

# The nature of glossolalia in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria


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Glossolalia has been a major divisive doctrine in the Christendom, as some Pentecostals claim that it is proof of being a real Christian. This article examined the extent to which tongues-speaking in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria conforms to New Testament (NT) teaching. It employed narrative criticism and the phenomenological approach. The essay found that glossolalia appeared in the NT in both human and unintelligible languages. As the gift caused disorderliness in the Corinthian church, Paul says it is desirable but should not be allowed to disrupt worship. During worship, there should not be more than three people speaking in tongues, and they should do it in turn. Most importantly, if there is not an interpreter, there should be no tongues-speaking at all. The work further discovered that in the Nigerian neo-Pentecostal churches, it is the unintelligible form of glossolalia that is predominantly practised, and usually without interpretation, thereby contradicting Paul's order. Moreover, the gift is being feigned by many to prove that they are born-again. In terms of its nature and conduct, therefore, glossolalia in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is more of a deliberate practice than a continuation of the NT practice.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** The disciplines of NT theology and Christian ethics are implicated in this article. It argues that the glossolalia being practised in the Nigerian neo-Pentecostal churches is virtually a deliberate practice rather than a spiritual gift.

**Keywords:** glossolalia; tongues-interpretation; the Corinthian church; neo-Pentecostalism; Nigerian Christians.

## Introduction

Γλωσσωλαλία, that is tongues-speaking, is derived from two Greek words, *γλωσσα* [language or tongue] and *λαλία* [speech]. Hence, it means 'speaking in languages or tongues' (Strauss 1997:1). Used in this sense, in the New Testament (NT) *γλωσσα* appears principally in Mark 16:17–18,<sup>1</sup> Acts 2, 10, 19 and I Corinthians 12–14. In the contexts of these passages, tongues-speaking is a spiritual gift, which enables the person endowed to speak in a language he or she has never learnt or understood. Comparing the experience in Acts 2, where the tongues spoken on the Day of Pentecost were understood by the hearers, with the unintelligible languages apparently spoken in the Corinthian church, some interpreters believe that tongues in the NT are of two types, namely, human languages 'that have never been learned by the speaker' and unintelligible non-human languages (Wang 2020:7). While many scholars argue that tongues-speaking refers only to the former type, the latter that is 'not part of any known human language, and unknown to the speaker' is accepted by some as a modern form of the experience in Acts 2 (Lowe 1965:4). Thus, perhaps 'no issue in Christendom has caused as wide a split in its ranks in modern times as has speaking in tongues' (Strauss 1997:1). It has so much divided the Christian community, 'becoming the symbolic, if not definitive', difference between charismatic and non-charismatic churches (Gianotti 2000:1). For some in the charismatic fold, speaking in tongues is the mark of spiritual maturity. Those who cannot speak in tongues are 'considered less mature in the Christian faith' (Busenitz 2006:69). In Nigeria, most of the neo-Pentecostal churches profess that tongues-speaking is proof of being born-again. In a research I conducted in several of these churches (Ademiluka 2007), it was the unintelligible type that was spoken and usually without any interpretation. Thus, tongues-speaking as practised in

<sup>1</sup>This reference quotes Jesus as listing tongues-speaking among the signs that will manifest in those who believe in him. However, most liberal commentators admit that Mark 16:9–20 was not part of the original manuscript, as the portion is absent from the oldest Greek versions up to the 4th century. In fact, several translations (e.g. the Revised Standard Version [RSV]) state in footnotes that most ancient authorities bring the book to a close at the end of verse 8. The character of verses 9–20 also confirms that it is a later addition in that it begins the story of the resurrection all over again. It has been popularly suggested that the section may have originated around the 2nd century as it is known to Tertian and Irenaeus (Obeng 1985:3; Obi 2001:142). In this research, therefore, Mark 16:17–18 is not treated as a passage relevant for the discussion on *glossolalia*.

these churches seems to contradict Paul's teaching that it should not be used without interpretation.

Therefore, while many scholars have written on other areas of this subject from the Nigerian perspective, the aim of this article is strictly to examine the nature and conduct of tongues-speaking in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria from the NT perspective. In other words, it attempts to find out the extent to which the practice, in terms of its nature and conduct, conforms to the NT stance on *glossolalia*. The study is considered relevant and significant in contemporary Nigeria in that it will educate the public, particularly the Christian community, on the teaching of the Bible on tongues-speaking. The essay employs what Cranford (2002:159) calls the 'narrative criticism and reader response criticism' for the study of the phenomenon of tongues speaking in the NT. According to him, these methods 'focus on the narrative flow of ideas in the text', appraising its impact on the reader. For the discourse on *glossolalia* in Nigerian churches, the work uses the phenomenological method, which involves the researcher's personal observation and/or participation in order to describe 'the natural way of appearance of a phenomenon' and to gain insights into its meaning and essence (Qutoshi 2018:215). The article first discusses tongues-speaking in the book of Acts, then in the Corinthian church focusing on its nature and Paul's injunction on its conduct. Finally, it relates the study to the practices in Nigerian churches, particularly the neo-Pentecostal fold.

## Tongues-speaking in the book of Acts

According to the account in Acts 2, the first occurrence of *glossolalia* was on the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish festival held on the 50th day after the Passover. As the disciples of Jesus gathered in a meeting, there came a sound like a mighty rushing wind and filled the house, and consequently they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in new languages. Subsequently, Peter interpreted the occurrence as the fulfilment of Jesus' earlier promise that the apostles would receive the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:8). The nature of the tongues spoken on this occasion is clearly indicated in that the hearers heard them, 'everyone in his own language' (Ac 2:6–8). The Greek διάλεκτος used here refers to human languages or dialects, which are specifically spelt out in verses 9–11. Thus, the author of Acts clearly indicates that 'these tongues were known human languages' (Gianotti 2000:8; cf. Lowe 1965:6; Strauss 1997:1). It was, then, a miracle in which the disciples were enabled 'to speak in languages which they had never learned' (Strauss 1997:1), as against any 'form of ecstatic utterance which nobody understood' (Lowe 1965:6). It is also important to point out that it was not a miracle of hearing, as some would like to suggest, but an event in which these Galileans 'could speak all these different languages' (Gianotti 2000:8).

In Acts 10, Peter went to preach to the household of Cornelius, the Roman officer at Caesarea. According to this account, as

these gentiles listened to his words, the Holy Spirit fell on them and they spoke in tongues (vv. 45–46). Similarly, in 19:6 the disciples of John the Baptist received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues when Paul laid his hands on them. Most commentators agree that there is no reason to suggest that the nature of tongues on these occasions was different from that of the Day of Pentecost. Lowe (1965:7) affirms that 'There is no evidence in these events that ... the gift of tongues [was] in any sense different'. Γλωσσα on these occasions 'is the same tongues as in Acts 2' (Gianotti 2000:8), and there is no reason to give it 'any meaning other than known [human] languages' (Lowe 1965:8).

Thus, in the book of Acts the tongues spoken were known human languages, unknown to the speakers, but clearly understood by the hearers and therefore created no need for interpretation. In the section below, the article examines the nature of the tongues in 1 Corinthians 12–14 and Paul's order on its conduct.

## ***Glossolalia in the Corinthian church: 1 Corinthians 12–14***

The right attitude to spiritual gifts was one of the several controversies that Paul had to deal with in the nascent church he had founded at Corinth (Carson et al. 1992:259; Carter & Levine 2013:135; cf. 1 Cor 7:1; 8:1, 12:1; 16:1). From the contents of 1 Corinthians 12–14, it is clear that tongues-speaking was one of these problems (Baker 1974:231–233). Some members must have regarded tongues as the communication with God *par excellence*, thus being 'inordinately enamoured' of speaking in tongues (Maier 1991:81). Hence, in these chapters, the apostle discusses the nature and purpose of the spiritual gifts, pointing out their benefits for the congregation if they are exercised with love (Maier 1991:81). Whereas the Corinthians saw tongues as the supreme manifestation of the Spirit, Paul says all the gifts of the Spirit are important, but tongues-speaking is the least of them (Ademiluka 2007:73). Hence, he lists the gifts three times (12:8–10, 28, 29–30) and on each occasion tongues come last. It is noteworthy that in his lists in Romans 12:6–8 and Ephesians 4:11 tongues are not mentioned at all. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul shows 'the inferiority of [tongues] to prophecy' in that the tongue speaker benefits himself or herself while one who prophesies edifies the whole church (Maier 1991:81; cf. Baker 1974:231). Therefore, Paul would want them all to speak in tongues, but much more that they should prophesy (14:5). In chapter 13, he has dwelt upon the essentiality of love, 'which supersedes [all] the gifts' (Strauss 1997:8). If one speaks with both human and angelic languages but has not love, such one is nothing more than a noise maker (13:1). In other words, in terms of pre-eminence, as a gift from God, love 'is the outstanding spiritual gift' (Lowe 1965:13).

Thus, Paul clearly de-emphasises the significance of tongues-speaking in comparison with the other spiritual gifts. However, there is controversy among interpreters over the nature of tongues implied in his exposition, particularly in 1 Corinthians 14. Are they human languages as in Acts

or ecstatic, unintelligible utterances? Some scholars do not see any difference in the nature of the *glossolalia* in the two contexts. Harinck (1984:84–89) asserts that  $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$  generally refers to the organ of speech, a language and the utterance of unintelligible sounds in spiritual ecstasy, but its usage in the NT reveals that when used of the phenomenon of speaking in tongues, it is always a sort of human language. Hence, he concludes that the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 12–14 ‘is basically the same as in the book of Acts’ (Harinck 1984:89). Similarly, Hodge (1974:249) maintains that in all cases in the NT, ‘tongues’ refer to intelligible language, and not ecstatic utterances. Gianotti (2000:9) shares the view that  $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$  as used in the NT ‘means a known human language and therefore ... means this also in 1 Corinthians’. According to Strauss (1997):

It would be an arbitrary and strange interpretation of Scripture that would make tongues-speaking in the New Testament anything other than known languages. There is no trace of Scriptural evidence that tongues were ever heard by anyone as incoherent, incomprehensible babbling. (p. 2)

However, this conclusion fails to take adequate cognisance of some of Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians 14 which suggest that  $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$  here has connotations other than known human languages (Ademiluka 2007:72). For instance, in verse 2, Paul says the speaker in tongues speaks not to men but to God, uttering ‘mysteries in the Spirit’ (RSV<sup>2</sup>). As rightly observed by Lowe (1965:15), in Romans 11:25 and 16:25, Paul uses  $\mu\sigma\tau\pi\rho\iota\sigma$  to refer to ‘gospel truths unknown to the uninitiated’. Here, therefore, ‘mysteries in the Spirit’ indicates that tongues-speaking implies ‘speech or language of the Spirit known only to God’ (Lowe 1965:15). Also, verse 9 suggests that *glossolalia* in the Corinthian church was, at least, at times unintelligible, hence Paul asks ‘[I]f you in a tongue utter what is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said?’ (RSV). Therefore, the tongues here are ‘different from the outpouring at Pentecost’ where the hearers clearly understood what was spoken (Lowe 1965:15). In verse 14, the one who prays in tongues does so with his or her spirit, but his or her mind is not involved, which means that he or she does not know what he or she is saying (TLB). This implies that the tongue speaker ‘has no control over what he speaks, that is to say he is ecstatic’ (Ademiluka 2007:73). Moreover, verses 27–28 indicate that, unlike the experience at Pentecost, tongues as encountered at Corinth required the gifted person or another to have the gift of interpretation, which indicates that ‘it was not given in a human language’ (De Jager 2019:52). From Paul’s exposition, therefore, it can be inferred that, unlike the human languages in Acts, *glossolalia* in the Corinthian church was not only unintelligible but also ecstatic, and several commentators have lent support to this view. Asaju (1987/88:21) categorises tongues in the NT into two groups, namely, known human languages as in Acts 2, and unknown languages as in 1 Corinthians. Hillyer (1980:1069) interprets  $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$  in 1 Corinthians 14:2 as referring to an ecstatic speaking in a language ‘usually unintelligible to speaker and hearer’.

2.The English Bible versions used are abbreviated as follows: New King James Version (NKJV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), The Living Bible (TLB).

Having a literal view of Paul’s idea of ‘tongues of men and of angels’ in 1 Corinthians 13:1, some who support the view of unintelligible *glossolalia* in the Corinthian church have suggested that this phrase allows for ‘angelic languages as a possible experience for tongue speakers’ (De Jager 2019:52). Based on this verse, Asaju (1987/88:21) is of the opinion that what Paul refers to as mysteries in 1 Corinthians 14:2 might be ‘tongues of angels’. Dunn (1975:244) also believes that in 1 Corinthians 13:1 ‘Paul thought of glossolalia as speaking the language(s) of heaven’. Similarly, in view of 14:2, Turner (1985:19) argues that because angelic speech is mysterious, that is, ‘eschatological secrets known only in heaven’, *glossolalia* in 1 Corinthians 12–14 is angelic or heavenly language. However, when 1 Corinthians 13:1 is closely examined in its immediate context of 12:31–13:3, there are indications that ‘languages of angels’ do not have a literal meaning here. In this context, Paul says he amounts to nothing if he has all the spiritual gifts and abilities but not love. All of these abilities are useless ‘unless and until they are motivated by charity’ (De Jager 2019:51). Hence, in ‘languages of men and of angels’, the reference cannot be to an actual existence of a language of angels; otherwise in 13:2 Paul would mean ‘I know all mysteries and all knowledge’, which actually is not the case (Gianotti 2000:15). Therefore, this expression is a metaphorical language used by Paul to emphasise that love is the gift of the greatest importance (De Jager 2019:51; Lowe 1965:13). In other words, figuratively the apostle says, ‘no matter how eloquent the ability to communicate, without love we are nothing’ (Gianotti 2000:15). To this end, many believe that this phrase does not refer to certain heavenly languages spoken by angels, but a metaphorical ‘expression of excellence of speech’ (De Jager 2019:44). As Battle (2007:3) puts it, in 1 Corinthians 13:1 Paul uses hypothetical and hyperbolic illustrations, in which ‘speaking in the tongues of angels [is] the hyperbole’. Therefore, ‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels ...’ simply means ‘No matter how eloquently I might speak ...’ (Gianotti 2000:15).

Because of its unintelligible and ecstatic characteristics, *glossolalia* must have contributed immensely to the disorderliness in the church at Corinth. This is seen in the fact that several members of the congregation were apparently eager to speak in tongues at the same time and most often without interpretation. Paul imagines a situation where many members are simultaneously making unintelligible utterances in an ecstatic mood with no one interpreting and says worship in that manner would be so meaningless that an outsider would think that the worshippers are mad (14:23, 27–28). Commenting on this situation, Lowe (1965:14) asserts that these ‘Corinthians were eager, contentious, and often immature’, apparently desiring to duplicate in Christian worship the exhibitions of ‘ecstatic speech [and] incoherent ejaculations in pagan worship’. Hensley (2012:346) conjectures that many talkers were vying to contribute, which resulted in ‘disorderly gatherings’. The situation that Paul rebuked, then, was one in which many congregants spoke at once, ‘apparently in some ecstatic form of speech, with or without interpretation’ (Lowe 1965:15). Hensley (2012:346) notes that Paul’s insistence on interpretation buttresses the fact that some

forms of *glossolalia* in this church were unintelligible, hence 'Paul's concern for intelligible speech'. In this way, Paul welcomes a worship service that is 'quite free and open to the sudden inspiration of the Spirit' (Baker 1974:234; cf. 1 Co 14:30), but for him that is no excuse for disorderliness because God's Spirit 'inspires order and not confusion' (Baker 1974:234; cf. v.33). Paul says the gift of *glossolalia* is desirable (v. 29), but in order to maintain order there should not be more than three people speaking in tongues during a worship service; they should do it one after another and then 'only if one person interpreted to the congregation' (Lowe 1965:15; cf. vv. 27 & 28). '[I]f there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church' (NKJV). In other words, 'the alternative to public use of tongues along with interpretation is silence' (Gianotti 2000:16).

Thus, from the NT perspective, in terms of its nature as a gift inspired by the Holy Spirit, *glossolalia* may be in the form of human languages or unintelligible ecstatic utterances. It appeared in the Corinthian church largely in the latter form, thereby causing some disorder during worship, for which reason Paul gave some guidelines on the exercise of the gift. During service session, there ought not to be more than three tongue speakers, and they should speak one after another. Most importantly, there should be no tongues-speaking if there is no one to interpret. This strict regulation for *glossolalia* indicates that it can and should be done under control, which excludes the idea that the tongue speaker must uncontrollably 'follow the prompting of the Spirit as some claim' (Gianotti 2000:15). The section below examines tongues-speaking in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, examining its nature and conduct in light of the NT teaching.

## The nature and conduct of *glossolalia* in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria

In Nigeria, tongues-speaking was first witnessed in the African Initiated Churches (AIC), particularly those commonly called Aladura Churches, that is, Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S), the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) and the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) (Adegboyega 2007/2008:166; Johnson 2011:151). According to Omoyajowo (1982:138), tongues-speaking has been part of worship in C&S since the early days of the church's emergence in the country in the second decade of the 20th century. To date in this church, speaking in tongues does occur at any time during worship service, especially during corporate chorus singing and prayer sessions. At such a time (Omoyajowo 1982):

[U]sually one or more members begin to tremble, first slowly, then more intensively. Then they speak out in speech which, for the most part is incoherent and unintelligible. One by one they are allowed to relate their messages in tongues, usually unknown to members, while an interpreter explains. (p. 138)

Sometimes, the tongue speaker has the gift of interpretation, in which case he or she interprets himself or herself the

message given in tongues.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, in the Aladura churches *glossolalia* is not always unintelligible. Omoyajowo (1982:138) reports that Captain Abiodun, the woman co-founder of C&S, told the story of a Yoruba woman in Lagos who was once inspired and spoke Arabic, which was interpreted by a member who understood the language. There was also a Gwari woman who spoke unalloyed Yoruba only when she was possessed by the Spirit, and an illiterate Hausa prophet who gave his message in English when in the Spirit. *Glossolalia* in the form of intelligible human language has reportedly occurred also in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). Obeng (1985:2) reports the story of an illiterate Yoruba woman, member of this church 'at Ile-Ife, a Madam Ruth, who received the Holy Spirit and spoke ... in English although she knew no word of English'.

Thus, tongues-speaking similar to the experience at Pentecost was known, and possibly still being experienced, in the classical Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.<sup>4</sup> This is remarkably different from what obtains today in the neo-Pentecostal churches. Characteristically, these New Generation Churches all over the world hold the doctrine that the baptism of believers into the Holy Spirit is 'indicated by the initial physical sign of speaking with tongues' (Obeng 1985:1). Writing on this subject in the African context, Anderson (1991:47) states that among African Pentecostals, *glossolalia* is usually taken as 'the initial evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit'. Menzies and Menzies (2000:142) opine that Paul encourages Christians to see the manifestation of tongues as 'available to every believer'. In fact, in some churches, the faithfulness of members is tested by their 'stand on the theology and practice of *glossolalia*' (Damboriena 1969:102), such that it is taught that something is missing in terms of holiness in the lives of Christians 'who have never experienced the gift' (Busenitz 2006:72). In Nigeria, some of the neo-Pentecostal churches have it as part of their statements of faith that true believers must speak in tongues. These include Assemblies of God, the Church of God and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (Darlington 2004:38). During his research, Ademiluka (2007:70) encountered this doctrine also at Rhema Chapel and Christ Embassy. For example, at the former in Ilorin, Kwara State (Ademiluka 2007):

[A]fter her sermon, the woman preacher for the day made an altar call: those who had been born again with the evidence of speaking in tongues should raise up their hands; those who did not raise up their hands were called to the altar for prayer for salvation [because] they were not yet true Christians. (p. 70)

Similarly, at Christ Embassy in Anyigba, Kogi State, the church leader who 'addressed those of us who were first timers' said the way to be sure one was born again was to speak in tongues (Ademiluka 2007:70).

It must be briefly pointed out, however, that the claim that *glossolalia* is necessarily an evidence of being Spirit-filled is

3. Personal communication with Evangelist Olufemi Ademiluka, C&S Prophetess.

4. Prophetess Olufemi Ademiluka says this form of *glossolalia* still occurs regularly in the C&S.

unbiblical. All the instances in Acts where the Holy Spirit is bestowed with tongues-speaking fall into the 'salvation historical purpose' of the author (Obi 2001:142). Accordingly, the purpose of the experience in chapter 2 is to prove to the nationalities present that God's hand was in the activities of the early Christians. In Acts 10 and 19, the purpose of the author is to prove that God himself readily accepted Samaritans and gentiles, respectively, into his programme of salvation. Thus, in each case, the author, following his purpose of salvation history, introduces a new group (i.e., Jews, Samaritans and gentiles). The author does not intend to present tongues-speaking as a necessary sign of receiving the Holy Spirit (Obi 2001:142). Hence, it is not recorded that the 3000 converts of the Day of Pentecost (2:41) spoke in tongues. Also, there are innumerable individual converts in Acts who are not said to speak in tongues, notable among whom are the Ethiopian Eunuch (Ac 8), Paul himself (9), Lydia (16:15–16) and the Philippian Jailer (16:16–40). In his explanation on the equality of the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul implicitly states that not all speak in tongues (12:30). Therefore, it is biblically 'incorrect to claim that one must speak in tongues' to be a true Christian (Ademiluka 2007:74).

The neo-Pentecostals accept the two forms of *glossolalia* discussed in the previous section, namely the tongues in Acts understood as human languages and those in 1 Corinthians as unintelligible languages (De Jager 2019:52). Progressively, however, among these churches, the definition of *glossolalia* has virtually become accepted as the latter, the unknown and unlearned language that is not understood by either the speaker or the hearers (Obeng 1985:1). Williams (1996:222) states that tongues-speaking today is 'language beyond human capacity to speak or understand'. Nel (2017:3) also affirms that, apparently in view of the events at the Corinthian church, modern Pentecostals identify the tongues they speak as 'heavenly languages, ecstatic languages, angelic languages, or prayer languages'. These terms all describe unintelligible 'language not spoken by any people group on earth' (De Jager 2019:36). Apparently applying 1 Corinthians 14:14 where Paul says praying in tongues means praying with one's spirit without knowing what one is saying (TLB), neo-Pentecostals differentiate between public and private uses of tongues, placing the most emphasis on the private use called 'devotional tongues or prayer language' (Busenitz 2006:72). Hence, Cartledge (2000:150) states that *glossolalia* also functions as a personal gift used 'in private devotion'. In fact, Walston (2003:21–23) asserts that while every Christian need not experience the public tongues-speaking, all 'should experience devotional tongues'. Possibly in view of verse 14b that says the 'mind is unfruitful' (RSV) when the spirit prays, proponents of the devotional use of *glossolalia* opine that it involves praying with the spirit, 'desiring that the mind be bypassed as much as possible' (Damboriena 1969:111). The practice may, therefore, imply a type of 'spiritual ecstasy in which self-control and personal inhibition are removed' (Busenitz 2006:70). It is important to point out, however, that this idea is contrary to Paul's teaching that the gift of tongues-speaking need not put the

speaker out of his or her mind or make him or her lose self-control (Busenitz 2006:70; cf. 1 Cor 14:22–23, 27–28).

In the Nigerian neo-Pentecostal churches, *glossolalia* is witnessed 'virtually in the unintelligible form' (Ademiluka 2007:69), and its nature and conduct are largely affected by the doctrine that one must speak in tongues to be a true Christian as well as the belief that it is a prayer or devotional language. It is usually exercised by individual worshippers during collective prayer and most conspicuously by great famous preachers while delivering sermons (Ademiluka 2007:60–75; Oyetade 2020). During the collective prayer session, following the prayer leader's leading, individual worshippers pray in whatever manner they choose. It is during this time that one hears all manners of tongues-speaking. Ademiluka (2007:74) reports that in all the churches he visited, all the *glossolalia* he heard on such occasions were unintelligible syllables like 'ba ba ba, bo bo bo, koro soso', utterances that some consider as mere 'nonsensical speech or incoherent babbling' (De Jager 2019:52). Ademiluka (2007:74) notes this practice as a pretence arising from the fact that those 'who do not have the gift have to feign it to prove that they are born-again'. Ademiluka (2007:69) reports further that sometimes before the sermon, the preacher prayed in tongues uttering syllables similar to those mentioned above. Usually, the preacher 'just wilfully switched from English to tongues ... and returned to English' without any interpretation. Kildahl (1972:2–3) opines that the doctrine that every Christian should speak in tongues has created in each church member the desire to speak in tongues. The doctrine is so entrenched that some churches actually 'train members how to speak in tongues' (Kildahl 1972:2–3). Some founders of neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are well known as tongue speakers. These include Pastors Oyedepo of Winners' Chapel, Olukoya of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Suleman of Omega Fire Ministry, Eneche of Dunamis, Adeboye of RCCG, among others. As reported by Oyetade (2020:489–490), tongues-speaking by these neo-Pentecostal leaders usually precedes their working of miracles. During preaching, the pastor 'speaks in tongues ... followed by outstanding miracles' (Oyetade 2020:489). Oyetade (2020:490) states that Adeboye 'gives an adequate interpretation' after speaking in tongues, but Ademiluka (2007:69) says in all the cases he witnessed, the preachers returned to English from tongues without 'any interpretation given'.

Thus, in terms of its nature and conduct, *glossolalia* in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is almost always unintelligible and virtually without interpretation. It 'is often faked [and] manipulated' (Busenitz 2006:74) by many because of the doctrine that it is a necessary sign of being born-again and can be employed as a devotional language. Therefore, tongues-speaking in these churches is mostly 'a deliberate practice' (Ademiluka 2007:70) rather than 'a continuation of the New Testament practice of the gift' (Weaver 1973:23).

## Conclusion

*Glossolalia* originated from the NT where it occurred as a sign of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It appeared in the book of

Acts in the form of human languages, but in 1 Corinthians as unintelligible utterances. Tongues-speaking became a major problem in the Corinthian church because, misconstruing it as the greatest spiritual gift, several congregants were apparently speaking in tongues at the same time and most often without interpretation. This situation, coupled with the unintelligible and ecstatic characteristics of *glossolalia* as practised in this church, must have caused some disorderliness during worship. In addressing this problem, Paul says the gift is desirable but in order to maintain decorum in the church, there should not be more than three people speaking in tongues during a worship service, and they should do it in turn. Most importantly, there should be no tongues-speaking without interpretation. In modern Christianity, tongues-speaking is one of the major characteristics of neo-Pentecostalism. The doctrine is so entrenched in some places, including Nigeria, that tongues-speaking is taught to be the essential proof of being born-again, that is, being a true Christian. In the Nigerian neo-Pentecostal churches, it is the unintelligible form of *glossolalia* that is predominantly witnessed and usually without any interpretation, thereby contradicting Paul's insistence on interpretation. Its nature and conduct are thus being determined by the doctrine that one must speak in tongues to be a true Christian. In other words, the gift is being feigned by many to prove that they are born-again. In terms of its nature and conduct, therefore, *glossolalia* in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is more of a deliberate practice than a continuation of the NT practice.

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