

An Evaluation of Speaking in Tongues as Angelic Language from the Judaeian and Early Christian Perspectives

Eben de Jager

Abstract

In contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic circles glossolalia is often referred to as the tongues of angels, with 1 Corinthians 13:1 being quoted. Yet writings on the tongues of angels available in the first century and the Judaeian context from which Paul wrote do not support such a narrative. In addition, the Corinthian context and the writings of the Church Fathers also paint a picture not aligned with the contemporary view. An analysis of 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 shows it to be a weak support for establishing the concept of contemporary ‘angelic language’. Other influences may have given rise to the idea of glossolalia as the tongues of angels, but the Bible does not appear to support such a view.

Keywords

Tongues of angels, angeloglossy, xenolalia, glossolalia, hebraeophone.

About the Author¹

Eben de Jager
Masters Degree, UNISA. He is a member of *Spirasa* (The Spirituality Association of South Africa).

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

There are many different views on the gift of tongues, or glossolalia, in Christian circles today. Cartledge (2000:136–138) lists twelve possibilities of what the linguistic nature of glossolalia might be, based on his study of various scholars' work. Similarly, Gulley (1998:135–136) also lists 12 possibilities, though his variations do not exactly match those identified by Cartledge. That having been said, broadly speaking with one exception,² all these possibilities can be easily categorised into three major groups namely akoulalia,³ xenolalia⁴ and ecstatic speech.⁵ The exception mentioned, which would be listed as either ecstatic or xenolalic speech,⁶ holds that the gift of tongues is a heavenly language, often referred to as the language of angels (Banks and Moon 1966:279; Cartledge 2000:149; Dunn 1975:244; Hodge 1988:266; Tolmie 2011:5; Williams 1996:222) or as Fee (1987:630) puts it 'the dialect (s) of heaven'.

The book *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* by Christopher Forbes (1995) brought convincing arguments against the commonly-held view that there are strong comparisons between divine languages found in Greco-Roman society, which manifested in ecstatic speech, and Christian glossolalia. It presented the biblical version as a distinct and unrelated phenomenon which identifies the spiritual gift as the supernatural ability to speak in unlearned human languages. The current study does not concern itself with ecstatic speech as found, for example, with the Sibylline Oracles of ancient cultures, but limits itself to angelic speech and/or divine language which stems from Judaeian and Early Christian sources.

Dunn (1975:244) declares that 'Paul thought of glossolalia as speaking the language(s) of heaven' and considers '[p]rayer in the Spirit' to also refer to glossolalia and therefore mentions Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 1:20 as possible allusions to it (Dunn 1975:239, 245–246; Williams 1996:219). 1 Corinthians 13:1, however, is the primary verse referenced in support of the idea of tongues as angelic language (Hasel 1991:122), with verses such as Romans 8:26 (Williams 1996:219), 1 Corinthians 14:2, 14 and 2 Corinthians 12:3–4 also being used to buttress this view. This view considers tongues to be a devotional or prayer language used by the practitioner to communicate with God and, as such, is often used in a private setting, although it does not exclude its use in a corporate worship setting (Busenitz 2014:69–83; Nel 2017:3; Smith 2010:133).

2 Gulley (1998:135-136) mentions languages from supposed previous lives which could fall into the second or third categories or in a category of its own because not enough information is provided on the nature of these languages to determine for certain where it belongs.

3 Akoulalia is a miracle of hearing that which is spoken in an unknown or unintelligible language in one's own language. Cartledge (2000:138) describes it as: 'the real miracle in Acts 2 was not one of speaking but of hearing, as the hearers were given the ability to understand a language or unintelligible speech that was otherwise incomprehensible'.

4 Xenolalia refers to the unlearned ability to speak in foreign languages; existing languages already known and spoken by people or people groups somewhere on earth. This view seems to be described by Luke in Acts 2.

5 Ecstatic speech is a term used to describe unintelligible speech which must be interpreted to be understood. It is not a language spoken by any people group on earth.

6 Heavenly/angelic speech, when considered a genuine language spoken by angelic beings and being the native language of heaven, would technically constitute xenolalia.

The purpose of this essay is to evaluate the contemporary view of the gift of tongues as the language of angels from a Judaeian and Early Christian context by considering various aspects that might have contributed to the use of the term in the first century AD, the time when 1 Corinthians was written, and influences impacting contemporary understanding of languages of angels. These aspects need to be scrutinised to determine their validity and likely influence on the use of the term tongues of angels. The aspects to be evaluated are 1) the first-century concept of 'tongues of angels', 2) tongues of angels in the context of contemporary Corinthian society, 3) the anti-Nicene understanding of angelic linguistic ability as well as their description of the nature of the gift of tongues,⁷ 4) the Middle Ages' possible contribution to the awareness of a secret languages spoken by angels, which might have influenced the contemporary view, 5) the text and context of the pivotal verse, 1 Corinthians 13:1, which is invariably used to establish the idea of the tongues of angels and 6) the contemporary Pentecostal view of tongues as the language of angels. These aspects will be discussed in order after briefly considering angels as understood in Judaeian and Early Christian culture.

⁷ The Anti-Nicene Fathers lived and wrote at a time when speaking in tongues was a contemporary and/or recent manifestation and therefore their understanding of tongues in general, and references to languages of angels specifically, can contribute greatly to this study.

2. Angels in Judaeian culture

There are many biblical and extra-biblical references to angels which informed their concept of the nature and function of angels. These range from references to the Angel of the Lord (Exod 3:2, Judg 13 and so on) to angels in general (Gen 19:1,15; Gen 28:12, Dan 6:22 and so on). There is a certain ambiguity on the nature of angels in ancient Judaeian society in part due to the terms such as *elihim*, *elim*, and 'children of the most High'⁸ as found in Psalm 82 (Evans 2007:260). In the literature of the Qumran community the plural of *el*, *elim*, refers to angels while *el* in Semitic languages refers to God, who is the father of the gods (Evans 2007:18). Psalm 82 speaks of a council of the Gods which was problematic to the staunchly monotheistic tradition of Israel and *Elohim* was therefore interpreted by many rabbis as referring to the people of Israel (Evans 2007:18). In similar councils, such as detailed in Job 1 and 2, the attending beings are called 'sons of God', a term synonymous with 'sons of the most High', and are also mentioned in Job 38:7, where the term cannot refer to humans, since the context suggests the time as being before humans were created.

⁸ According to Evans (2007:18) 'Children of the most High' is considered a synonym for 'sons of God'.

In Psalm 82, as in Job 1 and 2, and Ezekiel 1 and 10, the angels appear in the very presence of God. Relating to this scenario, Cook (2000:235) quotes Macarius (Apocritus), a Hellenic philosopher, as saying:

If you say that angels stand before God, who are not subject to feeling and death, and immortal in their nature, whom we ourselves speak of as gods, because they are close to the divinity, why do we dispute about a name? ... The difference therefore is not great, whether a man calls them gods or angels, since their divine nature bears witness to them.

Be that as it may, Murphy-O'Connor (2009:154–155) identifies two functions that angels perform when he says 'they served as mediators in the giving of the Law (Gal 3:19) and they observe what is going on in the world (1 Cor 4:9)'. This idea seems to be supported by Philo who says, 'the eyes and ears of the Great King, they watch and hear all' (Som. 1.140) referencing the angels as beings who report to God what occurs on earth.

The Bible records many encounters between humans and angels; for example, in Judges 13 where an angel reveals to Manoah and his wife that they will have a son, in Daniel 9 where Gabriel is sent to assist Daniel with the interpretation of the prophecy revealed to him in Daniel 8 (Dan 9:20–23) and more detail is provided on the first seventy weeks (Dan 9:24–27). The New Testament also records such incidents; for example, an angel revealing to Zacharias and Mary the birth of their respective sons (Luke 1:13, 30–31).

We can safely assume, then, that a primary function of the angels is communication with humans and that this function is mediatory and/or revelatory in nature.

3. The Tongues of Angels in First-Century Judaeon culture

Two views on the languages of angels predominated in Judaeon culture.⁹ The one was that the angels spoke Hebrew, a view Poirier (2010:1) refers to as *hebraeophone*. The alternative Poirier (2010:1) calls *angeloglossy*, a term he uses 'to denote the phenomenon of humans speaking in esoteric angelic languages'. Though it is not clear which of these views was held first, the reference to angels speaking Hebrew comes from *The Book of Jubilees*, which is the oldest source amongst these views. We therefore consider it first.

The idea that a specific language, foundational to a religion, is somehow sacred, is common. Poirier (2010:9) notes that '[t]he special status of the sacred language was often represented by attributing that language to the angels or gods, and it was widely held that the most ancient human tongue was also necessarily divine'.

⁹ An alternative view espoused by some was that the heathen nations, supposed to be 70 or 72, each spoke the language of their representative angel (Poirier 2010:10).

Second Temple Judaism is no exception, and Judaeen culture, attributing Creation to God, naturally led many Jews to consider Hebrew as the original language spoken. According to *The Book of Jubilees*, a document dated to the second century BC, Abraham supernaturally receives the ability to both speak and understand Hebrew (Charles 1902:96; Schodde 1888:43),¹⁰ the only language in existence and spoken from Creation to the time of the biblical narrative of the tower of Babel, when ‘it had ceased from the mouths of all the children of men’. Though Hebrew is not specified, *The Book of Jubilees* refers to the animals having lost their linguistic ability when Adam and Eve were cast from the garden.¹¹ Hebrew does seem implied since Eve conversed with the snake in chapter 3, verses 14–16 (Schodde 1888) and verses 17–19 (Charles 1902; Poirier 2010:13).

A Christian source that shares the view that Hebrew constitutes the language of angels is the *Vision of Paul* (Schaff 2004:IX, 290–291), where verse 30 reads:

And I said to the angel: Sir, what is Alleluia? And the angel answered and said to me: You ask questions about everything. And he said to me, Alleluia is said in **the Hebrew language of God and angels**, for the meaning of Alleluia is this: tecel cat. marith macha.³⁹²¹ And I said, Sir, what is tecel cat. marith macha? And the angel answered and said unto me: Tecel cat. Marith macha is: Let us all bless him together. I asked the angel and said, Sir, do all who say Alleluia bless the Lord? And the angel answered and said to me: It is so, and again, therefore, if any one sing Alleluia and those who are present do not sing at the same time, they commit sin because they do not sing along with him. And I said: My lord, does he also sin if he be hesitating or very old? The angel answered and said unto me: Not so, but he who is able and does not join in the singing, know such as a despiser of the Word, and it would be proud and unworthy that he should not bless the Lord God his maker (*emphasis added*).¹²

The reference to the language of God and the angels shows that the understanding was that God himself spoke Hebrew as his vernacular language, which would make it the language of Creation, and it would follow that the angels as created beings would speak it also. Poirier (2010:24) points out that although the Syriac version of the *Vision of Paul* specifies that ‘alleluia’ is a Hebrew term, it does not contain the phrase identifying Hebrew as the language of God and the angels.

¹⁰ In Schodde’s version it is verses 27–28, but in Charles’ (1902:96) it is verses 25–26, which adds the words ‘from the day of the overthrow (of Babel)’ to verse 25.

¹¹ ‘And on that day was closed the mouth of all the animals and of the beasts and of the birds and of whatever walks and of whatever moves, so that they could not speak; for they all had spoken with each other one lip and one tongue.’ Chapter 3:24 according to Schodde and chapter 3:28 in Charles’s version.

¹² ‘Tecel cat. Marith macha’ are words from another seemingly angelic language which, according to the quoted text, are translated as ‘Let us all bless him together’.

There are thus both Judaeen and Christian sources showing a body of people understanding Hebrew to have been the language of angels (and God). Within the Christian tradition, the lack of Hebrew seems to indicate that a specific ideology, probably driven by nationalism, was the driving force behind this view (Poirier 2010:26).¹³

On the other hand, *angeloglossy*, or esoteric languages of angels, was not foreign to Judaeen culture (Fee 1987:630). Various scholars have noted the references to angelic languages being mentioned in works such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah* and (Burton 2011:212–214). Poirier (2010:47–108) adds to these some rabbinical evidence such as *Hymn 11* by Ephrem Syrus and *The Book of the Resurrection* among others, but for our purposes we consider a selection of these works mentioned by both Burton and Poirier, since they contain the clearer references and can be considered representative of the variations encountered in this category.

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* records both before and after chapter 15 many instances of Abraham conversing with God and an angel. In chapter 8–10 God is speaking to Abraham, and in chapter 10 an angel starts speaking to Abraham on God's instruction. The last verses of chapter 15 contains a reference to heavenly beings speaking in a language not known to Abraham:

1. And it came to pass when the sun was setting, and behold a smoke like that of a furnace, and the angels who had the divided portions of the sacrifice ascended 2. from the top of the furnace of smoke. And the angel took me with his right hand and set me on the right wing of the pigeon and he himself sat on the left wing of 3. the turtledove, (both of) which were as of neither slaughtered nor divided. And 4. he carried me up to the edge of the fiery flames. And we ascended as if (carried) 5. by many winds to the heaven that is fixed on the expanses. And I saw on the air 6. to whose height we had ascended a strong light which can not be described. And behold, in this light a fiery Gehenna was enkindled, and a great crowd in the 7. likeness of men. They all were changing in aspect and shape, running and changing form and prostrating themselves and **crying words I did not know**. (*Apocalypse of Abraham*, Chapter 15), (*emphasis added*).

The language these heavenly beings employed was unknown to Abraham and indicates a language peculiar to them. These beings are not called angels *per se*, but their description as 'in the likeness of men' combined with changing shape and form are indicative of their other-worldly origin.

¹³ Poirier (2010:27) does, however, note that '[t]he relative lack of references to Hebrew-speaking angels in Christian sources does not mean that the church automatically rejected the claim that Hebrew was the first language.'

From the context it seems clear that the words they uttered were not addressed to Abraham; thus his understanding was not required. The words spoken to Abraham both before and after were instructions and explanations for the sake of his well-being and understanding of what was being revealed to him.

14 Probably written in Greek between 100 BCE. and 175 CE in Egypt (Poirier 2010:77-78)

The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*¹⁴ chapter 8 recounts Zephaniah taking a trip on a boat out of Hades. It reads:

1. They helped me and set me on that boat. 2. Thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of angels gave praise before me. 3. I, myself, put on an angelic garment. I saw all of those angels praying. 4. I, myself, prayed together with them. 5. **I knew their language, which they spoke with me.** 6. Now, moreover, my sons, this is the trial because it is necessary that the good and the evil be weighed in a balance. (*emphasis added*)

When Zephaniah states, ‘I knew their language, which they spoke with me’, it indicates the language as not being his native tongue, but theirs. Unlike in *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, here the language, though peculiar to the angels, is not just understood but also utilised by him to join in the angelic activity. If indeed this is an example of *angeloglossy*, the context is noteworthy. The setting is one of intercessory prayer, maybe even hymnody, with intercessory prayer being a regular feature of angelic activity in apocryphal books (Poirier 2010:78–80). Engagement in the angelic activity of intercessory prayer seems to set the stage for the same activity to also occur in an angelic language.

Another document which relates to *angeloglossy* in the Judaeen context, though not with such explicit mentions as those mentioned thus far, is *The Ascension of Isaiah*.¹⁵ The extract considered is from chapter 9:19–26:

15 Arguably a compiled work where chapters 1-5 are dated as a first-century CE work and 6-11 to the second century CE (Poirier 2010:82).

19. And I said to him what I had asked him in the third heaven, 20. ‘[Show me how everything] which is done in that world is known here.’ 21. And while I was still speaking to him, behold one of the angels who were standing by, more glorious than that angel who had brought me up from the world, showed me (some) books, {but not like the books of this world}; and he opened them, and **the books had writing in them, but not like the books of this world.** And they were given to me, and I read them, and behold the deeds of the children of Israel were written there, their deeds which you know, my son Josab. 23. And I said, ‘Truly, nothing which is done in this world is hidden in the seventh heaven.’ 24.

And I saw many robes placed there, and many thrones and many crowns, 25. and I said to the angel who led me, ‘Whose (are) these robes and thrones and crowns?’ 26. And he said to me, ‘As for these robes, there are many from that world who will receive (them) through believing in the words of that one who will be named as I have told you, and they will keep them, and believe in them, and believe in his cross; [for them (are) these] placed (here).’ (*emphasis added*)

The central issue in this passage is not the conversation with the angel, but the content written in the books. The expression ‘not like the books of this world’ indicates some kind of heavenly or angelic script used to record the deeds of men. Culianu (1983:105) interprets this as meaning that the books used a ‘celestial alphabet’, indicating an angelic language used to record the deeds of men. Culianu recognises that some thought the celestial language to have been Hebrew, as noted earlier in this essay, but unequivocally argues that Hebrew is not what is in view here, but rather the interpretation of an angelic language.

Even more subtle references to possible esoteric angelic language can be detected in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Poirier (2010:85–86) points out how Isaiah could have been faced by ‘language barriers’ as there is possible evidence of different languages, or ‘voices’ spoken by angels, even in some of the same levels of the 7-level heaven depicted in the book. These barriers are overcome, as he eventually joins them in praise, since Isaiah sees the righteous as well as an angelic host approach God and engaging in worship. As he joins them in worship, it is recorded that his ‘praise was like theirs’ (*Ascension of Isaiah* 9:28).

It is, however, the *Testament of Job*¹⁶ which tends to be mentioned most often in this regard (Burton 2011:211; Fee 1987:630). According to this work, the three daughters of Job, Hemera, Kasia, and Amaltheia, receive sashes from Job on his deathbed. These endowed them with special abilities. Chapter 11:21–29 states:

(48) Then Job’s daughter Hemera got up and wrapped the sash around her waist as her father had instructed her. She then received a new heart, and now no longer concerned herself about earthly things. **She chanted words in an angelic language and sent on high a hymn to God that was like that of the angels.** As she sang these hymns, she allowed ‘spirit’ to be inscribed on her garment.

(49) Then Kasia wrapped the sash around herself and received a new heart and no longer concerned herself about earthly things.

16 Whether the Testament of Job originated in Second Temple Judaism or Christianity greatly influences the dating of the document and by implication also its relevance in the context of 1 Corinthians 13:1. The dating issue will be addressed in the main text shortly.

Her mouth learned the language of the heavenly rulers and she praised the creation of the heavenly realm. If anyone should now want to know about the creation of heaven, it can be found in the ‘Hymns of Kassia.’ (50) Then the third daughter, Amaltheia’s Horn, wrapped a sash around her, and when her heart was changed and she withdrew from earthly matters, **her mouth began to speak in the language of those on high. The language she spoke was that of the cherubim,** as she praised the master of virtues by exhibiting their glory. The one who wants to discover a trace of the father’s glory will find it recorded in the ‘Prayers of Amaltheia’s Horn.’ (*emphasis added*)

From the context it is fair to deduce that literal angelic languages are in view here. In the light of Hemera’s singing of ‘angelic hymns in the voice [tongue] of angels’ and Amaltheia’s ‘in the language of those on high’ and ‘in the dialect of the Cherubim, it is reasonable to consider the use of the term ‘rulers’ (archons) in relation to Kasia as a reference ‘to supra-worldly powers which, as a rule, exercise lordship inimical to God’ (Balz and Schneider 1990:167)

The *Testimony of Job*; 52, adds to our understanding, when it states:

(52) After three days, while Job had the appearance of being sick on his couch—though he was without pain and suffering; those things could not touch him because of the sign of the sash that was girded around him—he saw those who were coming for his soul. Immediately he got up, took his lyre, and gave it to his daughter Hemera; he also gave a censer to Kassia and a drum to Ameltheia’s Horn, so that they might all bless those who had come for his soul. **They took the instruments and blessed and glorified God in their special tongue.** Then the one who rode in the great chariot came and greeted Job, as the three daughters and Job looked on, although no one else could see him. He took Job’s soul and embraced it and flew up and mounted the chariot and set off toward the east. His body, however, wrapped for burial, was carried away to the tomb, with his three daughters leading the way, their sashes tied around their breasts, singing hymns to God. (*emphasis added*)

We find the three daughters engaging in worship using a ‘special tongue’ or dialect, which contextually refers to the language of the hierarchies of heavenly beings.

First- and second-century Judaeon culture provides two possible interpretations of angelic language.

It could either refer to Hebrew, believed to be the original language, or it could be some esoteric angelic language which may or may not be understood and spoken by humans depending on whether they were endowed with the ability to speak the heavenly language.

4. Tongues of Angels in the Corinthian Context

Roman society in general placed a high premium on oratory skills and people gifted in this department were highly esteemed in the community. Corinth, being a significant port city of ancient Roman times invariably also valued this talent. Burton (2011:50–56) convincingly shows the importance of eloquence in speech as a vehicle for social upward mobility, and points out that the eloquent were at times viewed as inspired. Accepting his argument, the possibility exists that the language of angels does not literally refer to supposed heavenly languages spoken by angels, but serves as a metaphoric expression of excellence of speech. In this regard Blomberg (1994:259) states that tongues of angels ‘probably refers to the Corinthians’ estimation of the gift’. The egotistical motivation of rising in the estimation of men might well have been the motivation for Paul addressing the issue of boasting in the earlier chapters of 1 Corinthians (Fee 1987:630; Hawthorne 1993:174) and for addressing the challenge the practice of tongues posed, especially considering its use without outward love as the primary focus.

Hawthorne (1993:175) also highlights the over-realised eschatology of the Corinthian church, which might have caused them to interpret the gift of tongues as a manifestation which proved they ‘shared the spiritual existence of angels’. Fee (1987:631) concurs, arguing that the Corinthian community believed they had already entered ‘into some expression of angelic existence’¹⁷ which was evidenced by them speaking in the languages of angels. If this was indeed the case, the manifestation of the gift of tongues would be highly valued among them, and excessively so, but for self-advancement and not service, as the gifts are supposed to be utilised.

This could have prompted Paul to return to and expand on the theme of boasting and other problems in that congregation especially when it comes to tongues (Turner 1998:235). Eloquence in tongues would not equate to being spiritual in the Christian context, at least not if it was practised without ‘charity’, which exemplifies the outward focus of the spiritual gifts (Fee 1987:631).

17 This spirituality could have influenced their views on sexuality and the denial of a future bodily existence (Fee 1987:631).

In chapter 13:1 Paul aims to point out that the oratory skills the Corinthians craved were of no use unless and until used with the focus on edifying others, for the ‘common good’ (1 Cor 12:7), rather than for egotistical self-promotion which was the way operated by the pagan society in which the Corinthian church found themselves.

18 Consider the rhetorical nature of 1 Corinthians 12:30 which in Greek always implies a negating answer, and 1 Corinthians 14:5 which indicates the superiority of prophesying over the gift of tongues.

19 Some scholars consider Tertullian to have had a divergent view of tongues from that of the other Church Fathers; believing tongues to be ecstatic speech (Thiselton 2000:981-982). Due consideration should be given to the fact that Tertullian in *Against Marcion* Book V 8:7-12 does not discuss tongues *per se*, but rather the role of women in the church. Tertullian’s contribution to the discussion on tongues also seems over-emphasised compared to other Church Fathers who discuss tongues specifically.

20 Some, like Currie (1965:290) and Thiselton (1979:29) argue against such consensus by claiming Irenaeus and Celsus make mention of babbling or lalling in this context, but as Turner (1985:20-21) points out, their arguments ‘are not about glössais lalein at all: they are about the production of incoherent prophetic speech (incoherent, that is, not because the individual words are unintelligible, but because together they make no sense—a common criticism of unsolicited oracles in the ancient world)’.

21 Some scholars oppose the view that tongues were given for the sake of evangelistic endeavours. For arguments on this issue, see Edwards (1885:319) and Thiselton (2000: 976-977). The Church Fathers who wrote about tongues believed the gift of tongues and evangelism went hand in hand (Gumerlock 2004:124-138).

Here Paul further employs a symbol the Corinthians would be familiar with when he references the uselessness of tongues without love. He compares it with the sound of brass or cymbal, for in Corinth, ‘known for its highly treasured bronze-ware, one use of which was as “resonance enhancers” in the theatre’ (Hawthorne 1993:172). The people would be well familiar with the sound and therefore would vividly understand Paul’s intent (Grosheide 1980:304; Hodge 1988:266). They would also likely connect it to pagan worship practices common at that time (Fee 1987:631–632).

The Corinthian context brings to view eloquence of speech and the accompanying social ascendance, rather than a distinct language. The egotistical nature of seeking eloquence in speech for self-promotion fits well with Paul’s rhetoric in his letter as a whole, where he addresses the issue of boasting. It fits 1 Corinthians 12–14 in the context of gifts¹⁸ which have the common good of the congregation as focus, and justifies especially 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 and the emphasis on charity.

5. The Early Church Fathers on the Gift of Tongues and its possible relation to Language of Angels

Many of the Early Church Fathers wrote about the ‘gift of tongues’. Those who did, seem to have consensus on the nature of the gift of tongues.¹⁹ The following table lists some of the Early Church Fathers, the relevant document in which they refer to the gift of tongues and a short description of the nature of the gift of tongues according to each Church Father listed, as provided by Gumerlock (2004:124–133):

Evidently the consistent interpretation of the gift of tongues according to the Church Fathers is that the gift constitutes the ability to speak the multitude of languages spoken on earth²⁰ (see Table 1). Their writings also suggest that the purpose was to evangelise and educate the heathen nations in the Christian faith.²¹

One Church Father not listed above deserves some specific attention.

Hilary of Poitiers	On the Trinity	'the tongues of the Gentiles
Eusebius of Emesa	-	'the languages of the world'
Cyril of Jerusalem	Catechetical Lectures	'every tongue of those of Gentile extraction'
Gaudentius	Sermons	'the tongues of the various nations'
John Chrysostom	Homilies on 1 Corinthians	'all at once speak diverse languages'
Rufinus of Aquileia	Commentary on the Apostles' Creed	'a variety of different languages ... and no foreign speech beyond their powers of comprehension'
Pelagius	Letter to Demetrius	'the tongues of all nations', 'to speak in every language, and thus announce beforehand in the language of every nation'
Augustine	Sermons on the Liturgical Season	'to speak with the different languages of all nations which they didn't know, and hadn't learned'
Leo the Great	Sermon 75	'the languages peculiar to each nation became common property in the mouth of the church'
Jacob of Serugh	Homily 17 on the Sunday of Pentecost	'the speech of the nations and their tongues'
Cassiodorus	Commentary on Acts	'the languages of various nations'
Gregory the Great	Homilies on the Gospels	'the knowledge of all languages'
Gregory the Great	Moralia on Job	'speaking in the language of every nation'
Gregory the Great	Dialogues	'the power of speaking all languages'

Table 1: The Church Fathers on the gift of tongues

Filastrius (1889:63) connects the gift of tongues with the Old Testament narrative on the Tower of Babel, and also connects tongues and the linguistic abilities of angels. In the *Book of Diverse Heresies* (Filastrius 1889:63) states:

Adtamen omnem scientiam linguarum, quam ante duo milia annorum et septingentos annos offendentes amiserant homines, sub beatis apostolis rursus post ascensionem suam dominus per sanctum spiritum sine quodam labore credentibus conferebat, sicut scriptum est in Actibus apostolorum. Angelicae enim virtutis est linguas scire omnium hominum: per fidem autem Christi sine labore linguarum omnium credentibus subministratur scientia, sicut legimus, docente diuino spiritu apostolos atque gentes itidem credentes tunc temporis in Christum dominum saluae torem sine labore linguarum omnium donatam scientiam praedicasse, ut sub Petro et Paulo et aliis factum est, eum docerent gentes uenisse spiritum dei a deo: et linguis multis eos potuisse eloqui, ut audientes homines mirarentur de gentibus, quod tantarum linguarum et ipsi per fidem Christi scientiam haberent sine doctrina concessam.

Which translates to:

The knowledge of languages which offending men lost twenty-seven hundred years earlier the Lord conferred again through the Holy Spirit at the time of the blessed apostles after his ascension without any effort upon those who believed, as it is written in the Acts of the Apostles. For it is the power of angels to know the languages of all men; but through faith in Christ without any effort the knowledge of them all was passed on to believers as we read, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit the Apostles and the believers would be able to preach Christ the Lord and Saviour as the spirit of God from God effortlessly having been given such knowledge, as happened with Peter and Paul and others such that they could speak many languages, such that listeners among the Gentiles would marvel that they would have been given the knowledge of so many languages by faith in Christ without having been taught.²² [*emphasis added*]

22 Translation by Dr Girard J Etkorn.

The ability to speak all languages, being able to converse with all people groups seems to be the central focus of the Early Church Fathers when it comes to the gift of tongues. Filastrius refers to this ability as a power the angels possess, which indicates that all languages, rather than a distinct language, constitute the concept of ‘angelic language’.

6. Tongues of Angels in the Middle Ages

While the Church Fathers take us well into the fifth century AD with their references to tongues, history is not silent on the languages of angels in the era following the Church Fathers. During the Middle Ages mention of the language of angels is also found, though outside the Christian framework. Arguably the most notable are references to ‘angelic languages’ in the context of Enochian magic (Prinke and Follprecht 2015:120–121).

John Dee (1527–1608), a major figure in esoterism during the second part of the fourteenth century, viewed three ‘books’ as the primary sources through which the mysteries of God could be known. These metaphorical ‘books’ were ‘the human soul, revealed Scripture, and the “Book of Nature”’ (Asprem 2012:12). In his search for understanding, Dee studied optics, Kabbalistic hermeneutics, emblematics, mathematics, and astrology. Finding all of these contributing, yet not providing complete satisfaction in his pursuits, he turned to another source. Asprem (2012:14-15) explains:

When the corrupted text of the Book of Nature refused to reveal its meaning, Dee would turn to the source of all wisdom and understanding, by enrolling in a ‘celestial school’ run by angelic tutors. Just as God had sent his good angels to illuminate the patriarchs and prophets of old, including Enoch, Moses, Jacob, Esdras, Daniel, and Tobit, Dee was hoping to partake in the uncorrupted, perfect knowledge that could only come from a divine source.

In this pursuit, he employed, amongst others, Edward Kelley for his skills as medium. Kelley was able to engage with a ‘colloquium of angels’ who revealed to him ‘the lost language of Adam, knowledge of the angelic hierarchies, and secrets regarding the imminent apocalypse’ (Asprem 2012:11). He mediated the ‘angels’ through crystal-gazing, and related the content of the conversations to Dee, who was in attendance and made notes during the revelations.

During these detailed conversations, the knowledge now known as the Enochian system of magic was shared (Prinke and Follprecht 2015:120). According to the angels, the language of Adam was lost with the Fall, not at Babel as with *hebraeophone*.²³ This language was distinct in speech as well as writing. It was shared with Dee and Kelley in such a way that it enabled them to compile a dictionary which allowed for free translation from the ‘angelic language’ and script, to English.²⁴ The written alphabet of the angelic language is referred to as ‘the Adamic or “Enochian” alphabet’ (Asprem 2012:33)

23 According to the knowledge shared by the ‘angels’, Adam spoke the original language, knew the uncorrupted Kabbalah revealed to him by the angel Raziel, all of which was lost with the Fall (Asprem 2012:16). The restoration of Adamic language was part and parcel of restoring prelapsarian science to humanity.

24 For more detail, see the The Whole Enochian Dictionary downloadable from <http://www.gclvx.org/The%20Whole%20Enochian%20Dictionary.pdf>

The greater purposes of the angelic conversations were to ‘restore human knowledge to the state from which it had fallen over the course of human history’ (Findell 2007:7). As part of this restoration, deciphering ‘the Adamic language, [was] one of the more famous features of the angel conversations’ (Asprem 2012:16).

Angelic language in the Enochian context undoubtedly promotes the idea of a language distinct in speech and script. It equates it to the primordial language spoken by Adam, and views it as an essential part of restoring knowledge to humanity. This literal language can be translated by using a dictionary the angels enabled Kelley and Dee to compile.

7. Context of 1 Corinthians 13:1

As noted earlier, the foundational text referenced to establish the concept of speaking in tongues as angelic language is 1 Corinthians 13:1 (Hasel 1991:122; Poirier 2010:47). Considering the verse itself, it is imperative to recognise that though the plural *ταῖς γλώσσαις* is specified as far as man is concerned, it is inferred of the angelic version as well. We have ‘languages of angels’ in view, not merely a singular language peculiar to the heavenly beings.

Some scholars regard 1 Corinthians 13:1 as referring to literal languages of angels (Dunn 1975:244; Fee 1987:630; Hodge 1988:266) while others regard it as a metaphor for spiritual expression or the estimation of the gift of tongues (Blomberg 1994:259; Martin 1984:43).

When considering the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 13:1, which would be verses 12:31–13:3, we find more telling indicators that ‘languages of angels’ does not refer to the heavenly. Firstly 12:31a is overwhelmingly translated as an imperative; ‘But zealously strive after the better gifts’. It is, however, linguistically viable and would fit the context of chapter 12 (even the greater context of 1 Corinthians) and the core argument of chapter 13:1–3 better, if the translation is understood as being in the indicative. The verse would then read ‘but you zealously strive after the better gifts’, highlighting the Corinthian vanity, boasting and self-serving, ‘and yet I show to you a more excellent way’, which smoothly leads the reader from the chapter 12 foundational understanding of the gifts in general, as in service of the ‘common good’ (1 Corinthians 12:7), to the way of love laid out in chapter 13, which itself sets the stage for Paul’s main focus, which is addressing the misuse of the gift of tongues in the Corinthian church in chapter 14.

Verses 1–3 of chapter 13 follow a formula where three constituent elements are used to illustrate a point:

1) a hypothesis, or conditional clause as some prefer to call it (Hasel 1991:123), is presented²⁵

2) the hypothesis is taken to the point of hyperbole,

3) the uselessness of the gift without charity/love is indicated,

This formula, and the repetition of the formula in verses 1–3, are used to drive home the point Paul intends to make (Bozung 2013:7). The formula is an effective literary tool to show the ineffectiveness of gifts without love. The repetition of the formula reinforces the universality of the principle as it is applied to various gifts representative of all the gifts (see Table 2).

²⁵ The hypothetical nature of the statements in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 have been noted by scholars such as Battle (2007:3), Grosheide (1980:305) and Fee (1987:629), with Fee referring to it as ‘a series of conditional sentences’.

Hypothesis	Hyperbole	Uselessness without love
Though I speak with the tongues of men	and of angels,	and have not charity, I have become <i>as</i> sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.
And though I have prophecies,	and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so as to move mountains,	and do not have charity, I am nothing.
And though I give out all my goods to feed <i>the poor</i> ,	and though I deliver my body to be burned	and have not charity, I am profited nothing.

Table 2: The formula used in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1. The hypotheses in all three verses are indicated by the conditional clause ‘though’ (KJV/NKJV) or ‘if’ (ASV, ESV, ISV), followed by the first person singular, not to specify Paul as the author, but rather as ‘a more general reference of what is true of others or of everybody’ (Grosheide 1980:303). Paul thus intends to have the reader understand him/herself as the ‘I’ and so consider the way the gifts are practised. Battle (2007:3) highlights the hypothetical nature of these verses by pointing out that ‘Paul never “fathomed all mysteries and all knowledge”, nor “moved mountains”, nor “gave all his possessions to the poor”, nor “surrendered his body to the flames”’.

26 It is significant that only the gift of prophecy has no hyperbole associated with it. This could be a precursor to the way in which the importance of prophecy is highlighted when compared to tongues in chapter 14 in general and in verse 5 in particular. It could also be that there is no such a thing as hyperbole when it comes to prophecy as true divine proclamation cannot be taken to excess.

2. Verse 1 starts with the general and reasonable ‘speak in the tongues of men’ and then takes it to the hyperbole ‘and [the languages] of angels’, not to establish the existence of such (a) distinct language(s), but as a literary tool to emphasise the argument he is about to make. In verse 2 the hyperbole is indicated by ‘all mysteries’, ‘all knowledge’ and ‘all faith’, the last of which is presented even more graphically by specifying ‘so as to move mountains’.²⁶ In verse 3 the hyperbole is firstly indicated by giving ‘all my goods’ and in the last instance by giving ‘my body to be burned’, an act truly outside the scope of voluntary action.

3. Paul indicates the meaninglessness and senselessness of any and all of these actions and abilities unless and until they are motivated by charity/love, which has serving of the ‘common good’ as goal.

The formula used in these verses points to the languages of angels, not as a factual construct, but rather, as fictitious hyperbole to emphasise charity/love as an essential element for the efficacy of the spiritual gifts. Verse 1 clearly implies a plural form; ‘languages of angels’. That, in combination with the undeniable hypothesis and hyperbole formula, would render an Enochian style literal distinct language untenable. As Keener (2005:108) puts it ‘More likely, angelic speech merely reinforces the hyperbole of one able to speak “all” tongues’. Fitzmyer (2008:492) agrees when he states ‘Paul is simply indulging in rhetorical hyperbole, and using a bit of irony, as he joins contrary terms to express the totality of those who use speech.’

Paul’s use of the literary tools of hypothesis and hyperbole invalidates the use of 1 Corinthians 13:1 as a foundation for establishing the concept of an esoteric language of angels. The reading of angelic language as a fictional construct suits both the immediate context of verses 1–3, the greater context of the preceding and following chapters, and the issues addressed in the book as a whole.

8. The Contemporary Pentecostal View of Tongues as the Language of Angels

Pentecostals regard the gift of tongues as supernatural, which it surely is as a spiritual gift. The type of tongues they practise is glossolalia, a language not intelligible to other humans unless interpreted by one so gifted.

Williams (1996:222) states, however, that ‘speaking in tongues, while fully intelligible to God, is language beyond human capacity to speak or understand’ and is at first glance supported by 1 Corinthians 14:2. As most Pentecostals do, he argues strongly against the view that the utterances are mere ‘nonsensical speech or incoherent babbling’, on the contrary, they are considered ‘the ultimate in intelligible expression’ (Williams 1996:222).

This seems far removed from Acts 2:6, 8 and 11 which describe the languages of Pentecost as human languages of contemporary society in New Testament times. In contemporary Pentecostalism a distinction is made between tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians which was not the case during the early 1900s (Nel 2017:3). Nel (2017:3) highlights the contemporary phenomenon with the Corinthian teaching, saying: ‘Modern Pentecostals rather identify their experience of speaking in languages with the Corinthian phenomenon and call it heavenly languages, ecstatic languages, angelic languages, or prayer languages’. (Nel 2017:3).

The change in view from early Pentecostalism to the contemporary interpretation was due to the fact that the early expectation that tongues would enable missionaries to converse with foreign nations, tribes and peoples was not realised, resulting in a re-interpretation of tongues as a devotional prayer language (Busenitz 2014:69–83; McGee 2007:1; Nel 2017:2).

To Pentecostals, the ‘various kinds of languages’ (γέννη γλωσσῶν) in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is reflective of categories of tongues, as is ‘tongues of humans and angels’ (ταῖς γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων) in 1 Corinthians 13:1 (Menzies 2016:128; Nel 2017:6). They consider tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians as two different manifestations, though both are considered gifts of the Holy Spirit. The former is understood as being *xenolalia* and the latter *glossolalia*, the devotional prayer language or the ‘language of angels’ which is neither human language nor understandable without the gift of interpretation of tongues. Cartledge (2000:150) supports the idea of a prayer language saying ‘Glossolalia also functions as a personal and private gift edifying the spirit of the person using it in private devotion.’

Battle (2007:2) also describes in this context a language which must be interpreted:

Paul speaks of ‘the tongues of men and of angels,’ thus apparently allowing for ‘angelic’ languages as a possible experience for tongue speakers.

The gift may require another spiritual gift to interpret the message, perhaps indicating that it was not given in a human language. It is described as speaking ‘not to men but to God,’ and ‘uttering mysteries.’

Battle (2007:3) continues to explain that the ‘tongues of angels’, in his opinion, does not imply that an actual heavenly language of angels is referred to. He acknowledges the earlier-mentioned hypothetical and hyperbolic statements in 1 Corinthians 13. He says ‘Speaking in the tongues of angels’ would be the hyperbole, the extreme extent of tongue speaking—like the other examples, an extreme he never actually reached.’

Turner (1985:19) strongly disagrees, arguing that since the content of the angelic speech is mysteries, which he describes as ‘eschatological secrets known only in heaven’, it follows that the ‘language of heaven’ (angelic language) is used.

Pentecostals are aware of the challenges their view faces. Nel (2017:6) acknowledges that Paul is using ‘hyperbolic and superlative’ language in 1 Corinthians 13:1 with the aim of highlighting ‘love’s priority above all else’ and therefore that establishing the existence of angelic language on a hypothetical and hyperbolic statement is problematic.

9. A Critical Evaluation of the Contextual and Literary Study of Tongues as the Language of Angels

The first-century witness to the tongues of angels shows two primary views: *hebraeophone*, which claims Hebrew as the language of angels, and *angeloglossy*, which advocates for an esoteric angelic language.

If indeed the *Book of Jubilees* is correct in its narrative that Hebrew was the language of Creation spoken by God, it would also be the language of angels. Abraham, who, according to this view, has divinely received the Hebrew tongue anew after the cessation of its use with the Babel event, taught his sons this language, and it became the language of the Israelite nation. Thus, the whole nation of Israel spoke the ‘language of angels’, the tongue which Hebrew scholars knew and used until the time of Paul (and thereafter).

Though Paul wrote the letters to the Corinthians in Greek, the reference to ‘tongues of angels’ would then refer to Hebrew.

This would cause 1 Corinthians 13:1 essentially to read: ‘though I speak with the tongues of men and Hebrew, and have not charity,

I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal’, which destroys the hyperbolic nature of conditional clause Paul employed in the verse and also its link with the use of the formula in verses 2 and 3.

Many cultures of the ancient world claimed cultural superiority because of speaking the primordial language. Rubin (1998:308) says, ‘whoever holds onto this unique divine language is in consequence the “favourite son”, closest and most intimate to God, and therefore superior’. He soon after continues the argument saying ‘[t]he question of the “language of creation” or the “primordial language” serves therefore as a cultural yardstick of different cultural identities’. In all likelihood, this was the case with the nations of Israel’s view of Hebrew as the primordial language also.

It is highly unlikely that Paul had Hebrew in mind as the language of angels, since such a view is nowhere reflected in his writings and does not fit the literary formula which he employs in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

When the esoteric angelic language option is considered, we find in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* a mention of angelic expression which was not understood, but in both the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* and the *Ascension of Isaiah* the language spoken seems to have been the language of the heavenly beings which the human involved had the ability to understand and even speak. In the *Testament of Job* there are indications that different heavenly beings spoke different languages. Here it must be noted that the term ‘διάλεκτος’ (dialect) is used in the *Testament of Job*, and does not, as some assume, only denote a regional difference in speech based on the same underlying language, but when used in Acts 2, as an example, serves to point to distinct languages (Balz and Shneider 1990:307).²⁸

Martin (1984:43) explains that tongues of angels is ‘a Jewish phrase to denote a type of prayer-speech eminently suited to praising God’. His reference to prayer-speech in a Judaeian context is interesting, as he believes, on the one hand, that tongues of angels were indeed part of personal expression during worship and, on the other, that it existed and was practised in the Judaeian-Christian context in the first century AD.

28 Balz and Shneider (1990:307), in discussing the term ‘διάλεκτος’ states ‘[t]he Galileans actually speak in various languages and are understood by those who are present in their own dialects; the event is thus not a miracle of hearing associated with glossolalia’.

However, evidence is lacking. Williams (1996:396), commenting on Martin, claims the term tongues of angels ‘is another way of referring to spiritual utterance as being from heaven, even if it is not literally the speech of angels’. Williams thus views the term ‘tongues of angels’ not as necessarily referring to *angeloglossy*, but rather as inspired speech. Even when *angeloglossy* is not just assumed, but accepted as a given, the link between tongues of angels and glossolalia still needs to be established.

There are a few noteworthy arguments against the *Testament of Job* having had a major influence on the writing of Paul, if it had any influence at all. Firstly, many scholars have shown that the dating of the *Testament of Job* likely excludes it from being a document that could have existed or been in wide circulation at the time of Paul’s writing the first epistle to the Corinthians (Burton 2011:212). Forbes (1995:71–72), for example, argues that the *Testament of Job* (as well as the book *Acts of Paul*) used 1 Corinthians 13:1 as a source, which logically would imply that he is convinced that both these works were authored after 1 Corinthians. Secondly, if the *Testament of Job* is proved to have preceded Paul’s writing, it must also be shown that Paul knew about its existence, and even then, that his reference to the languages of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1 was influenced by it. Thirdly, the understanding of ‘angelic language’ as a distinct tongue in its own right does not seem to match the description of the *Testament of Job* which refers to an ‘angelic dialect’ with a ‘hymnic style of the angels’ (*T. Job* 48:3). The expression seems to convey a similarity to the language that Job’s daughters spoke, rather than a singular, distinct, unrelated language. The *Testament of Job* consistently used the term *διάλεκτος* while Paul uses the term *γλώσσα*. Hasel (1991:122) points out that there is ‘no genuine parallel on terminological grounds’ to link the references in the *Testament of Job* with Paul’s reference to languages of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1.

The fact that there was an awareness of the angelic speech, or even *angeloglossy*, in first-century Judaeian culture, by no means proves that it was understood to be glossolalia. On this issue Forbes (1995:62) states: ‘The Jewish parallels for the concept of angelic languages are interesting but not finally convincing ... and the theory puts altogether too much weight on one flimsy exegetical peg.’²⁹

²⁹ The exegetical peg here referred to is 1 Corinthians 13:1.

As a matter of fact, the reports from the Early Church Fathers seem a much more reliable source on the nature of the tongues of angels, since the Church Fathers lived at a time much closer to the biblical manifestation, either during or soon after it was still prevalent. They did not have the Pentecostal manifestation as the glasses through which the Bible narrative and apostolic tradition are seen today. Several Pentecostal scholars recognise the problem their prior experience poses to their hermeneutic process. Among them are Fee (1976:122), who says ‘in general the Pentecostal’s experience has preceded their hermeneutics. In a sense, the Pentecostal tends to exegete his or her experience’ and Cargal (1993:163–187), who concurs with Fee stating that ‘[o]ther Pentecostal scholars have recognized that indeed experience of the charismata informs Pentecostal interpretation from the outset’, and, ‘[w]e cannot simply assert that the modern phenomena identified by the labels of the New Testament charismata are in fact the same as the phenomena in the first century church’. The witness of the Early Church Fathers serves as an unadulterated account on tongues from much closer in time, culture and tradition to the apostles.

Filastrius (*Book of Diverse Heresies* 104.5–6) understood the angels to be capable of conversing in all languages. In his understanding, the ability to converse in all languages was the gift the apostles received on the day of Pentecost. If Paul did have the gift of tongues in mind when referring to the languages of angels, he would have likely been referring to a multitude of languages. After all, the reference in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is not singular, but plural, thus languages of angels refers to the ability to speak all languages, rather than a (singular) language of angels.

One having the gift of tongues, or speaking the languages of angels, would then be like the angels, having the ability to speak all known languages, and as such will find no people group with whom he/she would not be able to converse. This idea is exactly what Rufinus of Aquileia (Welliver 1961:184) conveys when Gumerlock (2004:127) quotes him as writing: ‘They [the apostles] were thus enabled to speak a variety of different languages, with the result that they found no nation strange to them, and no foreign speech beyond their powers of comprehension’.

There are other motivations for mentioning the languages of angels which are more viable in my estimation than outside influence such as the abovementioned apocryphal books, which Cox (2000:10) notes would likely be regarded by Paul as ‘Jewish fables’, which he explicitly warns against (Titus 1:14).

The Early Church Fathers may not directly reference the languages of angels, but analysing their work seems to indicate that they understood the gift of tongues to be the ability to speak all languages spoken by man, which would constitute the plural form 'languages of angels' encountered in 1 Corinthians 13:1. No biblical indication points to a distinct language spoken by angelic beings.

The accounts of angelic languages from the Middle Ages could not have influenced the writing of Paul, but could have impacted the understanding of his writings by later generations. Dee's work shows that his concept of angels was informed by the Bible and the apocryphal book called the *Book of Enoch* (Tyson 2005:1–2), rather than other secular sources or other religions. Dee recorded in *Mysteriorum Libri Quinti* many biblical accounts of encounters with angels.³⁰ Though the angels introduced themselves as those who 'had instructed the patriarch Enoch in the angelic language and the wisdom of God' (Tyson 2005:1), the 'angels' they conversed with do, however, seem to have been of the fallen kind, biblically speaking, as Dee records of Kelley at a particular point that 'he took our Teachers to be deceivers, and wicked, and no good Creatures of God' (Prinke and Follprecht 2015:123).³¹

Of significance here is the Enochian version of 'angelic language' or *lingua adamica*, which brings us again to the idea of a primordial/heavenly language given to the first man, Adam. This time it is not Hebrew, but a distinct language and script which are also considered the language of the angels.

Findell (2007:10–11), like Laycock (1994:29–35), noted similarities between Dee's records of the linguistics of the 'angelic language' and contemporary glossolalia. Findell states: 'the phonology and phonotactics of the angelic utterances present few difficulties to an English speaker. This behaviour conforms to what we would expect from an English-speaking glossolalist.' With this, a possible link between 'angelic language' in the context of Enochian magic and contemporary glossolalia has already been established. If proved legitimate, it poses a problem since any literal language of angels, such as found here, where the Enochian Dictionary could be developed, would render the need for interpretation of tongues as a gift unnecessary. As soon as a dictionary on that particular version of literal angelic language is created, anyone would then be able to translate the heavenly messages without the gift of interpretation by simply using the dictionary. The role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of tongues would then be rendered unnecessary.

30 Dee (1985:7) stated: 'And, seing, I have red in thy bokes, & records, how Enoch enjoyed thy favour and conversation, with Myses thow wast familier: And allso that to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Josue, Gedeon, Esdras, Daniel, Tobias, and sundry other, thy good angels were sent, by thy disposition, to instruct them, informe them, help them, yea in wordly and domesticall affaire, yea and sometimes to satisfy theyr desyres, dowtes & questions of thy Secrets'.

31 Asprin (2012:7) notes that 'the "angelic" system of Enochiana was interestingly incorporated into Anton LaVey's Satanic Bible'.

The similarity of the Enochian ‘angelic language’ and the phonology and phonotactics of contemporary glossolalia is also not proof in and of itself that there is a direct relationship between the two, much less that glossolalia should be considered as constituting the biblical languages of angels. Williams (1996:396) similarly reflects on 1 Corinthians 13:1 stating that he has ‘some difficulty in equating angelic languages with speaking in tongues since it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, who gives the utterance and therefore presumably would speak more than the language of angels’.

With the translation of the Enochian ‘angelic language’ to English it follows that, at least initially, the awareness of the phenomenon would be greater among English-speaking people groups such as are found in England, Scotland, Ireland and America. Among these groups many of the contemporary manifestations of glossolalia have emerged such as the Quakers in the United States, the Irvingites of Scotland, the Latter-day Saints and the Pentecostals (the Azusa Street Revival) in the United States. With all these groups references to ‘the languages of angels’ can be found. As we saw with the lack of evidence for linking Judaeian tradition with the writings of Paul on the tongues of angels, no evidence exists, to date, for linking the Enochian magic of Dee with the contemporary practice of tongues or references to angelic speech in Christian groups who practise(d) glossolalia.

Finally, considering the text and context of 1 Corinthians 13:1, Tolmie (2011:5) recognises the hyperbolic nature of the reference to angelic tongues when he states: ‘The effect of the reference to the tongues of angels is thus hyperbolic, helping to underline the notion of how extremely important the gift of love is’. He does, however, consider the reference to tongues of angels as presupposing that angels have a distinct language. It seems strange that the verse is used as foundational to the establishment of a distinct language spoken by angels due to its hypothetic and hyperbolic nature. When this structure of hypothesis → hyperbole → lack of charity → resulting futility, is recognised, then the concept of tongues of angels can be seen for what it is, hyperbole, utilised to emphasise the supremacy of love, and not evidence of the existence of angelic languages as a gift to man. As Hodge (1988:266) puts it, ‘Paul means to say, that the gift of tongues in its highest conceivable extent without love is nothing’.

Barnes (2012:195), recognising this formula, concludes: ‘In each of the couplets in 13:2–3 the second half of the couplet describes the very pinnacle of the first. Thus, the greatest language of men is actually the language of angels.’

It then seems evident that Paul's intent is not to establish the basis for the existence of heavenly languages, but rather to make use of the combination of hypothesis and hyperbole to show the excellence of gifts functioning with a motivation of loving service to the faith community.

Tolmie (2011:5) also recognises the function of hyperbole when he states:

From a rhetorical perspective, the reference to angels in verse 1 again functions hyperbolically and is constructed in a climactic fashion: 'If I speak in the tongues of humans and (even) of angels ...'. The effect of the reference to the tongues of angels is thus hyperbolic, helping to underline the notion of how extremely important the gift of love is.

Battle (2007:21–23), agreeing with the aspect of hyperbole in verses 1–3, points out that Paul never claimed to possess or express the hyperbolic state of the gifts mentioned; he did not 'understand all mysteries', possess 'all knowledge', have 'all faith, so as to move mountains', gave out 'all [his] goods to feed the poor' or delivered his 'body to be burned'.³² It would logically follow that he also, though having the ability to speak the languages of men, did not possess the ability to speak the languages of angels. Recognising that he did possess the gift of tongues according to 1 Corinthians 14:18, the gift of tongues can then also not equal the languages of angels since it is the hyperbolic version of the formula, which he did not possess in any and all of the cases mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

Hypotheses and hyperboles, as literary tools, are not vested in, nor do they aim to establish factuality as Hasel (1991:123) notes in relation to the tongues of angels. He declares '[t]he nature of the conditional clause with the hypothetical nature of Paul's sentence in 1 Corinthians 13:1 makes it clear that the key to Paul's understanding of "speaking in tongues" is not found in the text'.

Similarly, Grosheide (1980:305) also mentions in relation to 'delivering my body to be burned' that 'history does not record any major persecution at the time Paul wrote these words' and 'there is no record of anyone being burned at the stake at this early time.' Fee (1987:634) and Hodge (1988:268) agrees that martyrdom is not in view here, but rather, as the latter states, 'a sacrifice made for the good of others'.³³ This would especially reinforce, in the mind of the readers of that day, the fact that Paul is making use of the hypothetical and hyperbolic combination as a tool to emphasise the vital role of charity/love.

32 Some manuscripts render verse 3 differently and prefer *καυχῆσθαι* (boast) instead of *καυθήσομαι* (burned) (Fee 1987:633–635; Hodge 1988:259). For more detail on the relevant textual criticism see Andreas Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief* (HNT 9/I; Tübingen: JCB Mohr 2000), 285–286.

33 Blomberg (1994:259) mentions that the NIV 'surrender my body that I may boast' could be a closer reading to the original and may then point to giving up one's body as 'the ancient practice of selling oneself into slavery to raise funds for distribution to the poor'. Fee (1987:634–635) explains how Paul's use of the term 'boast' should not be viewed in the pejorative sense, but makes more sense in the context of boasting about his weakness and suffering as per 2 Cor 11:23–29 and 12:10.

Paul does not claim to possess the ability to converse in angelic speech (though he does acknowledge speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:18) and uses it as the hyperbole to one of the hypotheses he presents to signify the crucial importance of love as the element that gives value to the practice of the charismata.

In the light of the witness of the Early Church Fathers, the languages of angels could encompass all languages spoken on earth, with 'no foreign speech beyond their powers of comprehension' (Rufinius of Aquileia as quoted by Gumerlock 2004:127). The ability to converse in all languages, as opposed to one or even several languages as can reasonably be expected from a person, is evidence of divine giftedness.

10. Conclusion

Though Judaeen tradition does suggest an awareness of angelic language in New Testament times, it is impossible at this time to determine what influence, if any, it had on Paul's reference to the languages of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1. The most commonly referenced work in this regard, the *Testament of Job*, could very well have an origin too late for it to have had any influence whatsoever, which renders the influence of Judaeen tradition on angelic language to no more than mere speculation.

The Church Fathers, the closest extra-biblical witnesses of tongues, all agreed that the gift of tongues was the ability to speak all languages known to humankind, an ability they also ascribed to the angels. Considering their view, it would seem likely that the languages of angels would not refer to a distinct heavenly language or languages, but rather to the ability to communicate verbally with anyone and everyone encountered, like the angels are able to.

If the Judaeen tradition is believed to establish an awareness of angelic language during the New Testament era, then the establishment of the concept of a unique angelic language as found in Enochian magic, which had an English translation as soon as it was established, could have influenced Europe (its place of origin), England and America (the two countries where English was most commonly spoken). This could have influenced the later understanding of ecstatic speech, as spoken at the Azusa Street Mission, as an angelic language and have precipitated the comparison between the characteristics of the Enochian manifestation and contemporary glossolalic speech.

As with the Judaeian tradition, the influence of Enochian magic on the understanding of the concept of biblical tongues of angels remains mere speculation for now.

The context and structure of 1 Corinthians 13:1 point to a non-literal understanding of the languages of angels. As a hyperbolic expression it neither establishes the existence of a distinct language of angels, nor does it point to the gift of tongues as being a language of angels. Paul's lack of possession or practice of any of the hyperbolic expressions found in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 opposes the view that the gift of tongues is in fact angelic language. It is also problematic in terms of the Church Fathers' understanding of tongues as the ability to speak all languages known to humanity.

Equating the gift of tongues to angelic language cannot be justified by the Bible, nor by the historical context of the New Testament era.

Reference List

- Asprey E 2012. *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Balz H and Schneider G 1990. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol 1. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Banks R and Moon G 1966. Speaking in Tongues: A Survey of the New Testament Evidence. *Churchman* 80 (1966):280–89.
- Battle JA 2007. Speaking in Tongues in the New Testament. *WRS Journal* 14:2:20–27.
- Blomberg C 1994. *NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Bozung DC 2013. Does Paul Teach a Private Prayer Language of the Spirit? A Paper Presented to the 6th Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, September 18–19.
- Busenitz NA 2014. Are tongues real foreign languages? A response to four continuationist arguments. *Master's Seminary Journal* 25(2):63–84.
- Cargal TB 1993. Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age. *PNEUMA* 15(2):163–187.
- Cartledge MJ 2000. The Nature and Function of New Testament Glossolalia. *The Evangelical Quarterly* 72(2):135–150.

- Charles RH 1902. *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis*. London: Adam & Charles Black.
- Cook JG 2000. *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Graeco-Roman Paganism*. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck.
- Culianu JP 1983. La Visione di Isaia e la tematica della Himmelsreise. In Mauro Pesce (ed.), *Isaia, il diletto e la chiesa: visione ed esegesi profetica cristiano-primitiva nell'Ascensione di Isaia: atti del convegno di Roma, 9–10 aprile 1981*, 95–116. Testi e ricerche di Scienze religiose 20. Brescia: Paideia.
- Currie SD 1965. Speaking in Tongues': Early Evidence Outside the New Testament Bearing on 'Glossais Lalein'. *Int* 19:274–94
- Dee J 1985. *Mysteriorum Libri Quinti or, Five Books of Mystical Exercises of Dr. John Dee: An Angelic Revelation of Cabalistic Magic and other Mysteries Occult and Divine/ revealed to Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelley*, (ed.) Joseph Peterson. Wales: Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks.
- Du Toit P la G 2015. The Salvation of 'All Israel' in Romans 11:25–27. *Neotestamentica* 49(2).
- Dunn JDG 1975. *Jesus and the Spirit*. London: SCM.
- Edwards TC 1885. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Evans AHM 2007. The Development of Jewish Ideas of Angels: Egyptian and Hellenistic Connections ca. 600 BCE to ca. 200 CE. PhD Dissertation: University of Stellenbosch.
- Etzkorn GJ 2018. *Vertaling*. [Email]
- Fee GD 1976. Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent. In Russell P Spittler, *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- _____ 1987. *NICNT The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Filastrius Brixiensis. *Diversarum hereseon liber*. Edited by F Marx 1898: Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (38).
- Findell M 2007. The 'Book of Enoch', the Angelic Alphabet and the 'Real Cabbala' in the Angelic Conferences of John Dee (1527–1608/9). *Henry Sweet Society Bulletin* 48:7–22.
- Forbes C 1995. *Prophecy and Inspired speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment*. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Fitzmyer JA 2008. *First Corinthians*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Grosheide FW 1980. *NICNT The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Gulley N 1998. *Christ is Coming!* Hagerstown: Review and Herald.
- Gumerlock F 2004. Tongues in the Church Fathers. *Reformation & Revival Journal* 13(4):123–138.
- Guthrie D 1981. *New Testament Theology*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press.
- Hodge C 1988. *1 & 2 Corinthians*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.
- Hasel GF 1991. *Speaking in Tongues*. Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications.
- Hawthorne GF, Martin RP, and Reid DG (eds.) 1993. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press.
- Keener CS 2005. *1-2 Corinthians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Laycock DC 1978. *The Complete Enochian Dictionary: A Dictionary of the Angelic Language as Revealed to Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelley*, London: Askin.
- Lindemann A 2000. Der Erste Korintherbrief. *HNT* 9/I. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Martin RP 1984. *The Spirit and the Congregation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- McGee GB 2007. Brought into the sphere of the supernatural: How speaking in tongues empowered early Pentecostals. *Encounter* 4(1):1–16.
- Murphy-O'Connor J 2009. *Keys To First Corinthians: Revisiting the Major Issues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nel M 2017. The Pentecostal Movement's view of the continuity of tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians. *In die Skriflig* 51(1), a2198. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i1.2198>
- Poirier JC 2010. *The Tongues of Angels: The Concept of Angelic Languages in Classical Jewish and Christian Texts*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II, 287. Tübingen: Mohr Seibek.
- Rubin M 1998. The Language of Creation or the Primordial Language: A Case of Cultural Polemics in Antiquity. *JJS* 49:306–33.
- Schodde GH 1888. *The Book of Jubilees: Translated from the Ethiopic*. Oberlin: E.J. Goodrich.

- Smith JKA 2010. *Thinking in tongues: pentecostal contributions to Christian philosophy*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Thiselton AC 1979. The 'Interpretation' of Tongues: A New Suggestion in the Light of Greek Usage in Philo and Josephus. *JTS* 30:15–36.
- _____ 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Tolmie DF 2011. Angels as arguments? The rhetorical function of references to angels in the Main Letters of Paul. *HTS Theological Studies* 67(1):1–8.
- Turner M 1985. Spiritual Gifts Then and Now. *Vox Evangelica* 15:7–63.
- _____ 1996. *The Holy spirit and spirit Gifts Then and Now*. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- _____ 1998. Tongues: An Experience for All in the Pauline Churches? *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2:235.
- Tyson D 2005. *Enochian Magic for Beginners: The Original System of Angel Magic*. Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications .
- Williams JR 1996. *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- .