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GLOSSOLALIA IN THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION (1 CORINTHIANS 13:1): A RESPONSE TO SOME NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

The problem this article attempts to look into is the exaggerated importance given to glossolalia (by some pentecostal movements in Nigeria), as a necessary proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. This article has used the phrase ‘Economy of Salvation’ (cf, Catechism of The Catholic Church, 1066), to refer to God’s plan of salvation for mankind and everything disposed to this plan.¹ This exaggerated importance has led to a lot of abuses and false practices among many young christians, especially catholic youths who are increasingly becoming influenced by the influx of pentecostal practises. As professed by some Pentecostal churches, glossolalia is anticipated at the instance of what is called “spirit baptism” with reference to the scriptural phenomena in Mark 16:17, Acts 2:4, Acts 10:46, Acts 19:6, and 1 Cor 12-14. In other words, “every christian should be able to pray in tongues.” This begs the question; to what extent is glossolalia relevant in the economy of salvation?

¹ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000). 271

This article proposes to look at the problem by making an exegesis of the scriptural texts on glossolalia as a gift of the Holy Spirit as found in the aforementioned passages. Most importantly, it will focus on the text of 1 Corinthians 13:1 as the ideal response to such exaggerated practices in the church today. The article will attempt to show that this misplacement has arisen out of a skewed interpretation of the texts of the New Testament as well as from a desire to experience visible manifestations during prayers among pentecostals. To achieve this, it will employ the historical-critical and canonical exegesis as working methods.

1. THE PERCEPTION ON GLOSSOLALIA BY SOME PENTECOSTALS IN NIGERIA

‘Pentecostal’ as a word is an adjectival derivation of the noun ‘pentecost’ which is itself a translation of the Greek word *πεντηκοστή* derived from *πεντήκοντα* meaning ‘fifty’². *Πεντηκοστή* is the Greek name for the festival called *חג השבועות* (Chag HaShavuot) in Hebrew called the ‘Feast of Weeks’ in the Old Testament (Cf. Exodus 34:22, Leviticus 23:15-2, Deuteronomy 16:9-12, and Numbers 28:26-31) celebrating the fiftieth day after passover observances. In Acts 2, reference is made to this feast as coinciding with the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples.³ Eventually, the term has evolved to be synonymous with a group of Christians who emphasise the charismatic gifts as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church.⁴ It is in this context, that this article uses the term.

² J. Paul, *Evangelism and the Rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria*. Paper presented at Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria.pdf. p. 3

³ J. Rylaarsdam, ‘Pentecost’ *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, George Arthur Buttrick, et.al (Eds). (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p.234

⁴ M. Ojo, ‘Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Nigeria: Factors of Growth and Inherent Challenges’ *The WATS Journal: An Online Journal from West Africa Theological Seminary*, Vol.3, No.1, (2018).p. 77 (73-94) <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/watsjournalpdf>

On the other hand, the word ‘glossolalia’ as gleaned from the New Testament is a hybrid of two Greek vocabularies namely γλῶσσαις (tongue) which is ‘a plural feminine noun in the dative case derived from the nominative γλῶσσα⁵ and λαλεῖν which is the infinite form of the verb λαλέω (laleō), meaning “to speak”(to talk).⁶ Put together, these translate ‘to speak with the tongue’. The word γλῶσσα “appears in the Greek New Testament not less than fifty (50) times and is used to refer to the physical organ of the tongue as in James 3:5.”⁷ In Acts 2:4 and 1 Corinthians 14 are found the Greek phrase γλῶσσαις λαλεῖν, from which the word glossolalia was derived in early 19th century Germany.⁸ Subsequently, it came to be denoted as speaking in a strange manner. There are several places where the concept of speaking in tongues is referred to in the bible and they are mainly Mark 16:17, Acts 2:7-8, Acts 10:46, Acts 19:6, and 1 Cor 12-14.

On the hand, pentecostalism as a movement simply emphasises the dynamic activities (miracles, signs and charismatic gifts) of the Holy Spirit in the life of a christian and the church as a whole.⁹ Pentecostals in Nigeria for instance argue that charismatic gifts (Acts 2:1-4, Acts 3:1-10, Acts 9:1-18, Acts 9:36-42, Acts 12:5-11) are invaluable and must be resurrected.¹⁰ Hence, its birth in Nigeria was partly wrapped around the belief that the main-line churches lacked the visible

⁵ M. Oyetade, “A study of speaking in tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians and its use and abuse in some selected contemporary churches in Nigeria” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* Vol 6, No 1, (2020), p. 481 (477–498), DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2020.v6n1.a.pdf>

⁶ H. Kincaid, *Glossolalia: Emotionalism or Spiritual Awakening?* (Research Paper, 21st march 1975) pages 1-13. <https://archive.org/details/glossolaliaemoti00kinc/page/n12/mode/1up?view=theater&ui=embed&wrapper=false> Pdf

⁷ W. Samarín, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* New York: Macmillan, 1972, p. 56.

⁸ N. Harkness, *Glossolalia and the Problem of Language*, University of Chicago Press, 2021, p.3.

⁹ D. Nuhu et al, P. 298. .

¹⁰ E. Babalola, “The Africanness of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigerian Context” *African Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Education Research* Vol. 12, No. 1 (2023), p.17 (16-25) www.afropolitanjournals.compdf

presence of the charismatic gifts of the early church.¹¹ In addition to this belief was the economic and political malady of the 1980's to which miracles and visible signs gave hope.¹² Little wonder then that one of these gifts that is given pre-eminence is that of glossolalia.¹³ This gift is expected after the event called "spirit baptism" which is the most relevant ritual in the life of a christian after conversion or being "born again"¹⁴ There is no single comprehensive theory or agreement between historians regarding the origin of pentecostalism in Nigeria. However, the activities of the Aladura church (1940's)¹⁵ as well as undergraduates in the East (1980's)¹⁶ are predominantly referenced as the starting points of the movement. Others simply classify the former group as the background to pentecostalism in Nigeria, while the events of the 1980's is dubbed the nascent of Neo-pentecostalism.¹⁷

¹¹ J. Magbadelo, "Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Edifying or Exploiting the Masses?" *African Sociological Review*, 8,(2), 2004. Pp. 15-29.

¹² G. S Chukuwuemeka (Ed.), *The History of the Pentecostal Denomination in Nigeria*. Delta State; Debbichuks, 2023, P.7.

¹³ B. Onu, "The Rise of Pentecostalism in Ikwereiland," *Port Harcourt Journal Of History & Diplomatic Studies*, Vol.7 N0.3 (2020), p. 101-111, www.phjhs.com.pdf

¹⁴ *ibid*.

¹⁵ Cf the works of O. Adeboye, "'Arrowhead' of Nigerian Pentecostalism: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, 1952-2005" *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Vol. 29 (Boston, 2007).p 24-58, ;N. Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, New York; University of Rochester Press, 2014, p.18.

¹⁶ Cf Benson O. Igboin, "Nigerian Pentecostalism, Alternative State, and the Question of Accountability" *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, Vol. 46, No.3 (2020) p. 1-24 <https://upjournals.co.za/index.pdf>; O. Egwuonwu, "Pentecostalism and the Changing Pattern of Igbo Cultural Life: A Study in South East Nigeria" *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 4, (2021) p.179-193 pdf.

¹⁷ M. Brendan, "Nigerian Pentecostalism Observed: Theological Explorations on Miracles, Deliverance and Prosperity Gospel" *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 5 No. 2. (2022) p. 130-131 (127-145); F. Urology, "Pentecostal church growth in Nigeria amid Roman Catholicism" *African Journal of Pentecostal Studies 1 (1)*. ISSN 3005-6136, 29 March, 2024, a5. Pp1-6, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajops.v1i1.5.pdf>; M. Ogunewu, "Reflecting on tendencies in Nigerian Pentecostalism" *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 3, no. 1, (2022) p.4 (1-29). pdf

2. BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AS A FOUNDATION FOR GLOSSOLALIA

‘Baptism of the Holy Spirit’ according to Nigerian pentecostal theology, lays the back ground for glossolalia.¹⁸ This baptism is necessary as a formal declaration of repentance after which follows glossolalia in the manner of the early church.¹⁹ Where is this concept derived from? In speaking about the mission of Jesus, John the Baptist uses this expression ‘spirit baptism’ as found in Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16 and Jn 1:33. In anticipation of the pentecost event, Jesus speaks of this in Acts 1:5 which is believed to have eventually been fulfilled in Acts 2. It is used by Peter in Acts 11:16 while in Romans 6:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul taught its significance to believers.²⁰ Glossolalia is expected continue even after the baptism, as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a “believer”.²¹

It is believed that every Christian has been baptised into Christ but not everyone has been baptised into the Spirit.²²

¹⁸ D. Nuhu et al, “Speaking In Tongues Among the Nigerian Pentecostals” *Quest Journals* (Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science)Volume 11, no.6 (2023) p. 296-302, accessed 21st February, 2025. <https://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol11-issue6/1106296302.pdf>; Acts 1:5, Luke 3:6 and 1Corinthians 12:13. These scriptural passages provide the bases for “spirit baptism”.

¹⁹ N. Oyewole, “The Influence of Pentecostal Pneumatology on Mainline Churches in Nigeria” *Pharos Journal of Theology* ISSN 2414-3324, Vol.103, No.2 (2022). P. 1-9, @ [http:// www.pharosjot.compdf](http://www.pharosjot.compdf)

²⁰ M. Nel, “Glossolalia, Spirit Baptism and Pentecostals: Revisiting the book of Acts” *Theologia Viatorum*, Vol 47, no.1 (2023), Retrieved on 28th February, 2025. <https://theologiaviatorum.org/index.php/tv/article/view/222/533>

²¹ M. Nel, “Glossolalia, Ibid.

²² A. Adesoji, “The New Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria and the Politics of Belonging,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. (2016.)P.1-15. sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.navpdf

3. GLOSSOLALIA AS A MAJOR SIGN OF THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to Dantani Nuhu et al, the average pentecostal definition of glossolalia is simply the ability to talk in the ‘language of the Holy Spirit’ (which bears no resemblance to any human language) for the church or for personal edification²³. Some pentecostals in Nigeria generally believe that speaking in tongues is a purely supernatural activity and this gives little or no room to the assertion that it can faked.²⁴ Often, glossolalia as practiced by modern Pentecostals, consists of a series of sounds that, although they may have certain patterns, lack meaning and a definite syntactic structure.²⁵ If the the message is meant for the church, it is interpreted by those with the gift of interpretation and this can involve different interpretations from one message.²⁶ However, interpretation is not necessary if it is meant for personal edification. Also, it can be self induced and mastered by interested parties. This logic flows from the inference that Baptism of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by the ability to speak in a new tongue.²⁷ Hence, those who do not speak in tongues have a questionable Christianity.²⁸

Pentecostalism is known for despising a rigid and tradition-like approach to an individual’s relationship with God. This means that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate leader. This can often be heard in the mantra “as the spirit leads”. One of the reasons this has gained

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ F. Rojas, “Ineffable Tongues: An Analysis of the Notion of Ineffability in Pentecostal Glossolalia” *FILOZOFIA* Volume 79, Number 8, (2024) p. 863-877. <https://doi.org/10.31577/filozofia.pdf>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ P. Kolawole, “Must Every Believer Speak in Tongues? Another Look at the Gift of Tongues in Acts 2:1-8 and Its Implication to the Nigerian Church” *Light in a Once-Dark World Volume 2*. (2020) p.368 (367-383), <https://www.biblicaltheology.com/pdf>

²⁸ “The Concept of Speaking in Tongues in the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria (A case study of selected Pentecostal churches in Lagos State)”, Project Clue, Accessed on 9th February, 2025. <https://www.projectclue.com/payment/the-concept-of-speaking-in-tongues-in-the-pentecostal-churches-in-nigeria-a-case-study-of-selected-pentecostal-churches-in-lagos-state>.

popularity over the years is the fact that people generally want to see a sort of manifestation or power as a proof for their faith. One of the basic or most common acclaimed manifestation of this presence is through the evidence of glossolalia.²⁹ Churches who do not over glorify glossolalia are considered lacking the Holy Spirit. After a prayer session which led to an “outpouring of the holy spirit” and speaking in tongues in a Catholic Church in March, 1967, at Notre Dame, someone asked those involved: “Now that you have received the Holy Spirit, when do you plan to leave the Catholic Church?”. These words showed the common aftermath of such experience with the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit and in this case, glossolalia.³⁰

4. EXEGESIS OF SCRIPTURAL TEXTS ON GLOSSOLALIA

The basic passages of the scripture that mention glossolalia include Mark 16:17, Acts 2:1-8, Acts 10:44-47, Acts 19:3-6 and 1 Corinthians 12-14.

4.1. GLOSSOLALIA IN MARK 16:17

Mark is the only gospel that mentions glossolalia.³¹ The text in Mark 16:17 says “And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues.” The exact Greek phrase λαλεῖν γλώσσαις (lalein glossais) used is found in other passages where the concept appears. However, scholars are divided regarding the contention that the original text of Mark ends in Mark 16:8. This means that the latter part (Mark 16:9-20) most likely was

²⁹ A. Tennison, “What We Believe About speaking in Tongues: A Statement on the AG Statement of Fundamental Truths.” *Influence*, 23rd October, 2024, Accessed on 8th February, 2025, <https://influencemagazine.com/Practice/What-We-Believe-About-Speaking-in-Tongues#:~:text=By%20the%20fourth%20century%2C%20church,sign%20of%20the%20Spirit's%20activity.>

³⁰ B. Diara and N. Onah, “The Phenomenal Growth of Pentecostalism in the Contemporary Nigerian Society: A Challenge to Mainline Churches,” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol 5 No 6 (2014), p. 395 (395-402). Pdf.

³¹ H. Kincaid, “Glossolalia: Emotionalism or Spiritual Awakening?”, page 3

an early addition³². Regardless, almost 99 percent of manuscripts have these alleged addition. In fact, “there are effectively just two Greek manuscripts that lack Mark 16:9–20. These are codices Sinaiticus (ⲛ01) and Vaticanus (B03), two important manuscripts from the 4th century.”³³ Regardless, the tradition of regarding this alleged additional part of the scripture as part of Mark is long, wide and ancient.

In fact, a lot of early christians were said to have used it neither did many subsequent translations of the Bible omit it.

Aside the above, it is critical to pay attention to other signs mentioned by the text as proof of those who believe in Jesus aside from glossolalia. However, in reality, not everyone has these gifts or manifests them all. Also, Jesus’ statement in this context can be paraphrased as “if you see anyone speaking in tongue, casting out demons....it is a sign that they believe in me”. Hence, to use this text as proof of the need for the exaggerated status given to glossolalia as proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit is to ignore all contrary facts.

4.2. GLOSSOLALIA IN ACTS 2:1-8

Here, Luke describes the event that follows with the opening phrase Ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι which translates “When the day of Pentecost was fully come”.³⁴ Pentecost attracted people in their diversity more than other Jewish Feasts. Hence, it is easy to assume a divine reason behind the choice of the day. The disciples were said to have received „tongues as of fire” (Ac 2:3) and began to speak in other languages (Acts 2:4) to the chagrin of the onlookers.³⁵ The flames looked like tongues and enabled inspired speech similar to some biblical events and encounters in the Old Testament(cf. Ex 3:2; 19:18; 1 Ki 18:38–39; Ezk 1:27). “Glossa” here indicates miracle of speech -καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι

³² H.L. Crockett, “Conversations on the Tongue” p.14

³³ H. Elijah, ‘Was Mark 16:9-20 originally Part of Mark’s Gospel?’ *Bible and Theology*. February 13, 2020, Accessed 22nd February 2025. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/was-mark-16-9-20-originally-mark-gospel/>.

³⁴ P. Kolawole, p.372

³⁵ Ibid

αὐτοῖς- rendered literally ‘as the Spirit gave them utterance’. The word ἀποφθέγγεσθαι indicates to ‘to speak one’s opinion plainly.’ It can also be used to refer to ecstatic speech³⁶. The speeches were audible and distinctive in nature. Majority of scholars are of the opinion that glossolalia described here was an understandable language.³⁷ The passage in Acts 2: 7-8 states, „for these men are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking all the native languages of the lands where we were born.”

Who were these onlookers as mentioned by Luke and what significance does their presence hold to the entire meaning of the event especially glossolalia in Acts 2? According to F.F Bruce, Luke’s roll call of the people present and their geographical demographic seem also to appear later in the work of Paulus Alexandrinus, a 4th century astrological treatise.³⁸ The resemblance is however exaggerated. ³⁹Parthia, Media, Elam and Mesopotamia lay East of the Euphrates and the jews in those parts spoke Aramaic and were the exiles from the 10 Northern tribes that had been deported by the Assyrians in the 8th and 7th centuries. The settlement of jews in Mesopotamia was a well known fact. In fact, Josephus has a lot to say regarding them.⁴⁰ Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Phampilia are captured in the missionary journeys of St. Paul. Those visitors who came from Egypt and the district of Libya around Cyrene, belong to another populous sect of Jewish dispersion who lived in Egypt circa 6th B.C.⁴¹ The next group included visitors from Rome both jews and proselytes. It is believed that Luke might have been interested in mentioning the Romans and excluding the possible presence of the Greeks because Rome was to be end point of the entire narration in Acts. Meanwhile, the Arabs probably lived in the Nabataean Kingdom

³⁶ D. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Grand Rapids, 2009, p. 135 Quoted in M. Nel, “Glossolalia, Spirit Baptism and Pentecostals: Revisiting the book of Acts” *Theologia Viatorum*, Vol 47, no.1 (2023), Retrieved on 28th February, 2025. <https://theologiaviatorum.org/index.php/tv/article/view/222/533>

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ F.F. Bruce, “The Book of the Acts” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Cambridge: Eerdman’s Publishing Co, 1990, p.55

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Cf. (Mark 15:21, Acts 6:9, 11:20, 13:1)

which was East of Syria and Judea. The Jewish authorities appeared to have sanctioned the use of any other language in the recitation of certain religious formularies like the Shema. It is not uncommon however, to hear the praises of God in various languages in Jerusalem during festival periods but by the people of these languages themselves. However, this time around it was different because the praises are being rendered by the Jews themselves to the greatest chagrin of these people. This adds meaning to the fact that the event was a reversal of the events at Babel.

Aside from this, nothing in this encounter gives pride of place to tongue as an important fact in the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8, Jesus mentions that the reason why the Spirit will come is to empower the apostles to bear witness not to speak in tongues. Again, Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit was preceded by the words, "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever (John 14:14-17)" This means that one of the essential reasons of the coming of the Spirit is to enable them to love God and to love one another which includes the whole human race for the glory of God. Again, a closer look at the event of Pentecost reveals according to L. Crockett that "four things attended the coming of the Holy Ghost: wind, tongues of fire, speaking in other languages, and the Holy Spirit's effects upon the multitude. But there is not the least intimation that 'tongues' was a 'sign' of the baptism, any more than the others"⁴² Jesus before resurrection "plainly told of the Holy Spirit's coming at least six times : a strange omission, if it was to be the sign. Evidently He did not consider it as important as the tongues"⁴³ Acts cannot serve to justify tongues as the (only) sign of 'Spirit baptism'. This will be a misinterpretation of the meaning Luke intends to convey regarding 'Spirit baptism' which was soteriological in nature.⁴⁴ In addition to this, Marius Nel quotes Watson who believes that "Luke's inspired narratives did not intend to be prescriptive or didactic

⁴² H.L. Crockett, "Conversations on the Tongue" p.16

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ R. Watson, "The speaking in tongues controversy", Maitland, 2003, p.53

in nature, and they do not significantly demonstrate that speaking in tongues is the norm for Spirit baptism⁷⁴⁵

4.3. GLOSSOLALIA IN ACTS 10:44-47 AND ACTS 19:3-6

Another obvious mention of the gift of glossolalia is found in Acts 10 and 19. In Acts 10, while Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household and they spoke in tongues (vv. 44–46) before eventually being baptised (v. 48). Again, the purpose of the tongues spoken here was to glorify God (λαλούντων γλώσσαις καὶ μεγαλυνόντων τὸν θεόν).⁴⁶

Those accompanying Peter expressed as οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς πιστοὶ ὅσοι συνῆλθαν τῷ Πέτρῳ were astonished. The word used is ἐξέστησαν, which means ‘beside themselves’.⁴⁷ These astonishments is simply as a result of seeing the events of Pentecost repeated among Gentiles.⁴⁸ The huge gap between the two worlds of course made Peter hesitant to oblige to seeing Cornelius and his household. It is important to note that the centurion, apart from his identity and status, was living in Caesarea, “the roman capital of Judea, hence a symbol of gentile power and Jewish operation.”⁴⁹ A roman military legion consisted of about 5000 or 6000 men among which roughly about 70-80 were centurions. He was of an Italian Cohort (Acts 10:1) and his function would have implied leading a hundred men during war among other functions.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Grand Rapids, 2009, p 341. Quoted in M. Nel, “Glossolalia, Spirit Baptism and Pentecostals: Revisiting the book of Acts” *Theologia Viatorum*, Vol 47, no.1 (2023), Retrieved on 28th February, 2025. <https://theologiaviatorum.org/index.php/tv/article/view/222/533>

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ C.R. Holiday, *Acts: A commentary*, Westminster John Knox, 2016, p. 240. Quoted in Quoted in M. Nel, “Glossolalia, Spirit Baptism and Pentecostals: Revisiting the book of Acts” *Theologia Viatorum*, Vol 47, no.1 (2023), Retrieved on 28th February, 2025. <https://theologiaviatorum.org/index.php/tv/article/view/222/533>

⁵⁰ T. Soto, “What Do We Know About Cornelius the Centurion?” *Christianity.com*. May 26, 2023. Retrieved on 3rd March, 2025. <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/what-we-know-cornelius-the-centurion.html>

In fact, some believe he was the same centurion mentioned in Mark 15 who acknowledged Jesus to have been truly the son of God.⁵¹ It is important also to keep in mind the cultural and political tensions marking Roman province where he resided namely Judea arising out of the diversity in culture and religious systems.⁵² These tensions will later culminate into a full blown war.⁵³ These cultural diversity and tension between the jews the gentiles who also inhabited these regions, particularly embodied in the person of Cornelius and his household adds so much meaning to the reality of the event of glossolalia recounted here too. The event happened to show that God shows no favouritism but in every place where anyone serves him and does what is right, such a person is accepted by him (10:34–35). This is simply an extension of the manifestation of unity, a reversal of the Babel encounter and the evidence of God's love for all humanity.

We equally see the gift of glossolalia make an appearance in Acts 19:6 in the following manner: “And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John's baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying

It is important to note that “in both Acts 10: 44-47 and Acts 19: 3-6, Luke mentions tongues in reference to non-Jews receiving the gospel and in turn, receiving the Holy Spirit. The emphasis in both places is definitely upon the coming of the Holy Spirit — with tongues being secondary.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² M. Trotter, “Judea As a Roman Province, AD 6-66” *Religious Studies Centre*. Retrieved 3rd March, 2025, <https://rsc.byu.edu/new-testament-history-culture-society/judea-roman-province-ad-6-66>.

⁵³ J. Jordán, “An analysis of the Jewish-Roman War (66-73 AD) using contemporary insurgency theory” ORCID (University of Granada, Spain) 2. Retrieved 3rd March, 2025, <https://www.ugr.es/~jjordan/Jewish-Roman%20War.pdf>

⁵⁴ ibid

4.4. GLOSSOLALIA IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12 AND 14.

The need for Paul to address the proper perception and use of this gift must have been triggered by abuse⁵⁵. 1 Corinthians 12:1 says “now concerning spiritual gifts brothers, I would not have you ignorant.” Thus clearly indicating a prior misinformed practice concerning the use of spiritual gifts. The gift of tongues appears for the first time in Verse 10 in two manners “various kinds of tongues” and “interpretation of tongues”. These are listed as two separate gifts.⁵⁶ The entire chapter seems to be discouraging taking pride in the use of certain particular gifts and their relevance in the church while relegating others. And even if pride of place were to be given any of the gifts at all, it certainly won't be that of tongues.

1 Corinthians 14 begins with the phrase “make love your aim”. It goes ahead to place the gift of prophecy on a high plane as a gift worth seeking for aside love for the same reason that it deals with the other not just the self. “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.” In the words of L. Crockett, it is evident that for Paul, Glossolalia “is a sign of nothing that the others are not”⁵⁷. The phrase “for no one understands him” probably denotes that at this stage of the usage of the gift, another dimension might have developed which is the dimension of “praying in tongues” as some will call it.⁵⁸ The phrase hitherto explains this “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God...” However, in order not to run the risk of a hasty conclusion, it will be important to look at this from another perspective. Could it be that the man who speaks in tongue is not understood because no one who understands the language is present there? Or does this refer to a plain unintelligible

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ D.A. Hayes, *The Gift of Tongues*, p. 11

⁵⁷ H.L. Crockett, 14, Ibid.

⁵⁸ M. Nel, “Glossolalia, Spirit Baptism and Pentecostals: Revisiting the book of Acts” *Theologia Viatorum*, Vol 47, no.1 (2023), Retrieved on 28th February, 2025. <https://theologiaviatorum.org/index.php/tv/article/view/222/533>.

language that can only be understood through the gift of interpretation because it is a divine language “spoken in mysteries”?

From verses 11-22, Pauls argues on the need for interpretation if tongue as a gift has to be used in public liturgy. Ultimately, the difference between the view of glossolalia in both cases (Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12–14) is that Paul sees its use in Corinth (when accompanied by interpretation) as edifying the body while “Luke associates it with the theme of prophetically endowed worldwide evangelism”.⁵⁹.

5. 1CORINTHIANS 13:1: THE IDEAL APPROACH TO GLOSSOLALIA

1 Corinthians 13:1 introduces Paul’s famous passage on love. The Greek text reads: Ἐὰν ταῖς γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαλῶ καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω, γέγονα χαλκὸς ἢ ἤχων ἢ κύμβαλον ἀλαλάζον. Which translates to “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” The point of departure is glossolalia being metaphorically compared to the tongues of angels, showing the grandeur of this gift. Almost immediately, the absence of love destroys that grandeur. Love here referred to is ἀγάπη (agape) translating to a selfless and sacrificial love that reflects God’s nature. It is this ἀγάπη (love) that makes the phrase γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαλῶ καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων (speak in tongues of men and angels) meaningful and complete. Otherwise, what follows is ἐγὼ γέγονα χαλκὸς ἢ ἤχων ἢ κύμβαλον ἀλαλάζον (I have become a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal). That is, I make a meaningless noise. This in other words means that our attention should first and foremost be on love which makes us God’s children.⁶⁰ It is easier to speak in tongues, than to love even when its not reciprocated. Love is closer to the cross than

⁵⁹ C.S. Keener, *Acts*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2020, p.129. Quoted in M. Nel, “Glossolalia, Spirit Baptism and Pentecostals: Revisiting the book of Acts” *Theologia Viatorum*, Vol 47, no.1 (2023), Retrieved on 28th February, 2025. <https://theologiaviatorum.org/index.php/tv/article/view/222/533>.

⁶⁰ D.A.Hayes, *The Gift of Tongues*, Jennings and Graham, 1913. <iframe src=”https://archive.org

tongues, like wise is holiness than the gifts. In Matthew 7:22-23, Jesus makes it clear that the latter is supposed to be in service of the former.

Some pentecostal Churches in Nigeria do not only go as far as exalting the gift of glossolalia over and above other gifts but also see its absence in prayer as the absence of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ The aftermath is a wave of false and forced practices of speaking in tongues laced with an apparent disregard of the pauline principle of procedure (1 Corinthians 14) among many christians in Nigeria.⁶² According Gordon Fee, the presence of the Holy Spirit in these gifts can make it easy for some people to substitute his presence with these gifts. Rather, “the ultimate criterion of the Spirit’s activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. Whatever takes away from that, even if they be legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move towards...pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself.”⁶³ The Corinthian church might have been predominantly of Gentile converts majority of whom were at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, hence their christian ethics was possibly still marred by residues of pagan attitude such as asceticism, tongues and knowledge. These pagan tendencies went against the supremacy of love which christian ethics demanded.⁶⁴

According to Nathaniel Oyewole, Although the event on the day of Pentecost was accompanied by a rushing wind, tongues of fire, and speaking in other tongues (Acts 2:1-4), subsequent account in Acts did not record the same experience (cf. Acts 2: 41;4:31;8:14-20;10:44-46). So to assert that the absence of glossolalia is the absence of the spirit is akin to demanding that these other signs too have to be there to express the presence of the spirit aside glossolalia, including the visible tongues of flames.⁶⁵

⁶¹ S. Adejube, “Glossolalia: The Practice of Singing in Tongues in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches” *Research Gate*. Pdf document. April, 2006, p.158.

⁶² S. Ademiluka “The Nature of Glossolalia in the Neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.” *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 45(1), a2932.11 Jan. 2024, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.2932>

⁶³ G. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans, 1987. P. 582

⁶⁴ G. Fee, p.4

⁶⁵ P. Adebayo, *A Course Note on Hermeneutics*. ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, 2016, p.13.

Again, it is important to ask why Jesus never taught his disciples the necessity of glossolalia during prayers while he was teaching them how to pray in Luke 11:1-4 and neither does Mathew 6:9-13 mention it. If this form of prayer was necessary as an expression of the spirit, it should have definitely been mentioned. The scriptural texts of the New Testament make it very clear that love of both God and neighbour not tongues, is the most relevant proof of ones corporation with the salvific presence of the Holy Spirit (Mark 10:17-31, Matthew 22:36-40, 1 Corinthians 13:13, 1 Corinthians 13:1, 1 John 4:7-21, Mathew 7:22-23). Again, we have multiple references in the scriptures regarding people who were filled with the Holy Spirit and yet did not speak in tongues (1 Peter 2:21). Luke 4:1 talks about Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit after his baptism and yet not speaking in tongue. Other instances of people being filled with the Holy Spirit yet without glossolalia include Luke 1:15 – John the Baptist, Luke 1:41 – Elizabeth, Luke 1:67 – Zacharia etc⁶⁶

While addressing the Corinthian church, Paul wished everyone spoke in tongues. This fact shows that the object of the wish was not happening. That means Paul knew that the logic of demanding everyone to speak in tongue as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit was not valid.⁶⁷ Again, we are told that every believer who has been baptised has the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13-14. Demanding additional sign to evidence the presence of the Holy Spirit is akin to adding to scripture.

It is believed that the phenomenon of glossolalia which happened at pentecost is supposed to be also a symbolic reversal of the event at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:7-8). However, one can argue today that what is gleaned in some pentecostal gatherings is similar to that of the Babel experience than the intelligible phenomenon in Acts 2. This questions the source of the gift because we are told that God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

⁶⁶ P. Kolawole, 'Must Every Believer Speak in Tongues? Another Look at the Gift of Tongues in Acts 2:1-8 and Its Implication to the Nigerian Church' p.380

⁶⁷ Ibid, 378.

CONCLUSION

The research so far has revealed that the abuse and disorder seen in the practises and importance given to glossolalia within some pentecostal movements in Nigeria is arising from a misinterpretation of the truths of scripture as well as from the influence arising from the need to experience visible manifestations in prayer. In the bid to exact the assumed necessity given to glossolalia, they have failed to treat it as a gift but rather a compulsory tradition which they believe by doing so, they are exercising the gifts seen in the early church. This belief system concerning glossolalia is infiltrating into the Catholic Church among the young and also leading a lot of christians to forced practices regarding a gift they might or might not have. Hence, it is necessary for them to return to a more balanced approach to the gifts of the Holy Spirit after the manner of Pauline teaching which emphasises the love of God and neighbour without which glossolalia has no value.

ABSTRACT

This article has been pre-occupied with the exaggerated relevance given to glossolalia among some pentecostal churches in Nigeria leading to false practices, Confusion and crises of identity among young christians even within the Catholic Church. It has begun by clarifying the notions of Pentecostalism and glossolalia as believed by pentecostals in Nigeria as well as the notion of the baptism of the holy spirit as a foundation for glossolalia. Then it has looked at glossolalia in the scriptures by making exegetical analyses of them using the historical-critical and canonical methods to test proof the pentecostal belief system on glossolalia and its growing influence in Nigeria, and concluded with the teachings of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1 as the proper approach to the place of glossolalia in the economy of salvation.

Keywords: Baptism of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 13:1, Economy of salvation, glossolalia, Love , Pentecostals in Nigeria

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