counterfeit. In those churches which he can bring under his deceptive power, he will make it appear that God's special blessing is poured out; there will be manifest what is thought to be great religious interest. . . . Multitudes will exult that God is working marvelously for them, when the work is that of another spirit. Under a religious guise, Satan will seek to extend his influence over the Christian world."<sup>1</sup>

## Speaking in Tongues

That the tongues at Pentecost were real languages is shown in Acts 2:5 and 6. Modern tongue-speaking, called *glossolalia*, is not the same as the biblical gift of languages. Tongues-speakers today do not speak in real languages, but in some form of ecstatic speech that they call a “heavenly language.” About 20 percent of today’s Christians belong to a Pentecostal or charismatic church, and if one counts only committed Christians, the percentage is even higher. Nevertheless, in spite of all the manifestations of ecstatic speech today, nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of tongues is anything other than human languages.

First Corinthians 14, which is often cited as evidence for tongues as ecstatic speech, describes a misuse of

the real gift of languages. Instead of using the languages for evangelism, the Corinthians used it to show off in church, where they claimed that no one could understand them except God, unless they had an interpreter. A principle of biblical interpretation is that an obscure text is explained by a clear text. Hence, the tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 need be explained by the clear passage in Acts 2. Both chapters use the same Greek word *glossa* for tongues, and there is no indication in the New Testament that God gave two completely different gifts, both called *glossa*.

Ellen G. White called the modern tongues “gibberish.” “Some of these persons have exercises which they call gifts and say that the Lord has placed them in the church. They

---

“Paul’s comment [in 1 Corinthians 14:2 ] is not suggesting that tongues should be used as a ‘prayer language’; he was using irony, pointing out the futility of speaking in tongues without an interpreter, because only God would know if anything was said.

Spiritual gifts were never intended to be used for God’s benefit, or for the benefit of the gifted individual. Peter made that clear in 1 Peter 4:10: ‘As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another’” (John F. MacArthur, Jr.).

have an unmeaning gibberish which they call the unknown tongue, which is unknown not only by man but by the Lord and all heaven. Such gifts are manufactured by men and women, aided by the great deceiver.”<sup>2</sup>

## Healing

Every week, millions of viewers worldwide watch television preachers, many of whom are faith healers. With its “faith formula” for health, wealth and prosperity, the Faith Movement has taken many Christian churches by storm. Kenneth Copeland and Benny Hinn are prominent representatives of the Faith Movement, which teaches that the human mind and the tongue contain supernatural power. Psalm 33:9 says, “He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (NKJV). On the basis of this text, the Faith Movement teaches that when persons speak, expressing faith in divine laws, their positive thoughts and positive verbal expressions allegedly produce a “divine force” that will heal, produce wealth, and bring success.

Most of these so-called healings cannot be verified. Some years ago, a medical doctor who tested the claims of faith healers wrote, “Search the literature, as I have, and you will find no documented cures by healers of gallstone, heart disease, cancer, or any other serious organic disease. Certainly, you’ll find patients tem-

porarily relieved of their upset stomachs, their chest pains, their breathing problems; and you will find healers, and believers, who will interpret this interruption of symptoms as evidence that the disease is cured. But when you track the patient down and find out what happened later, you always find the ‘cure’ to have been purely symptomatic and transient. The underlying disease remains.”<sup>3</sup>

Though this may be true in many cases, I do not dispute that some genuine healings take place. The question is: From which power does the healing come? Ellen White predicted, “God’s Word declares that Satan will work miracles. He will make people sick, and then will suddenly remove from them his satanic power. They will then be regarded as healed.”<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that every healing must be from Satan, but we must be aware of possible counterfeit miracles.

## Prophecy

Once upon a time, Seventh-day Adventists were seen as a cult because we claimed to have a prophet in our church. Today, Pentecostal and charismatic churches have a number of prophets. Evangelical theologians have worked out a whole theology to justify the existence of these modern prophets. Wayne Grudem, who teaches at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School,

believes that Scripture is verbally inspired. In regard to modern prophets, he says: "Prophecy today is merely human words reporting what God has brought to mind, while the prophecies that were written down in the Old Testament were men speaking God's words to report what God had brought to mind."<sup>5</sup> This, of course, is valid only if one believes in verbal inspiration. As Seventh-day Adventists who believe in thought inspiration, we cannot make this distinction.

### Evaluation

In evaluating what is happening in many charismatic and also in some Adventist churches today, we need to remember the following:

Though the Bible clearly affirms that "In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people'" (Acts 2:17, NIV), it also emphatically states, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1, NKJV).

Jesus warned of false prophets: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:15, 16, NKJV).

Miracles are not necessarily a proof of God's power: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your

name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"'" (Matt. 7:22, 23, NKJV).

Signs and wonders may be supernatural, but this does not mean they must be from God. "False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24, NKJV).

Ellen White indicated that we cannot rely on miracles: "The man who makes the working of miracles the test of his faith will find that Satan can, through a species of deceptions, perform wonders that will appear to be genuine miracles."<sup>6</sup>

As Seventh-day Adventists, it behooves us to be alert and know what is happening in the world around us. As we see certain events taking place, we can rejoice, for Jesus said: "When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28, NKJV).

### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>*The Great Controversy*, p. 464.
- <sup>2</sup>*Maranatha*, p. 154.
- <sup>3</sup>W. A. Nolan, *Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 259.
- <sup>4</sup>*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 412.
- <sup>5</sup>G. S. Greig and K. N. Springer, eds., *The Kingdom and the Power* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1993), p. 79.
- <sup>6</sup>*Maranatha*, p. 156.