

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE CORINTHIAN TONGUES PHENOMENON

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This monologue seeks to demonstrate that the mystical "tongues" phenomenon, described in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians found its roots in the heathen religious practices of the Apostolic era. A careful analysis of the textual data clearly bears witness to the influence of non-Christian glossolalia (tongue speaking) on the Corinthian Church.

That religious practitioners in certain cults extant in the contemporary Greco-Roman culture engaged in such activity cannot possibly be assailed. Indeed, Thomas R. Edgar asserts:

It can be clearly seen that speaking in incoherent fashion or unknown language is a consistent factor in pagan religion. It is much more characteristic of non-Christian religion than it is of Christianity. There is a consistent testimony throughout the history of glossolalia among religious groups which are in no way under the influence of the Holy Spirit.(1)

Non-Christian forms of glossolalia were commonly associated with a phenomenon called Ecstasism. According to Watson E. Mills,

Ecstasism may be defined as: those religious phenomena in which the devotee is given to such conditions known to psychologists as trances, hypnotic states, or extreme euphoria, followed or accompanied by external behavior such as dancing, shouting, whirling, jerking, prostration, and speaking with tongues, or glossolalia. (2)

According to Edgar,

"Certain characteristics tend to be common in pagan glossolalia: The speaker is in a trance-like or ecstatic state. The voice pattern and intonation are not normal. The speaker is overcome or seized." (3)

A survey of the historical data begins nearly 4000 years ago in the Ancient city of Mesopotamia. John T. Bunn refers to three different ecstatic states extant in the ancient Mesopotamian religion between 2000-1500 B.C.

"These were (1) oral pronouncement, (2) sleep revelations (that is dreams) and (3) physical signs, such as jerking, facial contortions, and the like...."(4)

In ancient texts found at Mari, an Amonite state, situated on the Euphrates in Mesopotamia, we find certain men and women referred to as "givers of oracles". These prophetic individuals were called Muhhum from the word meaning "to be beside one's self" or "to be out of one's mind." (5) According to the prophetic materials from the Mari archives, in Mesopotamia, the ecstatic individual received messages from deity

which he delivered orally to a specific person. (6) Thus, even in this ancient instance of ecstaticism we find a group of spiritual elite or "pneumatikos" individuals assuming an air of spiritual superiority based on their ecstatic experience.

Perhaps the earliest Egyptian record of frenzied or ecstatic religious speech is the Report of Wen-Amon recorded in 1117 B.C.(7) The report written from Byblos on the coast of Syro-Palestine, tells of a worshipper of Amon who spoke in ecstatic language while possessed by the god Amon. As with the Muhhim of ancient Mesopotamia the worshipper in the Report was hand-picked by Amon and considered specially worthy of honor and protection.

A similar phenomenon is to be found in the rites of the Dionysian Cult which experienced a revival between 1100-1000 B.C. Watson Mills tells us that in this movement, which swept rapidly over Greece and Syria Palestine, the devotees experienced a kind of religious rapture or ecstasy comparable to intoxication. (8)

The Dionysian cultic ritual involved drinking to excess:

In the service of the god the Bacchanals drank wine until they were intoxicated. The wine they drank was for them potent with divine power-it was the god himself. Their enthusiasm was quite literally a matter of having the god within themselves, of being full of and completely possessed by the god. (9)

James B. Pratt likens the Dionysian cultic ritual to "*revival meetings-and these of a very emotional and exciting sort*" (10)

Harold Willoughby's graphic description of these events sounds surprisingly similar to Pratt's account:

The dances in honor of Dionysus were usually held at night time by torch light and were preceded by fasting. They were wild and irregular and were characterized by a tossing of the head and a violent, whirling bodily motion. Thus by the very movement of the dance a physical frenzy was quickly induced, quite as the dancing dervishes of Mohammedanism lose control of themselves in the delirium of their ritual.(11)

We find similar ritual enthusiasm centuries later in the Apocryphal book of 2 Esdras 14:39-41 which affords a typical example of frenzied speech from the Greek Period. In the account of Ezra's ecstaticism, the text reads:

Then I opened my mouth, and behold, a full cup was offered to me; it was full of something like water, but its color was like fire, and I took it and drank; and when I had drunk it my heart poured

forth understanding, and wisdom increased in my breast, for my spirit retained its memory and my mouth was opened and was no longer closed. (12)

The most striking thing about this example is its similarity to the Dionysian cultic ritual involving drink induced enthusiasm. As with the earlier examples we find the speaker claiming superior understanding by means of ecstatic ritual.

Plato's dialogues (429-347 B.C.) contain references to ecstatic occurrences as well. In his *Phaedrus*, Plato discusses the question of madness in terms of prophecy, inspiration, poetry, and love. In discussing madness as prophecy, Plato alludes to the prophetess at Delphi, the priestess at Dodona, and Sibyl, all of whom he thinks "*have conferred great benefits upon Hellas through their ecstatic speaking when out of their senses, but when not, little or none.*" (13)

"For Plato, the contemporary poets were much akin to the prophets and priestesses; they created their literary compositions during ecstatic trances and from ecstatic utterances."(14) In the *Ion* he likens the poets to Corybanthian revelers and Bacchic maidens of the Dionysian cult who became ecstatic in action and utterance.(15)

"Plato stated that good poets compose their poems not by art but because they are inspired and possessed. They are not in their right minds because God takes away their minds and uses them as his minister."(16)

Mills supplies an interesting note in observing that:

In his Timaeus he (Plato) sought to draw a distinction between the diviner and the true prophet. The diviner was pictured as similar to ecstatic persons-demented, unable to evaluate the visions which he sees or the words which he utters. In describing these diviners Plato ascribes to them certain features similar to those of glossolalists; their speech being due to spirit possession; their being unable to discern what they said while in a given ecstatic need; their state being unconscious....(17)

Gromachi notes Plato's contention that "*there was the need of interpretation by another.*"(18)

Virgil(70-19 B.C.), in his *Aeneid*, gives us another example of Hellenistic ecstaticism. He describes the Sibylline priestess on the isle of Delos as attaining her ecstatic state and speech in a haunted cave. "*When she became unified in spirit with the god Apollo, she began to speak with tongues, sometimes understood and sometimes incoherent.*"(19)

Plato alluded to the ecstatic speech of the Prophetess of Delphi in his *Phaedrus*. Gromachi tells us: *"because of her ability to produce ecstatic utterances under divine inspiration and possession, she was frequently worshiped and consulted for advice and predictions."* (20)

Martin notes: *"Priests were apparently in attendance to catch her every utterance, and to interpret her cries and babblings whenever they ceased to be coherent."*(21) According to Chrysostom, *"she would foam at the mouth and utter her words of madness in a frenzy."*(22)

Shelton Smith writes:

The prophetess at Delphi spoke in tongues. This was of course, ecstatic, un-intelligible utterances, not known, human languages. It was similar in many ways to the utterances being made by modern day glossolalists. (23)

In the later part of the fourth century B.C. Alexander the Great opened the floodgates to the West and numerous oriental deities were introduced to Hellenistic culture. (24) These systems of belief with their initiatory rites and practices centered themselves on the idea of spirit possession. (25) We have already observed such concepts in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Oriental cults transplanted to Rome brought this concept with them. (26) In the mystery religions cultic rites were supposed to move the initiate step by step into higher states of emotionalism until an ecstatic plateau was reached in which the devotees spoke in a secret language known only to other cult members. They had developed a form of specialized glossolalia. (27)

Philo Judaeus (A.D. 30-50) wrote during a period when a cultural and religious syncretism was enveloping the Jews who were dispersed throughout the empire. Philo's philosophy was comprised of a wedding between Hellenism, Judaism, and Eastern mysticism. As both Jew and Alexandrian, he was particularly suited for the task of popularizing a synthetic union of Greek, Hebrew and Eastern mystic thought.

The most probable background for the practice of ecstatic speech in Corinth can be found *"in the pagan Hellenistic world in general, and in a Hellenistic Judaism strongly influenced by this broader sphere in particular."* (28) Birger Pearson states that in Philo's works we find the most fruitful place to look for a background to the enthusiastic practices of Paul's Corinthian opponents. (29) It is noted that Philo, like the Corinthian enthusiasts regarded *"prophetic ecstasy as the highest manifestation of the divine Spirit, given only to a relatively few good and wise persons."* (30)

In his *Heir of All the Earth*, Philo details his understanding of the nature of prophetic ecstasy.(31) In this he borrows unashamedly from Plato. Indeed, his four types of mania correspond exactly to those found in Plato's *Phaedrus*. (32) Philo writes,

What reasoning is in us, that, the sun is, in the world. Since each of them gives light. As long therefore as our mind still shines around... pouring as it were a noontide light into the whole soul, we, being masters of ourselves, are not possessed by any extraneous influence; but when it approaches it's setting, then, as is natural, a trance, which proceeds from inspiration, takes violent hold of us, and madness seizes upon us, for when the divine light sets this other light rises and shines.. for the mind that is in us is removed from it's place at the arrival of the divine Spirit, but is again restored to it's previous habitation when that Spirit departs, for it is contrary to holy law for what is mortal to dwell with what is immortal. (33)

He adds,

...in reality the prophet, even when he seems to be speaking, is actually silent, while another makes use of his organs of speech, the mouth and the tongue expressing what he wishes. With an invisible musical skill he plays on these organs and produces pleasant and elaborate sounds full of every harmony. (34)

Union with God was to be attained through frenzied enthusiasm. Man must be prepared for this visit of the divine prophetic spirit, and he becomes prepared for it when that other divine spirit within him, his incorporeal soul or mind, detaches itself from all bodily influences. and empties itself from all bodily kinds of knowledge. whether sensations or rational concepts based upon sensations, with which it has become charged through it's existence in the body. When that liberation from the body is achieved, the divine prophetic spirit comes and infuses into the other divine spirit in man a new kind of knowledge, prophetic knowledge, unmixed knowledge, a knowledge of things incorporeal.(35)

Harry Wolfson assesses Philo as follows: *Such a state of complete liberation from bodily influences can be attained by the ordinary run of man only on certain occasions and under special conditions. There-fore the divine prophetic spirit is described by Philo as visiting man only periodically... and as abiding with him only for a while. Only in the case of exceptional men may the divine prophetic spirit abide forever in their souls. (36)*

In *Wisdom of Solomon 1:6* Sophia is called a philanthropon pneuma. Pearson.(37) observes that this "*interconnection between wisdom and ecstatic 'prophecy' is attested in Hellenistic Judaism, in which the Corinthians were apparently well schooled*" (38)

Another feature of ecstaticism in the Greek period was the predominance of feminine participants. Catherine Kroeger notes that there was a difference in the worship practices of men and women in the Hellenistic age. Most popular with women were the cults of Isis and Dionysos, whose adherents were predominantly female. (39) Characteristic of feminine worship was an extreme form of ecstaticism. *"There were many aspects of ancient feminine religiosity that stood in direct opposition to restrained and rational forms of worship"* says Kroeger.(40) She suggests,

The assimilation of formerly pagan women would pose special difficulties. It is noteworthy that the Pauline dictates regarding women are directed to troubled Gentile churches with serious problems involving undesirable religious elements.(41)

She adds,

Plutarch, writing in the early second century of the Christian era, said that even the female worshipers of Osiris engaged in shoutings and movements similar to those of women in the sway of Dionysiac Frenzy. A plaque excavated from the sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth is dedicated to the sacred cries of women and reads "olylyngos," evidence that the phenomenon was alive and well at Corinth...The ritual cries of women are still an integral part of many cultures and persist in certain rural areas of Greece even today.(42)

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians indicates the infiltration of ecstaticism particularly among women in the Corinthian church. He faced opposition from an ecstatic faction claiming "pneumatic" superiority. In response, Paul explains the nature of true spirituality, in chapters two and three. In chapter four, he refutes their claim of having reached an eschatological zenith. Reading between the lines in chapters seven and eleven, suggests that the women in this group were particularly disorderly in their approach to worship, a common event among female devotees to pagan deities.

As Pearson observes, in chapters 12-14, pneuma is an external force, in the view of the opponents, which possesses a subject and enables him to engage in ecstatic speech. The opponents of Paul in Corinth evidently placed a high premium on the gift of ecstatic "prophecy". So much so that Paul finds it necessary to counter their enthusiasm with the observation that speech is not the only, nor even the most important, "spiritual gift.(43)

Paul is not giving credence to "ecstasy" by any means. His letter is in fact a tactful refutation to all claims of enthusiastic inspiration.

Theologians are divided respecting their understanding of the nature of glossolalia, as practiced in Corinth.(44) Some, believing it to be a divine language, view it as virtually identical in form to the pagan phenomena reviewed above.(45) Others, taking their cue from the account in Acts, understand it to have been regular foreign languages in which the speaker was miraculously enabled to transmit the message of the Gospel. This second view is divided between those who believe the speaker could not understand what he was saying,46 and those who believe he understood his own words.(47)

Some exegetes, noting discrepancies between the accounts found in Acts and Corinth suggest they might be two distinct but equally valid phenomena. I believe this question can best be resolved when we take a skeptical glance at the outbreak of the "gift" in Corinth. As Calvin once said of enthusiasts in his day, "they allege miracles which might produce wavering in minds otherwise well disposed, they are so frivolous and ridiculous so vain and false."(48)

Paul begins his response to the Corinthian Pneumaticists in 1 Corinthians 12:1 where he writes, "Now concerning spiritual matters brethren, I would not have you be ignorant" (my translation). Calvin renders "peri de ton pneumatikon" as "concerning spiritual things" rather than "gifts." This is perfectly valid since the matter Paul is concerned with in 12-14 is the true nature of spirituality.

Walter Schmithals prefers a more personal rendering. He observes that 12:4-14:40 in no way creates the impression that Paul is answering definite questions of the community's letter. He rather appears to be attacking excesses and undesirable distortions in the use of the gifts of the Spirit among the zelotai pneumatikon (14:12), of whom he had an oral report. Also arguing in favor of the personal translation of ton pneumatikon is the fact that not only vs.3 but also the whole of the three chapters dealt with persons as bearers of spiritual gifts, but not with the content of this giftedness. But if we read 12:1 as "concerning the Pneumatics" it becomes clear that there was in Corinth a group of Christians who claimed for themselves the title of pneumatikos as a characteristic which distinguished them from the other members of the community."(49)

Schmithals notes that such a concept is contrary to Pauline theology but is "on the other hand genuinely gnostic"(50) Of course, as we have observed above, this may just as easily be attributed to Philonism as Gnosticism. The rendering "spiritual matters" is preferred since Paul is correcting a wrong notion of spirituality. The passage could be paraphrased, "now concerning the true nature of spirituality.." In that Paul wishes for them to be informed we must assume they were in fact ignorant. Paul is correcting error here. But more than that, he is refuting their claims to Pneumatic superiority.

As with contemporary neo-pentecostals, the Corinthian pneumatikoi thought their "gift" of ecstatic glossolalia was a genuine stamp of higher spirituality. Thus when Paul adds, "I would not have you be ignorant" this is doubtless a blow to their over inflated spiritual egos. They thought they had achieved "gnosin"(cf.8:1). He had already chastised them for this in :6-8. In fact there are striking parallels between the language of Paul in chapters 1-4 and that of 12-14 which suggests that the abuse of gifts is tied in with the spiritual mysticism of Paul's pneumatikoi opponents. His terminology in 1 Cor.2:6-16 is "clearly taken from Christian and Jewish apocalyptic- wisdom theology."(51)

In writing, "Ye know that when ye were heathen, ye were led away unto those dumb idols, however ye might be led," Paul recognizes their pagan notion of inspiration; i.e., divine possession. When they followed false gods they were led under their power and apart from their own will. As we noted earlier, Philo, Plato and all Eastern religions dating back two millennia B.C. understood inspiration to be the product of divine possession. Pearson suggests that "Paul is shown to be sharing the typical Jewish attitude toward idols and heathen gods current in late antiquity; namely, the view that behind the heathen gods and idols stand demonic powers."(52)

Accordingly, he accepts the notion that the Corinthians are being possessed but rejects the idea that it is divine possession. Wayne House writes, "Since the Corinthians had a background of ecstatic (and so-called "spiritual") religion, the apostle felt it necessary to instruct them that the spirituals of which he would write were not of the same class."(53)

Paul understood that, unlike demonic powers, God does not operate in this manner. He does not need to put a man in a trance to give him knowledge. The Reformed doctrine is that of concursus. God works and man works simultaneously in the same action. Both wills work in conjunction. Divine inspiration is organic not mechanical. Dr. Hendrick Krabbendam has noted:

"Scripture displays on every page that God employs the full-orbed humanity of the biblical writers...The divine and human factors...flow confluent and harmoniously to the production of a common product...the divine and human elements do not compete with one another or exclude one another. The divine factor does not supercede, suppress or eliminate the human factor... the human writers did not function as implements or pens. The mechanical theory of Scripture production in which inspiration is essentially diction is not tenable...The fact of the concursus of the divine and human factor means, on the other hand, that every word of Scripture is both God's word and man's word...no quality inconsistent with either humanity or divinity, can be found in any word portion or element of Scripture."(54)

Paul continues in 12:3; "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit." The word anathema means to devote to destruction. Kroeger informs us that ritual cursing of a divine figure was a common aspect of Greek popular religion. It was particularly used of Hercules. "Like Jesus, Hercules was said to have returned from beyond the grave."(55)

The idea was that in cursing the individual, he would be consigned to meet his deity. But Paul is telling the Corinthians that the Spirit does not lead men to ritually curse Jesus. "God," says Paul, "does not operate the way your pagan deities operated." W. Schmithals agrees with Kroeger that there may have been a group within the Corinthian community for whom "an anathema against Jesus is not excluded."(56) Pearson resists this suggestion on the grounds that "it is impossible for any kind of Christian to curse Jesus no matter how erroneous his views or how loose his behavior."(57)

Pearson's suggestion is that Paul is saying that this demonic variety of ecstatic speech as such is not capable of leading men to confess Jesus as Lord, on the contrary, such ecstatic speaking could also lead to cursing Jesus...This they are capable of doing even by simulating the "spiritual gift" of ecstatic prophecy. Paul's point is simply that possession of the Spirit is not to be judged by the occurrence of ecstatic speaking 'in tongues' but by the utterance of the common Christian (baptismal) confession.(58)

Schmithals notes that there is historical precedent for the cursing of Jesus in the Gnostic sects. "Such "Christians""are in fact not unknown to us...In his debate with Celsus, Origen tells of Gnostics who "admit no one to their fellowship who has not first cursed Jesus."(59) Quite possibly this was a Gnostic ritual which originated from a pagan practice such as that cited by Kroeger above. It seems evident at least that Paul is polemicizing against both ecstaticism and ritual cursing; heathen practices which the Corinthians should avoid.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that ecstatic utterances are a common phenomenon in false and even demonic worship. As such it is certainly not an indication of greater spirituality. Pearson argues that the whole discussion of "spiritual gifts" in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is to inform the Corinthians that tongues "ought not to be made a criterion for special status in the community"(60) But I would go beyond him in suggesting that Paul entirely rejects this heathen practice.

Beginning with verse 4 of chapter 12 Paul lists various kinds of gifts found in the body of Christ. Paul gave this list, by no means an exhaustive one, to illustrate that diversity is for the purpose of building up the church. It is almost universally assumed that in verse 10, Paul is referring to the miraculous gift of speaking languages unknown to the

speaker. But all that may be definitively inferred from the wording of the text is that God has given some men the ability to speak diverse languages. In my opinion, Paul is here referring to the regular acquisition of language usage by natural means. He addresses the question of language in general for the purpose of dealing with the claims of the Corinthian enthusiasts.

In verses 12-31 Paul demonstrates that it is God's will that we should have varied gifts. There is not one special gift which marks a man more spiritual than another. His statement in verse 29-30 "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" is to be understood in the negative. As in verse 10, tongues can here refer to normal multilingual ability. "His concern throughout has been the need for diversity, which of course must function in unity."(61)

Gordon Fee observes correctly that Paul's point is to question the Corinthian preoccupation with language. I believe Paul has normal multilingualism in view here because he is building from the lesser to the greater. From the proper view we ought to have of language, Paul will argue against the Corinthian abuses of pretended mystical ecstatic utterances. It is often assumed that since Paul lists tongues as a gift it must have been a widespread and frequent phenomenon.

But he also listed the gift of Apostleship for which there were only twelve recipients and miracles which surely were rare events. We can only be certain of three occasions, all listed for us in the Acts of the Apostles, in which a miraculous ability to speak foreign languages occurred. There may have been more but we can't prove that from Scripture. It's my contention that the case for a more widespread phenomenon in Corinth is suspect, demonstrated by the text of 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14.

Calvin's conception of the "gift of tongues" in Corinth is one of ordinary foreign languages. The only thing miraculous about them for Calvin was that "they did not at that time acquire these gifts by hard work or studying; but they were theirs by a wonderful revelation of the Spirit." (62)

Calvin seems to have based his interpretation of the Corinthian phenomenon on the reports in Acts. The advantage of his interpretation does justice to the account in Acts without exaggerating the event. Too often theologians envision more of the miraculous into the biblical record than the text demands. Nowhere in Acts do we read that the speaker did not understand what he said or that he was experiencing divine possession or a trancelike state. All that can be said is that the speaker was able to proclaim the truth in a language he had not learned through experience. This is miracle enough! Anything more consists of

reading the Corinthian phenomenon into the Acts account which is as bad as the reverse.

In 13:1 Paul's reference to the "tongues of angels" is indicative of his awareness of the false ideas the Corinthians have concerning the nature of the miraculous events they had heard about on Pentecost and in Samaria and Ephesus. Their notion of divine possession, already refuted by Paul in vs. 1-3 involved speaking a "heavenly language." Paul tells them that even if one were to speak in such a language as they suppose was happening, it would be futile without the greater gift of love. He refutes their idea that pagan glossolalia is the mark of true pneumatic existence. Calvin rightly observes that Paul is using hyperbolic language in speaking of tongues of angels. (63)

The writer would add that he chose this terminology because the pneumatic Corinthians were making just such claims. In verses 8-13 of chapter 13 Paul goes on to argue that the greatest gift is not linguistic aptitude but the gift of love. The fact that Paul found it necessary to argue in this manner serves to substantiate that the Corinthian pneumatics thought otherwise.

In verse 8 Paul states, "tongues shall cease.." Once again, this is not a reference to the miraculous ability, but rather, refers to language in general. (Zephaniah 3:9) As Calvin points out, the need for understanding diverse tongues will cease when we have become perfect.

That gift has been bestowed upon us to help us in our weakness. But one day our imperfection will come to an end; therefore the use of those gifts will also stop at the same time.. When will that perfection come? It begins, indeed at death.. but it will not be completely established until the day of judgment.(64)

He does not see the perfection as a reference to the closing of the canon of Scripture as so many theologians do today.(65) (cf. Robert Reymond, op.cit,p.32ff.) If we assume Paul is referring to the miraculous "gift" this poses problems. But when we understand Paul is referring to language in general all is cleared up. Paul says, "Why be so enthralled with language when diversity of language was originally a curse from God to confuse rebellious men and to scatter them. (Gen.11:4-9) This diversity will cease when the Lord returns. There will be only one language. The diversity you delight in will be no more!"

His arguments against preoccupation with language speaks to their ecstaticism. If language in general is a fading thing, ecstatic language cannot be a badge of honor to distinguish who is most spiritual among them. Paul encourages them to "desire spiritual gifts" (14:1-2) but he holds that proclaiming God's words is more desirable than speaking in another languages.

The one who speaks in another language cannot be understood by those who listen. Paul is not saying the pneumatic truly relays mystical messages, but rather that "he preaches to himself and to the walls" to use a phrase from Calvin. (66) I believe John Hurd, Jr. is essentially correct when he asserts that "Paul here 'damned' glossolalia 'with faint praise.'" (67) "In a state of spiritual euphoria, the pneumatic speaks unintelligible words". He is not directly addressing the question as to whether the spirituality in question is really of the Spirit.

As House notes; Many of Paul's statements... should perhaps be recognized as conciliatory rather than commendatory. The statement, "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1Cor.14:4) is not commendatory. Paul merely conceded a point here for argument. He did not affirm the legitimacy of that believer's experience as from the Holy Spirit. One might even say that irony is to be found in Paul's statement.(68)

Considering the magnitude of the problem this is a testimony to the monumental wisdom and gentleness of the great apostle. He does not write to shame them but to warn them.(4:14) How else should a Christian handle the situation. Remember the letter was to be read aloud to the entire congregation. Had he been less tactful he might well have split the congregation in two. As House suggests above, we need not view the expression "edifies himself" in a literal fashion. Only if the person speaking knew what he was saying could he be edified.(69)

This is doubtless a euphemist way of saying he edifies no one. He cannot even truly build himself up but rather puffs himself up (8:1). How could a self centered act such as hording a legitimate gift of God, (if it were such) be an edifying act even to the speaker? It would be singularly astounding were God to allow his divine revelation to be thwarted from reaching its intended destination by the actions of God's people to whom those gifts were sent.

"In addition, If Paul's statement is one of truth, not irony, then it contradicts 1 Corinthians 12:7, that grace gifts (charismata) are "for common good," and also 13:1-3, that gifts are not to be self-centered. Paul also uses irony in 1 Corinthians 4:8-10." (70)

When Paul says "I wish you all could speak with tongues" the implication is of course, that all do not. Here we see the irony in Paul's statement- "Why is it that when you gather together, every one of you has a tongue?" (14:26) The reader will note that he does not define the word "lalia". In some places he is referring to foreign languages as with 13:8 and in others to the ecstatic manifestation (14:26). The context identifies these distinctions of usage. Paul can honestly say he wishes all to have the ability to speak foreign languages without desiring them to engage in pagan ecstaticism. Paul goes on to state that unless an unknown language is translated there is no possibility of edification. To

raise such speech to the level of prophecy Paul states it must be translated. This deals a death blow to pagan ecstaticism. It cannot be translated because it consists of nothing but gibberish unless it is demonically inspired.

Paul as much as denies the content of the pneumaticists ecstaticism when he suggests that language is useless without spiritual content. He uses himself in a hypothetical situation to illustrate his point. How much use to you would I be, asks Paul, if I spoke in foreign languages whenever I visited you? In 14:7-11 Paul illustrates his point with the imagery of musical instruments. Pearson suggests that "Philo's reference to the organs of speech as instruments of God sheds light on Paul's reference to musical instruments.." (71) If we assume that Philo's work was known to the pneumaticists, and even quoted by them, Paul can then be seen as refuting their positions with Philo's own words.

In 14:12-17 Paul argues that in ecstatic speech even the speaker is not edified because he does not understand what he is saying. Calvin thinks that Paul is referring to cases in which the speaker did not understand the common tongue of the congregation, but given the context of the obvious existence of ecstaticism in the church this is unlikely. Paul is challenging the pneumaticists to seek more useful gifts. Gifts which will edify the body rather than exalt the ego.

He adds, "If I pray in an ecstatic tongue, my prayer may be spiritual but my meaning is unclear" (my paraphrase). Whether the meaning is unclear to the speaker and hearers or only to the hearers has been debated (cf. above). It is unclear in which sense Paul is using this phrase. Both possibilities will therefore be considered.

Assuming he has ecstatic utterance in view his meaning must be that the speaker cannot translate because he does not understand the meaning of what he says. From the purely hypothetical standpoint Paul suggests that even if he were to pray in an ecstatic tongue, his spirit would be praying while his mind was disengaged. His response to this is that he would rather "pray with the spirit and... pray with the mind." The same goes for singing.

If he means only that the hearer cannot understand he could be referring to the general act of speaking in an unknown language whether by divine or natural means. His argument then becomes, "If I pray in a language you do not know, my prayer might be fine but you can't understand and say the Amen. The hearer is not edified." Paul's insistence on interpretation hits at the heart of ecstaticism. In verse 18 Paul says "I speak with tongues more than you all" This does not mean he engages in ecstatic utterance but that he uses foreign language. As a scholar this certainly does not need a miraculous explanation. One might wonder how many languages Paul might encounter that he was unfamiliar with? Certainly not Greek, Hebrew or Latin. His point is that

although he constantly used foreign languages he would rather use five words in their native tongue than an infinite number in another language they couldn't understand.

Paul's reference to Isaiah 19 in verses 20-21 was to give Scriptural support for his contention that tongue speaking, as it occurred at Pentecost, was a sign against the nation of Israel for refusing to obey God. (72) Since they wouldn't hear him in their language he gives them over to ignorance by coming in a language they cannot fathom. Thus Paul says the phenomenon at Pentecost was not something to try to duplicate. It was a sign of judgment on Israel. A sign against those who would not obey God. Prophecy on the other hand is a sign for the obedient.

In verses 26-33 Paul directly challenges the validity of their claims to pneumatic experience. Since he has demonstrated that God does not give everyone the same gift he asks how it is possible that everybody is claiming the same gift; divine inspiration. He insists on orderly conduct in worship and commands that the others judge the speaker as he delivers his message—a message that must be translated. Why does Paul ask them to judge the message if it was unquestionably of God? Obviously in Paul's mind, it was not.

Paul's regulations prevented any but a legitimate manifestation of foreign speech. Paul, in effect, tactfully removed the possibility of ecstatic utterance. How would an ecstatic speaker know whether there was a translator present? Their euphoric trance would prevent them from proceeding in the specified manner. Before one could speak in a tongue he would have to identify which tongue he was about to speak in and then see if there was a translator present. These restrictions would make ecstatic utterances un-practicable.

Paul allowed no excuse of Spirit possession. Rather he refutes the idea which is basic to ecstaticism. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" says Paul. This is the exact opposite of the teaching of Philo and the mystery religions. It is also contrary to the position of the Corinthian pneumatics. They placed the "spirit" above the "flesh" (ie, humanity). Paul reverses this and makes the spirit subject to the flesh (ie the prophet). This tendency to reverse the authorities of his opponents is seen throughout Paul's epistle. (cf. Dale Martin's argument that 1 Corinthians is "thematically unified by the issue of conflict between higher status and lower status points of view.") (73)

Verse 34 is most telling in light of what Kroeger has suggested about pagan female ecstaticism. It seems likely that the pneumatics were largely women. We may infer this from the text under consideration as well as from Paul's admonitions concerning appropriate attire for women in worship and the evidence in chapter seven that women were deserting their husbands for a more "spiritual" celibacy which is entirely

in keeping with the Hellenistic form matter dichotomy of Platonic thought. It is surely more than coincidence that the discourse on glossolalia is sandwiched between sections which give regulations for female worship practices, ie., 11:1-16 and 14:34-40.

Finally we note that Paul does not forbid the Corinthians to speak in tongues, that is, in foreign languages. Paul's policy allowed foreigners to share with the congregation. Once again as with so many other verses in these three chapters Paul's usage of the term "lalia" must be determined by the context. Assuming the accuracy of what has been put forth above, it becomes unnecessary to defend the position that the miraculous "gift of tongues" has ceased with the closing of the canon. There never was such a gift, in the sense of a widely distributed and frequently occurring phenomenon. Rather there were three instances in Acts in which God miraculously removed the language barriers implemented by him in Gen. 11, to facilitate the spread of the gospel. They were a sign against Israel. Because of her unfaithfulness the Kingdom would now be given to the Gentiles. The Gospel would be promulgated in every tongue, both in Jerusalem (Acts 2) and Samaria, the northern kingdom (Caesaria was in Samaria) (Acts 10:46) and in the uttermost parts of the earth (ie Ephesus) (Acts 19:6)

Paul is excluding ecstaticism from worship not encouraging it. There is no evidence of a form of divine ecstaticism in the Biblical record. If my thesis is correct as the historical evidence seems to indicate, it would suggest that contemporary neo-pentecostalism is nothing more than the revival of an ancient cultic enthusiasm along the lines of the mystery religions. It is a pagan phenomenon the church would do well without.

However, Paul's approach to the problem should suggest some possibilities for dealing with the contemporary scene. The existence of pagan elements in ones theology does not make one an unbeliever. We need to correct each other in love. Love is after all, our greatest gift to each other!

End Notes

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