

Divine Madness? Speaking in Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14.23

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Abstract

The response of the hypothetical outsider in 1 Cor. 14.23 to hearing uninterpreted tongues is usually understood as one of alienation. This fits an exegetical consensus that takes tongues as a sign of divine judgment on unbelievers. Yet the exclamation *μαίνεσθε* may, in fact, be positive. If it is a social categorization by the outsider of tongues as parallel to the phenomenon of divinely gifted madness within Graeco-Roman religion, the response is very likely not one of alienation. Uninterpreted tongues are a positive sign to the outsider of divine activity among the Corinthian believers, but are inadequate from Paul's perspective as they fail to communicate the gospel. This article defends the plausibility both of the outsider drawing such a parallel and of its positive sense. Its argument counters a tendency among recent commentators to note the parallel but to uphold the exegetical consensus that the response is one of alienation.

1 Corinthians 14.20-25 poses notorious problems of interpretation. As part of a sustained argument for the superiority of the gift of prophecy over that of tongues, Paul hypothetically compares the impact of experiencing the two gifts upon those who are not already Christians. The exercise of the gift of prophecy produces conversion (vv. 24-25), while the exercise of the gift of tongues fails to do so (v. 23). The difficulty is that on a first reading (and perhaps on subsequent ones as well!) these examples do not seem to fit with the statement of principle given immediately beforehand (v. 22). There, Paul states that tongues are a sign for unbelievers and prophecy for believers, yet it is prophecy that converts the unbeliever and tongues that fail to do so. The examples seem to prove the opposite of what was stated in v. 22, and this exegetical puzzle has provoked much disagreement and

considerable displays of exegetical gymnastics.¹ The purpose of this article is to suggest that a solution to the puzzle is best pursued by focusing our attention on the reaction to hearing tongues of the outsider,² described by

1. For example, B.C. Johansen, 'Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers? A Structural and Exegetical Study of 1 Cor. xiv.20-25', *NTS* 25 (1979), pp. 180-203 suggests that 1 Cor. 14.22 should be read as a rhetorical question. The οὐν of v. 23, which makes what follows stand as a consequence of the words of v. 22, rather than as a denial of them, is generally held to be fatal to his argument. O.P. Robertson, 'Tongues: Sign of Covenantal Curse and Blessing', *WTJ* 38 (1975), pp. 43-53 (52) and K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 116 n. 9 both exploit the fact that the verb has to be supplied in the second half of v. 22 to suggest that Paul designates only tongues as a sign and not prophecy, which is simply 'for believers'. The clear parallelism in the sentence tells against this interpretation, and it has, to my knowledge, gained no further support. See the objections of W. Grudem, '1 Corinthians 14.20-25: Prophecy and Tongues as Signs of God's Attitude', *WTJ* 41 (1979), pp. 381-96 (388-89).

2. To describe the person who enters the worship meeting Paul uses two terms, ἄπιστος (unbeliever) and ἰδιώτης. In general the term ἰδιώτης denotes a non-expert, but exactly what Paul means by that in the context of Christian worship is unclear. He has already used the term in v. 16, where the ἰδιώτης is someone who is prevented from adding their amen to a prayer in tongues because of its unintelligibility. One solution is to regard an ἰδιώτης as a non-expert in the sense of one uninitiated into the gifts of the Spirit, someone who could, as such, be either a Christian or an unbeliever. See A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *1 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911), pp. 313-14, 317-18. However, a prayer spoken in an uninterpreted tongue would be unintelligible to all. Everyone, and not just the uninitiated, would be unable to say amen to the prayer of v. 16. An alternative view is that an ἰδιώτης is a sort of catechumen, and the reference in v. 16 to τὸν τόπον τοῦ ἰδιώτου is taken literally as an area of the room reserved for them. See BAGD, p. 371. Yet, there is no other evidence in Paul's letters or elsewhere for the existence of a catechumenate at this early date. Perhaps the best way out of the impasse is to take the τόπος of v. 16 figuratively so that Paul's objection to uninterpreted tongues is that they reduce fellow Christians to the level of an ἰδιώτης because they are unintelligible. C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1971), p. 321 pictures it thus: 'Here now one, now another is forced into the role of ἰδιώτης as the gift of tongues goes round'. This leaves the way clear to identifying the ἰδιώτης of vv. 23-24 as simply a sympathetic and interested outsider, perhaps the spouse or close friend of a Christian. See G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 684-85; D.E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), p. 651; R.B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), p. 238; W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, III (Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), p. 411; B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), pp. 281-82. Paul regards both the ἄπιστος and ἰδιώτης as

Paul in v. 23. The exclamation $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\iota\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$, often translated ‘You are mad’,³ should not be understood, as is often assumed, as a pejorative reaction. Instead it is a categorization by the outsider of speaking in tongues as parallel to the phenomenon of divinely gifted madness within Graeco-Roman religion.⁴ If this is accepted, and the implication that it represents a positive evaluation by the outsider is recognized, vv. 20-25 as a whole begins to appear more coherent. Tongues do serve as a sign for unbelievers in the straightforward sense that they alert the outsider to the presence of divine activity among the Corinthian believers.

Such an argument runs counter to the trends of recent decades, when an alternative solution to the puzzle has gained wide acceptance. There is agreement that the effect of tongues on the outsider, whose interest in the gospel is quenched by the experience, is one of alienation or repulsion. Tongues thus function as a negative sign of divine judgment. Such judgment will result from the outsider’s rejection of the gospel, a rejection prompted by the experience of hearing the Corinthians speak in tongues. Paul’s quotation in v. 21 from Isa. 28.11-12 is understood as a scriptural example of ‘tongues’ functioning in this way.⁵ In contrast, prophecy is thought to

standing in need of conversion, and in this article the term ‘outsider’ will subsequently be used to cover both.

3. JB, KJV, REB, RSV. The GNB opts for ‘You are crazy’, the NRSV and NIV for the slightly more ambiguous ‘You are out of your mind’.

4. There have been those who, without developing a comprehensive exegesis of 14.20-25 on its basis, have seen the background to Paul’s argument here, and/or his discussion of women prophesying with heads uncovered in 11.2-16, as ecstatic behaviour within Graeco-Roman religion. See F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), p. 105; E. Shüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1995), p. 227; R. and C. Kroeger, ‘An Inquiry into Evidence of Maenadism in the Corinthian Congregation’, in P. Achtemeier (ed.), *SBL Seminar Papers* 14.2 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), pp. 331-36; J. Painter, ‘Paul and the *pneumatikoi* at Corinth’, in M.D. Hooker and S.G. Wilson (eds.), *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C.K. Barrett* (London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 237-50 (245).

5. D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 108-17; Fee, *First Corinthians*, pp. 676-88; G. Hovenden, *Speaking in Tongues: The New Testament Evidence in Context* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 145-47; A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), pp. 1119-30; A. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), p. 140; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, p. 285. Although it has become widely accepted

function as a positive sign for believers, although this is understood in a number of ways. Some interpreters hold that the conversion of the outsider, through the laying bare of the secrets of the heart (v. 24), is a sure signal that God is truly present in the believing community. His favour rests upon his people.⁶ Others suggest that what is signified by prophecy is simply its own superiority over the gift of tongues,⁷ while yet others dilute the relationship between Paul's statement of principle in v. 22 and the conversion of the outsider in vv. 24-25. The latter is simply a by-product of prophecy addressed in the first instance to believers within the assembly.⁸

If we are to provide an alternative to this emerging consensus, the translation of the verb *μαίνεσθε* (v. 23) is indeed a vital issue. For if it is translated 'You are mad', it is most naturally taken by contemporary English-speaking readers as an expression of distaste that equates speaking in tongues with mental illness or instability. If this were an adequate translation, understanding tongues to be a sign of divine judgment that produces alienation or repulsion on the part of outsiders would indeed appear to be the best way to make sense of Paul's argument. Yet, while linguistically accurate, this common translation may well be culturally misleading. The Greek noun *μανία* and its related terms certainly denote madness, but, whereas in modern English the idea of madness simply implies a condition caused by mental illness,⁹ in Greek the range of meanings conveyed by the word is rather wider. Under *μανία* Liddel and Scott include the definition 'enthusiasm, inspired frenzy',¹⁰ and under the verb *μαίνομαι* they include 'ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μ. to be inspired by...to be driven mad by...'¹¹ The same set of

in recent decades, this interpretation is not, in fact, a new one. See, for example, J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), pp. 331-34.

6. Barrett, *First Corinthians*, p. 324; Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 683; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 651; Schrage, *An die Korinther*, p. 409.

7. K.O. Sandnes, 'Prophecy—A Sign for Believers (1 Cor. XIV, 20-25)', *Bib* 17 (1996), pp. 1-15 (14-15).

8. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 116-17; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, p. 285.

9. Common insanity is certainly what is intended in the other examples of the use of these terms in the New Testament. See Jn 10.20, Acts 12.15, Acts 26.24-25. Schrage, *An die Korinther*, p. 410 n. 214, feels that the plainly negative sense of these examples tells against any possible positive use in 1 Cor. 14.23. However, in all these cases a negative reaction is prompted not by behaviour that could in any sense be construed as belonging to the same social category as speaking in tongues, but by what the hearer regards as the literally unbelievable content of perfectly intelligible statements.

10. LSJ, p. 1079.

11. LSJ, p. 1073. BAGD simply fails to register the religious dimension of these

terms was able to denote both mental illness and divine inspiration because ancient society recognized that, far from being opposites, these two conditions could be very much akin to one another. Commenting upon the prevailing attitude towards the mentally ill in classical Athens, E.R. Dodds states,

Yet if the insane were shunned, they were also regarded with a respect amounting to awe; for they were in contact with the supernatural world, and could on occasion display powers denied to common men... The dividing line between common insanity and prophetic madness is in fact hard to draw.¹²

This double-edged nature of madness is neatly illustrated by an oration to the citizens of Tarsus by Dio Chrysostom (c. 50 CE–c.110 CE). He notes that they may not heed him because they will consider him a Cynic and therefore mad, but argues that if he really is mad (μαίνεσθαι) this is the very reason that they should listen to his advice. In the first instance Dio is clearly speaking of madness as insanity, but in the second instance of madness as divine inspiration.¹³ If the reaction of the outsider to tongues were understood in this second way, as a social categorization of speaking in tongues as parallel to phenomena of divine inspiration within the world of Graeco-Roman religion, then other ways of understanding Paul's argument might emerge. It would not necessarily follow that the outsider's reaction is one of alienation or repulsion. A crucial issue for the interpretation of 1 Cor. 14.20–25 is therefore whether such a social categorization of tongues is credible. Are there sufficient analogies between tongues and established phenomena in Graeco-Roman religion to allow it?

*Speaking in Tongues and Graeco-Roman Religion:
The Current Debate*

In his dialogue *Phaedrus*, Plato identifies four different kinds of potentially beneficial madness or inspiration sent by the gods.¹⁴ Poetic madness inspired

terms in Graeco-Roman culture, perhaps on the assumption that all the New Testament uses refer to common insanity.

12. E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 68.

13. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 34.2–4. One of his translators notes that 'madness was early associated with divine inspiration and guidance'. See J.W. Cohoon and H.L. Crosby (trans.), *Dio Chrysostom*, VIII (London: W. Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), p. 340. (Unless otherwise stated, all other quotations from ancient works are from the LCL editions.)

14. Plato, *Phaedr.* 265B. See also Plato, *Tim.* 86E–87A and, for a later similar dis-

by the Muses and erotic madness inspired by Aphrodite and Eros need not concern us. However, prophetic madness, whose patron is Apollo, and cultic or ritual madness, whose patron is Dionysus, are both important potential analogies to speaking in tongues.¹⁵

Prophetic Madness

Also in *Phaedrus*, Plato has Socrates state that

the greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods. For the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when they have been mad (μᾶνεῖσαι) have conferred many splendid benefits upon Greece both in private and public affairs, but few or none when they have been in their right minds.¹⁶

This reference to divine madness as characteristic of the delivery of oracles appears all the more impressive as an analogy to speaking in tongues when it is placed alongside the traditional picture of the activities of the Pythia (prophetess) at Delphi. She is often pictured as prophesying in a frenzied ecstatic state, muttering incomprehensible sounds that would then be interpreted into Greek and placed into verse by attendant officials. Her unintelligible speech, with its requirement for interpretation, might be taken as parallel to tongues. However, in his 1978 book *The Delphic Oracle*, classicist Joseph Fontenrose sought to overturn this view. He offered a mundane Pythia, who herself calmly answered inquiries to the god without intermediary officials, and in plain prose that was rarely ambiguous or especially prescient. Those responses that Fontenrose was prepared to accept as probably genuine (those for which our source was composed within a lifetime of the date of the claimed delivery of the oracle) he finds to be ‘commonplace pronouncements’.¹⁷ Most aspects of this argument have

cussion of different kinds of madness, Plutarch, *Mor.* 758D-E.

15. See the treatment in Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, ch. 3 and the fine discussion in G. Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (ET; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), pp. 276-91.

16. Plato, *Phaedr.* 244A-B. C. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), p. 212, is puzzled by the reference here to the priestesses at Dodona since ‘the hellenistic evidence is unanimous that they practised various forms of technical divination’. However, given that we are concerned with how an outsider might have allocated the gift of tongues to a social category, the perception that there was prophetic madness at Dodona is significant irrespective of the historical reality.

17. J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 9. He

been well received by scholars.¹⁸ While there remains some evidence that the oracles were perceived as ambiguous, particularly in early centuries,¹⁹ Fontenrose demonstrates convincingly that the Pythia is unlikely to have uttered incomprehensible speech.²⁰ In this sense, prophetic madness provides no analogy to speaking in tongues.

Yet there remains Plato's description of the Pythia's state when prophesying as madness, the same vocabulary as in 1 Cor. 14.23. While Fontenrose succeeds in his attempt to dissolve the picture of the Pythia violently flinging herself around the adyton of the temple, our evidence still indicates a state of consciousness somewhat different from normal. Fontenrose suggests that the Pythia sat 'calmly on the tripod',²¹ but what he actually demonstrates is that she did not become positively frenzied. All the possibilities in between these two extremes of behaviour are simply discounted. Plutarch (c. 45 CE–c. 120 CE), who was a priest at Delphi, and who is our best source on Delphic matters in the Graeco-Roman period, compares the peace and calm felt by the Pythia after an oracular session to that felt by warriors after battle or a bacchant or corybant after the dance.²² While dismissing accounts of the Pythia ranting and raving, Simon Price suggests,

makes similar arguments in relation to the oracle at Didyma. See J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle, Cult and Companions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 84.

18. M. Dillon, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 81-86; S. Levin, 'The Old Greek Oracles in Decline', *ANRW*, II.18.2, pp. 1599-649 (1612); J.D. Mikalson, 'Review of J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*', *Classical World* 74 (1980–81), pp. 179-80; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, pp. 276-79.

19. F.E. Brenk, 'Review of J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*', *Gnomon* 52 (1980), p. 705 points to Plutarch, *Mor.* 407B-C.

20. S. Price, 'Delphi and Divination', in P.E. Easterling and J.V. Muir (eds.), *Greek Religion and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 128-54 (142) points out that the rare allegations of bribery and corruption at Delphi are levelled against the Pythia. If she had spoken incomprehensibly, then these allegations would surely have been levelled against the attendants who interpreted her words.

21. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, p. 204.

22. Plutarch, *Mor.* 759B. See also *Mor.* 763A. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, p. 211, does acknowledge this reference in Plutarch but comments that it represents 'a return to normal calm after excitement, not a return to sanity after madness or frenzy or delirium. The Pythia experienced enthusiasm, but not an uncontrolled and irrational frenzy.' I have difficulty in conceiving the experience of a warrior in battle as a little mild excitement or enthusiasm.

‘she did not have a normal conversation with the enquirer’.²³ He supports this position by his interpretation of the infamous episode when a consultation gone awry resulted in the death of the Pythia (Plutarch, *Mor.* 438B). Price comments, ‘her voice was supposed to change, but not in this bizarre and extreme manner’.²⁴ It thus seems that the Pythia’s prophetic madness ‘did have some perceptible physical and mental symptoms’.²⁵

Further, there is an entire Platonic tradition that understands not only prophetic madness, but also the inspiration enjoyed by poets, statesmen and even philosophers to bypass the rational faculties. Those who are inspired do not know what they say.²⁶ This tradition finds even more explicit expression in Philo of Alexandria (c. 15 BCE–c. 45 CE), who applies it to the Old Testament prophets. In one passage Philo notes that ‘the mind (ὁ νοῦς) is evicted at the arrival of the divine spirit, but when that departs the mind returns to its tenancy’.²⁷ Another passage says of a prophet that, when inspiration comes, ‘the reason withdraws and surrenders the citadel of the soul to a new visitor and tenant, the Divine Spirit which plays upon the vocal organism and dictates words which clearly express its prophetic message’.²⁸ It is true that Plutarch disputes this theory of inspiration in relation to the

23. Price, ‘Delphi and Divination’, p. 136.

24. Price, ‘Delphi and Divination’, p. 137. A bizarre voice during the mantic session was one of the first indications that all was not well with the Pythia. In order to please a foreign delegation, the session had proceeded despite unfavourable indications during the preparatory rituals.

25. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, p. 109. See also Brenk, ‘Review’, *Gnomon* 52 (1980), p. 705, who comments that Fontenrose underplays Plutarch’s evidence.

26. Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, pp. 282–88 marshals the evidence. See Plato, *Apol.* 22B–C; *Ion* 533D–35A; *Meno* 99C–D; *Phaedr.* 250A; *Tim.* 72A–B.

27. Philo, *Rer. Div. Her.* 265.

28. Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 4.49. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, pp. 143–46, regards Philo’s views on inspiration as idiosyncratic because Philo is exclusively concerned with the impact of inspiration on the mind rather than visible, observable symptoms such as dancing and shouting. Yet here I treat him as part of the Platonic tradition because he does not think that the mind is active when one is in a state of inspiration. D.B. Martin, ‘Tongues of Angels and Other Status Indicators’, *JAAR* 59 (1991), pp. 547–89 (573), treats Philo as a variation on the Platonic tradition as, although Philo agrees that the mind is inactive during prophecy, ‘this corresponds (as it did for Plato) to a hierarchy of *nous* over *body* and (as it did not for Philo) *pneuma* over *nous*’. These differing assessments bring home the degree to which the results of comparison are shaped by the questions and interests of the scholars making them. See below n. 51.

Pythia, arguing that she is not directly possessed by the god, who merely gives her visions while the words spoken are her own. However, he is arguing against an alternative view that holds that the god himself ‘enters into the bodies of his prophets and prompts their utterances, employing their mouths and voices as instruments’.²⁹

The significance of all of this for the interpretation of 1 Cor. 14.23 is, of course, that Paul holds that the mind is not involved in the production of uninterpreted tongues (1 Cor. 14.14). If he prays in tongues his spirit is active, but his mind (ὁ νοῦς μου) is unproductive (ἄκαρπος).³⁰ ‘For Paul...ecstatic speech is talking without *nous*’.³¹ Paul departs from the Platonic tradition in not giving this passivity of the mind a positive evaluation. Ideally, the mind should be involved in prayer as well as one’s spirit (14.15), and he would rather speak five words in church with his mind than ten thousand in a tongue (14.19). Presumably one of the reasons that Paul regards prophecy as the greater gift is that, in producing the intelligible speech of prophecy, the inspiration of the Spirit engages rather than bypasses the human mind. Although our only access to the views of the Corinthians is through Paul’s words,³² it is possible, as Theissen suggests, that they too understand uninter-

29. Plutarch, *Mor.* 414E. This view is reported and rebutted as part of a dialogue by Lamprias, Plutarch’s brother. His opinions are generally taken as representing Plutarch’s own. Interestingly, Plutarch describes this view as childish (παιδικός). See also *Mor.* 397C and 404B, and the comments of Levin, ‘The Old Greek Oracles’, p. 1613.

30. Although Paul is clear that the mind is not involved in speaking in tongues, he does not consider that this leaves the tongue-speaker with no personal involvement. Even although they do not understand their own words, this verse suggests that those speaking in tongues pray with their spirits, and Paul earlier says that they edify themselves (14.4). For different views on the relationship between ‘my spirit’ and the Holy Spirit, see Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 670, and Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, pp. 1110–13.

31. Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, p. 287.

32. It is conceivable that, although Paul understood speaking in tongues as ‘talking without νοῦς’, the Corinthians understood it in some other way. Yet there is little in chs. 12–14 to suggest that Paul expects his readers to dispute his understanding of the nature of tongues. Rather, he seems to expect debate over his relatively low evaluation of the worth of this gift. Of course, there may also, as on other matters, have been more than one perspective within the church at Corinth on speaking in tongues. To speak of how ‘the Corinthians’ thought about a particular issue as if there were only a single opinion amongst them is therefore largely a matter of convenience. However, in chs. 12–14 Paul seems to be addressing a single viewpoint that he is concerned to counter. Even if it is not the only viewpoint in the church on speaking in tongues, it does seem to be the dominant one.

puted tongues as ‘talking without *nous*’.³³ If so, the difference between themselves and Paul is that they follow the Platonic tradition by placing a high value upon this. Their evaluation of the nature and status of tongues is influenced by factors that they have inherited from their pre-Christian religious understanding and experience. Prophetic madness in Graeco-Roman religion *does not* provide us with examples of incomprehensible speech, but it *does* provide us with an analogy for speaking in tongues in terms of its mode of inspiration.³⁴

Ritual Madness

References to divinely gifted madness occur regularly in sources that discuss the worship of Dionysus. The classic text is Euripides’ play *The Bacchae* (first performed 405 BCE), in which Pentheus, King of Thebes, resists the spread of Dionysiac worship among the women of his kingdom. He is unable to accept the temporary absence from their domestic roles of the women, who, in honour of the god, roam the hills with music and wild dancing. The condition of the worshippers is described as a divinely bestowed madness,³⁵ and the fitting punishment that Dionysus inflicts on Pentheus for resisting this appropriate madness is that he himself becomes

33. Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, p. 287 Theissen points out that the tension between the Platonic understanding and Paul’s insistence on the superiority of inspiration that engages the mind resurfaces in later Christian debates. Epiphanius, *Refutation of All the Heresies* 48.4.1 reports that Montanus regarded people as completely passive when the Spirit spoke through them, but that Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.3, thinks that true inspiration heightens the rational faculties rather than bypassing them.

34. Thus, the Platonic understanding of divine madness in general, and prophetic madness in particular, turns out to have more relevance for understanding speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians than it does for understanding prophecy. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, pp. 103-106, rightly disputes the suggestion of J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 247, that there is a parallel between those who have the gift of interpreting tongues and the προφήτης at Delphi who attended the Pythia and mediated her responses to enquirers. For Plato, the προφήτης is not inspired, since he uses his rational faculties. For Paul, the Holy Spirit inspires the speaker in tongues, the one who interprets and the prophet. In his view the use of the mind and inspiration are not mutually exclusive, and it is tongues, in his view the lesser gift, that does not involve the use of the mind.

35. Euripides, *Bacch.* 33, 299, 305. Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.79 tells the story of Scyles, king of Scythia, who is deposed because his subjects object to his participation in the madness of Dionysiac worship. In one of the Homeric hymns honouring him (1.17), Dionysus is described as γυναιμανές and thus as one who drives women mad.

insanely mad.³⁶ In this state he is torn to pieces by the women, whom Dionysus causes to perceive the king as a predatory animal. In later sources, closer to the era of the New Testament, the details of Dionysiac worship suggested by this admittedly literary text are confirmed. We have a reference in Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE) to biannual festivals in many Greek cities,³⁷ and references in both Pausanias (late second century CE) and Plutarch to one such festival at Delphi.³⁸ The features considered characteristic of the worship of the cult are ‘outbursts of shouting, the music of cymbals, drums and flutes, and frenzied dancing, sometimes also accompanied by frenzied cries’.³⁹ The description of this state in terms of divine madness also persists. Pausanias remarks that the female worshippers of Dionysus are said to be maddened (μαίνεσθαι) by his inspiration.⁴⁰ He also comments that all women who are mad (μαίνονται) in honour of Dionysus are known as Thyads after Thyias, daughter of Castalius, who was the very first priestess of Dionysus.⁴¹ Plutarch tells an old story of the women of Phocis in time of war wandering the countryside at night in a state of Bacchic madness (ἐκμανεῖσαι).⁴²

Of particular interest in relation to speaking in tongues are the cries that often accompanied the worship of Dionysus. Euripides tells of the worshippers’ cry of *Εὐοῖ*, which seems to have no meaning.⁴³ In his famous account of the ‘Bacchanalian Conspiracy’ of 187–186 BCE, Livy does not specifically refer to this phrase, but he does mention shouting.⁴⁴ Plutarch also does the same,⁴⁵ while there are specific references to the phrase *Εὐοῖ* in Diodorus Siculus and the poems of Catullus.⁴⁶ Christopher Forbes dis-

36. On divine madness sent not as inspiration but as punishment, see also Euripides, *Orest.* lines 835, 845.

37. Diodorus Siculus 4.3.3.

38. Pausanias, *Descr.* 10.4.3; Plutarch, *Mor.* 953D.

39. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, p. 135. Many of these features are also characteristic of the worship of Cybele such that much of what is said here of madness in the cult of Dionysus could also be said of her cult.

40. Pausanias, *Descr.* 2.7.5.

41. Pausanias, *Descr.* 6.6.4.

42. Plutarch, *Mor.* 249E-F.

43. Euripides, *Bacch.* line 142. It is also used as an adjective in lines 158, 238 and 579, and apparently as an alternative title for the god in line 566.

44. Livy 39.8.5-8.

45. Plutarch, *Mor.* 364E.

46. Diodorus Siculus 4.3.3 describes the worshippers of Dionysus as *εὐαζούσας*, while Catullus, another figure of the first century BCE, poem 64, line 255 refers directly to the cry.

misses this as an analogy to speaking in tongues on the grounds that ‘Dionysiac cries were invocations first, and acclamations as well. Christian glossolalia was not invocation... nor does it appear to have been primarily acclamatory.’⁴⁷ The same reason is given for discounting a reference to incomprehensible speech in Lucian’s *Menippus*,⁴⁸ and a reference to incomprehensible inspired speech in Lucian’s account of Alexander of Abonoteichos is dismissed as irrelevant on the grounds that it belongs to the second century CE.⁴⁹

Interpreting the Evidence

Such negative conclusions are characteristic of Forbes’s general evaluation of the relationship between speaking in tongues and potential analogies in Graeco-Roman religion. He puts similar arguments in regard to all oracular activity, to worship in the mystery cults and to any other evidence drawn from what might be described as popular religion. Indeed, he is highly successful in demonstrating that there is nothing in Graeco-Roman religion *precisely* equivalent to speaking in tongues.⁵⁰ Yet, in all comparisons between religious traditions, those making the comparisons perceive patterns of similarity and difference in relation to their own questions and interests.⁵¹ In asking whether it is credible that the hypothetical outsider of 1 Cor. 14.23 might categorize speaking in tongues as parallel to the phenomena in Graeco-Roman religion described above, we are not seeking any precise equivalent. While it may be true that the Dionysiac cries were invocations

47. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, p. 147.

48. Lucian, *Men.* 7-9.

49. Lucian, *Alex.* 9.12-14. Lucian lived c. 125CE – c. 180CE. See Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, p. 152, and p. 2 where he takes as a matter of scholarly consensus that there was between the middle of the first century and the end of the second ‘a widespread rise in the credibility of the miraculous, and an increasing fascination with occult and ecstatic phenomena, especially as evidence of divine powers or divine activity’. In fact, this belief in the rise of the irrational is a controversial one. For a contrary view, see R.L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Viking Penguin, 1986), pp. 64-65 and Martin, ‘Tongues of Angels’, p. 559 n. 22.

50. Hoveneden, *Speaking in Tongues*, pp. 6-30, makes a similar assessment.

51. J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 51, points out that, when used well, comparison always involves a third term. It can be expressed in formulations such as ‘x resembles y more than z with respect to...’ or ‘x resembles y more than w resembles z with respect to...’ Smith comments that ‘in the case of an academic comparison the “with respect to” is most frequently the scholar’s interest, be this expressed in a question, a theory, or a model’.

and Christian tongues were not, this is not our question. We are asking rather whether an individual might have considered them to belong to the same general category of behaviour. In disputing Forbes's conclusions, Dale Martin observes that

Forbes is looking for the same 'thing' as Christian glossolalia...instead of looking, as I do, for comparable activities by means of which some outsider could have conceivably made sense of early Christian glossolalia. In other words, I am not concerned about the 'essence' of the phenomenon but simply how speech acts would have been socially 'placed' by most observers within the society.⁵²

It is that social placing of tongues by association with the phenomenon of divine madness in Graeco-Roman religion that is made by the outsider of 1 Cor. 14.23. In this sense, prophetic madness and ritual madness provide comparable modes of inspiration, and comparable examples of incomprehensible speech, to speaking in tongues.⁵³

The Exegetical Implications of Divine Madness

Given these conclusions, it is likely that the exclamation of the outsider of 1 Cor. 14.23 refers to divine madness rather than to common insanity. If that is the case, then the reaction of the outsider to tongues need not be one of alienation or repulsion. Instead it is a positive evaluation: recognition that in exercising the gift of tongues the Corinthians are divinely inspired. Speaking in tongues would then function as a sign for unbelievers by alerting them to the presence of divine activity among the Corinthians. On this view, 'for those seeing and hearing the tongue-speakers, the phenom-

52. Martin, 'Tongues of Angels', p. 548 n. 4.

53. Generally, prophetic madness and ritual madness do seem to be distinct. However, Euripides, *Bacch.* line 298 claims that Bacchic frenzy and ecstasy (τὸ μανιῶδες) contain much prophecy. Despite some evidence that Dionysus was known as an oracle god in Thrace (Herodotus 7.111), and in one part of Greece (Pausanias, *Descr.* 10.33.11), Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, p. 128, rightly insists that in its context this functions as another proof of divinity rather than as a suggestion that prophecy was one of Dionysus's main roles. Yet although there is no evidence that Dionysus gave oracles there, his tomb was in the adyton at Delphi (Plutarch, *Mor.* 365A), and Plutarch states that Delphi belonged as much to him as to Apollo (*Mor.* 388E). Plutarch also quotes line 298 from *The Bacchae* (*Mor.* 432E). This blurring of the boundaries between its different varieties suggests a certain imprecision in the use of the category of divine madness and makes the social placing of tongues within that general category all the more plausible.

enon was undoubtedly impressive'.⁵⁴ The verb *μαίνεσθε* would best be translated not as 'You are mad', but as 'You are inspired'. This might fail fully to capture the uncanny or awe-inspiring quality of such manifestations of the divine, but it would be better than the misleading alternatives. For translations such as 'You are mad', 'You are raving' or 'You are possessed' would all convey pejorative connotations absent from the Greek.⁵⁵

The obvious objection to such a translation is to ask why, if the outsider evaluates tongues positively, does Paul prefer prophecy? The answer is that, although the response of the outsider is positive in its own terms, from Paul's perspective it is less than satisfactory. It is something of a pyrrhic victory for an outsider to recognize the activity of the Holy Spirit as equivalent to manifestations of divine presence in the cults of idols. As a sign, tongues do not signify nearly enough.⁵⁶ Precisely because they are incomprehensible, uninterpreted tongues do not communicate the gospel. They leave outsiders to evaluate the phenomenon for themselves, and risk the response "Oh, this is just another group like the devotees of Dionysus or Cybele"—one more consumer option in a pluralistic religious market'.⁵⁷ Tongues do not help the outsider to make what is, for Paul, the vital distinction between Christian worship and that of mute idols (12.2). Paul the missionary wants far more than recognition of the Corinthian church as one more legitimate cult among many. He is looking for conversion, and it is only through prophecy that this greater response is achieved. 'In prophecy and its results the believer may see a real sign of the presence of God. For where God is, there men find life and are transformed.'⁵⁸

This line of interpretation has a major advantage over the view that

54. L.T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), p. 125.

55. I regard 'You are inspired' as the least unsatisfactory available translation. All the alternatives I can think of are either pejorative or, as in this case, rather too bland. 'You are out of your mind' (NIV, NRSV) does reflect, to some degree, Paul's sense that the mind plays no active part in speaking in tongues (14.14), but still carries pejorative overtones in standard contemporary English usage.

56. On the problems of interpretation facing observers of divine activity within Graeco-Roman religion, see J. Gould, 'On Making Sense of Greek Religion', in P.E. Easterling and J.V. Muir (eds.), *Greek Religion and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 1-33 (8-14). Plutarch, *Mor.* 407B-C refers to a saying in Heracleitus that, at Delphi, Apollo does not tell or conceal but signifies (οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει).

57. Hays, *First Corinthians*, pp. 238-39.

58. P. Roberts, 'A Sign—Christian or Pagan?', *ExpTim* 90 (1979), pp. 199-203 (202).

tongues are a sign of judgment in that it enables the term ‘sign’ (σημείον) to maintain a consistent sense. In both uses of the term in v. 22 what is signalled to the outsider is divine presence or activity among the Corinthians, whereas, on the alternative view, it is only prophecy that does this. On such a view, tongues are a negative sign of judgment whereas prophecy is a positive sign, indicating God’s presence. The reader has to cope with a change of meaning that comes without warning.⁵⁹ Further, if tongues are a negative sign of judgment for unbelievers it is difficult to see how they function. How are unbelievers to know that the incomprehensible tongues they hear indicate divine displeasure?⁶⁰ This problem prompts the suggestion of alternative senses of ‘sign’, but these alternative senses usually turn tongues into a sign ‘about’ unbelievers rather than ‘to’ or ‘for’ them.⁶¹ Signs

59. Some feel that this interpretation also involves a dubious shift in the meaning of the term ἄπιστος, which indicates both those who have heard the gospel and rejected it in v. 22 and those about to become believers in vv. 23-25. See Roberts, ‘A Sign’, p. 200 and the response of Grudem, ‘Prophecy and Tongues’, pp. 392-93. See also J.P. Sweet, ‘A Sign for Unbelievers: Paul’s Attitude to Glossolalia’, *NTS* 13 (1966), pp. 240-57 (242). Barrett, *First Corinthians*, p. 324, achieves consistency by taking both tongues and prophecy to be negative signs. The Corinthians incur judgment by closing their ears to prophecy because of their preference for tongues. In this sense prophecy is a negative sign for them. I know of no one else who has adopted this solution, which seems to sever the principles of v. 22 from the illustrations that follow in vv. 23-25.

60. Roberts, ‘A Sign’, p. 200, suggests, ‘It is hardly fair to judge or condemn unbelievers on the basis of an unintelligible message uttered by Christians’. This objection also ultimately applies to the proposal of Schrage, *An die Korinther*, pp. 405-11, that tongues are a sign concerning God’s relationship with the community, which signal different things to different types of observer, namely ‘die Aboder aber Anwesenheit Gottes und seines Geistes’ (p. 407). To the outsider uninterpreted tongues signal only madness and divine absence, but to the Christian they are a manifestation of divine presence. Tongues thus signal something to the outsider about the community, rather than something directly about the outsider’s own position before God. See also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 650. However, the consequence for outsiders, who unwittingly land under judgment through an erroneously negative assessment of God’s people prompted by the experience of hearing uninterpreted tongues, is the same as in the majority view. They ‘können darum nur in ihrem Unglauben bestätigt werden’ (p. 406).

61. Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, pp. 74-80 turns vv. 20-25 into a debate between Paul and the Corinthians about how one recognizes that an individual has come to faith. For the Corinthians, this becomes clear if someone speaks in tongues or interprets them, but for Paul only prophecy can make a sure judgment about new entrants to the community. However, as Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 113 comments, ‘the text focuses attention not on confirmation of the church’s assessment of the individual, but of the individual’s reaction before the two phenomena, tongues and prophecy’.

can certainly be positive, negative or simultaneously positive to one group and negative to another. A sign is ‘an indication of God’s attitude’,⁶² but it does not leave those to whom it is directed ignorant of the fact that it is a sign. Paul’s dative construction demands that tongues signify something to unbelievers.⁶³

Despite these advantages, the view that tongues prompt a positive response from the outsider is usually rejected.⁶⁴ This is true even among scholars who recognize that the exclamation of v. 23 is not an accusation of common insanity but an assertion of the equivalence of speaking in tongues to phenomena within Graeco-Roman religion. It seems that there is a failure to recognize the exegetical implications of divine madness. In my view there are three reasons for this. The first is a failure properly to distinguish from each other Paul’s evaluation of tongues, that of the Corinthians and that of the outsider. The second is a failure to recognize the degree to which taking tongues to be a negative sign strains the relationship between vv. 20-25 and Paul’s wider argument. The third is the conviction that Paul’s quotation of Isa. 28.11-12 in v. 21 requires tongues to serve as a negative sign. We shall examine each in turn.

Differing Evaluations of Tongues: Paul, the Corinthians and the Outsider Barrett suggests that the outsider may recognize ‘the supernatural origin of tongues’, and hints at a parallel with the worship of Dionysus, but translates *μᾶίνεσθε* as ‘You are possessed’, arguing that tongues serve to harden the unbeliever.⁶⁵ Fee believes that the public use of tongues drives the

62. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 115. See also Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 682; Grudem, ‘Prophecy and Tongues’, pp. 389-91, and D.E. Lanier, ‘With Stammering Lips and Another Tongue: 1 Cor. 14.20-22 and Isa. 28.11-12’, *CTR* 5 (1991), pp.259-85 (273-74).

63. In the LXX version of Deut. 28.46 the curses that will fall upon Israel for disobedience to the law are described as ἐν σοὶ σημεῖα. This is a clear case of signs signifying God’s negative attitude, but these signs are given in the context of a covenant relationship. They ought to be received and understood as signs by the people. Sandnes, ‘Prophecy—A Sign for Believers’, p. 12, suggests that tongues are a sign for unbelievers in the simple sense that their outsider-hood is confirmed. This seems to amount to tongues telling outsiders that they are outsiders. As they presumably already know this it is again difficult to see any genuine sense in which tongues function as a sign.

64. Hays, *First Corinthians*, pp. 238-39, Johnson, *Religious Experience*, p. 125, and Roberts, ‘A Sign’, pp. 199-203, are the only interpreters of whom I am aware that take tongues as a sign prompting a positive response.

65. Barrett, *First Corinthians*, pp. 323-27. See also Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, pp. 284-85.

unbeliever away and translates $\mu\acute{\alpha}\iota\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$ as ‘madness’, yet suggests that this is the result of recognizing in tongues something parallel to phenomena in the mystery cults.⁶⁶ The outsider is apparently expected to react negatively to something that he or she finds analogous to features of Graeco-Roman religion.⁶⁷ Even allowing for the fact that different individuals might have different views, this scarcely seems likely.⁶⁸ As we have seen, the practices described in terms of divine madness had been an accepted part of Hellenistic religion for centuries. To be sure, they were not regarded as safe or tame, for contact with the divine never was, and, on occasion, madness sent by the gods could be a curse rather than a blessing.⁶⁹ However, these practices were not on that account to be despised or rejected. As the fate of King Pentheus in *The Bacchae* illustrates, to reject divine madness was to risk being overwhelmed and destroyed by that same madness.⁷⁰

The false move made by exegetes in expecting the outsider to evaluate divine madness negatively reflects a failure clearly to distinguish Paul’s own views from those he ascribes to the outsider. The outsider does not present Paul’s own perspective.⁷¹ Rather, in v. 23 Paul presents something

66. Fee, *First Corinthians*, pp. 682, 685. See also Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, pp. 1126-27.

67. This is expressed particularly strongly by Schrage, *An die Korinther*, p. 410, who notes the connection between ecstatic behaviour and madness in Graeco-Roman religion (n. 212), but comments that ‘wo nur ekstatisch gejauchzt, gebetet oder geschrien wird und man kein einziges vernünftiges Wort vernehmen kann, ist es kein Wunder, wenn Nichtchristen die Christen für Wahnsinnige halten und abgestoßen werden’.

68. J. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, II (Oxford: J.H. Parker; London: J. Rivington, 1839), pp. 504-507, does envisage different reactions from different outsiders. Tongues will impress some but others will mock, and it is the response of the latter that is recorded in v. 23. This response comes not from the nature of the sign but the folly of the outsider. Chrysostom thus grasps that tongues are intended to signify divine presence, but struggles to integrate this insight with v. 23 because he takes $\mu\acute{\alpha}\iota\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$ as a reference to common insanity.

69. Plutarch, *Mor.* 249B-E, 821B; Diodorus Siculus 3.65; Dio Chrysostom 4.112, 27.2.

70. R.S. Kramer, ‘Ecstasy and Possession: The Attraction of Women to the Cult of Dionysus’, *HTR* 72 (1979), pp. 55-80: ‘Those who accept the call of the god and surrender to temporary possession suffer no harm, while those who struggle against the god invoke a second level of possession far more dangerous than the first. It is insane to be sane, sane to be insane’ (p. 67).

71. Schrage, *An die Korinther*, p. 410, misses this point, suggesting that ‘von der anti-thetischen Struktur der beiden Beispiele her ist es ausgeschlossen, dem $\mu\acute{\alpha}\iota\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$ eine positive statt eine pejorative Bewertung abzugewinnen’. He is certainly correct that the

of what he presumes will be the outsider's reaction to uninterpreted tongues. Not surprisingly, his own measured assessment, reached as an apostle of Christ, is different from this. For Paul, of course, does think that $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\iota\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$ is an inadequate or undesirable response and for that reason prefers prophecy to tongues, correcting the Corinthians' opposite view. For Paul, for the outsider to say $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\iota\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$ is indeed a negative outcome. Further, Paul would feel negatively about practices within Graeco-Roman religion described in terms of divine madness. Yet, in describing the response of the outsider, Paul has introduced a third voice, whose opinion of uninterpreted tongues cannot be assumed to resemble his own.⁷² A response that represents a negative outcome from Paul's perspective need not be viewed as negative from the perspective of the outsider.⁷³ Exegetes should also consider the position of the Corinthians. If Paul is disturbed by the use of uninterpreted tongues in their worship, and the outsider is alienated by it, having equated it with divine madness, what are we to make of the Corinthians' apparent enthusiasm for the practice? How have they come to embrace a practice that Paul deprecates and that unconverted members of Gentile society find alienating? Could the Corinthians be distinctive in their great esteem for tongues, or is it more likely to reflect a cultural preference that would be shared by Graeco-Roman society at large?

Forbes argues that the Corinthians are distinctive. The outsider interprets tongues as evidence of divine activity, but finds it 'frightening, off-putting, or merely strange'.⁷⁴ The Corinthians' esteem for tongues is a departure from the norms of Graeco-Roman society stimulated by a desire to imitate

reaction must be negative from Paul's perspective, but it does not follow that it must also be negative from the outsider's perspective.

72. Thus, Paul presents three different perspectives (his own, the Corinthians and that of the outsider) in his text. While we may assume that in his estimation Paul's presentation reflects reality, my argument concerns his presentation of these perspectives in the text, not a hypothetical reconstruction of a Corinthian or 'outsiders' viewpoint behind the text.

73. Sandnes, 'Prophecy—A Sign for Believers', pp. 12-15, rightly pays considerable attention to the question of from whose perspective the gifts of tongues and prophecy are being evaluated. Unfortunately, this leads him to argue that tongues and prophecy are both signs to both believers and unbelievers, but are interpreted differently by each group. This leads to a total and implausible reversal of the sense of v. 22 of which Sandnes says, 'this verse is not a denial that speaking in tongues is a sign to believers as well, or that prophecy also is a sign to the outsiders'.

74. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, p. 174.

‘a habit of the great leaders of the Christian movement’.⁷⁵ There is no reason to doubt that Paul introduced tongues to Corinth, and so, in a very general sense, that the Corinthians speak in tongues is indeed in imitation of him. Yet, in 1 Cor. 14 Paul seeks to check what he considers to be the Corinthians’ excessively high estimation for, and disorderly use of, tongues. He seeks to restrain their enthusiasm, and this enthusiasm requires an explanation. For the Corinthians to be so enthusiastic about tongues out of misguided loyalty to Paul would run counter to the tenor of much of the Corinthian correspondence. Far from rushing to imitate Paul at every point, at least some in the church were far from satisfied with his performance as an apostle.⁷⁶ There is also little evidence that the Corinthians experienced any particular tensions in their relationships with society at large.⁷⁷ On a range of issues, Paul seeks to distance them from the norms of Graeco-Roman society.⁷⁸ Those against whom Paul is arguing may have been interested in stressing the superiority of their own religious experience over that of outsiders, but on the grounds of their superlative fulfilment of the norms of Graeco-Roman society, not their rejection of them.⁷⁹

There are also more general reasons to doubt the plausibility of the view that the Corinthians’ enthusiasm for tongues was counter-cultural. We have little evidence of negative reactions to Christianity in the first century because of the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit.⁸⁰ Indeed, Martin points

75. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, p. 173.

76. See 1 Cor. 4 and 9, 2 Cor. 11 and 12.

77. See J.M.G. Barclay, ‘Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity’, *JSNT* 47 (1992), pp. 49-74.

78. V.P. Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 10, comments that Paul’s task in 1 Corinthians was to help the congregation reckon with the world ‘as it continued to be present in the lives of believers, and therefore within the church itself. Especially in the ways they related to one another and to their leaders (including Paul), and in certain of their congregational structures and practices, the Corinthian Christians continued to be influenced by the social patterns and conventions of Roman Corinth.’

79. See 1 Cor. 4.8-10: ‘You are held in honour, but we in disrepute’. Barclay, ‘Social Contrasts’, p. 70, comments that their experience of the Spirit seemed to the Corinthians ‘a deeper or richer experience of divine power than they had known before in Graeco-Roman religion. Yet this did not necessarily annul the claims of others—prophets, poets, seers and philosophers—to similar experiences of ecstasy or inspiration’. They have a sense of distinction and superiority without a sense of hostility.

80. The exception would be the charge of drunkenness in Acts 2.13, but whether Paul and Luke understand tongues to be ‘the same thing’ is highly debatable. See Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, pp. 970-88 for a detailed discussion of different views of

out that, except in societies stamped by a modern concept of rationality, esoteric speech acts are rarely if ever regarded as indications of marginality or low status.⁸¹ On the contrary, they are a source of status for their practitioners. Martin also points out that, in the course of his discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor. 12–14, Paul employs the image of the church as a body (12.12–31a). This image is commonly used in Graeco-Roman literature to represent society as a natural hierarchy and so to justify the status quo,⁸² but Paul instead uses it to suggest that within the church greater respect should be accorded to those normally considered to be of low status. If Paul was trying to push the Corinthian Christians back into more socially acceptable behaviour by calling on them to revise their evaluation of tongues in a downwards direction, then this subversive use of the image of the body is an odd argument to present. It seems more likely that Paul's attempt to revise the Corinthians' high view of tongues is part of a wider attempt to undermine their ideas about status. The Corinthians' enthusiasm for tongues represents not a departure from conventional social values but an expression of them. These values they share with the outsider, who also evaluates tongues positively, but not with Paul.

Paul's Wider Argument in Chapter 14

If Paul did intend to say that tongues serve as a negative sign of judgment that drive away the outsider, some features of his argument in other parts of ch. 14 are difficult to explain. If the public use of the gift of tongues can have such disastrous consequences, it becomes difficult to see why Paul does not encourage the Corinthians to abandon it entirely. In fact, he explicitly instructs them that tongues are not to be forbidden (14.39b). True, this comes after Paul's instructions as to the appropriate ways of worship (vv. 26–33). He is speaking now of interpreted tongues, spoken one at a time in orderly fashion (v. 27), whereas in v. 22 the outsider apparently hears uninterpreted tongues spoken by all simultaneously. Yet one wonders about the reaction of the outsider even to interpreted, orderly tongues. Is it plausible to suppose that uninterpreted tongues produce alienation, but that interpreted tongues are entirely unobjectionable? Even with interpreted tongues, the experience for the outsider begins with hearing

the nature of tongues in 1 Cor. 12–14.

81. Martin, 'Tongues of Angels', pp. 549–58.

82. Martin, 'Tongues of Angels', pp. 563–69, who cites, among others, Livy 2.32.7–11 and Polyaeus, *Stratagems of War* 3.9.22. See also D. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), ch. 4.

unintelligible speech. Interpretation may help, but can it remove the distaste for the phenomenon expressed in v. 23? Why has the problem of social unacceptability vanished? Paul's argument does not seem to be entirely consistent.

Yet if *μαίνεσθε* is regarded as positive reaction from the outsider's perspective, then this apparent inconsistency vanishes. Paul's problem in v. 23 is not that the outsider is alienated or driven away by tongues, but that they are unintelligible and do not communicate the gospel. He can later allow interpreted tongues, as well as prophecy, since interpretation overcomes this problem. Paul is engaged in a discourse concerning *relative* superiority and *relative* advantage. Tongues may be viewed in a more negative light than prophecy, but they are not viewed negatively in absolute terms. This also holds true for Paul's argument in vv. 1-19. Here he vigorously asserts the superiority of prophecy over tongues, and any reading of these verses that failed fully to acknowledge the primacy of prophecy would be inadequate. Yet Paul can still give thanks that he speaks in tongues more than any of the Corinthians (14.18), and tongues are portrayed as the uttering of mysteries to God in the Spirit (14.2), a characterization scarcely to be described as derogatory. A reading that took Paul's negative evaluation of tongues to be absolute rather than relative would also be misguided.⁸³

Taking the reaction of v. 23 to be a positive one from the outsider's perspective thus allows vv. 20-25 to integrate more fully into Paul's wider argument. In vv. 20-25, Paul pursues the same clear and straightforward rhetorical strategy as in vv. 1-19.⁸⁴ There he demonstrated that, due to its

83. W. Grudem, 'Prophecy and Tongues', p. 393, rightly comments that 'to use Paul's discussion of an *abuse* of tongues in 14.20-23 as the basis for a general polemic against all other (acceptable) uses of tongues is quite contrary to the entire context in 1 Cor. 12-14'. J.F.M. Smit, 'Tongues and Prophecy: Deciphering 1 Cor. 14.22', *Bib 75* (1994), pp. 175-90, ignores this. He argues, 'So the tongues, regarded as a sign of recognition, are proper not to the believers, but to the unbelievers...the thesis is simple: faced with ecstatic speakers the ordinary observer does not think of believers, but unbelievers ...the glossolaly of the believers bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the ecstatic utterances, present everywhere in the pagan environment' (p.187). Thus, Smit recognizes that *μαίνεσθε* refers to divine madness rather than common insanity but implicitly draws from this the false conclusion that Christians should avoid tongues.

84. Both Smit, 'Tongues and Prophecy', pp. 178-82, and Johansen, 'Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers?', pp. 186-90, detect considerably more complex rhetorical patterns, with Smit drawing extensively on ancient rhetorical handbooks in his reconstruction of Paul's position.

intelligibility, prophecy is more effective than tongues in building up the church. Here he demonstrates that it is more effective than tongues in producing conversion for the same reason. Conversion provides a second criterion in relation to which prophecy proves superior. One wonders whether this might have been a surprise to the Corinthians. If they valued speaking in tongues over other gifts, perceiving it as a high-status activity, they may have thought tongues an adequate evangelistic agency. They may have been gratified that an outsider found their worship attractive and recognized the divine origin of their favourite gift. Paul reminds them sharply that conversion involves much more than this, and, in the process of doing so, asserts the importance of winning converts. For Paul's demonstration in vv. 20-25 of the superior effectiveness of prophecy in producing conversion forms the climax of his whole argument. The τί οὖν ἐστίν, ἀδελφοί; of v. 26 heralds not more discussion, but instead practical instructions concerning the conduct of worship based on what has been argued previously. Paul clearly regards his discussion of conversion as having clinched his case.⁸⁵

Paul's Use of Isaiah 28.11-12 in 1 Corinthians 14.21

Even before one considers its function in Paul's argument, this quotation from Isaiah presents extraordinary difficulties. It is not easy to interpret the verse in its original context, and the wordings of the MT and the LXX differ substantially from each other. Paul's version differs in significant ways from either, matching no known text of Isaiah.⁸⁶ This has provoked debate concerning Paul's use of the Old Testament. Is the context of the verse in Isaiah significant for Paul's meaning, or does he quote out of context so that to understand Paul's purpose in using this verse we should focus not on Isaiah but on Paul's particular wording? Those who dispute the view that tongues serve as a negative sign of divine judgment tend to assume that Paul quotes out of context,⁸⁷ those who accept it tend to regard the context in Isaiah as significant. Indeed, for some interpreters, especially those holding conservative theological views, this has been a vital issue,

85. See W. Richardson, 'Liturgical Order and Glossolalia in 1 Cor. 14.26C-33A', *NTS* 32 (1986), pp. 144-53 (146).

86. Origen, *Philocalia* 9.2, claims to have found something similar to Paul's version in Aquila's translation, while Jerome, *Commentariorum in Esaias* 9.4, notes that Symmachus and Theodotion also diverge from the LXX.

87. See Johanson, 'Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers?', pp. 182-83, and Roberts, 'A Sign', p. 201.

helping to determine their reading of vv. 20-25 as a whole.⁸⁸ If it is clear that in Isaiah ‘the stammering tongues were an unmistakable sign of God’s judgment’,⁸⁹ then this is also Paul’s point. Paul must not be seen to take liberties with scripture. Yet, I will argue, whichever of these views one holds about Paul’s use of scripture, to take tongues as a negative sign of divine judgment is not the most satisfactory available solution. I have two alternative interpretations of 14.21 to offer, both of which support the view that the response of the outsider to hearing tongues is positive.⁹⁰ The first of these interpretations does largely discount the context in Isaiah in favour of attention to Paul’s particular wording. The second also pays attention to Paul’s wording, but it is consistent with the context in Isaiah. Indeed, I will argue that in certain respects it is more respectful of that context than the majority view. Translated into English, the three versions are as follows:⁹¹

<i>Paul</i>	<i>MT</i>	<i>LXX</i>
By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people	Truly with a stammering lip and with alien tongue he will speak to this people,	...through the contemptuous speech of lips, through another tongue; for they will speak to this people,
	to whom he has said, ‘This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose’;	saying to them ‘This is rest for the hungry; and this is the calamity’;
And even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.	yet they would not hear.	but they would not hear.

88. See, for example, the weight given to the context in Isaiah by Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 108-17.

89. Lanier, ‘With Stammering Lips’, p. 271.

90. I do not mean to suggest that both interpretations are correct. It will become clear to the reader that I regard the second interpretation presented below as superior. My point is simply that both interpretations are possible, each sitting within alternative general understandings of Paul’s use of scripture, and yet both lend equally weighty support to my reading of the role of tongues in Paul’s argument.

91. The translations of Paul and the MT are taken from the NRSV, that of the LXX from Johanson, ‘Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers?’, pp. 181-82.

In the MT, it is clear from the context that the stammering lip and alien tongue is that of Assyrian conquerors of God's people. That God speaks through them is seen as a judgment upon his people for ignoring his prophet. In contrast, the LXX turns the text into an illustration of the steadfastness of the people in the face of foreign oppression.⁹² They refuse to capitulate in return for a promise of lenient treatment, choosing to endure persecution rather than surrender. These very different senses stem from the way in which the two textual traditions handle the words spoken to the people. In the MT the words spoken to the people are uttered by God ('he will speak') and are an offer of comfort. It is because the people refuse this offer to take refuge in their Lord that the judgment of stammering lip and alien tongue subsequently comes upon them. In the LXX, the words spoken to the people are uttered by the Assyrians ('they will speak') and are intended as an offer they cannot refuse. The rest for the hungry is what the people will receive from their conquerors in return for cooperation, the calamity what will come upon them if they resist. Yet despite these vast differences, in both the MT and LXX vv. 11-12 are descriptions by a third party of the actions of either God or the Assyrians, who only speak to the people directly in the words quoted above.

Paul transforms the text by omitting the intelligible message.⁹³ The words spoken by God in the MT, or by the Assyrians in the LXX, simply do not appear. He also adds the words λέγει κύριος at the end, thus making God speak the whole of the text. The significance of this change is that in both the MT and the LXX it is the spoken, intelligible message to which the people refuse to listen. As Paul configures the text, it is the unintelligible strange tongues to which the people will not listen. Clearly this suits his general purposes, making the text more applicable to the phenomena of uninterpreted tongues. Yet Paul goes further than this. He places the verb εἰσακούω in the future tense rather than the past,⁹⁴ so confirming what he regards as the predictive force of the text, and, whereas the MT and LXX

92. Lanier, 'With Stammering Lips', pp. 263-4, provides a helpful analysis of the LXX wording, commenting on choices made in translation and on variants in the LXX tradition.

93. For a complete technical analysis of Paul's wording in comparison with the MT and LXX, see C. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 197-205. Stanley suggests that a Hebraizing revision of the LXX may underlie Paul's quotation.

94. BAGD, p. 232. On the difference in nuance between ἀκούω and εἰσακούω, see Grudem, 'Prophecy and Tongues', pp. 386-87. The latter denotes hearing in the sense of heeding and/or responding obediently.

both say simply that the people would not hear the intelligible message spoken to them, Paul introduces the words οὐδ' οὕτως. As Johanson notes, this means that 'in contradistinction to both these, Paul's text indicates that although God will speak by men of unintelligible speech "this people" will *even then* not listen'.⁹⁵ Read literally, 1 Cor. 14.21 is a statement not that the people will fail to listen because they have been spoken to in strange tongues, but rather that they will fail to listen *despite* the fact that they have been spoken to in this unusual way.⁹⁶ The strange tongues are not themselves a punishment, which would be a highly inappropriate function for a *spiritual gift*. If we apply this to the outsider of v. 23, the sense is plain. Despite the fact that tongues are a gift of the Holy Spirit, and are a sign to the outsider of divine presence, they will not bring such a person into obedience to God. Even though the outsider hears tongues, conversion does not follow. Tongues do serve as a sign for unbelievers, but not a sufficient one.⁹⁷ The greater gift of prophecy is also needed, and the Corinthians should not neglect it.

This interpretation makes straightforward sense of Paul's wording of Isa. 28.11-12, satisfactorily integrating the quotation into his argument. It is only the context in the MT, where the strange tongues clearly are a judgment, which seems to contradict it. If one assumes that Paul was not concerned with this, but only with the wording of his version of the text, this interpretation is clearly stronger than that which regards tongues as a negative sign of judgment. However, these interpretations share a characteristic that should cause us to pause for thought. *In both cases the words of Isa. 28.11-12 are applied to the outsider*. If one considers that Paul quotes out of context, this need not be a problem. However, if one considers that the context in Isaiah is significant, it is surely a problem. A text that originally

95. Johansen, 'Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers?', p. 182. The RSV, NRSV and the NIV all render οὐδ' οὕτως as 'even then', while the KJV has the even more emphatic 'and yet for all that'. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture*, pp. 202-203 regards the substitution of οὐδ' οὕτως for οὐκ (LXX and MT) as 'showing every sign of having been introduced into the text by Paul himself'.

96. In support of taking tongues as a sign of judgment, Grudem, 'Prophecy and Tongues', p. 387, comments that, 'not even when they hear foreign speech coming as punishment will they obey the Lord'. This is plainly unsatisfactory since, as they are incomprehensible, the outsider has no way of knowing that tongues are intended to signal punishment.

97. As Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture*, p. 204, suggests, "Speaking in Tongues" remains a sign of the divine presence to those who have ears to hear (v. 22), even if its content remains wholly unintelligible to them'.

applied to God's people is here applied to the Gentile outsider.⁹⁸ Those judged in Isaiah fail to listen to God in the context of a covenant relationship with him, but the outsider has never enjoyed such a relationship.⁹⁹ If he applies Isa. 28.11-12 to the Gentile outsider, Paul has made a revision of the sense of the text arguably more radical than any of his changes to the detail of its wording. If one thinks that the context in Isaiah is relevant to Paul's meaning, ought it not be possible to make sense of v. 21 on the basis that he applies the quotation to those who are now God's people, namely the Corinthian believers?¹⁰⁰

It is indeed possible to do this, providing an explanation, beyond the merely arbitrary, both for Paul's decision to use Isa. 28.11-12 and for his particular wording of the quotation. Although both interpretations of 14.21 equally support my reading of the role of tongues in Paul's argument, this capacity to explain Paul's rationale suggests, in my view, the superiority of the following second interpretation. We may begin by noting that there is a feature of Isa. 28 in the MT that would facilitate its application to the Corinthian believers. In v. 9 there is a reference to newly weaned children. This is often understood to be part of a debate between Isaiah and the priests and the prophets whom he attacks in v. 7. They respond to his message with contempt, either accusing Isaiah of treating them like children or referring him to a kindergarten class as the appropriate audience for his

98. It is unclear in Isaiah whether 28.7-13 applies to the northern kingdom of Israel or to Judah. The chapter clearly begins as a prophecy against Ephraim (v. 1), but v. 14 condemns the rulers of Jerusalem. When the switch is made is a question debated by commentators. For the northern kingdom, see J.N. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 506, and J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), pp. 357-65. For Judah, see R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), p. 224, and A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), p. 230.

99. This point counters the move made by Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 115, who implicitly aligns those judged in Isaiah's day more closely with the Gentile outsider by describing them as 'unbelievers' and the prophet and his supporters as 'a godly remnant'.

100. Paul applies a text about Israel to the Corinthian church in v. 25, where the confession of the outsider that ὄντως ὁ θεὸς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστίν is generally taken as a deliberate reference to Isa. 45.14. Zech. 8.23 may also be relevant, but in both texts the point is that Gentiles confess the presence of God in Israel. See Barrett, *First Corinthians*, pp. 326-27; Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 687; Hays, *First Corinthians*, p. 239; Sandnes, 'Prophecy—A Sign for Believers', p. 13; Schrage, *An die Korinther*, p. 414; Sweet, 'A Sign for Unbelievers', pp. 245-46.

childish message.¹⁰¹ Other commentators take the speaker of v. 9 to be God. The leaders of God's people have succumbed to wine and beer (vv. 7-8), and young children, or those who have only a child's level of understanding, are the only ones left to whom God can explain his message. This prompts the incomprehensible and apparently meaningless words of v. 10, *tsaw lātsāw, tsaw lātsāw—qaw lāqāw, qaw lāqāw—ze'ēr shām, ze'ēr shām*. They are the equivalent of the nonsense talk of infants. 'For if Yhwh were to teach children, what would the message be... baby talk—not, to be sure, the babble of drunkards, but babble just the same'.¹⁰²

If Paul is conscious of this feature of Isa. 28, and especially if he understands v. 9 in the second of the two ways outlined above, then there could be a relationship between it and his words in 1 Cor. 14.20. Here Paul urges the Corinthians not to be childlike in their understanding but mature. The implication is that if they are mature they will concur with his preference for prophecy, but that holding to their own preference for tongues would indicate them to be childlike. As in Isa. 28, God could then only speak to his people using the babble of baby talk, in the case of the Corinthians that of uninterpreted tongues. The force of Paul's quotation from Isa. 28.11-12 is therefore directed to the Corinthians not the outsider. Because they are unintelligible, tongues do nothing to enable the Corinthians continuously to hear and obey God in their relationship with him. The danger the Corinthians face is that of placing themselves in the same position as God's people in Isa. 28.11-12, trapped in spiritual immaturity. The routes to this destination are slightly different in each case, for in Isa. 28 the unintelligible speech of the foreigners is itself a form of punishment or judgment for disobedience. Paul can scarcely say this of a gift of the Spirit, hence his omission of the intelligible message from God, and his insertion of the words οὐδ' οὐτως, to give the sense that the Corinthians do not hear and obey God *despite* their experience of tongues. Nevertheless, the effect is the same in both cases. The Corinthians' preference for tongues over prophecy will mean that God speaks to them only unintelligibly, and their growth

101. W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah II* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), p. 36; Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, p. 228; Motyer, *Isaiah*, p. 231; Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, pp. 511-12.

102. C. Exum, 'A Literary Approach to Isaiah 28', in D.J.A. Clines, D.M. Gunn and A.J. Hauser (eds.), *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), pp. 108-39 (121). See also D.L. Petersen, 'Isaiah 28: A Redaction Critical Study', in P. Achtemeier (ed.), *SBL Seminar Papers 15* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 101-22, and A. van Selms, 'Isaiah 28.9-13: An Attempt to Give a New Interpretation', *ZAW* 85 (1973), pp. 332-39.

will be hindered just as surely as that of those judged in Isa. 28. On this interpretation of 14.21, Paul displays considerable freedom in his handling of the wording of Isa. 28.11-12. Yet, by applying these verses to the relationship between God and the Corinthians, he preserves the broad thrust of their context more closely than if he intends the quotation to indicate that tongues are a negative sign about outsiders.¹⁰³

In applying Isa. 28.11-12 to the Corinthians, this interpretation connects the quotation in v. 21 to Paul's preceding verse, where he is clearly discussing the Corinthians, rather than to the succeeding verse, where the first mention of unbelievers occurs. This seems preferable, for Paul expresses v. 22 as a consequence of v. 21, using the term ὥστε. He also deals first with the consequences for the Corinthians, stating that tongues are a sign not for believers *before* going on to say that they are a sign for unbelievers.¹⁰⁴ The entry of the outsider and the description of the impact of the two gifts in v. 23-25 then illustrate the principles stated in v. 22. They do so without any direct relationship to vv. 20-21 beyond the fact that the Corinthians' failure to appreciate the superiority of prophecy over tongues in the matter of conversion is another demonstration of their tendency to childish thinking. It follows that the exclamation μαίνεσθε in v. 23 must refer to divine madness and must represent a positive assessment from the outsider's perspective. If it does not, then it is difficult to discern any coherent relationship between v. 22 and the illustrations that follow. Paul's examples would indeed contradict the principles stated. For the view that tongues are a sign of judgment indicating God's negative attitude towards unbelievers depends upon applying Isa. 28.11-12 to the outsider. Once the quotation is applied

103. Thus, on this interpretation, Paul's use of Isa. 28.11-12 would broadly conform to the conclusions about his use of scripture reached by R.B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Paul correlates God's word to Israel with the new circumstances of his churches, believing that words initially addressed to others in other times find their true addressees in the eschatological community. Citations do indeed allude to their original contexts, but as part of readings that are transformative. The meaning derived by Paul from the old context for the new is 'not so much like a relic excavated from an ancient text as it is like a spark struck by the shovel hitting rock' (p. 155).

104. Paul uses a prepositional phrase αἱ γλῶσσαι εἰς σημείον εἰσιν. This may be translated as 'tongues serve as a sign'. See BAGD, p. 748, Barrett, *First Corinthians*, p. 323 and Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, p. 1123. This nuance may reflect a consciousness on Paul's part that tongues are not primarily a sign. They serve as a sign for unbelievers, but their principal function is as a gift to believers.

instead to the Corinthians that connection is severed and the interpretation is no longer viable. Thus, both of the above interpretations of v. 21 hold the same exegetical implication. Whether one thinks that Paul quotes out of context and applies Isa. 28.11-12 to the outsider or that, as I believe, the context is significant and he applies it to the Corinthians,¹⁰⁵ the force of the quotation supports the view that *μαίνεσθε* is a positive response from the perspective of the outsider. Tongues are perceived as an indication of divine activity.

Conclusion

We have reviewed the evidence for divine madness in Graeco-Roman religion and have found significant parallels to speaking in tongues. While these do not suggest the presence of phenomena that could appropriately be labelled as ‘the same thing’ as speaking in tongues, they do offer instances of behaviour that could be placed by an observer in the same social category. Many interpreters would concede this, but most nevertheless continue to understand tongues as a negative sign that alienates or repulses outsiders, indicating that they are under divine judgment. Yet, when vital exegetical issues are examined this is not convincing. In relation to the different evaluations of tongues made by Paul, the Corinthians and the Outsider, and to Paul’s wider argument, and to his use of Isa. 28.11-12, my alternative proposal makes better sense. The exclamation *μαίνεσθε* (14.23) is therefore best translated, ‘You are inspired’, and can plausibly be understood as a positive response from the outsider, who recognizes tongues as a manifestation of the divine. In this sense, tongues serve as a sign for unbelievers,

105. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, pp. 1120-21, tries to have it both ways, arguing that Paul applies Isa. 28.11-12 to both the Corinthians and the outsider. It applies to the Corinthians in the sense that tongue-speaking ‘places many of God’s people in the situation of feeling like foreigners in a foreign land and “not at home” in their own home’ and to the outsider in the sense that tongues fail to communicate the gospel. Although the argument of ch. 12 may imply concern lest those who do not speak in tongues are perceived as less valuable members of the body, there is little in ch. 14 to suggest that Paul is worried lest tongues themselves make believers feel uncomfortable. His concern is rather that tongues fail to build up the church because they are unintelligible (14.5, 17-18). Thiselton’s position also requires that disobedient Israel serve as a type of both the childish Christian, insensitive to the needs of fellow believers, and the unbeliever. This seems more than a little strained. Schrage, *An die Korinther*, p. 406 points out that the prophecy can only be applied to one or the other.

but from Paul's perspective they do not signify enough. Tongues do not communicate the gospel, and the ability of prophecy to do this, accomplishing the conversion of the outsider (vv. 24-25),¹⁰⁶ is another indication that it is the greater gift.

106. For a discussion of vv. 24-25, see S.J. Chester, *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul's Theology and the Corinthian Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), pp. 114-25. That the conversion of the outsider illustrates the principle that prophecy is a sign for believers is often taken to indicate that it is the conversion itself that is a sign. Believers know that God's blessing rests upon them because of the power of the gospel to work conversion in the midst of the community. See above, n. 6.