

An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

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The choice of these verses that conclude the 14th chapter of 1 Corinthians was made with this conference's practical paper in mind, "Reverence in Worship." Although this section does include that well-known section that has been referred to often in the hot-button issue of the proper role of women in the church, both the NIV Bible and the *People's Bible Commentary on 1 Corinthians* agree that the main thrust of this entire section is on "Orderly Worship" (Prof. Toppe's title is "Good Order in the Public Service").

The Program Committee wanted this to be the central focus of this exegesis, but at the same time the committee thought it would be worthwhile to review the women's role matter since this remains a difficult area of application for today's WELS churches living in the society that we do. No doubt this study will elicit some application questions in this area. However, many of those questions have been addressed more directly and completely in the slough of very scholarly papers that came out in the mid-80's. A number of those were published in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Some of those will be referred to in this exegesis.

But once again I must direct you to this section's main theme, that of orderly worship. Although the reason for the apostle's words to the congregation in Corinth is probably entirely different from our current interest in this subject, no doubt some of the root reasons why there are some disorderly worshipers in our congregations are similar to the root reasons for the disorderly worship in the congregation at Corinth.

I really don't know how widespread a problem this is in our churches today. In the two previous congregations that I served, there were those occasional problems with crying children and how ushers might approach their parents in an inoffensive and non-threatening manner when it was time for them to take their child out. It actually helped having a strong-willed firstborn for members could see that the pastor's own child often had to be taken out of the service. In fact, one of my most embarrassing moments in my entire ministry happened at the baptism of my oldest daughter when her brother had a significant tizzy fit that the entire congregation of 350 could clearly see. However, a joke about that at the end of the service probably went a long way in letting struggling parents with over-active or crabby little ones know that the pastor understands.

In my present congregation the issue has seldom been crying children—our declining congregation wishes that crying children were a greater problem, for we have so few in that age group. But where we have had some significant problems has been in the dress of some of the members (no doubt, this will be addressed in the practical paper) and in the conduct. Talking out loud during the service, frequent departures and returns during the service, latecomers (which we have a lot of) coming into the sanctuary at any time—these things had to be addressed by the elders and in a letter to the congregation. Some things did improve, but the greatest offending family didn't get the hint, and a couple of Moms with small children thought they were the ones being singled out even though the elders didn't even have them in mind. This is always such a touchy issue. As many of you know, the congregation I currently serve came out of some major divisions in the early 90's. Today things are very peaceful there (sometimes too peaceful if you know what I mean), but because of our continuing statistical decline the brothers in our circuit often use my congregation to check themselves when their own congregational problems start getting them down. I understand, and I don't take that too personally. After all, I have often looked upon the congregation in Corinth in the very same way. Whenever I start feeling sorry for myself because of my congregation's problems, I think of that congregation's numerous problems. That was a divided congregation with various cliques, one of which had little regard for pastors' and their ministry. That was a congregation in which worldly ways were beginning to reassert themselves. That was a congregation whose members made much of their "rights" and who abused their Christian liberty. That was a congregation that had members advocating sexual freedom and that was ready to grant the women in the church rights that would violate the Lord's headship principles. That was a congregation that overestimated the gifts of the Spirit and downplayed the much more profitable gift of preaching the gospel. That was a congregation with

a major doctrinal problem in one of the fundamental areas, that of the bodily resurrection. That was a congregation that was overly concerned about its standing among its sophisticated unbelieving neighbors.¹

And that was a congregation that tolerated disorderly worship services. When we hear of all those other problem areas, it doesn't surprise us to hear that they had problems in this area, too. But this was just one more symptom of a- root sin, that being self-centeredness in all of its forms. We see that at work in what Paul wrote to: them in chapters 8-10. The Concordia Self-Study Bible describes it this way:

In their self-centered piety, puffed up as they were by knowledge, they did not consider what harm their freedom might do to the brother whose knowledge was not yet deep and firm enough to make him capable of exercising such freedom [as they were practicing]. In their complacent self-assurance they did not pause to consider that demonic powers are at work behind all false worship of false gods, though the gods themselves are nothing. They disregarded the warning example of Israel recorded for them in the Old Testament. They flouted the example of the apostles, whose knowledge was as great as theirs, whose wisdom was more profound and certainly more sober and realistic than theirs.²

So it follows very naturally that this selfish spirit, this abuse of Christian freedom, eventually infected the worship life of the church, too. Women were asserting their newfound "rights" by appearing at worship without the veil, which was the badge of their womanliness and their recognition of the place that God had assigned to them (ch. 11). "They were also adding to the confusion of an already chaotic public worship by an unwomanly assumption of a teaching authority which neither Jesus nor the apostles had given them."³ (1 Cor. 14:33-36)

This spirit of "rampant individualism" made the common fellowship meals of the church chaotic scenes of carousing that effectively spoiled the celebration of Lord's Supper that took place at these meals. The sacred meal's spiritual oneness was shattered by man's self-assertion and division (1 Cor. 11:17-34). "When knowledge is the capstone of the religious structure and love no longer rules (1 Cor. 13) decency and order are sacrificed, edification is no longer possible, the salutary commands of the apostle are disregarded (14:37-38), and the example of the churches of God everywhere means nothing."⁴

I have quoted much from the Concordia Self-Study Bible's introduction on 1 Corinthians. If you possess a copy, I recommend your reading carefully all seven pages of it, for it gives much insight on the problems of our times, all of which go back to that common arrogance of natural man that will not bow before the Lord and His authoritative Word. So what is the solution? It is the cross that the apostle sets squarely before this "problem child," the cross that "pronounces an annihilating judgment on all human, greatness,"⁵ the cross that cuts off all improper boasting, the cross that will break down all sinful, divisions, the cross that will bring about a humble submission and servant attitude in both men and women, regardless of their roles, the cross that brings order in the court.

Whereas Prof. Toppe in the People's Bible Commentary lists ch. 14, which he has entitled "The Proper Use of Spiritual Gifts in Public Worship," as the last of nine points under the major outline heading, "Various Moral and Spiritual Problems in the Congregation," the Concordia Self-Study Bible sets chapters 11-14 apart under the heading, "Disorders in the Worship Life of the Church." The three subjects under that heading are "Woman in the Church" (11:2-16), "The Lord's Supper" (11:17-34), and "the Use of Spiritual Gifts" (12-14). At the beginning of ch. 12 we're reminded that it is the Holy Spirit who places people under the Lordship of Jesus, the Crucified. The gifts which the Spirit bestows are therefore to be the expression of the Lord's self-giving will and are to be used in the mutual ministry of the body of Christ (the Church), where every member is necessary and no member is self-sufficient. The highest fruit of the Spirit is that of love, which gives value to every other gift (ch. 13). No gift of the Spirit is being used rightly if it is used to foster individualism in worship

¹ Carleton A. Toppe, *1 Corinthians* [the People's Bible] (Milwaukee: Northwestern Pub]. House, 1987), pp. 3-4.

² Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (NT notes) (St. Louis: Concordia Pub]. House, 1979), p. 145.

³ Ibid, p. 145.

⁴ Ibid, p. 145.

⁵ Ibid, p. 146.

and creates a confusion which does not edify (ch. 14). This is where the assigned verses of this exegesis come in.

There's much more that could be said about the previous context of chapter 14, which effectively contrasts the gifts of prophecy and tongues. The epistle lesson for Epiphany 5 this year (ILCW Series C) is 1 Corinthians 14:12-20. I wonder how many of you have preached on that challenging text. The first time I did so I thought it would be beneficial for our congregation to hear what Scripture really has to say about the matter of speaking in tongues, since there were a number of small Pentecostal churches in the area. Later I came to find out that I caused the new wife of one of our older members to go home crying because that was her background. But by being driven to make a careful study of 1 Corinthians 14 she came to the conclusion that the points I made in the sermon were correct. Not long after that she took the adult class and became a member. I happened to see her at a funeral this past October where she repeated that whole story. Forgetting that she had previously shared her feelings with me, she apologized profusely for having been so upset with me almost nine years ago.

Many pastors aren't pestered by members who are concerned about the absence of speaking in tongues in the congregation. But most probably are pestered every once in a while about the worship service. Why can't we (or the choir or the children) sing this song or that? Why don't we applaud the soloists or the choir or other musicians? Occasionally most pastors have to remind the members that the worship service is not intended to entertain the congregation but to edify. It was the true edification of the Christians in Corinth that Paul was so concerned about. Four times that word appears in the NIV in the first 17 verses of this chapter. Other verses also speak of the importance of doing that which builds up the church. In those verses the apostle points out that it is the gift of prophecy that will do that much more than speaking in tongues. As he decisively adds in v. 19, "In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue." Indeed, just these five words can make all the difference in the world for the person who truly apprehends them: "Jesus died for your sins."

All of today's tongue speaking churches, indeed, all of those "happy" churches that preach little law, need to take to heart w. 23-25 that immediately precede our exegetical study: "So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'"

Verse 26

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = to convene, depart in company with, associate with, or (spec.) cohabit (conjugally):--accompany, assemble (with), come (together), come (company, go) with, resort.

SBLGreek = of uncert. affin.; the tongue; by impl. a language (spec. one naturally unacquired):--tongue.

SBLGreek = translation:--interpretation.

SBLGreek = architecture, i.e. (concr.) a structure; fig. confirmation:--building, edify (-ication, -ing).

Translation: What shall we therefore conclude, brothers? Whenever you assemble, each person has a psalm, piece of instruction, revelation, tongue, or an interpretation. Make sure this is all done for edification.

NIV: What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word 'of instruction, a revelation, a' tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

The careful and detailed instruction given in w. 1-25 is followed by careful and detailed directions regarding the procedure the Corinthians were to follow in their church services so as to employ their spiritual gifts in the most beneficial way. Such special directives were needed because the worship services at that time

were not conducted by a single individual as they are today. We pretty much take for granted the good order that our pastor-led services maintain. Our liturgical experts often argue that the ancient, liturgical patterns that we follow help to maintain that orderliness, and I would agree. Although I have often used home-made services for the festival services, I almost always follow the same outline as the main services in the hymnal. It's very much like a weekly television show that follows the same basic skeleton pattern but just changes the main "bad guy/gal" guest star characters just a bit to keep things interesting.

Now imagine if there were no such orderly pattern to follow, but each week various worshipers would contribute to the service according to their gifts and as they were moved to speak. Some had hymns they had composed, others had some instruction in doctrine or Christian living. Someone else had a revelation, probably not a direct communication from God to the speaker but some portion of God's Word which the speaker thought of value to the congregation. Finally, there might be some speaking in tongues and the interpretation of that speaking. Talk about "fruit basket upset." In my current congregation I'm guessing that if we followed that pattern, we'd have a lot of moments of dead silence. Those who would be most inclined to speak would be 'some of the more forward women. What would it be like in your congregation? Just the thought of this makes many of us pale with horror.

We notice that the apostle lays down no legalistic order of service. With his most kindly address, "brothers," he asks the Corinthians to receive his directions in a brotherly spirit.

As Lenski points out, we should not overly stress the word "each" since there would have been many who came to the service only to hear. "Each" refers to those who had some gift to exercise in that service (but remember, this was a "gifted" congregation).⁶

Paul mentions a number of gifts, but his main purpose was to compare especially the two gifts, prophecy and tongues. In fact, one might argue that sharing a psalm, a teaching, or a revelation are all gifts that fit under the gift of prophecy in the wider sense. It might be helpful to place the two types of gifts in two columns such as this:

Prophecy	Speaking in Tongues
<p>Psalm – this could have been a newly composed hymn; the Living Bible says, "When you meet together some will sing." Lenski believes this was a psalm uttered in the vernacular.</p> <p>Teaching – a piece of instruction</p> <p>Revelation – there are three basic ways to take this:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct communication from God (this is unlikely in view of the context) 2. Some section of Scripture 3. Some special insight based on Scripture. (This brings to mind the insight that is so often shared at pastoral conference for the edification of the whole body. The Interpreter's Bible has this beautiful description: "Just as one sees new colors and beauties in a piece of mother-of-pearl as one turns it over in one's hand, so does new beauty or light reveal itself to the sensitive and meditative minds of those hearts that are set on things above.") 	<p>Tongues – The Living Bible gives "unknown language" as its interpretative translation; the NEB goes the other way: "an ecstatic utterance." On the basis of this chapter one could make a case for either translation. That "no one understands him" (v. 2) is a strong argument for taking this as some sort of "ecstatic speech," since it was very likely that in a cosmopolitan city like Corinth someone would be able to understand a known language. However, if we take this to be ecstatic spec," we see this as a special gift for the apostolic era, perhaps to attract public attention to the supernatural origin of Christianity.</p> <p>It must always be noted that there are so many aspects of the modern day tongues-speaking movement that do not conform to the specifications of this chapter regarding the nature and sue of tongues (as that woman in my previous congregation discovered). [see Toppe list on p. 19]</p> <p>Interpretation of Tongues—This was a crucial requirement of the apostle. There is also something in his subsequent words that is a strong argument against taking this as "ecstatic speech."</p>

⁶ R.C.H. Lenski, St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publ. House, 1963), p. 607.

So here's a general sketch of the "typical" service in Corinth, which is somewhat reminiscent of the Jewish pattern of worship (Matt. 26:30; Luke 4:16-30), but this is hardly an exhaustive listing of the main service parts, for prayer is not mentioned nor is confession of sins. It's a very short outline but not a set order.

So what can we learn from this? This verse fits the stress of the preceding verses of this chapter, that a supreme function of the church is its teaching function. The Interpreter's Bible makes this very relevant point: "The need of the age, and of every age, is not to adjust the Christian message so as to make it acceptable to a particular civilization, but to baptize civilization into the spirit and truth, of Jesus Christ."⁷ That same commentary makes much of the fact that it is a note of praise [a psalm/hymn] that was struck at the outset of the service. We must be careful not to read too much into one word, especially in view of the immediate context, but it is probably generally true that where adoration is the first note in man's approach to God, that sense of awe and wonder is an expression of gratitude, gratitude that we are a "liberated" people. Worship experts like to point us to the book of Revelation where one of its grand undertones is that of praise.

What does this have to do with the church in Corinth? It is the exercise of praise that directs the mind and emotions away from the worshiper to God, who is the sole object of worship. "It will prepare an atmosphere of expectation in which the living Christ will be able to visit his people with further blessing."⁸ In my handwritten notes I jotted down at this point, "What a key this is!" Why? Because where there is that vivid consciousness of being in the presence of God in worship, there will be that attendant reverence and respect. There will not be that self-display in its various forms that can be disruptive, and disorderly and detracting. In a desire to show off, to be first, to attract attention, the gifted Corinthians were not only causing disorder, they were excluding. But proper congregational praise furnishes every individual worshiper with the opportunity to make his own contribution. No worshiper need be excluded unless his is an unwilling spirit. Isn't that actually our great goal with the entire service that the entire congregation be swept into the realized presence of God?⁹

Perhaps I am digressing just a bit. Rather than trying to make too much of the word "psalm," we should instead concentrate on the last four words of this verse, for it is here that the apostle gives us the key principle to follow: that everything is to be done for edification. First of all, the gifts themselves must be of a kind that edify; and secondly, what is done with them when the assembly comes together must also serve this purpose. I personally like the words "edify" and "edification" because they are full words that lose something when we use words like "strengthening" (NIV), "build up" (Living Bible), or "make strong" (Phillips). The TEV probably had all of those thoughts in mind when it very simply translated, "Everything must be of help to the church."

Because of the nature of our services, we don't have the same problem that the church at Corinth had. But as we struggle to bring about a God-pleasing unity out of our own great diversity, we will want to ask the same question that Paul wanted the church in Corinth to ask, "Will this build up the church? In this we always need to look for proper balance. Whereas we would like to light a fire under a great number of our apathetic members, sometimes the really enthusiastic ones need to be reined in. In Corinth the enthusiasm of some had to be controlled. That was the inherent danger in Corinth's order of service. That was the reason for the apostle's detailed directions on how to proceed.,

Verse 27

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = behalf, coast, course, craft, particular (+ -ly), part (+ -ly), piece, portion, respect, side, some sort (-what).

SBLGreek = to explain thoroughly; by impl. to translate:--expound, interpret (-ation).

Translation: Then whoever speaks in a tongue, let only two or at most. three people do so in turn, and make sure there is one person to give an interpretation of what was spoken.

⁷ George Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 210.

⁸ Ibid, p. 209.

⁹ Ibid, p. 209.

NIV: If anyone speaks in a tongue, two--or at the most three--should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.

Verse 28

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = an explainer:--interpreter.

SBLGreek= to keep silent (trans. or intrans.):--keep close (secret, silence), hold peace.

Translation: But if there is no interpreter present, let each one keep silent in church, speaking only to himself and to God.

NIV: If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

Verse 29

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = to separate thoroughly, i.e. (lit. and reflex.) to withdraw from, or (by impl.) oppose; fig. to discriminate (by impl. decide), or (reflex.) hesitate:--contend, make (to) differ (-ence), discern, doubt, judge, be partial, stagger, waver.

Translation: Have two or three prophets speak while the others are seriously weighing what's being said.

NIV: Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.

Notice how Paul in reversed order (chiasm) speaks about tongues first and prophecy second. He probably does this to place his practical instructions regarding the most important fruit at the end.

What we especially notice here is the apostle's concern for good order. He didn't want the speakers to monopolize the presentations. They were to take turns, and they were to make sure that there was time for prophecy. It's my guess that too much time was spent with tongues, which doesn't surprise us, since this would appear to be the more impressive gift. In our circles today are certain musical gifts sometimes placed on that same pedestal? As much as I appreciate the many talented vocalists and musicians within our synod and as much as I appreciate a variety of choral numbers, I am one that has trouble sitting through an entire concert service. I believe the reason for this is I miss straight-forward prophecy (preaching). This is meant as no criticism but just food for thought. If we have, time constraints in our services (when there are special choral numbers or the showing of the WELS Connection) what gets cut?

In Corinth the problem evidently wasn't just with too much tongues speaking but also that it was being done simultaneously, and that was causing unseemly confusion. What Paul required would eliminate the confusion in two ways: each tongues-speaker had to take his turn, and he had to make sure that there was someone who could interpret the tongue. If not, then he was to keep it between himself and the Lord. This shows that such speaking in tongues in Corinth was not an irresistible impulse of the Holy Spirit, as modern day charismatics describe it. This also is a strong argument for taking these tongues to be known languages, since this implies that the tongue speaker could ascertain in advance whether an interpreter was present or not. He couldn't really do this if tongues are the language of heaven or a mystical non-human language. How could such a speaker with such a tongue ascertain in advance whether the Spirit was ready to grant someone the required revelation at the time?¹⁰

In the matter of orderly speaking in turn, in v. 29 we see that the same ground rules applied also to the prophets. Two, or at most three, could speak in turn. Then the others in the assembly should weigh carefully what was said. Nothing is said about who would make the selection of the two or three speakers. I assume that the elders must have done this. In light of what follows (especially v. 40) some system must have been used to maintain good order.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 609.

Now who were “the others who were to judge what the prophets said? Luther asks the same question and then answers it “What is meant here by ‘the others’? Is it the mob? By no means. This means the other prophets who help to preach in the church and to improve the congregation, they are to judge and to help see that preaching is rightly done.”¹¹ Lenski agrees, classifying the definite article as an article of previous reference.¹² But that still leaves the question, did these prophets have a special office as such, or were they members who had the gift of discerning spirits, one that naturally accompanies the gift of prophecy? Such discernment helps to protect the church from error, whether innocently or ignorantly offered (think of what is sometimes said in a Bible Class) or whether consciously. Whereas we would truly like to have all of our Sunday listeners to be very careful judges of what is said (not critics, but conscientious discerners), we realize that only some have that gift. Maybe that does take some of the pressure off who of us is totally comfortable preaching before a church full of pastors—but there is something very comforting about knowing our brothers won’t let us go too far afield. Having served for nine years in a multi-pastorate congregation where there were eventually two other pastors and a respected retired pastor evaluating my every word, you, get used to it, and you actually appreciate it. The same could be said of this pastoral conference, which has been blessed with some excellent and well-rounded discernment.

Verse 30

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = to sit down; fig. to remain, reside:--dwell, sit (by, down).

Translation: And if a revelation is granted to another person while he’s sitting,, there, then let the first person be quiet.

NIV: And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

What was to be done if someone else thought of some pertinent word of revelation and rose to utter it to the congregation, either to corroborate what had been previously said or to correct it? The speaker who had the floor was to yield to the person who rose. According to Lenski, this was the custom of the old Jewish synagogues, which evidently was introduced into the Christian churches.¹³

Again this brings to mind our practice at our conferences. The conference chairman does a good job of directing traffic, but I believe it used to be more common practice in the past for speakers requesting the floor to rise. The point, of course, isn’t the technicalities of how we do this, but that good order be followed. Although standing up is a little too formal for my tastes, it certainly would make it very obvious who was next in turn, and it would encourage more serious speaking.

Verse 31

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = matheo, is used as an alt. in cert. tenses; to learn (in any way):--learn, understand.

SBLGreek = to call near, i.e. invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation or consolation):--beseech, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) exhort’(-ation), intreat, pray.

Translation: For you can all prophesy in turn, so that everyone may learn something of value and everyone may be encouraged.

NIV: For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may, be instructed and encouraged.

Notice the emphasis here on “in turn.” Paul will have no confusion.

¹¹ Quoted by Lenski, op. cit., p. 611

¹² Ibid, p. 611.

¹³ Ibid, p. p. 612.

All along in this chapter Paul has been speaking about that which will edify. Notice how in this verse he now divides edification into two parts: instruction and application. Because this is all in the context of edification, I have translated the Greek word *μανθάνω* to “learn something of value.” I am pausing here for a moment because I’m a bit notorious for giving my members a lot of information, but some no doubt would question whether it’s always of practical value. Everything I do has a definite, conscious purpose in mind, but if my members don’t understand that, it won’t truly edify. A seven course dinner isn’t always needed or appreciated. A basic balanced meal of law and gospel is always needed. Our people want to go home full but not stuffed.

They also want to go home “encouraged.” *παρακαλέω* is another one of those full Greek words that is hard to translate with just one English word. Literally, it means “call to one’s side,” but it includes more than just giving comfort. “Urging, admonishing, entreating, exhorting, beseeching, encouraging”—that’s all part of it, although context will often determine which feature is most prominent. The old word for the Holy Spirit is Paraclete, transliterated from the same root. What the Holy Spirit is for us, comforter, counselor, encourager, we are to be in our prophesying.

In my notes I was struck by the Phillips translation of this verse that ends with these words: “and everyone will have his faith stimulated.” Maybe that’s not the most accurate translation, but that is an interesting way of putting it. I like it when a member says about a sermon, “You’ve given me much food for thought.” He or she is saying more than “I’ve been encouraged.” *παρακάλειν* is a much fuller expression than that.

Verse 32

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = to subordinate; reflex. to obey:--be under obedience (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto.

Translation: The spirits of prophets submit themselves to prophets.

NIV: The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.

The Greek words are simple enough, but what Paul is really saying with them is not. Lenski sees this as referring to proper self-control that is a virtue that any prophet may well cultivate today.¹⁴ Many translations agree:

[Living Bible] Remember that a person who has a message from God has the power to stop himself or wait his turn.

[Phillips] The spirit of a true preacher is under that preacher’s control.

[TEV] The gift of speaking God’s message should be under the speaker’s control.

[Jerusalem] Prophets can always control their prophetic spirits.

Prof. Toppe in the *People’s Bible Commentary* seems to agree: “If they feel they must speak out of turn, lest they burst, Paul directs them to exercise self-control. ‘The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.’ Prophets can and will follow God’s way, which is the way of ‘peace.’ If they yield to their sinful zeal and ambition, they will be disorderly.”¹⁵ The Interpreter’s Bible also agrees with this interpretation. It makes the point that religious gatherings’ can reach a saturation point, hence, ‘the need’ for prophetic self-control.¹⁶

The NEB like the NIV is much more nebulous: “It is for prophets to control prophetic inspiration.” That translation can go either way.

Although I have a definite tendency toward saturation when it comes to any presentations (this paper possibly being a case in point), I feel that Paul would have expressed this a little differently if that were his real

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 613.

¹⁵ Toppe, op. cit., p. 135.

¹⁶ Buttrick (ed.), op. cit., p. 210.

thought here. I see this instead as the type of yielding that goes on at a pastoral conference, where we're ready to submit to the consecrated insight that a particular brother or two or three may be able to give. The Expositor's Bible Commentary basically agrees. The spirits of prophets, that is, their own spirits that are being guided by the Holy Spirit when they use this special gift, will let their prophetic utterances be checked by other such prophets for accuracy and orthodoxy.¹⁷

Verse 33

SBLGreek

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = instability, i.e. disorder:--commotion, confusion, tumult.

Translation: For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints.

NIV: For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints,

If the yap of this verse only goes back to v. 32, then the commentators have a definite point in seeing that verse as referring to individual self-control. However, one can also see it as being connected with the whole previous section, which has that subject of disorder.

The word that Paul uses here for such disorder, SBLGreek, is a very strong word: "instability, commotion, confusion, tumult" are some of its possible translations. Lenski calls this topsy-turvy dealings that do not belong to God.¹⁸ He also makes the interesting note that Paul does not mention the direct opposite; of confusion, that being "order," but instead he mentions the motive, or purpose which underlies the opposite: He's a God of peace, in the sense of well-being and quiet satisfaction.¹⁹

Confusion is full of sinful zeal and contentions (James 3). God does not want His Church to be disturbed and upset by the manner in which His gifts are used; He wants it to grow and to prosper in peace.

At first glance it would appear that the original designator of the verses must have had a slip of the pen with his notation of v. 33, since at first glance it would appear that the second part of the verse should go with what follows instead of what precedes. However, since Luther himself agreed with most of the ancients in connecting "as in all the churches of the saints" with the preceding sentence, we ought to at least consider the reasons for this division.

The main argument is that treating the second half of v. 33 as part of the following sentence leads to a certain awkwardness. Wouldn't we expect that αἱ γυναῖκες or ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις would be modified by υμῶν? And why would ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις repeated? Isn't that pretty redundant?

Dr. Siegbert Becker also makes this argument for following the ancient verse division:

"If we, however, remember that the congregation in Corinth was Paul's Sorgenkind and that almost every chapter in this letter had dealt with disorder of some kind, the kind of disorder that we meet in no other congregation addressed by Paul, it would not be out of place for Paul to contrast the disorder in Corinth with the more orderly procedures followed by other congregations. In that context it would no longer seem totally out of place for the apostle to say that God is not a God of disorder but of peace (also in Corinth) as (he is) in all the churches of the saints."²⁰

Dr. Becker actually presents both sides in such a way that I'm not really sure which he favors. I do favor taking the second half of the verse with what follows, but I agree that a credible case can be made for the other.

¹⁷ Frank Gaebelin (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 275.

¹⁸ Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 613.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 613.

²⁰ Siegbert Becker, "An Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 14:33b-36," published in the *WLQ*, Vol. 78, #3 (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publ. House, 1981), p. 176.

By the way, the *KJV*, *Living Bible*, *Phillips*, and *God's Word to the Nations* all take the phrase with the first half of the verse. So even the modern Bible scholars and translators are pretty well divided.

It still seems to me to make a lot more sense to connect this phrase with the following. It would seem that Paul wants the Corinthians to realize that the public speaking of the women in the churches (or silence in connection with it) was the practice in all the other congregations. In fact, Lenski places in parentheses, "As (the practice is) in all the assemblies of the saints,"

Either direction one goes with this, Lenski's words on this bear repeating:

"The spirit of individualism which prompts one congregation to do what it prefers although it thereby contradicts its sister congregations and perhaps offends them is foreign to Paul. He ever conserves true fellowship, loving regard for others, inward and outward harmony. In this spirit he points the Corinthians to all the other churches in connection with this question."²¹

I find this most pertinent in our common struggles with the matter of the women's role in our congregations. When considering those iffy applications that we feel are technically OK, what is the common practice in the rest of the congregations of the saints? [Of course, church history also warns us that just because everyone is doing it doesn't necessarily mean something is right either. That needs to be said, as we now get into a section that many modern day Christian churches pretty much ignore.]

Verse 34

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = a woman; spec. a wife:--wife, woman.

SBLGreek = to keep silent (trans. or intrans.):--keep close (secret, silence), hold peace.

SBLGreek = to turn over (transfer), i.e. allow:--give leave (liberty, license), let, permit, suffer.

SBLGreek = to subordinate; reflex. to obey:--be under obedience (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto.

SBLGreek = from a prim. nemo (toparcel out, espec. food or grazing to animals); law (through the idea of prescriptive usage), gen. (regulation), spec. (of Moses [includ. the volume]; also of the Gospel), or fig. (a principle):-- law

Translation: ... the women in the church (as in the congregations of the saints) are to keep silent for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to be in subjection, just as the Law says.

NIV: women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.

Paul's prohibition of all public speaking of women in the churches is in the nature of an appendix to his directions about the public use of tongues and of prophecy. He wants it made clear that what he wrote in vv. 26-32 applied only to men.

It didn't matter whether they had the gift of tongues or of prophecy. This prohibition still stands. Was this also a major problem in Corinth? Lenski says we should be careful not to make too great a judgment here, that it was possible that the question was simply broached. In view of vv. 36f I would say it was a problem. And the Holy Spirit, in having the apostle put down these words, was anticipating a future movement that would go to the extreme. However, there have been women's liberationists in every century who have' tried to set aside God's order.

The women "are not allowed to speak" (literally the Greek says, "this (right) to speak has not been turned over to them"). It has been withheld, not by (chauvinistic) men, but by God.

²¹ Lenski, op. cit., p. 614.

The root meaning of the word *upotassein*, which I've translated "be in subjection," is "to be put in array under"; there's that idea of order once again. Indeed, so many of the headship applications fit under the umbrella of good order.

The original authority which commands women to be silent in the churches, which refuses to turn over to women the right of speaking in public in Christian assemblies, and which places them in subjection is the Law. Now it is true that there is no specific and express command in the Old Testament Torah which orders women to be subject in these ways. The closest we come to such a command is the word that was spoken to Eve after the fall which made her subject to a sinful husband. Many commentators have assumed that, Paul must have had that word of God in mind. But the law, the Torah, can refer to the first five books of Moses and by extension to the entire Old Testament. The law then includes also the story of creation and all that is said and implied there about the order of creation. Our synod's official position paper on the roles of man and woman in God's world makes much of that order of creation before the fall, just as the apostle Paul did in 1 Timothy 2.

If Paul only had in mind Gen. 3:16, which speaks of wives' subjection in marriage after the fall, then it would be difficult to understand why he would have used the very generic *hypotameia* instead of the more specific Greek word that means "wives." Although it is true that a few scattered manuscripts have the possessive pronoun *υμων* modifying *αι γυναικες* that still doesn't justify the translation "Let your wives be silent in the churches," since there is nothing in the context that would indicate that Paul is addressing members of the congregation as husbands here. He is addressing the whole congregation, and even if we would adopt *υμων* as a genuine part of the inspired text, it would be best to take that as meaning the women who belong to the congregation (and certainly there are many times when we do use the possessive pronoun in referring to "our" women). Now some have argued that we should take the women of v. 34 as wives because of the phrase *τους ιδιους ανδρας* in v. 35. While the translation "their own husbands" is possible (cf. the NIV), it is also possible to translate that phrase "their own men-folk." And even if v. 35 is speaking only of the wives, that still would not prove that the women of v. 34 are only the wives.

So the women are to keep silent in the churches. But how far are we to take this prohibition? Strictly and literally interpreted, this would mean that they are not to join in the singing of any hymns, the speaking of any prayers, or the reciting of any creeds. It's here that Dr. Becker speaks at length about Luther's hermeneutical rule of manifest absurdity, a rule that is to be used with great caution and quite sparingly. This rule states that every single word of Scripture should be interpreted in its strict native sense unless manifest absurdity would result. Such manifest absurdity never gives us the right to reject what has been said or to let sinful human reason determine what is a manifest absurdity (I suppose that the Reformed would claim this for their interpretation of the words of institution). Scripture itself must teach us what a manifest absurdity is. A "manifest absurdity" exists when an interpretation would make Scripture contradict itself.²²

As Dr. Becker goes on to explain:

"It would surely be a manifest absurdity to interpret Paul's words to mean that women are never to utter any sounds in the church service under any and all conditions. That manifest absurdity follows from everything that the Bible says about the honored place that women hold in the Savior's kingdom as heirs together with men of the grace of life. Should they be altogether silent while the praises of the Lord are being sung or when the faith is being confessed, when out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks? He who defended the loud speaking of the little children in the temple and saw in their songs of praise a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy surely would also say that if the women who believe in him were altogether silent, the very stones would cry out."²³

If the command to be silent is an absolute command that applies under any and all conditions in the church service, then this would appear to contradict what Paul wrote previously in chapter 11 about the woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered. The context there would appear to indicate that Paul was discussing disorders in the public worship of the Corinthian congregation.

²² Becker, op. cit., p. 178.

²³ Ibid, p. 178.

Now some commentators are so sure that there is an insoluble contradiction between chapter 11 and this passage in chapter 14 that they view vv. 34-35 as an interpolation by which the text was corrupted. A German commentator by the name of Wendland tries to solve this difficulty by maintaining that in chapter 11 Paul is not speaking about prophesying and praying in the church service but only of such activities carried on by women in private or in the family circle.²⁴ Although it's true that the context of the opening verses of that chapter aren't conclusive, in the second half of chapter 11 Paul does discuss disorders in public worship, particularly in the celebration of Lord's Supper. And the custom that the apostle refers to there, that of wearing a veil, had to do with the public behavior of women.

So if we accept the praying and prophesying of the women that is mentioned in chapter 11 as something that is done in public, then the silence that the apostle calls for in this chapter must be interpreted in that light. Here the more immediate context helps us out. First of all, we should note that the legal principle that he is applying here is not that the women are to keep silent (I would call this more application) but rather that women are to be in subjection "as the law says.

Now as to the type of speaking that Paul has in mind as an application of this principle, what were the two activities that he had just addressed that involve speaking? Prophesying (not jointly as in ch. 11, but singly) and judging the prophesying, which involved someone rising to speak. In both cases, but especially with the second, the rising to speak would in effect be a command to the man Who was speaking to be silent. This sort of speaking would very clearly conflict with the subordinate position that God has established for women ever since creation. But what if a certain woman with the gift of prophecy just cannot contain herself? It should not be that difficult, for as v. 32 reminds us, "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets."

To me I find it extremely helpful to remember what the overriding principle is here: that of subjection. When we in our individual congregations have to wrestle with a variety of difficult application questions on this whole subject, it is always helpful to ask, will this application violate this legal principle, "Let them be in subjection"? The speaking that Paul has in mind in this context would have.

Now in the next verse Paul refers to another type of speaking which is also forbidden to women in the church.

Verse 35

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = prol. from a prim.- verb, another form of which, *matheo*, is used as an alt. in cert. tenses; to learn (in any way):--learn, understand.

SBLGreek =:to ask for, i.e. inquire, seek:--ask (after, questions), demand, desire, question. *avrlp* = a man (prop. as, an individual male):--fellow husband, man, sir.

SBLGreek = a shameful thing, i.e. indecorum:--shame:

Translation: If they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own men folk at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

NIV: if they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home;’ for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

In contrast to the two previous examples, it's a little more difficult to see how the desire to learn could violate the principle that women should be subject to men. However, each of us has no doubt experienced that type of questioning that gives evidence of a rebellious and undisciplined attitude. Since such questioning can easily become judgmental, it is perhaps quite closely connected to the type of judging that Paul referred to previously that the women were not to engage in because of their subjection.

At the same time Paul wishes to safeguard the woman's right to learn, which fits his earlier statement in v. 31 that all might learn (same word as in this verse). This right was to be safeguarded just as much as the

²⁴ Cited by Becker, op. cit., p. 179.

principle that women are to be subject to men. So if they wished to know more about the matters that had been the subject of the prophesying, they were to ask their own husbands/men folk at home. Although most translators translate “their own husbands” (the possessive pronoun is a strong argument on their side), I side with Lenski and Toppe in translating not so restrictively, since most unmarried women and widows would have fathers, brothers, or sons that they could talk to. In the exceptional cases (and we seem to be living in more exceptional times) the women could go to their elders or pastor(s).

As Paul now summarizes his whole discussion of the question of woman’s role in the church service, he uses a Greek word (ataopov) that is a very strong word. Even the seemingly harmless asking of questions would be such a shameful thing, for it could lead to discussions in which they would be tempted to take charge. As Dr. Becker comments:

“Whatever is in conflict with God’s law ought to be shameful in’ the eyes of God’s people. Whenever the speaking of a woman gives or seems to give evidence of a lack of awe and respect for the holy and immutable will of God in regard to human behavior, the sensibilities and consciences of God’s people are wounded. Such awe and respect for the will of God ought to be especially manifest ‘in church,’ when God’s people’ gather to hear his word and to sing his praises.”²⁵

What does this say to congregations who have allowed their women not only to attend voters’ meetings (what effect does their mere presence have on the, men?) but to ask questions of them or to make comments? Where can they ask these things? “At home.” Here I should share with you two experiences. In my first congregation I thought for one voters’ meeting it would be a good idea to let the women come in because the major issue that was being discussed was the planned covering of the pews with pads or carpeting, and we wanted the women’s opinion on style and color for proper coordination. After getting their input, during the rest of that meeting some of the more forward women couldn’t keep themselves from speaking up on other matters. That’s the last time that I’ve encouraged women to come to any meetings.

In my present congregation it was a longstanding practice to have regular open meetings in order to let the concerned women ask their questions and give their input on some of the major subjects. In theory I felt this was a way to apply v. 35 to today’s situation. But after a number of such meetings where just a couple of forward women really stepped over the line, especially in their attitude, I became increasingly uncomfortable with these meetings. However, our men became even more uncomfortable than I, and for the past five years there has been no suggestion to have such a meeting. After looking again at Scripture and discussing briefly some of the application issues, our men came to their own conclusions. What’s interesting is that our women haven’t asked for these either. I believe it has helped that we are now very open in our communication of congregational business (especially the newsletter), and the women know they can talk to me at any time. We also have an input committee made up of both men and women, and so for anyone with ideas, there is a way for their ideas to be heard.

Verse 36

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = to issue (lit. or fig.): -come-(forth, out), depart (out of), escape, get out, go (abroad, away, forth, out, thence), proceed (forth), spread abroad

SBLGreek = to meet against, i.e. arrive at (lit., or fig.):—attain, come.

Translation: Or did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones that it has reached?

NIV: Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

²⁵ Becker, op. cit., p. 183.

Here the King James is priceless: “What! came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?” As Lenski says, these final two questions on this subject contain a touch of irony that is intended to sting the haughty Corinthians. Both questions are preposterous and absurd.²⁶

But we know all too well that many people and churches and entire church bodies act in this way. Their actions imply that they know better than God and His Word, for they make God and His Word mean what they think they should mean. Consider what so many modern interpreters do here; they throw out every judgment on this in the past. Over 19 centuries of conservative interpretation on this must now be wrong, but they wouldn't judge our forefathers too harshly for their less enlightened interpretations were merely the product of their times, as Paul himself was the product of his times. To such interpreters it is no problem accommodating Scripture to the current times rather than the other way around. How ironic this verse is for such people, who are being hit on the head with a veritable sledgehammer and not feeling a thing. Lenski shares a similar thought: “Although throughout all ages of the past God's people have had the Word, these innovators presume to ignore all of them as though they had never existed and now arise to tell us what God's word contains. They conduct themselves as though they had just received the very first communication that God ever granted to men.”²⁷

I found it revealing that, generally speaking, the older the commentary, the more “traditional” were its comments. On the other hand, the more recent NIV Application Commentary on I Corinthians with a copyright date of 1995 makes this appeal in its comments on this section:

“We desperately need to allow one another the freedom to agree to disagree, to set up alternate models, to encourage local fellowships to determine for themselves, according to their best understanding of Scripture, what men and women should and should not do in home and in church. Egalitarians and hierarchicalists alike need to stop accusing each other of being unbiblical and instead acknowledge more humbly that the biblical data simply aren't clear enough to permit dogmatism on either side.”²⁸

I think Mr. Blomberg would also have us in mind, even though we fit somewhere in between the meaning of those two big words.

Verse 37

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = mean.; to think; by imps. to seem (truthfully or uncertainly):--be accounted, (of own) please (-ure), be of reputation, seem (good), suppose, think, trow.

SBLGreek= a foreteller (“prophet”); by anal. an inspired speaker; by extens. a poet:--prophet.

SBLGreek = non-carnal, i.e. (humanly) ethereal (as opposed to gross), or (daemoniacally) a spirit (concr.), or (divinely) supernatural, regenerate, religious:--spiritual:

SBLGreek= to know upon some mark, i.e. recognise; by impl. to become fully acquainted with, to acknowledge:-(ac-, have, take) know (-ledge, well), perceive.

SBLGreek= a prol. form of a prim. verb doko, dok'-o (used only as an alt. in certain tenses) of the

SBLGreek = injunction, i.e. an authoritative prescription:--commandment, precept

Translation: If anyone considers himself to be a prophet or to be spiritually minded, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command

NIV: If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge' that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.

²⁶ Lenski, op. cit., p. 619.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 620.

²⁸ Craig Blomberg, The NIV Application Commentary, I Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub]. House, 1995), p. 292.

With his discussion of spiritual gifts completed, all that remains is that Paul affixes the seal of authority to what he has written.²⁹ Our Lord Jesus spoke similarly in His very serious discussion with the Jews in John 8: “He who belongs to God hears, what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God” (v. 47).

Prof. Toppe puts it so well:

“As Christian women listen to the voice of God in Scripture, they acknowledge God’s will in this matter. They will recognize that the effort of feminists and their supporters in the church to justify changing the role of women in the church is not only vain; it is also dishonest manipulation of the word of God. The problem is not that God’s word isn’t clear. The problem is that respect for God and his word is becoming rare.”³⁰

It’s happened quite a number of times in my ministry that when a member who struggled with God’s will in this matter (and it wasn’t always the women!) approached Scripture with an open mind, that that member soon became convinced, convinced (and maybe somewhat convicted, too) by the Holy Spirit. Of course, the opposite has also happened, that certain people have stubbornly closed their minds to the Lord’s will in this area. But significantly few in my own personal experience have done this head on. It’s either been anonymous or it’s been done in more of a veiled manner, such as with humor. In only one case do I remember a more mature member who grew up in the church calling Paul a male chauvinist.

In my former congregation, which I understand recently had a major issue with this that needed to be addressed with some intensive Bible study, I suspected that there were a number of the younger adult women in the congregation who disagreed with our doctrine or our application of it, but who decided to “tolerate” our “extremism” until the synod became more enlightened on the subject. One of our more forward women in that age group, who had significant experience with upper management-type jobs and who was convinced by a careful study of Scripture, once commented to me that she thought we were becoming more and more like the Catholics, where more and more members of the church stay in the church but really don’t agree with all of the teachings of the church. I realize that much of this is nothing new, but I also have noticed in recent years how the young ladies in my public school confirmation classes have become much more vocal on this subject. Society and public school propaganda are having their effect. My pastoral authority eventually silences them in the classroom, but I’m not too sure that they’re totally convinced.

As I regularly remind, my students of all ages, where Pastor Meiselwitz speaks, that is a debatable matter, but where the Lord has spoken, all protests to the contrary are to stop. As the Interpreter’s Bible succinctly puts it, “And there we must leave it.”³¹ The apostle will brook no questioning of his status or authority. Those truly “inspired” will have no difficulty accepting these words.

But if they do, there is this warning:

Verse 38

SBLGreek

SBLGreek = not to know (through lack of information or intelligence); by impl. to ignore (through disinclination):--(be) ignorant (-ly), not know, not understand, unknown.

Translation: If anyone ignores this, he himself is to be ignored.

NIV: If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

There are actually two ways one can take this verse, as is indicated by the subtle difference between the KJV translation (“But if a man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.”) and the NIV (see above). The Living Bible paraphrase bridges the two: “But if anyone still disagrees—well, we will leave him in his ignorance.” Here I

²⁹ Lenski, op. cit., p. 620.

³⁰ Toppe, op. cit., p. 137.

³¹ Buttrick (ed.), op. cit., p. 213.

believe Lenski's translation fits well with the previous context: "But if anyone does not acknowledge, he himself is not acknowledged," i.e., as a prophet and as man who is spiritually gifted.³² Lenski goes on to make this very pertinent point: "Men in and out of the church still delude themselves by thinking that they are able to pronounce on the Lord's Word whereas by every such pronouncement they pronounce only on themselves alone, either that they apprehend the Word (for which they deserve acknowledgment) or that they fail to apprehend it (for which they themselves forfeit acknowledgment)."³³

Verse 39

SBLGreek

SBLGreek= to have warmth of felling for or against-affect, covet (earnestly), (have) desire, (move with) envy, be jealous over, (be) zealous (-ly affect

Translation: Therefore, my brothers, be very eager to prophesy, but do not forbid speaking in tongues.

NIV: Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

With a brotherly appeal that begins with a concluding "therefore," Paul sums up this section and, in fact, the entire chapter. What's definitely to occupy the number one position in our church's services? Prophecy, that is, preaching. Thou shalt covet clear preaching of the Word in language that everyone can understand (remember that at times our preachers' language sounds like speaking in tongues to today's people in the pew in recent years I've been surprised at some of the words some of my catechism students ask me to define; I find it an ever increasing challenge to keep pushing my knowledgeable members while at the same time not losing the "immature").

Even though preaching is number one, Paul takes care to remind us not to despise the lesser gifts. In the church's infancy, even a lesser gift like speaking in tongues, which had many problems in connection with its use still had a place in the church. Prof. Toppe surmises that one of its chief functions was to attract public attention to the supernatural origin of Christianity.³⁴ That makes sense, but the much more difficult question is how to apply the second half of v. 39 to the church today? If all of the tongues-speaking of Paul's day was that of known foreign languages, then we have no problem with that. In fact, we pray for an abundance of this gift in the world mission field. This pastor has himself been such a "tongues-speaker," having preached in German for 11 years, two as a vicar (emergency situation) at St. Matthew's in Benton Harbor, MI, and nine as an associate pastor at St. Paul's in Stevensville, MI. While not a miraculous gift as it was with the apostles at Pentecost, it was nevertheless quite amazing that I could do that with just the minimum amount of German courses at Northwestern and, with extremely limited conversational ability. So the Lord still grants various gifts in this department, but just because they come through careful language study and hard work we at times devalue their specialness and uniqueness.

But what shall we say if the tongues-speaking of Paul's day was some type of ecstatic speech, as Prof. Toppe and others have allowed as a possibility? Prof. Toppe is very quick to add that the modem movement does not conform to the specifications of this chapter regarding the nature and use of tongues-speaking. He also lists five other reasons for rejecting modem tongues-speaking, which I've summarized very briefly:

1. Practices associated with such ecstatic speech violate the Scripture requirements for fellowship in doctrine.
2. Personal "experience" is so often elevated above what God's word says.
3. Tongues-speakers have a tendency to divide the church because they often consider themselves first-class Christians as compared to those who are not tongues-speakers.
4. Modem tongues-speaking typically has a very strong psychological bent.

³² Lenski, op. cit., p. 621.

³³ Ibid, p. 622.

³⁴ Toppe, op. cit., p. 138.

5. When God rescued his church in the days of the Reformation, not one of the reformers, Lutheran or Reformed, was a tongues-speaker. It was the Word that saved the church.

The Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly (Vol. 89, #2, 1992) has an instructive article on this very matter. Its title is the very question we have just raised: “Is Speaking in Tongues a Gift of the Spirit for the Church of All Times?” Parts 5 & 6 of that essay emphasize the gradual fading away of speaking in tongues in Corinth and the passing away of the gift of speaking in tongues altogether. Significantly, in no other New Testament letters is it even referred to, not even where a large number of gifts are enumerated (Rom. 12:3-8), and our Lord Jesus Himself never mentioned them. Later St. Augustine referred to this gift as a sign that had disappeared, and Luther stated very categorically that these signs ceased immediately after apostolic proclamation had been made to the ends of the earth.³⁵

In our WELS circles, when prophecy (preaching) occupies first place among spiritual gifts and functions, when it is so zealously sought and guarded, then the modern type of speaking in tongues holds very little appeal. But when emotionalism is so highly valued, then it is not that surprising when Lutherans leave their precious roots, as happened twice in my former congregation, the latest being a former Board of Ed. and Board of Evangelism member. Our own conference and district has seen former brothers become defectors in this and related matters, which has wrecked havoc in a number of the Chicago land churches. They made very emotional appeals that we be more understanding and “loving” brothers. But in retrospect we can see in how many ways they rejected the brotherly appeal of the Lord’s apostle. And now the loving words of the apostle in v. 38 have proven so true.

Verse 40

SBLGreek

SBLGreek= decorously; decently, honestly

SBLGreek= regular arrangement, i.e. (in time) fixed succession (of rank or character), official

Translation: But make sure that everything is done with appropriateness and according to good order.

NIV: But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

I like the word “decorously,” because it’s another one of those full words. It tells us that everything ought to be done with decorum. The Jerusalem Bible uses the similar word “propriety.” Since I don’t want to be guilty of speaking in tongues, I’ve used the word “appropriateness.” Lenski uses the word “seemly,” which he says is the opposite of egotistic disorder.³⁶ Prof. Toppe picks up on that by reminding us that “the Christian worship service is not the place to indulge personal whims or to satisfy egos.”³⁷

The second phrase, *κατὰ τάξιν*, is probably a military metaphor. It was used in connection with the Greeks’ manner of fighting at Salamis as opposed to the disorderly efforts of the barbarians.³⁸ It reminds me not only of a military regiment in perfect formation, it also makes me think of the perfect order and arrangement that exists with the heavenly bodies. As beauty and harmony prevail in God’s universe for the display of God’s glory, so they should in the worship of God.

Now it is somewhat true that decorum and good order are highly culture-specific—and the assigned practical paper will have more to say about this subject but in most cases it will be pretty obvious when something is over the line.

“Order in the court.” As much as we strive for that in our churches, we realize that even in the typical formal ritual of our WELS churches there are plenty of frustrating zigs and zags. Maybe we can still play the

³⁵ Rolf Borszik and Gottfried Wachler, “Is Speaking in Tongues a Gift for the Spirit for the Church of All Times?” - published in the *WLQ*, Vol. 89, #2 (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publ. House, 1992), pp. 134-135.

³⁶ Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 622.

³⁷ Toppe, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

³⁸ Archibald Robertson, *The International Critical Commentary, I Corinthians* (New York: Charles Scribner’s & Sons, 1911), p. 328.

old totem pole game of comforting ourselves that we are not as bad as _____ congregation in our area and surely not as bad as the congregation in Corinth, still we always strive for the perfect decorum of heaven.

God himself is present—Let us now adore him
And with awe appear before him.
God is in his temple—All within keep silence,
Humbly kneel in deepest rev'ence.
He alone On his throne
Is our God and Savior, Praise his name forever!