

## A Neuroscientific Look at Speaking in Tongues

The passionate, sometimes rhythmic, language-like patter that pours forth from religious people who “speak in tongues” reflects a state of mental possession, many Christians say. Now they have some neuroscience to back this up.

Recently, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania took brain images of five women while they spoke in tongues and found that their frontal lobes- the thinking, willful part of the brain through which people control what they do- were relatively quiet, as were the language centers. The regions involved in maintaining self-consciousness were active. The *women* were not in blind trances, and it was unclear which region was driving the behavior.

The images, appearing in the journal *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, pinpoint the most active areas of the brain. The images are the first of their kind taken during this spoken religious practice, which has roots in the Old and New Testaments and in Pentecostal churches established in the early 1900s. The women in the study were active churchgoers.

“The amazing thing was how the images supported people’s interpretation of what was happening,” said Dr. Andrew B. Newberg, leader of the study team. “The way they describe it, and what they believe, is that God is talking through them.”

In the study, the researchers used imaging techniques to track changes in blood flow in each woman's brain in two conditions, once as she sang a gospel song and again while speaking in tongues. By comparing the patterns created by these two emotional, devotional activities, the researchers could pinpoint blood-flow peaks and valleys unique to speaking in tongues.

Donna Morgan, a co-author of the study, was also a research subject. She is a born-again Christian who says she considers the ability to speak in tongues a gift. “You’re aware of your surroundings,” she said. “You’re not really out of control. But you have no control over what’s happening. You’re just flowing. You’re in a realm of peace and comfort, and it’s a fantastic feeling.”

Contrary to what may be a common perception, studies suggest that people who speak in tongues rarely suffer from mental problems. A recent study of nearly 1,000 evangelical Christians in England found that those who engaged in the practice were more emotionally stable than those who did not. Researchers have identified at least two forms of the practice, one ecstatic and frenzied, the other subdued and nearly silent.

## **Evangelical Leaders Reject Compromise on GBWT Rights**

Compromises designed to safeguard both religious freedoms and LGBT rights won't fly among many of America's most influential conservative Christians.

Leaders from nearly 90 evangelical seminaries, publications, ministries and churches—as well as Catholic and Orthodox clergy—signed a statement last month rejecting any legal efforts to protect sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).

“[We] believe that proposed SOGI laws, including those narrowly crafted, threaten fundamental freedoms,” they wrote as part of the “Preserve Freedom, Reject Coercion” campaign, hosted by the Colson Center for Christian Worldview.

The declaration follows months of conversations among Christian college leader around the Fairness for All strategy, which would bring religious leaders and LGBT advocates together to try to secure satisfactory legal protections for both. Parties from each side of the conversation convened recently for a conference at Yale University.

The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) spearheaded discussion of a potential nationwide Fairness for All law—modeled after a well-regarded compromise enacted in Utah in 2015—among its members and partners.

Advocates of the Fairness for All approach argue that evangelicals and other faith groups end up with greater protections when actively involved in crafting legislation; if left up to the courts to weigh the rights of either side, Christian-run institutions and businesses—from churches to bakers—risk more severe restrictions.

However, presidents and professors from 16 CCCU member schools and affiliates are among the signatories declaring that “any ostensible protections for religious liberty appended to such laws are inherently inadequate and unstable.”

At stake in the SOGI dispute are the local, state, and federal laws governing whether religious institutions or businesses owned by people of faith must serve LGBT individuals despite their convictions on sexuality and gender.

Opponents of Fairness for All legislation worry that such compromises offer too limited protections at the expense of designating SOGI as a protected class—a position they believe has deeper moral implications for Christians.

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