

what makes the church like heaven.⁷⁶ His answer: it is love. The church's manifestation in time of the glories that are yet to come is not accomplished in the gift of tongues, nor even in prophecy, giving, teaching. It is accomplished in love. One day all the charismatics who know the Lord and all the noncharismatics who know the Lord will have nothing to fight over; for the so-called charismatic gifts will have forever passed. At that point, both of these groups of believers will look back and thoughtfully contemplate the fact that what connects them with the world they have left behind is not the gift of tongues, nor animosity toward the gift of tongues, but the love they sometimes managed to display toward each other despite the gift of tongues. The greatest evidence that heaven has invaded our sphere, that the Spirit has been poured out upon us, that we are citizens of a kingdom not yet consummated, is Christian love.⁷⁷

76. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, ed. Tyron Edwards (1852; reprint ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 323ff.

77. Perhaps it should be said that from a broader, biblical perspective this test is always a necessary but not always a sufficient criterion. For instance, in his first epistle, John lays out three tests: a truth test revolving around christological confession, a moral test revolving around the Christian's principal obedience to Christ, and a love test—and John does not suggest that two out of three constitute a passing grade. Other tests are found elsewhere that serve to check any putative believer's claim to grace; for the New Testament writers are at one in believing that saving grace transforms a person. But although no biblical test is universally sufficient, a particular test may be sufficient in a particular context. In the context of Corinthian disputes over the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*), Paul's test of love is both necessary and sufficient.

3

Prophecy and Tongues: Pursuing What Is Better (14:1–19)

Reflections on the Nature of Several of the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*)

Kinds of Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues (12:10, 29, 30)

Apostles (12:28)

Teachers (12:28)

Prophecy and Prophets (12:10, 28, 29)

The Superiority of Prophecy over Tongues (14:1–19)

The Potential of a *χάρισμα* (*charisma*) for Building the Church (14:1–5)

Edification Depends on Intelligibility of Tongues (14:6–12)

I want to use the majority of my space in this chapter to address directly a question I have so far avoided: What precisely are such gifts as prophecy, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues? I intend therefore to explore those questions presently before turning to a summary exposition of the text itself.

Reflections on the Nature of Several of the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*)

Kinds of Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues (12:10, 29, 30)

What does *γλώσσαις λαλεῖν* (*glōssais lalein*, to speak in tongues) mean? Discussions of this question are legion. I shall try to simplify the issues by asking and trying to answer the following questions.

Were the tongues in Corinth “ecstatic”? Everything turns on the

definition of "ecstatic." One major work offers this definition: "In ecstasy there is a condition of emotional exaltation, in which the one who experiences it is more or less oblivious of the external world, and loses to some extent his self-consciousness and his power of rational thought and self-control."¹ Most noncharismatics who argue that ecstasy characterizes contemporary speaking in tongues mean something more than this (though usually not less), in particular that the languages spoken by tongues-speakers are not real languages but (in the less graceful books) mere gibberish. Strictly speaking, however, there is no necessary connection between ecstasy and the coherence or incoherence of the "tongue" that is spoken. Indeed, there are three quite discrete issues: whether or not ecstasy is involved, whether the utterance is contentful or not, and whether it is a known, human language. These are three distinct questions. Any one of them can stand independently of the others. Most charismatics avoid applying the term *ecstasy* to their tongues-speaking; but this is because they do not take the term to describe the intelligibility or otherwise of their "tongue," but to the psychological state, the degree of dissociation, that they experience. Culpepper writes:

The main reason charismatics object to tongues being called "ecstatic utterance" is that it seems to suggest one has gone "off his rocker" and lost control of oneself. The first meaning which *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1975) assigns to ecstasy is that of "a state of being beyond reason and self-control." Glossolalists make the point that Paul assumes that the glossolalist can control his or her speech. This, they say, is exactly what they experience. The point is well taken!²

Hollenweger helpfully distinguishes between "hot" tongues (those that are spoken in a state of advanced mental dissociation) from "cool" tongues (those uttered where the speaker has perfect control of his or her utterance and remains mentally alert and cognizant of what is going on, even though he or she cannot understand the sounds coming from his or her own mouth).³ In that sense, hot tongues are ecstatic, cool tongues are not. My perception is that the overwhelming majority of modern tongues-speakers resort to cool tongues; and that is also the self-perception of most tongues-speakers themselves.⁴ By and large,

1. G. B. Cutten, *Speaking with Tongues, Historically and Psychologically Considered* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), 157.

2. Robert H. Culpepper, *Evaluating the Charismatic Movement: A Theological and Biblical Appraisal* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1977), 103.

3. Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 344.

4. This is widely represented in charismatic literature, and is also recognized by competent observers. C. F. D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978),

however, "ecstasy" has become such a slippery term that it is probably better left out of the discussion unless it is thoroughly qualified and all sides in the debate know what is meant.⁵

Were the tongues at Corinth "real languages," or something else? To put the matter in technical terms, is the phenomenon of 1 Corinthians an instance of xenoglossia (that is, speaking in unlearned human languages) or glossolalia (that is, speaking in verbal patterns that cannot be identified with any human language)? This is an extraordinarily difficult question to answer convincingly on either side, despite the dogmatic claims made by many proponents on each side. Most contemporary charismatics would be happy with the definition of "tongues" offered by Christensen: "a supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit, whereby the believer speaks forth in a language he has never learned, and which he does not understand."⁶ This of course simply pushes the question back from the meaning of "tongue" to the meaning of "language." Probably most charismatics are persuaded their utterances are real languages insofar as they believe they actually convey something: they are the tongues of men or of angels. It is a slightly different question whether they believe they are human languages occurring naturally in the world but unlearned by the tongues-speaker. Increasingly, however, some charismatics and a variety of sympathetic observers of the charismatic movement, spurred on by modern linguistic analyses of tapes of tongues utterances (about which I will say more in a few moments), argue that modern tongues and the tongues in Corinth alike are not so-called real languages at all (for instance, Cardinal Suenens,⁷ H. Mühlen, who views tongues primarily as a more intense prayer experience in the worship of the inexpressible God,⁸ and Green, who suggests that some tongues may be real languages and others not⁹).

One of the strongest defenders of the glossolalist position, over

90, rightly comments: "Those who are familiar with it [i.e., with contemporary tongues-speaking] assure us that it is never 'ecstatic,' if that word is taken to mean out of the subject's control. . . . It is exercised consciously and self-controlledly in such a way that if the gift is available, the use of it can be started or terminated at will."

5. Cyril G. Williams, "Glossolalia as a Religious Phenomenon: 'Tongues' at Corinth and Pentecost," *Journal of Religion and Religions* 5 (1975): 16-32.

6. Larry Christensen, *Speaking in Tongues and Its Significance for the Church* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1968), 22.

7. Léon-Joseph Suenens, *A New Pentecost?* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 99.

8. Heribert Mühlen, *A Charismatic Theology: Initiation in the Spirit* (London: Burns and Oates; New York: Paulist, 1978), 152-56. See George T. Montague, *Riding the Wind: Learning the Ways of the Spirit* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1974), 45: "The gift is primarily non-rational prayer ([The one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God] 1 Cor 14.2). Artless, it uses no phrenetic energy in formulation."

9. Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 162-63.

against xenoglossia, is Williams.¹⁰ He firmly criticizes those word studies of γλώσσα (*glōssa*, tongue) that insist the term, when it does not refer to the wagging organ in one's mouth, always means real languages. Not only may the word "indicate the physical organ, known languages, dialects or sub-dialects, but also the incoherent utterance of certain forms of spiritual fervency."¹¹ In any case, he writes, "normal usage is not the only criterion when the subject of investigation is what appears to be a new phenomenon or at least one that is unfamiliar in a particular context. In such cases a term in common currency may be given an extension of connotation and sometimes the new meaning establishes a technical application."¹² Williams is similarly unimpressed with studies that argue the verb *to interpret* normally means "to translate"—and translation presupposes a real language.¹³ Williams is far from saying that tongues are entirely devoid of meaning: he means rather that they may be an expression of deep feelings and inarticulate thoughts issuing out of the speaker's deep experience of the Spirit, but not demonstrably conveyed in propositional terms in the sounds themselves. Whereas many commentators would be reasonably happy with this so far as 1 Corinthians is concerned, they might prefer to see in Acts 2 not glossolalia but xenoglossia. Williams, however, pushes on to consistency, and suggests that even in Acts 2 we are dealing with glossolalia: after all, even glossolalia makes *some* sounds that could be identified as real words in various languages. How else could it be, Williams wonders, that many of those present accused the believers of being drunk? Would we accuse someone who was speaking in another human language of being drunk?¹⁴

Nevertheless, I remain unpersuaded by Williams's arguments. I shall discuss Acts 2 in the last chapter, but for the moment I must merely register my conviction that what Luke describes at Pentecost are real, known, human languages. More careful word studies have shown that in none of the texts adduced by Behm¹⁵ or the standard lexica¹⁶ does

10. Cyril G. Williams, *Tongues of the Spirit: A Study of Pentecostal Glossolalia and Related Phenomena* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1981), especially 25–45.

11. *Ibid.*, 26, referring to BAG.

12. *Ibid.*, 26.

13. In particular, J. G. Davies, "Pentecost and Glossolalia," *Journal of Theological Studies* 3 (1952): 228–31. See also R. H. Gundry, "'Ecstatic Utterance' (N.E.B.)?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 17 (1966): 299–307.

14. Williams, *Tongues of the Spirit*, 31ff.

15. Johannes Behm, "γλώσσα, ἐτερόγλωσσοσ," *TDNT*, 1:719–27.

16. In particular, BAGD.

γλώσσα (*glōssa*) ever denote noncognitive utterance.¹⁷ The utterance may be enigmatic and incomprehensible, but not noncognitive. The ecstatic utterances of the pagan religions prove less suitable a set of parallels than was once thought.¹⁸ Nor is Thiselton entirely convincing when he argues that the verb ἐρμηνεύω (*hermēneuō*) can be used in Philo and Josephus to mean "to put into words" rather than "to translate";¹⁹ for as Turner has pointed out, in 1 Corinthians it is not simply the verb that one must wrestle with, but the use of the verb *in connection with* "to speak in (or with) tongues."²⁰ MacGorman insists that glossolalia in 1 Corinthians is "Holy Spirit inspired utterance that is unintelligible apart from interpretation, itself an attendant gift. It is a form of ecstatic utterance, a valid charismatic endowment."²¹ He goes on to affirm that if the modern reader reads real languages into the picture, then verses such as 14:2, 13, 14, 18, 26 degenerate to sheer nonsense. But in fact, not one of them is nonsense, even if the tongue is a real language, *provided only that the tongues-speaker does not know what he or she is saying*—a point Paul surely presupposes when he exhorts the tongues-speaker to pray for the gift of interpretation, and acknowledges it is possible to pray without the mind (see further discussion, below). Moreover if tongues are principally unintelligible at the intrinsic level until the gift of interpretation is exercised, one wonders in what sense tongues are being "interpreted" at all. Dunn supports the view that the tongues in Corinth were not real human

17. By this I mean utterance without cognitive content, regardless of whether such content is understood by either the speaker or the hearer. See Gundry, "'Ecstatic Utterance'"; Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1983), 110–21.

18. See T. M. Crone, *Early Christian Prophecy: A Study of Its Origin and Function* (Baltimore: St. Mary's University Press, 1973), especially chap. 1, and 220–21; and the excellent treatment by Christopher Forbes, "Glossolalia in Early Christianity" (unpublished paper, Macquarie University, 1985).

19. A. C. Thiselton, "The 'Interpretation' of Tongues: A New Suggestion in the Light of Greek Usage in Philo and Josephus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979): 15–36.

20. M. M. B. Turner, "Spiritual Gifts Then and Now," *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985): 18–19. Moreover, as Forbes has shown ("Glossolalia in Early Christianity," 23–27), Thiselton's argument is flawed at several points. His statistics of the use of ἐρμηνεύω and διεκμήνευσις in Philo ("no less than three-quarters of the uses refer to the articulation of thoughts or feelings in intelligible speech" [Thiselton, "The 'Interpretation' of Tongues," 18]) are substantially reversed if one includes the simple verb ἐρμηνεύω and its cognates: 60 percent now stand against his thesis. That the verb *can* mean "to put into words" or the like, Thiselton has clearly established; that such is the obvious meaning in 1 Cor. 12–14 is less likely. Forbes also demonstrates that Thiselton's arguments from context are not convincing.

21. Jack W. MacGorman, *The Gifts of the Spirit: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974), 390–91.

languages, partly on the grounds that the subject matter is "mysteries," which he understands to be eschatological secrets known only in heaven, and partly on the grounds that if Paul thought the gift of tongues utilized real foreign languages he could not have compared them with real foreign languages in 14:10ff. But "mysteries" in 13:2 are connected with prophecy, not tongues; and the expression *all mysteries*, as we saw in the last chapter, is purposely wildly hyperbolic, since Paul does not think that we can now enjoy more than partial knowledge. In any case, Paul is capable of expressing heavenly mysteries in Greek: see 1 Corinthians 15:51–52—so there is no necessary connection between mysteries and noncognitive speech. And in 14:10ff., "Paul could be pointing to the obvious consequences in the secular realm of what the Corinthians fail to see in the spiritual, without which others do not understand; Paul points out how close they come to being ridiculed as 'barbarians' rather than exalted as 'spirituals.'" ²²

Other arguments in favor of taking tongues in 1 Corinthians as noncognitive have been treated elsewhere.²³ Perhaps two more should be mentioned here. Smith says that if the tongues are real but unlearned languages, then each instance is an open miracle—and God is in the awkward position of doing miracles through tongues-speakers while simultaneously instructing his apostle to curb them. Therefore these cannot be real tongues, miraculously bestowed.²⁴ But if this argument were applied to other spiritual gifts, we would arrive at nonsense. For instance, Paul curbs excesses in prophecy, which presumably is Spirit-prompted. Smith's argument seems to suppose that if the tongues are not real languages, then the Spirit of God may not be so intimately involved. Indeed, if Smith's argument had any real weight, it would be a decisive blow against the notion of a sovereign and providential God; for since all that transpires takes place under the aegis of divine sovereignty (Rom. 8:28), why should God forbid anything that does in fact take place? Possible answers to that question lie elsewhere;²⁵ but certainly Smith's objection does not rule out real languages.

A second objection concerns the use of the verb *λαλεῖν* (*lalein*), "to speak" in tongues. Some have suggested that it here retains an older meaning and hints at babbling, utterance empty of cognitive content. Gundry replies with four telling observations: Paul can also use *λέγω* (*legō*) for speaking in tongues, 14:16—and that verb is regularly used

22. Turner, "Spiritual Gifts Then and Now," 19.

23. *Ibid.*, 19–20; Forbes, "Glossolalia in Early Christianity."

24. Charles R. Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective: A Summary of Biblical Conclusions Concerning Tongues*, 2d ed. (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1973), especially 26–27.

25. See D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

for ordinary speech; Paul uses the verb *λαλέω* (*laleō*) in 14:19 in connection with speaking with the mind, which seems to embrace intelligible speech, so the verb cannot be restricted to unintelligible speech; Paul also uses this verb in 14:29 of prophetic speech, which like tongues is Spirit-prompted but unlike tongues is immediately intelligible; and the same verb is used in 14:34–35 of a woman asking questions, presumably in her normal language.²⁶

On balance, then, the evidence favors the view that Paul thought the gift of tongues was a gift of real languages, that is, languages that were cognitive, whether of men or of angels. Moreover, if he knew of the details of Pentecost (a currently unpopular opinion in the scholarly world, but in my view eminently defensible), his understanding of tongues must have been shaped to some extent by that event.²⁷ Certainly tongues in Acts exercise some different *functions* from those in 1 Corinthians; but there is no substantial evidence that suggests Paul thought the two were *essentially* different.

We have established high probability, I think, that Paul believed the tongues about which he wrote in 1 Corinthians were cognitive.²⁸ But before any sweeping conclusions can be drawn, another question must be brought to bear.

What bearing does the discipline of linguistics have on the assessment of modern tongues? To my knowledge there is universal agreement among linguists who have taped and analyzed thousands of examples of modern tongues-speaking that the contemporary phenomenon is not any human language.²⁹ The patterns and structures that all known human language requires are simply not there. Occasionally a recognizable word slips out; but that is statistically likely, given the sheer quantity of verbalization. Jaquette's conclusion is unavoidable: "we are dealing here not with language, but with verbalizations which

26. Gundry, " 'Ecstatic Utterance,' " 304.

27. Some writers, among them Jimmy A. Millikin, "The Nature of the Corinthian Glossolalia," *Mid-America Theological Journal* 8 (1984): 81–107, have argued that tongues in Corinth were a degenerative form of tongues in Acts, a strange mixture of real words and gibberish. But Paul nowhere in 1 Cor. 12–14 treats the gift as if it were itself degenerative. Not the gift, but the weight the Corinthians were placing on it, is the focal point of Paul's attack.

28. Or, more precisely, that the tongues bore cognitive content, whether or not that content was actually *understood* by speaker or hearer. See Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri de Vries (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 132–38.

29. See especially the much cited works of W. J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1972); *idem*, *Variation and Variables in Religious Glossolalia: Language in Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

superficially resemble language in certain of its structural aspects."³⁰ When studies have been made of tongues uttered in different cultures and linguistic environments, several startling conclusions have presented themselves.³¹ The tongues phenomena have been related to the speaker's natural language (e.g., a German or French tongues-speaker will not use one of the two English "th" sounds; and English tongues-speakers will never include the "u" sound of French "cru"). Moreover, the stereotypical utterance of any culture "mirrors that of the person who guided the glossolalist into the behavior. There is little variation of sound patterns within the group arising around a particular guide,"³² even though other studies show that the tongues patterns of each speaker are usually identifiable from those of others, and a few tongues-speakers use two or more discrete patterns.³³ In any case, modern tongues are lexically uncommunicative and the few instances of reported modern xenoglossia are so poorly attested that no weight can be laid on them.

What follows from this information? For some, the evidence is so powerful that they conclude the only biblical position is that no known contemporary gift of tongues is biblically valid, and ideally the entire practice should be stopped immediately.³⁴ For others, such as Packer, modern tongues are not like biblical tongues, and therefore contemporary tongues-speakers should not claim that their gift is in line with Pentecost or with Corinth; yet on the other hand the modern phenomenon seems to do more good than harm, it has helped many believers in worship, prayer, and commitment, and therefore should probably be assessed as a good gift from God that nevertheless stands without explicit biblical warrant.³⁵ I cannot think of a better way of displeasing both sides of the current debate.

Can we get beyond this impasse? I think so, if the arguments of Poythress stand up. How, he asks, may tongues be perceived? There are three possibilities: disconnected sounds, ejaculations, and the like that are not confused with human language; connected sequences of sounds that *appear* to be real languages unknown to the hearer not

30. J. R. Jaquette, "Toward a Typology of Formal Communicative Behaviors: Glossolalia," *Anthropological Linguistics* 9 (1967): 6.

31. See Felicitas D. Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues: A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

32. *Ibid.*, 123.

33. Virginia H. Hine, "Pentecostal Glossolalia: Toward a Functional Interpretation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8 (1969): 212.

34. E.g., John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), especially 156ff.

35. J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity; Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1984), 207ff.

trained in linguistics, even though they are not; and real language known by one or more of the potential hearers, even if unknown to the speaker.³⁶ I would add a fourth possibility, which was later treated by Poythress though not at this point classified by him: speech patterns sufficiently complex that they may bear all kinds of cognitive information in some coded array, even though linguistically these patterns are not identifiable as human language.

Our problem so far is that the biblical descriptions of tongues seem to demand the third category, but the contemporary phenomena seem to fit better in the second category; and never the twain shall meet. But the fourth category is also logically possible, even though it is regularly overlooked; and it meets the constraints of both the first-century biblical documents and of some of the contemporary phenomena. I do not see how it can be dismissed.

Consider, then, Poythress's linguistic description of glossolalia:

Free vocalization (glossolalia) occurs when (1) a human being produces a connected sequence of speech sounds, (2) he cannot identify the sound-sequence as belonging to any natural language that he already knows how to speak, (3) he cannot identify and give the meaning of words or morphemes (minimal lexical units), (4) in the case of utterances of more than a few syllables, he typically cannot repeat the same sound-sequence on demand, (5) a naive listener might suppose that it was an unknown language.³⁷

The next step is crucial. Poythress reminds us that such free vocalization may still bear content beyond some vague picture of the speaker's emotional state. He offers his own amusing illustration;³⁸ I shall manufacture another. Suppose the message is:

"Praise the Lord, for his mercy endures forever."

Remove the vowels to achieve:

PRS TH LRD FR HS MRC NDRS FRVR.

This may seem a bit strange; but when we remember that modern

36. Vern S. Poythress, "The Nature of Corinthian Glossolalia: Possible Options," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1977): 131. See also the cautious essay by Francis A. Sullivan, "Speaking in Tongues," *Lumen Vitae* 31 (1976): 145-70.

37. Vern S. Poythress, "Linguistic and Sociological Analyses of Modern Tongues-Speaking: Their Contributions and Limitations," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1979): 369.

38. *Ibid.*, 375.

Hebrew is written without most vowels, we can imagine that with practice this could be read quite smoothly. Now remove the spaces and, beginning with the first letter, rewrite the sequence using every third letter, repeatedly going through the sequence until all the letters are used up. The result is:

PTRRMNSVRHDHRDFRSLFSCRR.

Now add an "a" sound after each consonant, and break up the unit into arbitrary bits:

PATARA RAMA NA SAVARAHA DAHARA DAFARASALA FASA CARARA.

I think that is indistinguishable from transcriptions of certain modern tongues. Certainly it is very similar to some I have heard. But the important point is that it conveys information *provided you know the code*. Anyone who knows the steps I have taken could reverse them in order to retrieve the original message. As Poythress remarks, "thus it is always possible for the charismatic person to claim that T-speech [tongues] is *coded* language, and that only the interpreter of tongues is given the supernatural 'key' for deciphering it. It is impossible not only in practice, but even in *theory*, for a linguist to devise a means of testing this claim."³⁹

It appears, then, that tongues may bear cognitive information even though they are not known human languages—just as a computer program is a "language" that conveys a great deal of information, even though it is not a "language" that anyone actually speaks. You have to know the code to be able to understand it. Such a pattern of verbalization could not be legitimately dismissed as gibberish. It is as capable of conveying propositional and cognitive content as any known human language. "Tongue" and "language" still seem eminently reasonable words to describe the phenomenon. This does not mean that all modern tongues phenomena are therefore biblically authentic. It does mean there is a category of linguistic phenomenon that conveys cognitive content, may be interpreted, and seems to meet the constraints of the biblical descriptions, even though it is no known human language. Of course, this will not do for the tongues of Acts 2, where the gift consisted of known human languages; but elsewhere, the alternative is not as simple as "human languages" or "gibberish," as many noncharismatic writers affirm. Indeed, the fact that Paul can speak of different *kinds* of tongues (12:10, 28) may suggest that on

39. *Ibid.*, 375–76.

some occasions human languages were spoken (as in Acts 2), and in other cases not—even though in the latter eventuality the tongues were viewed as bearing cognitive content.

What bearing does the gift of interpretation have on the nature of contemporary tongues? This was addressed in part when the meaning of the verb *to interpret* was briefly considered, but several other things must be said. The most important is that Paul draws an extremely tight connection between the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation. If someone wishes to argue that Paul may have used "tongues" or "languages" even though what was spoken was verbalization that bore no cognitive content, Paul's treatment of the gift of interpretation becomes an immediate barrier. After all, the interpretation issues in intelligible speech, cognitive content; and if it is not in fact a rendering of what was spoken in tongues, then the gift of interpretation is not only misnamed but also must be assessed as undifferentiable from the gift of prophecy. The tight connection Paul presupposes between the content of the tongues and the intelligible result of the gift of interpretation demands that we conclude the tongues in Corinth, as Paul understood them, bore cognitive content.

What about the contemporary gift of interpretation? A few years ago a friend of mine attended a charismatic service and rather cheekily recited some of John 1:1–18 in Greek as his contribution to speaking in tongues. Immediately there was an "interpretation" that bore no relation whatsoever to the Johannine prologue. Two people with the gift of interpretation have on occasion been asked to interpret the same recorded tongues message and the resulting different and conflicting interpretations have been justified on the grounds that God gives different interpretations to different people.⁴⁰ That is preposterous, if the interpretations are wildly dissimilar, because it would force us to conclude that there is no univocal, cognitive content to the tongues themselves. I know of no major work that has researched hundreds or thousands of examples; but it could be a very revealing study.

More commonly, at least in my experience, triteness triumphs: "Interpretations prove to be as stereotyped, vague, and uninformative as they are spontaneous, fluent, and confident."⁴¹

This does not prove that there is no valid, modern gift of tongues. But these distortions of interpretation are sufficiently frequent, and the interpretations themselves so commonly pedestrian, that at some

40. See John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 63; *idem*, "Psychological Observations," in *The Charismatic Movement*, ed. Michael P. Hamilton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 136.

41. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 212.

point the gift of tongues must, *in some cases*, also be called into question. The evidence is not comprehensive enough to serve as a universally damning indictment; but it is enough to provoke reflective pauses in all thoughtful believers.

In the last chapter, I will reflect further on the bearing of church history and of psychology in assessing the modern tongues movement. At the moment I shall turn to three other gifts.

Apostles (12:28)

There is neither time nor space to treat this subject in a comprehensive fashion; yet something must be said, for quite apart from its intrinsic interest, the subject has a curious relation to the broader questions of spiritual gifts. As long as "apostles" are understood to refer to a select group (the Twelve plus Paul) whose positions or functions cannot be duplicated after their demise, there is a *prima facie* case for saying *at least one* of the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) passes away at the end of the first generation, a gift tightly tied to the locus of revelation that came with Jesus Messiah and related events. Therefore, there is a precedent for asking if there were other spiritual gifts in Paul's day that cannot be operative in our day. Conversely, once the charismatic movement had rehabilitated all of the other spiritual gifts explicitly mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12–14, it is not surprising that some felt there should be a place for apostles as well. As a result some wings of Pentecostalism do not hesitate to appoint modern apostles.

Certainly Paul does not use the term exclusively in a tightly defined or technical sense. The referent in some passages is disputed: are the apostles in 1 Corinthians 15:7 the Twelve less Judas Iscariot, as I think likely, or a broader group who became, as eyewitnesses of the resurrection, founding missionaries? There are certainly broader uses. Epaphroditus is an "apostle," a messenger, of a congregation (Phil. 2:25); Paul's agents to the churches can also be designated "apostles" (2 Cor. 8:22–23). The force of "apostles" in Romans 16:7 is uncertain on several grounds, but may be roughly equivalent to "missionaries" or the like. Moreover, as has often been remarked, "There could not have been false apostles (2 Cor. xi.13) unless the number of Apostles had been indefinite."⁴² Certainly the tendency in some branches of modern scholarship is to downplay the uniqueness and authority of those thirteen (the Twelve plus Paul) traditionally referred to as apostles. All recognize that in time these thirteen came to be looked on as a closed

42. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1914).

circle that served in part as the foundation of the church, a position already reflected (it is argued) in the Epistle to the Ephesians and in the Apocalypse (cf. Eph. 2:20; 3:5; Rev. 21:14). Because some date Ephesians rather late, and Revelation later, naturally there are suspicions that such notions formed no part of the understanding of the original apostles about whom such claims are made. Taking a leaf out of this analysis, some branches of the charismatic movement therefore cluster the kinds of apostles in the New Testament in three groups: Jesus Christ himself, a group of one; the Twelve, unrepeatable and irreplaceable; and Paul and all other apostles—an open-ended group that allows modern equivalents.⁴³ And since it is Paul who is writing 1 Corinthians 12:28, the conclusion is obvious.

This conclusion is nevertheless premature. Dupont has shown that even Acts pictures the missionary and authority status of Paul in the same categories as that of the Twelve;⁴⁴ and Jervell, likewise bucking the tide, argues that the perspectives of Acts and of the writings of Paul are indistinguishable so far as the apostolic authority of Paul is concerned.⁴⁵ Too much is made of Paul's persistent willingness to reason with his churches, to beg them to reform or to take some action, to function as the servant and example. None of this is incompatible with a strong sense of unique, personal, apostolic authority that may (as threatened in 2 Cor. 10–13) regretfully be applied in its full force if the church does not conform to gentler admonitions.⁴⁶ Indeed, this combination of authority and meekness lies at the heart of all levels of Christian leadership; so to pit one against the other, as if the former is called into question by the latter, is to exhibit a very deep misunderstanding.

Of course, the word *apostle* can extend beyond the Twelve plus Paul; but "Lord" can extend beyond Jesus, "elders" and "deacons" can extend beyond ecclesiastical office/functions, and so forth. The primary reason is obvious: nascent Christianity had to use the vocabulary into which it was born, and its own specialized use of certain terms did not immediately displace the larger semantic range of the terms em-

43. See Hywel Jones, "Are There Apostles Today?" *Foundations* 13 (Autumn 1984): 16–25.

44. Jacques Dupont, "La Mission de Paul d'après Actes 26.13–23 et la Mission des Apôtres d'après Luc 24.44–49 et Actes 1.8," *Paul and Paulinism: Studies in Honor of C. K. Barrett*, ed. Morna D. Hooker and Stephen G. Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), 290–99.

45. Jacob Jervell, *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 77–95.

46. The theme is treated repeatedly in D. A. Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10–13* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984).