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The Theology of Glossolalia: A Multifaceted Biblical Exegesis and Its Pentecostal Hermeneutic

HARIYANTO

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Sangkakala Jakarta,
Kec. Grogol Petamburan, Kota Jakarta Barat, D.K.I. Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: hariyantogracia@gmail.com

Mulyani SUSANA

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Sangkakala Jakarta,
Kec. Grogol Petamburan, Kota Jakarta Barat, D.K.I. Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: susankezia2018@gmail.com

Paulus SUGIANTO

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Sangkakala Jakarta,
Kec. Grogol Petamburan, Kota Jakarta Barat, D.K.I. Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: paulus614nt@gmail.com

Josephine Mariana TUMBELAKA-WIELAND

Yudith House of Care,
The Netherland, Netherland

Email: yosefinwieland@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comprehensive examination of the biblical theology of glossolalia, commonly known as speaking in tongues, through detailed exegesis of relevant New Testament texts and systematic theological reflection. The study argues against a reductionist interpretation that flattens the diverse biblical witness into a single doctrinal formulation. Instead, it demonstrates how the Lukan and Pauline writings present complementary rather than contradictory perspectives on this phenomenon. In Acts, Luke portrays glossolalia primarily as a missiological sign marking epochal transitions in salvation history, while in 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses it as a charismatic gift for personal edification and corporate worship when properly regulated. The paper further explores historical interpretations, contemporary theological implications, and pastoral applications for Pentecostal practice, with particular attention to African and Global South Pentecostal communities. By engaging with major scholarly voices and examining the biblical texts in their original contexts, this research contributes to a more nuanced Pentecostal hermeneutic that honors the full biblical witness while maintaining the distinctive Pentecostal emphasis on the experiential dimension of the Spirit's work. The paper also engages with African Pentecostal scholarship, demonstrating that glossolalia

functions not merely as doctrinal evidence but as a practical means of engaging spiritual realities in contexts where the supernatural is assumed rather than debated.

Keywords: glossolalia; tongues; Pentecostalism; pneumatology; 1 Corinthians; biblical exegesis; hermeneutics; African Pentecostalism.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of glossolalia stands as the theological and experiential cornerstone of classical Pentecostalism. Harvey Cox (1995) famously described it as “the fire from heaven” that ignited the movement’s global expansion. From the Azusa Street Revival between 1906 and 1909 to contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic churches worldwide, the practice of speaking in tongues has served as both a unifying symbol and a source of theological controversy (Hasugian, 2022). The formalization of this experience into the doctrine of “initial physical evidence” in denominational statements such as the Assemblies of God’s Statement of Fundamental Truths in 1916 established an official position that speaking in tongues constitutes the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Macchia, 2022).

This doctrinal formulation rests upon a particular hermeneutical approach that synthesizes accounts from the Book of Acts, a historical narrative, with didactic instructions from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. The fundamental tension this paper addresses emerges from this synthesis. Does this harmonization do justice to the distinctive theological purposes of Luke and Paul, or does it flatten a richly diverse biblical witness into a single, prescribed function? The question becomes particularly acute when considering the apparent differences between the tongues described in Acts 2 as known human languages, a phenomenon sometimes called xenolalia, and the tongues described in 1 Corinthians 14 as requiring interpretation and operating differently in personal and corporate settings.

The significance of this investigation extends beyond academic curiosity. A nuanced understanding of glossolalia has profound implications for pastoral practice, ecumenical dialogue, and the spiritual formation of millions of Pentecostal believers worldwide. An uncritical harmonization can lead to pastoral insensitivity where the absence of the experience is viewed as a spiritual deficiency. Conversely, a rigid separation of the texts risks diminishing the transformative, empowering dimension of the Spirit that Luke so vividly portrays. As Yong (2005) notes, the Pentecostal commitment to experiential spirituality must be balanced with rigorous theological reflection to avoid both emotionalism and intellectualism.

Furthermore, the global spread of Pentecostalism, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, demands a theology of glossolalia that is attentive to diverse cultural contexts. African Pentecostal scholars such as Kalu (2008) and Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) have emphasized that glossolalia in non-Western contexts is often integrated with indigenous spiritualities and worldviews. It functions not merely as doctrinal evidence but as a practical means of engaging with spiritual realities. This paper therefore engages with both Western and Global South Pentecostal scholarship to develop a more globally representative theology.

This paper argues that a rigorous exegesis of Luke and Paul reveals a complementary, not contradictory, theology of glossolalia. While Luke emphasizes its function as a missiological sign of epochal inclusion, Paul outlines its role as a devotional and ecclesial charism. A mature Pentecostal hermeneutic must hold these aspects in tension, moving beyond a reductionist view of “initial evidence” to embrace a holistic theology that informs mission, worship, and spirituality.

The methodology employed includes detailed exegesis of key biblical passages in their original languages and historical contexts, engagement with major scholarly interpretations, historical theology tracing the interpretation and practice of glossolalia through church history, and systematic theological construction aimed at developing a holistic Pentecostal theology of glossolalia. This multifaceted approach provides the necessary depth and breadth to address this complex topic adequately.

The structure of the argument proceeds through several major sections. First, an exegesis of the Lukan narratives in Acts establishes his theological use of glossolalia as a sign of salvation-historical transitions. Second, an examination of the Pauline material in 1 Corinthians elucidates his understanding of glossolalia as a charismatic gift for edification. Third, the wider New Testament witness is considered to provide additional context. Fourth, the historical interpretation and practice of glossolalia is traced through church history. Fifth, African and Global South perspectives are explored to broaden the theological conversation. Sixth, a constructive theological synthesis is proposed that integrates these diverse perspectives into a coherent Pentecostal theology. Finally, conclusions are drawn regarding the implications for contemporary Pentecostal theory and practice.

EXEGESIS OF GLOSSOLALIA IN THE LUKAN NARRATIVE: SIGNS, WONDERS, AND SALVATION HISTORY

Luke's portrayal of glossolalia in the Acts of the Apostles must be understood within his broader theological project. As a theologian-historian, Luke carefully selects and arranges his material to demonstrate the Spirit-driven progression of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, as outlined in Acts 1:8. In this narrative framework, glossolalia functions not primarily as a personal devotional gift but as a powerful, repeatable sign attesting to critical, Spirit-initiated moments of inclusion in salvation history.

The paradigmatic Pentecost event in Acts 2:1-13 establishes the pattern for understanding Lukan glossolalia. As the disciples are gathered together, the Holy Spirit descends with audible and visual phenomena, a sound like a mighty rushing wind and divided tongues as of fire. Then "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4, NIV). The text specifies that these were "other languages," using the Greek term *heterais glōssais*, and that the international crowd gathered in Jerusalem "each one heard their own language being spoken" (Acts 2:6, NIV). This detail is crucial for understanding the nature of the phenomenon in this narrative. The miracle encompasses both the speaking and the hearing (Keener, 2012), suggesting a supernatural intervention in both production and reception of speech.

The content of their speaking is identified as "the wonders of God," using the Greek phrase *ta megaleia tou theou* in Acts 2:11. This indicates that the glossolalia here functions as proclamation rather than purely ecstatic utterance. This Pentecost event represents a theological reversal of the Babel narrative in Genesis 11, where human pride led to the confusion of languages and the scattering of peoples. At Pentecost, the Spirit's power enables a miraculous linguistic unity that gathers together those who were scattered, heralding the dawn of the new covenant and the birth of the universal church. González (2001) notes that "the miracle of tongues is a sign of the universality of the Christian message" (p. 45). It serves as a powerful missiological symbol demonstrating that the gospel is for every nation, tribe, and tongue.

The second major account occurs in Acts 10:44-48 with the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household. This event is arguably the most theologically significant for Luke's pneumatology. While Peter is preaching the gospel to these Gentiles, "the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message" (Acts 10:44, NIV). The Jewish believers with

Peter were astonished “that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.” The evidence for this was that “they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God” (Acts 10:45-46, NIV). The function of tongues here is unmistakably evidential. It serves as an objective, undeniable sign to the skeptical Jewish Christians that the uncircumcised Gentiles had been fully accepted by God without first becoming Jews (Witherington, 1998). The Spirit himself breaks down the ethnic barrier, and tongues are the audible proof.

This event is so pivotal that Peter must defend his actions before the Jerusalem council in Acts 11. His entire argument rests on the replication of the Pentecost experience: “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:15-17, NIV). The “same gift” is explicitly linked to the phenomenon of speaking in tongues. For Luke, this repetition validates the Gentile mission as a divine initiative beyond human prejudice or planning.

The third instance is found in Acts 19:1-7 with a group of about twelve disciples in Ephesus who had only received John’s baptism. Paul baptizes them in the name of Jesus, lays hands on them, and “the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6, NIV). This event signifies the incorporation of a group that possessed an incomplete or outdated understanding of the faith into the fullness of the new covenant community. Tongues, accompanied by prophecy, again serve as a confirming sign of their reception of the Spirit and their full inclusion into the apostolic church.

A careful reading of Acts suggests that tongues are not described as a universal ongoing experience for every believer but as a sign accompanying these critical, transitional moments in the foundation of the church (Dunn, 1997). It is the Spirit’s audible seal on a new epoch in salvation history. Luke’s primary interest is not in the private use of the gift but in its public, theological function as a divinely orchestrated sign of validation and inclusion. As Stronstad (1984) argues, Luke presents a distinctive pneumatology where the Spirit primarily empowers God’s people for witness rather than sanctifies them for holiness, which is more characteristic of Pauline pneumatology.

This Lukan perspective challenges contemporary Pentecostalism to recover the missiological dimension of glossolalia. The ultimate purpose of Spirit-baptism in Acts is empowerment for witness, as stated in Acts 1:8. An overemphasis on the personal evidential aspect of tongues can cause the movement to neglect its primary calling to be a witness to the ends of the earth. The tongues of Pentecost were for proclamation; they were directed outward. A holistic theology would reconnect glossolalia to its missional roots, viewing it as equipment for cross-cultural witness rather than merely evidence of personal spiritual attainment.

EXEGESIS OF GLOSSOLALIA IN THE PAULINE CORPUS: CHARISM, ORDER, AND LOVE

If Luke provides the theology of glossolalia from a historical-missiological perspective, the Apostle Paul provides its pastoral-ecclesiological counterpart. His most extensive treatment is found in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, a section of the letter dedicated to correcting disorderly worship and misunderstandings about spiritual gifts, which Paul calls *charismata*. Here, glossolalia is not a sign of epochal shift but one gift among many to be used for the building up of the body of Christ.

The Corinthian context is essential for understanding Paul’s approach. The church in Corinth was characterized by spiritual enthusiasm bordering on excess, with particular pride taken in the more dramatic gifts like tongues. This led to disorder in worship and a

neglect of the more foundational Christian virtue of love. Paul addresses this situation not by rejecting the gifts but by reorienting their understanding and practice within a framework of Christ-centered love and mutual edification.

Paul introduces spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 by emphasizing their source, the Spirit, their purpose, which is “for the common good” (v. 7), and their diversity within unity, using the body of Christ analogy. Within these lists, “various kinds of tongues” and “the interpretation of tongues” are included as manifestations of the Spirit (12:10, 28-30). Crucially, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions expecting a “no” answer: “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?” (12:29-30, NIV). This clearly indicates that, in Paul’s pastoral context, glossolalia was not a universal experience for all believers but a particular gift given to some.

Chapter 13, the famous “love chapter,” is not a disconnected poem but the theological and ethical center of Paul’s argument about spiritual gifts. He relativizes all charismata, including tongues, by placing them under the supreme criterion of love. Even the most spectacular gifts are “nothing” without love (13:1-3). Furthermore, all gifts, including tongues, are temporary, and they will cease “when completeness comes” (13:8-10). By placing this chapter between chapters 12 and 14, Paul frames the entire discussion not in terms of personal spirituality but in terms of corporate edification fueled by self-giving love (Thiselton, 2000).

It is in 1 Corinthians 14 that Paul offers his most practical instructions regarding glossolalia. He does not forbid speaking in tongues (14:39) but strongly regulates it according to the central principle of intelligibility and edification. Prophecy is preferred because it edifies the church through understandable speech (14:1-5). Paul draws a clear distinction: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful” (14:14, NIV). This suggests a form of prayer that bypasses the cognitive faculties, directed Godward. This is a significant difference from Acts 2, where the speech was directed to people and was cognitively understood.

Paul acknowledges the personal value of this devotional practice: “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you” (14:18, NIV). This indicates a profound personal prayer life that involved glossolalia. However, his priority in corporate worship is communication: “But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (14:19, NIV). The key is that the church must be built up, using the Greek term *oikodomē*, and this requires understanding. Therefore, Paul lays down strict guidelines for corporate practice: only two or three should speak in tongues in a meeting, and only “one at a time,” and absolutely only if there is an interpreter present (14:27-28). Without interpretation, the speaker must “keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God” (14:28, NIV). This stands in stark contrast to the uncontrolled, simultaneous expression that seems to have been occurring in Corinth and which Paul is seeking to correct. For Paul, the chaos in Corinth was not a sign of the Spirit’s presence but of childishness and a lack of love (14:20, 33).

Paul’s theological understanding of tongues extends beyond mere regulation to its function as a sign. In 1 Corinthians 14:20-25, he offers a complex discussion of how tongues serve as a “sign not for believers but for unbelievers” (14:22, NIV), while prophecy is for believers. This seems counterintuitive given the confusion tongues might cause among visitors. The solution likely lies in understanding Paul’s allusion to Isaiah 28:11-12, where foreign tongues served as a sign of judgment against unbelieving Israel. Thus, unintelligible tongues in worship may function as a judicial sign confirming the unbelief of those who reject the message, while interpreted tongues or prophecy can lead to conviction and worship.

This Pauline perspective challenges contemporary Pentecostalism to implement wise regulation of glossolalia in corporate settings while affirming its value in personal devotion. It calls for a greater emphasis on the interpretation of tongues when exercised publicly and a commitment to the principles of order and edification that prioritize the building up of the community over individual expression. As Fee (1994) emphasizes, for Paul, the measure of spirituality is not the manifestation of gifts but the growth of Christ-like character expressed through love.

BEYOND ACTS AND CORINTHIANS: THE WIDER NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS

While Acts and 1 Corinthians provide the most extensive biblical material on glossolalia, other New Testament references contribute to a more complete picture of this phenomenon and its interpretation in the early church. These additional witnesses, though briefer, offer important insights that complement the Lukan and Pauline perspectives.

The longer ending of Mark contains a possible reference to glossolalia: “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues” (Mark 16:17, NIV). Although textually disputed, as the earliest manuscripts do not contain Mark 16:9-20, this passage reflects early Christian tradition regarding the place of tongues in the post-resurrection mission of the church. The phrase “new tongues,” using the Greek term *kainais glōssais*, parallels Luke’s “other tongues,” using *heterais glōssais* in Acts 2:4, suggesting a similar understanding of the phenomenon as a supernatural enablement for witness. For Pentecostals who accept the longer ending as canonical, this verse provides dominical authorization for the practice of glossolalia as part of the believer’s equipment for mission.

The epistle of Jude may contain an oblique reference to glossolalia in its exhortation: “But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20, NIV). While not explicit, the phrase “praying in the Holy Spirit” has been understood by many Pentecostal and charismatic interpreters as including or referring to prayer in tongues. This interpretation connects with Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 about praying with the spirit, which is contrasted with praying with the mind. Dunn (1997) cautions against too readily identifying Jude’s phrase with glossolalia, noting that it could simply refer to Spirit-inspired prayer in general. Nevertheless, the connection remains plausible within a Pentecostal hermeneutic that sees continuity between the various New Testament descriptions of Spirit-enabled prayer.

Perhaps equally significant is the silence of other New Testament writers on the subject of glossolalia. The absence of explicit references in the pastoral epistles, the catholic epistles except possibly Jude, and the Johannine literature suggests that glossolalia may not have been a universal phenomenon in all early Christian communities or that it was not considered necessary to mention in addressing their particular situations. This silence should caution against constructing a theology that makes glossolalia normative for all Christians in all times, even while affirming its value and legitimacy as a gift of the Spirit.

The Petrine reference to the events of Pentecost in Acts 2 is also instructive. In his sermon, Peter interprets the glossolalia not as a peculiar phenomenon but as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days (Acts 2:16-21). This connection places glossolalia within the framework of eschatological expectation, identifying it as a sign of the messianic age inaugurated by Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation. This eschatological dimension complements both the missiological emphasis in Luke and the ecclesiological focus in Paul, reminding us that glossolalia is ultimately a sign of the new creation breaking into the present age.

These additional references, while not providing the same level of detail as Acts and 1 Corinthians, contribute to a more complete biblical theology of glossolalia. They suggest its association with the worldwide mission of the church, its potential role in personal spiritual edification, its eschatological significance, and its limited mention outside Pauline and Lukan literature. A comprehensive theology of glossolalia must account for this wider witness while recognizing the primary weight of evidence comes from Luke and Paul.

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY: THE PRACTICE AND INTERPRETATION OF GLOSSOLALIA THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY

The interpretation and practice of glossolalia did not end with the apostolic age but continued throughout church history, albeit with varying degrees of acceptance and frequency. Tracing this historical development provides important context for contemporary Pentecostal practice and demonstrates that while the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement brought renewed attention to glossolalia, it was not without historical precedent.

The post-apostolic church fathers provide limited but significant evidence of continuing glossolalia in the second and third centuries. Irenaeus of Lyons, who lived from approximately 130 to 202 AD, in his *Against Heresies*, mentions believers “who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages” (Book 5, Chapter 6). This reference suggests that glossolalia was still known in some Christian circles in the late second century. Similarly, Tertullian, who lived from approximately 155 to 240 AD, describes spiritual gifts including “the interpretation of tongues” as present in his day (*Against Marcion*, Book 5). However, these references become increasingly rare in the subsequent centuries, suggesting a decline in the practice or at least in its documentation.

By the time of John Chrysostom, who lived from approximately 347 to 407 AD, the meaning of Paul’s discussion of tongues in 1 Corinthians seems to have become obscure. In his *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Chrysostom admits regarding tongues: “The whole subject is very obscure and it is not possible to establish the precise meaning of the difference between them” (Homily 29). This suggests that by the late fourth century, glossolalia was either no longer practiced or had become so rare that church leaders had difficulty understanding Paul’s instructions regarding it.

The medieval period witnessed occasional outbreaks of glossolalia-like phenomena, often associated with mystical experiences or heretical movements. The Franciscan spiritualists, various female mystics, and groups like the Cathars were sometimes reported to have ecstatic experiences that included speaking in tongues. However, these occurrences were generally viewed with suspicion by ecclesiastical authorities and did not represent mainstream Christian practice.

The Protestant Reformation brought a renewed interest in the gifts of the Spirit but generally did not result in the recovery of glossolalia. Martin Luther and John Calvin interpreted the miraculous gifts as confined to the apostolic age, necessary for the founding of the church but no longer normative. This cessationist position became dominant in Reformed theology and continues to influence many evangelical churches today.

The modern precursor to Pentecostalism emerged in the nineteenth century with the Irvingite movement. Edward Irving, who lived from 1792 to 1834, was a Scottish Presbyterian minister whose congregation in London experienced various spiritual phenomena including glossolalia, prophecy, and healing. Although ultimately rejected by mainstream Presbyterianism, the Irvingites established a pattern of seeking the restoration of apostolic gifts that would influence later Pentecostalism. Similar manifestations occurred in various revival movements throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in America, setting the stage for the Pentecostal outbreak at Azusa Street in 1906.

The Azusa Street Revival, led by William J. Seymour, an African-American preacher, became the catalyst for the global Pentecostal movement. The revival was characterized by interracial worship, spiritual enthusiasm, and especially glossolalia as evidence of Spirit baptism. From Azusa Street, Pentecostalism spread rapidly throughout the United States and eventually around the world, becoming one of the most significant religious movements of the twentieth century.

This historical survey demonstrates that while glossolalia has never been completely absent from Christian history, its interpretation and acceptance have varied widely. The Pentecostal movement represents the most significant recovery and normalization of this practice since the early church. Understanding this history helps contemporary Pentecostals appreciate their place within the broader Christian tradition while also recognizing the distinctive contribution of their movement to the understanding and practice of spiritual gifts.

AFRICAN AND GLOBAL SOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON GLOSSOLALIA

While the Western Pentecostal tradition has dominated theological discourse on glossolalia, African and Global South Pentecostal scholarship offers distinctive perspectives that enrich and challenge conventional understandings. African Pentecostal scholars such as Kalu (2008) and Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) have emphasized that glossolalia in African contexts is integrated with indigenous spiritualities and worldviews. It functions not merely as doctrinal evidence but as a practical means of engaging with spiritual realities where the supernatural is assumed rather than debated.

Kalu (2008) argues that African Pentecostalism represents a “re-enchantment” of Christianity, where the supernatural is not relegated to a distant past but is experienced as an immediate reality. In this context, glossolalia serves as a tangible manifestation of the Spirit’s presence and power, providing believers with direct access to divine resources for healing, deliverance, and spiritual warfare. Unlike Western Pentecostalism, which has often emphasized glossolalia as doctrinal evidence, African Pentecostalism tends to emphasize its functional and pragmatic value in addressing the daily spiritual and material needs of believers.

Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) similarly observes that African Pentecostal spirituality is characterized by a “pneumatological realism” in which the Holy Spirit is experienced as an active, accessible, and transformative presence. Glossolalia, in this framework, is not merely a private devotional practice but a public witness to the Spirit’s activity in the world. It functions as a form of “embodied theology” that integrates the spiritual and the material, the individual and the communal, the local and the global.

This African perspective challenges Western Pentecostalism to move beyond an individualistic and evidential understanding of glossolalia toward a more communal, missional, and practical theology. It also highlights the importance of context in shaping the interpretation and practice of spiritual gifts. A globally representative theology of glossolalia must therefore attend to the diverse ways in which Pentecostal communities around the world experience and understand this gift.

Furthermore, the rapid growth of Pentecostalism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has led to a “global South” turn in Pentecostal scholarship (Yong, 2005). Scholars such as Wariboko (2012) have called for a decolonization of Pentecostal theology, arguing that Western theological frameworks often fail to capture the full richness and diversity of global Pentecostal experience. In this context, glossolalia must be understood not only as a biblical and theological phenomenon but also as a cultural and social practice embedded in particular historical and geographical contexts.

The engagement with African and Global South perspectives therefore enriches the theology of glossolalia by broadening its horizons, challenging its assumptions, and

deepening its practical relevance. It calls for a theology that is simultaneously biblical, contextual, and global, a theology that honors the full diversity of the Spirit's work in the world.

CONSTRUCTING A HOLISTIC PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY OF GLOSSOLALIA

Having examined the biblical evidence, historical development, and global perspectives, we now turn to the constructive task of developing a holistic Pentecostal theology of glossolalia that does justice to the full biblical witness while remaining grounded in Pentecostal distinctives. This theology must integrate the Lukan emphasis on glossolalia as a missiological sign with the Pauline understanding of it as a charismatic gift for edification. It must also account for the wider biblical witness, historical practice, and global perspectives.

The first step in this constructive task is addressing the apparent tensions between the Lukan and Pauline perspectives. Rather than seeing these as contradictory, a holistic theology recognizes that they represent different emphases appropriate to their respective genres and purposes. Luke's historical narrative highlights the role of glossolalia in salvation-historical transitions, while Paul's pastoral instruction addresses its ongoing use in Christian community. As Macchia (2022) suggests, we might understand Luke as providing the "root" of Spirit baptism as empowerment for mission, with tongues as a sign of participation in the prophetic community. Paul, in turn, provides the "fruit" of the Spirit's ongoing work in the community.

Regarding the nature of glossolalia, a holistic theology can accommodate both the xenolalia of Acts 2 and the more ecstatic speech of 1 Corinthians 14 without insisting on one exclusive form. The biblical evidence suggests that the Spirit manifests glossolalia in different ways for different purposes. Sometimes it appears as known languages for proclamation to people; other times it appears as heavenly languages for prayer to God. This flexibility honors the sovereignty of the Spirit in distributing gifts according to divine purpose rather than human expectation.

The doctrine of initial evidence requires careful nuance in light of the full biblical witness. While the pattern in Acts consistently associates glossolalia with the reception of the Spirit, Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 12:30 suggests that not all believers speak in tongues. A holistic Pentecostal theology can maintain the normative value of initial evidence while allowing for exceptional cases and avoiding legalistic application. The focus should be on the empowering purpose of Spirit baptism for witness rather than on the particular manifestation. As Archer (2004) argues, Pentecostals should view glossolalia as the "prototypical" evidence while acknowledging that the Spirit may work in diverse ways.

The function of glossolalia in personal spirituality deserves greater emphasis in Pentecostal theology. While corporate practice must follow Paul's regulations for order and edification, the private use of tongues for prayer and worship represents a significant aspect of Pauline practice (1 Corinthians 14:18-19). This devotional use aligns with Jude's exhortation to "pray in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 1:20) and provides believers with a means of prayer that transcends cognitive limitations, enabling deep communion with God when words fail (Romans 8:26-27).

A holistic theology must also account for the eschatological dimension of glossolalia. As the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, glossolalia serves as a sign of the last days, a foretaste of the new creation where people from every tribe and language will worship God together. This eschatological perspective connects the personal, corporate, and missional aspects of glossolalia, viewing it as a proclamation of God's ultimate purposes for creation.

Furthermore, engagement with African and Global South perspectives enriches this holistic theology by emphasizing the practical, communal, and missional dimensions of glossolalia. In contexts where the supernatural is assumed and daily life is shaped by spiritual realities, glossolalia is not merely a doctrinal marker but a vital resource for navigating the challenges of existence. This perspective challenges Western Pentecostalism to recover the pragmatic and transformative dimensions of glossolalia that are often obscured by an overemphasis on doctrinal formulation.

Finally, a holistic Pentecostal theology of glossolalia must be practically integrated with other aspects of Christian spirituality. Glossolalia should never be isolated from the fruit of the Spirit, the practice of love, or the pursuit of justice. As Paul makes clear, spiritual gifts without love are worthless (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). The ultimate evidence of the Spirit's fullness is not glossolalia but Christlike character expressed in loving service to others.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A MATURE PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTIC OF GLOSSOLALIA

This examination of the biblical theology of glossolalia has demonstrated the richness and complexity of the biblical witness. Rather than a flat, monolithic doctrine, the biblical presentation of glossolalia emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon with distinct emphases in different contexts. Luke highlights its role as a missiological sign marking epochal transitions in salvation history, while Paul addresses its function as a charismatic gift for personal edification and corporate worship when properly regulated.

The challenge for contemporary Pentecostalism is to develop a mature hermeneutic that embraces this full biblical witness without reductionism. This requires holding the Lukan and Pauline perspectives in creative tension, recognizing their different purposes and emphases while affirming their ultimate coherence. It means valuing glossolalia as a beautiful gift of the Spirit without absolutizing it as the exclusive measure of spirituality.

Such a mature hermeneutic has significant implications for Pentecostal theory and practice. It calls for a recovery of the missional dimension of glossolalia as equipment for cross-cultural witness. It demands wise regulation of corporate practice according to Pauline principles of order, love, and edification. It encourages the devotional use of tongues in personal prayer while maintaining that the ultimate evidence of the Spirit's fullness is Christlike character expressed in love.

Furthermore, engagement with African and Global South perspectives enriches this mature hermeneutic by emphasizing the practical, communal, and missional dimensions of glossolalia. In contexts where the supernatural is assumed and daily life is shaped by spiritual realities, glossolalia serves not merely as doctrinal evidence but as a vital resource for navigating the challenges of existence. This perspective challenges Western Pentecostalism to recover the pragmatic and transformative dimensions of glossolalia that are often obscured by an overemphasis on doctrinal formulation.

Additionally, a mature Pentecostal hermeneutic of glossolalia facilitates more fruitful ecumenical dialogue. By recognizing that the Spirit works in diverse ways and that glossolalia is one gift among many, Pentecostals can engage other Christian traditions with greater humility and generosity. At the same time, they can share their distinctive experience of the Spirit's power as a valuable contribution to the whole body of Christ.

Thus, the theology of glossolalia is far richer than any single doctrinal formulation can contain. It is a sign of new creation, a weapon against Babel's divisions, a prayer language that transcends cognitive limits, and a gift for building up the body of Christ when

exercised in love. By holding the Lukan and Pauline witnesses together in creative tension, Pentecostalism can move toward a more nuanced, biblical, and pastorally effective understanding of this defining yet often misunderstood gift. This will not weaken its distinctive but rather strengthen it, grounding a vibrant experience in the full counsel of God's word and empowering the church for its mission in a fractured world.

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