

Simultaneous Glossolalia: A Theological Survey

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Abstract

A distinctive hallmark of Pentecostal spirituality is speaking in tongues. Believers praying or singing in tongues together – or simultaneous glossolalia, as this chapter terms it – belongs at the heart of Pentecostal piety and mission. This chapter identifies and critically evaluates five common objections to simultaneous glossolalia, through a careful examination of church historical context, scriptural evidence, and the writings of Early Church theologians as well as present-day scholars. It also draws on the experiences and insights of pastors from contemporary Asian churches to demonstrate how congregational tongues have fostered unity, courage, church growth, and resilience under pressure. Ultimately, the chapter calls for Pentecostal churches to recover wise and ordered simultaneous glossolalia as a biblical, historic, and missional practice.

Key Words: contemporary churches; glossolalia; Pentecost; simultaneous; singing; speaking; spirituality; theological objections; tongues

Glossolalia,¹ or speaking in tongues, has long been recognised as a distinctive hallmark of Pentecostal spirituality. From the earliest days of the Azusa Street Revival, the practice of simultaneous praying in tongues has not only been frequent but has also constituted a defining feature of the movement's worship life. In such moments of Spirit-empowered, united prayer, Pentecostals experience deep renewal, divine encounter, and missionary zeal. What first ignited this global movement should continue to sustain it: the dynamic outpouring of the Holy Spirit expressed in a congregation lifting their voices together in tongues.²

In recent decades, however, this practice has been increasingly devalued in many Pentecostal contexts. The *embourgeoisement* (social elevation) of Pentecostals – most visibly in the rise of urban megachurches – has led some leaders to downplay or even omit simultaneous glossolalia in public worship. This tendency is often driven by a desire to appear more respectable to the

¹ The word “glossolalia” comes from two Greek words: *glossa*, meaning “tongue” or “language,” and *lalia*, meaning “speech” or “talk.” It literally means “speaking in tongues.”

² The same gospel truths and power of the Spirit that ignited early Pentecostals keep carrying us forward (1 Cor 15:1-2; Col 1:22-23; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2 Thess 2:15).

unchurched, to present a polished liturgy that appeals to middle-class sensibilities, or to avoid controversies with cessationist or fundamentalist critics. As a result, one of the earliest and most powerful marks of Pentecostal identity has become muted – sometimes to the point of invisibility – within the very churches that claim Pentecostal heritage.

This chapter seeks to recover the importance of simultaneous glossolalia – not as a cultural oddity or relic of early Pentecostalism, but as a Spirit-given means of uniting the church in prayer, strengthening communal life, and fuelling ongoing mission. By examining its biblical foundations, historical roots, and contemporary relevance, I argue that the very practice that birthed the Pentecostal Movement must also be the means by which it is continually renewed and propelled into the future.

Objections to Simultaneous Glossolalia

In discussions concerning simultaneous glossolalia, Pentecostals frequently face five recurring objections:

1. *The Cessationist Objection:* Tongues, along with other *charismata*, are believed to have ceased with the apostolic age or with the completion of the New Testament canon and are therefore considered no longer valid for the contemporary church.
2. *The “Xenolalia Only” Objection:* All authentic tongues are claimed to be unlearned human languages given for missionary proclamation. Modern tongues, being unintelligible, are thus viewed as inauthentic and unsuitable for public worship.
3. *The Pastoral or Seeker-Sensitive Objection:* Public glossolalia is said to confuse or alienate unbelievers and should therefore be restrained or excluded from corporate worship settings.
4. *The Pauline-Regulation Objection:* Drawing from 1 Corinthians 12–14, critics argue that tongues in a corporate gathering should occur sequentially and with interpretation, not as simultaneous or overlapping prayers that may appear disorderly or even chaotic.
5. *The “Least Gift” Objection:* Even if tongues are accepted as still operative, they are often regarded as optional, of minimal importance, and peripheral to the believer’s spiritual life and the mission of the church.

(1) The Cessationist Objection

Cessationism and the Debate over Tongues

Cessationism holds that the *charismata* listed in 1 Corinthians 12 – including glossolalia – ceased with the apostolic age and are therefore neither valid nor normative for the believer or the church. “Old Princeton” theologian B. B. Warfield, in *The Cessation of the Charismata*, explicitly stated that “kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues ... belonged therefore exclusively to the

apostolic age ... They were withdrawn when they had served their purpose.”³ Other cessationists contend that tongues ended with the completion of the New Testament canon in the fourth century, citing 1 Corinthians 13:8, 10 (“as for tongues, they will cease ... when the perfect comes”)⁴ and interpreting “the perfect” as the closing of the canon.⁵

Pentecostals reply, first, that “the perfect” refers not to Scripture but to the eschatological glory of Christ’s return, for Paul continues: “Now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face” (1 Cor 13:12). Only then will the *charismata* pass away. Second, there is abundant historical evidence of glossolalia continuing well beyond both the apostolic age and the fourth century, demonstrating that tongues were not confined to the Early Church.⁶

Glossolalia throughout Church History

If Mark 16:17 indeed belongs to the “long ending” of Mark, which many scholars regard as a later addition from the second century – this suggests that even in the post-apostolic church there remained an expectation of glossolalia.⁷ Church historian Philip Schaff affirms: “The speaking with tongues ... perpetuated itself in the apostolic church. We find traces of it still in the second and third centuries.”⁸

In the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons described believers in his day as manifesting charismatic gifts, including speaking in tongues.⁹ Montanus also led

³ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Cessation of the Charismata* (C. Scribner’s Sons, 1918), e-book. Warfield explicitly states that “kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues ... belonged therefore exclusively to the apostolic age ... They were withdrawn when they had served their purpose of indicating the duties to be permanently performed. To ‘gifts of tongues’ succeeded orderly human teaching.”

⁴ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

⁵ Tom Pennington, “A Case for Cessationism (Tom Pennington),” Grace for You, October 17, 2013, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.gty.org/sermons/TM13-7/a-case-for-cessationism-tom-pennington>.

⁶ Stanley M. Burgess, ed., *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (NYU Press, 2011).

⁷ James Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1975), 246. New Testament scholar James G. D. Dunn agrees: “The significance of the reference is then that, with the Christian mission probably already a century old, speaking in tongues was regarded as a typical sign of the gospel’s expression in the first century and perhaps also in the second.”

⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church: With a General Introduction to Church History* (Charles Scribner, 1863), 197-98.

⁹ (a) Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1, Church Fathers, New Advent, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103506.htm>. Although the Greek original of *Against Heresies* Book V is lost, the Latin version preserves this statement: “In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, bring to light for the common benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God—whom also the apostles term spiritual.” The Latin phrase *omnibus linguis* (“all kinds of languages”) closely parallels Paul’s phrase *alii genera linguarum* (“different kinds of tongues”) in 1

a prophetic movement marked by glossolalic utterances, which was confirmed by historian Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*.¹⁰

In the third century, in his challenge to the heretic Marcion, Tertullian revealed that the interpretation of tongues was still active in his church, and that these manifestations were genuine evidence of the Spirit's presence.¹¹

In the fourth century, Hilary of Poitiers affirmed Paul's teaching that "the gifts of the Holy Spirit are many and diverse ... to another kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues."¹² This serves as another witness to the continued grace of glossolalia in the post-apostolic church.

In the sixth century, the scholar and monk Cassiodorus wrote a massive commentary on the Psalms, in which he refers many times to the grace of "jubilation." He writes, "Jubilation ... with great delight leaps with joy into the voice. What the speech of a confused voice cannot explain, the devout bursting forth of the rejoicing believer declares."¹³ Catholic author Eddie Ensley believes Cassiodorus was describing an experience that closely resembles glossolalia.

In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville explained jubilation as a breathtaking experience of joy in God: "Language cannot explain ... words cannot explain ... it is an effusion of the soul ... When the joy of exultation erupts by means of the voice, this is known as jubilation."¹⁴ To Ensley, this too represented a Spirit-inspired utterance or song beyond human language.

Corinthians 12:10. Most scholars therefore regard Irenaeus's description as a clear reference to glossolalia. (b) Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.32.4, Church Fathers, New Advent, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103232.htm>. Elsewhere, in *Against Heresies* Book II, Irenaeus explicitly cites Mark 16:17-18, affirming that the same signs promised by Jesus—casting out demons, healing the sick through the laying on of hands, and speaking in new tongues—continued among "those who are truly His disciples." While he summarises the tongues phenomenon under the phrase "utter prophetic expressions," this can reasonably be understood as encompassing all forms of Spirit-inspired speech and interpretation. Taken together, these passages leave little doubt that Irenaeus affirmed the continuing reality of glossolalia in the church of his time.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Church History* 5.16. Eusebius quotes critics, who were eyewitnesses of that movement, that Montanus "became beside himself, and being suddenly in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying ..."

¹¹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.8, Church Fathers, New Advent, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/03125.htm> quotes, "Let Marcion then exhibit ... prophets who speak not by human sense but with the Spirit of God ... let him produce a psalm, a vision, a prayer—only let it be by the Spirit, in an ecstasy ... whenever an interpretation of tongues has occurred to him." The continued practice of interpreting tongues in Tertullian's own church suggests that glossolalic utterances were still occurring, and he regarded such manifestations as genuine evidence of the Spirit's presence.

¹² Hilary of Poitier, *On the Trinity* 8.33, Church Fathers, New Advent, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/330208.htm>.

¹³ M. Aureli Cassiodori, Psalm 97:5, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 70, col. 689-90 as quoted by Eddie Ensley, *Sounds of Wonder: 20 Centuries of Praying in Tongues and Lively Worship* (Tau Publishing, 2013), 14.

¹⁴ Isidore of Seville, *Opera Omnia* V, 43, quoted by Ensley, *Sounds of Wonder*, 15.

In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen wrote to Pope Anastasius IV describing a divine encounter in which she received “an unknown tongue” and “a language ... from above.”¹⁵ This experience bears striking resemblance to glossolalia. The “unknown tongue” she later recorded in her *Lingua Ignota* has led many scholars to associate Hildegard with the phenomenon of speaking in tongues.¹⁶

In the sixteenth century, Teresa of Avila wrote of “a strange and mysterious kind of prayer,” sometimes accompanied by jubilation or an inward movement that the soul cannot fully express. In *The Interior Castle*, she observed: “This may sound nonsense (‘gibberish’) but it really happens. So excessive is its jubilee that the soul will not enjoy it alone but speaks of it to all around so that they may help it to praise God, which is its one desire.”¹⁷ Catholic theologian Peter Kreeft believes that Teresa was describing an experience akin to speaking in tongues.¹⁸ Louis Bertrand, a contemporary of Teresa, was a Spanish Dominican friar who evangelised widely in Nueva Granada (modern Colombia), particularly in the regions of Cartagena, Turbaco, and parts of the West Indies. The Bull of Canonisation (1671) recorded that he had been “miraculously endowed with the gift of tongues,” enabling him to communicate the gospel to the native peoples without learning their languages.¹⁹

In the seventeenth century, the Quakers often experienced intense emotional states in worship – quaking, trembling, shaking, crying – with spontaneous vocal expressions. Edward Burrough describes early Quaker meetings: “While waiting upon the Lord in silence ... we received often the pouring down of the Spirit upon us, and our hearts were made glad and our tongues loosened, and our mouths opened, and we spake with new tongues, as the Lord gave us utterance.”²⁰

In the early eighteenth century, the Camisards of southern France were noted for prophetic and often ecstatic experiences. A key source, *Le Théâtre sacré des*

¹⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, “Letter 8: Hildegard to Pope Anastasius,” in *Letters of Hildegard of Bingen: Volume 1* (Oxford University Press, 1998), accessed October 1, 2025, ProQuest Ebook Central quotes, “But He who is great and without flaw [God] has now touched a humble dwelling [Hildegard] so that it might see a miracle and form unknown letters and utter an unknown tongue. And this was said to that little inhabitation: You have written these things in a language given to you from above, rather than in ordinary human speech, since it was not revealed to you in that form, but let him who has the pumice stone [likely her secretary Volmar] not fail to polish it and make it intelligible to mankind.”

¹⁶ Robert Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Baker Publishing Group, 1967), 18.

¹⁷ Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* 6.11, trans. The Benedictines of Stanbrook (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1921), accessed October 1, 2025, <https://ccel.org/ccel/teresa/castle2/castle2.x.vii.html>.

¹⁸ Dave Nevins, “Charisms: Visions, Tongues, Healing, etc (w/ Dr. Peter Kreeft),” YouTube video, 30:21, <https://youtu.be/mqUc-hQr8ow?si=BrnEc4yRkUbBeKfP>.

¹⁹ John B. O’Connor, “Louis Bertrand, Saint,” Catholic Answers, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/louis-bertrand-saint>.

²⁰ Edward Burrough, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, chapter 19.20, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/page/19-20/>.

Cévennes, explicitly records an episode described as the “first example ... of the gift of tongues in the Cévennes.”²¹

In the nineteenth century, the London congregation of Scottish Presbyterian Edward Irving experienced “outbursts of tongues and prophecy” that frequently interrupted worship services at Regent Square Church.²²

Around the same period, the Holiness Movement, a major precursor to Pentecostalism, was often marked by revival and camp meetings filled with intense emotional and spiritual expressions such as crying, shouting, laughter, and jubilation. At the 1896 Shearer Schoolhouse Revival in Camp Creek, North Carolina, “about 130 persons received the Holy Spirit with tongues, and many healings took place.”²³ Some view this as one of the first large-scale outpourings of the Spirit in America.²⁴

At Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, Charles Parham asked his students to study the biblical sign of Spirit baptism.²⁵ To his surprise, they all concluded that the sign was glossolalia. On New Year’s Day 1901, when Parham laid hands on one student, Agnes Ozman, the Holy Spirit fell on her and she spoke in tongues. Historian Klaude Kendrick notes, “Although Agnes Ozman was not the first person in modern times to speak in ‘tongues,’ she was the first known person to have received such an experience as a result of specifically seeking a baptism in the Spirit with the expectation of speaking in tongues ... For this reason the experience of Agnes Ozman is designated as the beginning of the Modern Pentecostal Revival.”²⁶

From 1906 to 1909, the Pentecostal outpouring at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, under the leadership of William J. Seymour, marked a turning point in modern church history. Eyewitnesses described multitudes speaking in tongues, prophesying, falling under the power of the Spirit, and engaging in interracial worship – an unprecedented phenomenon for the era. The *Los Angeles Times* (April 18, 1906) published the first outside report under the headline,

²¹ Ami Bost, ed., *Le Théâtre sacré des Cévennes*, 2nd ed. (H. Bost, 1847), https://archive.org/stream/lesprophetspro00missuoft/lesprophetspro00missuoft_djvu.txt.

²² C. Gordon Strachan, “Pentecostal Worship in the Church of Scotland,” *The Liturgical Review* 2, no. 2 (November 1972): 17, <https://www.churchservicesociety.org/sites/default/files/journals/1972-Nov-16-27.pdf>; Timothy C. F. Stunt, “Edward Irving and the Catholic Apostolic Church,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (IVP Academic, 1993), 420–22. Irving interpreted these as signs of the imminent return of Christ and the restoration of apostolic gifts. After his death, his followers organised the Catholic Apostolic Church and continued to emphasise glossolalia and prophecy.

²³ David K. Bernard, *A History of Christian Doctrine: The Twentieth Century A.D. 1900–2000* (Word Aflame Press: 1999), 41, <https://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/History%20of%20Christian%20Doctrine%20Vol%203.pdf>.

²⁴ H. Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 1997), 87–89.

²⁵ Sarah E. Parham, *The Life of Charles Parham: Founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement* (Garland Publishing Inc, 1985), 52.

²⁶ Klaude Kendrick, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement* (Gospel Publishing House, 1961), 52–53.

“Weird Babel of Tongues,” describing a “tumble-down shack on Azusa Street” filled with “men and women, white and black” praying, swaying, and “howling” for hours, claiming “the gift of tongues” and producing “a babel” of strange speech.²⁷ By contrast, the first issue of *The Apostolic Faith* (September 1906) offered a different picture: “The power of God now has this city agitated as never before. Pentecost has surely come and with it the Bible evidences are following, many being converted and sanctified and speaking with the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues as they did on the day of Pentecost.”²⁸ Together, these contrasting accounts captured the moment glossolalia at Azusa Street became both a public spectacle and the defining mark of modern Pentecostalism.

By the mid-twentieth century, glossolalia began to appear outside classical Pentecostal churches through the Charismatic Renewal in mainline denominations – Episcopal, Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, and others – bringing tongues into millions of non-Pentecostal congregations.²⁹ The Catholic Charismatic Renewal alone claims tens of millions of adherents worldwide who practise or accept glossolalia.³⁰

(2) The “Xenolalia Only” Objection

This view treats tongues strictly as *xenolalia* – foreign speech given for missionary proclamation. Reformed pastor John MacArthur writes that “nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of tongues is anything other than ‘human languages!’”³¹ Cessationist Tom Pennington similarly argues that glossolalia is “speaking in a known language or a known dialect. Compare that with today’s tongues which are ecstatic speech. It’s not the same thing.”³² Another cessationist paper defines tongues as “the supernatural ability to speak in other languages ... [In Acts 2,] tongues communicated the gospel in a foreign language.”³³

Glossolalia Is Not Missionary Speech

Yet Acts resists such a narrow reading. In Caesarea, the only audience for tongues was Peter and his Jewish companions (Acts 10:45-46); in Ephesus, Paul stood alone (19:6-7). In both cases, foreign languages were unnecessary and served no evangelistic purpose. When Peter later equated the Gentiles’ tongues with “what happened at the beginning” (11:15), the common element was not

²⁷ Author unknown, “Weird Babel of Tongues,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1906.

²⁸ Author unknown, “Pentecost Has Come,” *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 1 (September 1906): 1.

²⁹ Charles E. Hummel, “Worldwide Renewal: The Charismatic Movement,” *Christian History*, Issue 9, 1986, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/worldwide-renewal-charismatic-movement>.

³⁰ Todd M. Johnson, “Counting Pentecostals Worldwide,” *Pneuma* 36, no. 2 (2014): 281, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15700747-03602006>.

³¹ John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Zondervan, 1992), 226.

³² Pennington, “Case for Cessationism.”

³³ Michael D. Martin, “What We Believe: Cessationism,” First Baptist Church of Wellsburg, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://wellsburgfirstbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/Why-We-Are-Cessationist-Web.pdf>.

missionary speech but praise to God. This is confirmed by Paul's statement: "Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God" (1 Cor 14:2). At Pentecost, the crowd testified, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues" (Acts 2:11). Before Peter ever preached (vv. 14-41), the disciples were already extolling God.

I personally experienced something similar in 1987, during my first mission to Laoag, Philippines. In an early-morning prayer meeting, as we prayed simultaneously in tongues, two locals told me they had heard me praying fluently in Ilocano, praising God for sending His glory on the city. Surprised, they asked whether I had grown up in the Philippines. I replied that it was my first time in their country. This encounter mirrored Pentecost, where known languages were heard – yet the focus was worship rather than preaching.

As Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel notes, this is "pneumatic in character ... not the usual praise any Christian may give at any time but an ecstatic praise connected with glossolalia."³⁴ *The Expositor's Greek Testament* calls it "jubilant ecstatic praise."³⁵ The mockers' accusation of drunkenness (Acts 2:13) ironically reveals the exuberance of Spirit-filled worship. Paul draws the same contrast in Ephesians 5:18-20: "Do not get drunk on wine ... be filled with the Spirit," resulting in psalms, hymns, and Spirit-inspired songs.

Luke shows the same pattern in Caesarea: "speaking in tongues and praising God" (Acts 10:46). These are likely one and the same – an example of hendiadys, where two words express one idea. Luke's wording varies ("declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues" in Acts 2:11; "speaking in tongues and praising God" in Acts 10:46), yet the same Greek root *megal-* underlies both expressions, denoting magnification. In Jerusalem and Caesarea alike, they magnified God's mighty deeds. Charismatic theologian J. Rodman Williams aptly calls this "transcendent praise."³⁶

Transcendent Speech with Intelligible Content

Acts consistently presents glossolalia as Spirit-given utterance. "They began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4): the believers spoke, but the Spirit supplied the utterance, making it qualitatively different from normal language. Critics such as Kirsopp Lake reduce glossolalia to emotional outbursts or psychological release;³⁷ yet before the mockers' accusation of drunkenness, Luke notes that "each one heard their own language being spoken" (v. 6). The tongues of Pentecost carried *intelligible content*, not incoherent babble, even when expressed as the language of "mysteries" known only to God (1 Cor 14:2).

³⁴ Hermann Gunkel, *Die Wirkungen des Heilige Geist (The Influence of the Holy Spirit): The Popular View of the Apostolic Age and the Teaching of the Apostle Paul* (Fortress Press, 1979), 18.

³⁵ W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume Two: Apostles, Romans, First Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1988), Acts 10:46.

³⁶ J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective* (Zondervan, 1996), 660.

³⁷ Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part 1: The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 4 (MacMillan and Co, 1933), 117, 120.

Transcendent speech is not irrational noise but a *suprarational* utterance – beyond ordinary human language, yet fully intelligible to God.³⁸ The term “other tongues” itself indicates a new kind of speech, qualitatively different from normal languages: the Spirit’s self-expression through human voices. Jesus promised that believers would “speak in new tongues” (Mark 16:17); the Greek *kainos* (“new”) points to a kind of speech never spoken before – a Spirit-given utterance of an entirely new order.³⁹ Paul calls this “different kinds of tongues” (1 Cor 12:10), a genus of speech that may include “the tongues of men or of angels” (13:1). New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn considers glossolalia “as speaking the language(s) of heaven.”⁴⁰

A parallel may be found in 2 Corinthians 12:4, where Paul describes hearing “inexpressible words” in paradise – heavenly language beyond ordinary human articulation. While it is possible that one might speak in a known foreign language, Paul notes that under ordinary circumstances, “no one understands them” (14:2). Far from incoherent gibberish, glossolalia is suprarational – fully intelligible to God and, when supernaturally interpreted, revealing divine truth to others. Because the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth,”⁴¹ such speech is filled with truth that transcends ordinary expression.

(3) *The Pastoral/Seeker-Sensitive Objection*

Since Azusa Street, Pentecostalism has been one of the fastest-growing movements in modern Christianity, with an estimated 664 million Pentecostal and charismatic believers worldwide, a number projected to exceed one billion by 2050.⁴² New Testament scholar Robert Menzies argues that Spirit baptism with tongues – private, corporate, and simultaneous – has been a defining feature of the movement from its inception; without this linkage, it is doubtful that Pentecostalism would have emerged or endured.⁴³ Yet within Pentecostal circles, a pastoral or seeker-sensitive objection – shaped by evangelical assumptions about orderly worship – is frequently raised: simultaneous glossolalia confuses visitors and should therefore be avoided in public services.

³⁸ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669. Williams cautions against the word “ecstasy” because of its associations with loss of control, confusion, or madness, without intelligent content. The Greek *ekstasis* can mean confusion or astonishment.

³⁹ Blue Letter Bible, “Mark 16:17 Interlinear,” accessed October 1, 2025, https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mar/16/17/t_conc_973017; Blue Letter Bible, “Strong’s G2537— kainos,” accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2537/kjv/tr/0-1/>.

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 244.

⁴¹ John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6; 1 Peter 1:22.

⁴² Center for the Study of Global Christianity, “Status of Global Christianity, 2025, in the Context of 1900-2050,” accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2025/01/Status-of-Global-Christianity-2025.pdf>.

⁴³ Robert Menzies, *Pentecost: This Story is Our Story* (Gospel Publishing House, 2013), loc. 978, Kindle.

Not “Fundamentalist-Plus” Or “Evangelical-Plus”

Amidst such rapid growth and ongoing debates over practices, questions naturally arise regarding how Pentecostalism should be understood and classified within the wider Christian tradition. Since its emergence at the turn of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism has often been treated as a subset of the Protestant movement. Pentecostals have sometimes described themselves as “fundamentalist-plus” or “evangelical-plus,” suggesting that their movement is essentially a version of these traditions – *plus* fire, dedication, Spirit baptism, tongues, healing, and missionary success.

Swiss scholar Walter Hollenweger argues that such categorisations fail to account for Pentecostalism’s distinctive origins, impulses, and trajectory.⁴⁴ Theologian Russell P. Spittler similarly notes that while fundamentalism arose as an intellectual reaction to modernist theology, Pentecostalism emerged as a spiritual response to ecclesial lifelessness. Fundamentalists pursued doctrinal recovery; Pentecostals sought spiritual renewal. Fundamentalists mounted arguments; Pentecostals offered Spirit-empowered experience – tongues, prophecy, healing, and passionate worship.⁴⁵

This divergence soon created distance. By 1928, fundamentalist organisations had officially condemned Pentecostals as sectarian outsiders, dismissing their practices as fanaticism.⁴⁶ By the mid-twentieth century, many Pentecostals increasingly aligned themselves with the evangelical movement – a “milder form of fundamentalism.”⁴⁷ From 1947 to the late 1970s, numerous Pentecostal denominations in the United States joined Billy Graham’s National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and similar bodies.⁴⁸ By the 1980s, Pentecostal colleges sought accreditation, adopted evangelical doctrinal statements, and toned down charismatic practices to fit evangelical norms.⁴⁹

While such alliances brought respectability and influence, they also came at a cost. The *evangelicalisation* of Pentecostals led to a dilution of early distinctives, including pacifist convictions, the egalitarian participation of women, openness to ecumenical dialogue,⁵⁰ and the reduction of charismatic expressions in public worship, particularly simultaneous glossolalia. To call Pentecostalism “fundamentalist-plus” or “evangelical-plus” is to seriously misread its DNA.

⁴⁴ Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Hendrickson, 1997), 192, 202.

⁴⁵ Russell P. Spittler, “Are Pentecostals and Charismatics Fundamentalists? A Review of American Uses of These Categories,” in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, ed. Karla Poewe (University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 103-16, mentioned in Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 191.

⁴⁶ Prominent leaders such as G. Campbell Morgan dismissed Pentecostalism in caustic terms, describing it as “the last vomit of Satan.” Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 191.

⁴⁷ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 192.

⁴⁸ Darrin J. Rodgers, “The Week in AG History—May 10, 1947,” Assemblies of God, May 12, 2022, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://news.ag.org/en/article-repository/news/2022/05/this-week-in-ag-history-may-10-1947>, as quoted by Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 192-93.

⁴⁹ Russell P. Spittler, “Are Pentecostals Evangelicals?” *Pneuma* 9 (1987): 1-19.

⁵⁰ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 194.

Though it may share certain convictions with both, it is reducible to neither. Alliances may shift, but Pentecostalism's enduring vocation is to keep alive the fire of Pentecost as a Spirit-birthing movement in its own right.

Tongues as a Sign for Unbelievers

In recent decades, the embourgeoisement of Pentecostalism has given rise to urban megachurches. This sociological shift has reshaped worship culture and public presentation, often driven by a desire to appeal to middle-class sensibilities and avoid controversy with cessationist or fundamentalist critics. Leaders increasingly emphasise polished liturgy, professional production, and cultural respectability, often at the expense of simultaneous glossolalia.

Some argue that tongues should be restrained or omitted because they confuse seekers. Yet Acts 2 demonstrates the opposite: the sound of simultaneous glossolalia *drew the crowd together* (v. 6). Catholic scholar George Montague observes that it was tongues at Pentecost that “got their attention.”⁵¹ Though some mocked, many more believed – and about three thousand were saved (v. 41). Paul likewise writes, “Tongues ... are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers” (1 Cor 14:22). When met with unbelief, they (tongues) harden; when received in faith, they reveal God's presence and power (cf. 1 Cor 2:14).⁵²

This has also been the experience of City Harvest Church (CHC) in Singapore. In every public worship service, one of the core spiritual practices is a five- to ten-minute period of simultaneous glossolalia. Far from deterring visitors, the sound of congregational praying and singing in tongues has neither hindered members from inviting friends nor prevented seekers from being drawn to the services. According to CHC's internal records, between 2015 and 2024 – including the COVID-19 years – the church recorded an average of 5,197 people each year receiving Christ as Saviour.⁵³ Clearly, simultaneous glossolalia is not

⁵¹ George Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (Wipf and Stock, 2006), 179, quoted by Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 844.

⁵² Quoting Isaiah—“With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me” (v. 21; cf. Isa 28:11)—he recalls how God used the Assyrians' foreign speech to confront Israel, yet they remained deaf. Paul now applies this principle to glossolalia: tongues signal that God is speaking, but those with unbelief will refuse to hear. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Harper & Row, 1968), 323, quoted by Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 844. Barrett notes, “When they are not met with faith (cf. Heb. 4:2), tongues serve to harden and thus to condemn the unbeliever.” For those who believe, however, tongues are recognised as a sign of God's presence and power, spiritually discerned as an expression of the Spirit's love and activity. Those with unbelief will dismiss them as foolishness, confirming Paul's earlier words: “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God ... and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:14). Thus, tongues also become a sign of judgement, exposing those who reject them as “natural” persons hardened in unbelief.

⁵³ According to CHC's internal records, the number of respondents at its altar calls to receive Christ from 2015 to 2024 were 6,303; 5,805; 5,502; 6,218; 4,927; 783; 1,468; 4,546; 7,489; and 8,928 respectively. Notably, during the COVID-19 years, the figures dropped to 783 in 2020 and 1,468 in 2021.

a barrier to evangelistic growth. In fact, anecdotal evidence suggests that when congregational tongues are wisely interwoven into prayer and song, they heighten seekers' awareness of God's presence, contributing to consistently strong altar call responses.

Heavenly Anthem – Singing in the Spirit

In Ephesians 5:18-19, Paul exhorts believers to “be filled with the Spirit” and to “sing psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit,” echoing “I will sing with the spirit” in 1 Corinthians 14:15 – a clear reference to glossolalic singing.⁵⁴ Just like psalms and hymns are to be sung corporately, Paul makes the communal dimension explicit: “speak to one another with ... songs from the Spirit” (Eph 5:19) and “admonish one another with ... songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Col 3:16). These commands presuppose a corporate setting.

Emerging scholar Randal Ackland notes that early Pentecostals prized this “heavenly anthem” – simultaneously singing in tongues – as an essential element of their spirituality because it (a) was widely accepted by outsiders, (b) created hunger for the gift, and (c) often became a person's first glossolalic experience.⁵⁵ Such moments frequently made a profound impact on unbelievers, stirring them to seek the reality behind what they had heard.⁵⁶ True worship longs to transcend ordinary language, and the Spirit answers with a new heavenly language – an impulse scholars see echoed in jubilation, Gregorian chant, and Eastern liturgical prayer.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 238-39, quoted in Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669. The Greek phrase for “spiritual songs” is *odais pneumatikais*, the same expression used in Colossians 3:16. Dunn notes the songs from the Spirit referring specifically to “spontaneous singing in tongues.” Similarly, the Jerusalem Bible views the “inspired songs” of Colossians 3:16 as likely charismatic improvisations prompted by the Spirit during worship. Clearly, Paul's exhortations concerning singing in the Spirit is a call for simultaneous glossolalia.

⁵⁵ Randal Ackland, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Glossolalia* (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2020), 357.

⁵⁶ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669.

⁵⁷ Here are a few examples: (a) Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 2004), 158-59. Scholars have noted echoes of this in church history. Anglican rector Michael Green writes about his visit to a church with glossolalic worship in his book: “We were lifted out of ourselves in the worship of the Lord. There was a period of singing in tongues, and the variety in the sound was matched only by its harmony and the unanimity with which it began and ended, almost as if at the signal of a conductor; but there was no conductor—at least, not a human one;” (b) J. Rodman Williams, *The Era of Spirit* (Logos International, 1971), 33. Williams describes the experience of singing in the Spirit as such: “There may be long periods of joyful, lilting music, quite unplanned, moving back and forth through psalms, hymns, choruses, and the like as the Spirit guides the meeting. But the climax is the moment when not only is the melody given by the Spirit but also the language, as words and music sung by the assembled worshipers blend into an unimaginable, humanly impossible, chorus of praise. Here is ‘singing in the Spirit’ at its zenith—the sublime utterance of the Holy Spirit through the human spirit to the glory of Almighty God;” (c) Werner Meyer, *Der erste*

At Azusa Street, the heavenly anthem was “one of the most indisputable evidences of the presence of God,”⁵⁸ as worshippers proleptically joined “the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and innumerable people in singing a ‘new song.’”⁵⁹ Earthly speech is too limited to convey divine worship fully; until the age to come gives us language adequate to express our love and joy, God bridges the gap by granting Spirit-inspired utterance. In this way, he opens within us a channel of prayer and worship that more fully glorifies him.⁶⁰

Dunn rightly observes that the person “who experiences glossolalia ... experiences it as effective communication with God.”⁶¹ Tongues, then, are not marginal but a *gift of intimate communion* – Spirit-given speech in which the believer speaks mysteries to God and receives a foretaste of heavenly worship.

Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia observes that tongues in worship “tap the soul,” transforming merely cerebral services into powerful encounters with God,⁶² while Hollenweger describes congregational tongues as a “cathedral of sounds” proclaiming, “God is here.”⁶³ In all its strangeness, simultaneous glossolalia remains a Spirit-given sign – speech not manufactured by human effort but produced by divine visitation and power – still opening hearts and revealing God’s presence today.

(4) The Pauline-Regulation Objection

Critics often appeal to Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 14 to question the validity of simultaneous glossolalia. Paul writes: “So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?” (v. 23). This verse is frequently cited to argue that overlapping tongues hinder evangelism or disrupt worship. Some Pentecostals agree and suspend such expressions in order to prioritise intelligibility. Yet Paul also explicitly encourages “singing with the spirit” in

Korintherbrief: Prophezei, vol. 2, trans. A. Bittlinger (Zwingli-Verlag, 1945), 122, quoted in Ensley, *Sounds of Wonder*, 117. Meyer calls the glossolalia of the early Eastern Church “the germ cell of sung liturgical prayer” and sees its influence in Gregorian chant; (d) Ensley, *Sounds of Wonder*, 115, quoted by Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669. A related practice, jubilation—wordless cries of joy—has been referred to by Ensley as “a continuation of the glossolalia of the New Testament;” (e) Gerhard Delling, *Worship in the New Testament* (Westminster Press, 1962), 35, quoted by Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669. Delling likewise describes tongues as “a special language of jubilation ... an anticipation of the praise and worship of God in the heavenly service.”

⁵⁸ Bennett Freeman Lawrence, “Article X – Apostolic Faith Restored: My First Visit to the Azusa Street Pentecostal Mission, Los Angeles, California,” *WE* 131 (March 18, 1916), 4-5, 7, quoted by Ackland, *Glossolalia*, 358.

⁵⁹ Revelation 4 and 5; Melissa Archer, ‘I Was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day’: A Pentecostal Engagement with Worship in the Apocalypse (CPT Press, 2015), 173-91, quoted by Ackland, *Glossolalia*, 359.

⁶⁰ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 666.

⁶¹ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 245, quoted by Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669.

⁶² Frank Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry* (T&T Clark, 2020), 260.

⁶³ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 225.

worship gatherings (Eph 5:18-19; Col 3:16). If congregational *singing* in tongues is commended, then simultaneous *praying* in tongues should likewise not be excluded.

Corporate Glossolalia: Sequential or Simultaneous?

Paul writes: “If anyone speaks in a tongue, two – or at the most three – should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God” (1 Cor 14:27-28). Critics interpret this as a prohibition of simultaneous glossolalia, viewing it as disorderly.

Yet several passages depict believers speaking in tongues together. At Pentecost, “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues” (Acts 2:4) – many people speaking at once, heard by a large crowd gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (*Shavout*). In Caesarea, “they heard them speaking in tongues” (10:46); Cornelius and his household *all* spoke, as at Pentecost. In Ephesus, when Paul laid hands on the disciples, “the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (19:6) – about twelve men in *all*. Each scene portrays a collective, simultaneous experience rather than a sequential one.

Many Evangelicals find simultaneous praying disorderly,⁶⁴ yet it is not an anomaly in Scripture. When Peter and John were arrested and released, the believers gathered to pray: “When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God” (Acts 4:24), and the meeting place was shaken by the Holy Spirit. While Luke does not specify every detail of their prayer, the language suggests a corporate outpouring – everyone lifting their voices at once. Menzies believes these were likely glossolalic prayers.⁶⁵

Moreover, Paul permits the private use of tongues during worship (“speak to himself and to God,” 1 Cor 14:28). Taken together, these passages indicate that Paul distinguishes between *devotional* tongues (prayer and praise directed to God, which may occur simultaneously) and *ministry* tongues (a glossolalic message addressed to the congregation, which should occur one at a time and be interpreted). It was the confusion between these two forms that created tension in Corinth and prompted Paul’s careful regulation in 1 Corinthians 12–14.

The Corinthians appeared to have been offering public utterances in tongues intended for the assembly but without interpretation. Paul describes this as unedifying “speech into the air” (1 Cor 14:9). The problem, therefore, was not simultaneous prayer but uninterpreted public messages. Thus, he insists that if a tongue is meant for the congregation, it must be interpreted, and only two or three should speak in turn (vv. 27-28).

⁶⁴ Robert Menzies, “Simultaneous Prayer: A Pentecostal Perspective,” *Themelios* 49, no. 2 (2024): 421, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/simultaneous-prayer-a-pentecostal-perspective/>.

⁶⁵ Robert Menzies, *Speaking in Tongues: Jesus and the Apostolic Church as Models for the Church Today* (CPT Press, 2016), 37.

Devotional and Ministry Glossolalia

Luke's account in Acts presents tongues as a *sign* of Spirit baptism for believers ("for they heard them speaking in tongues" (Acts 10:46), whereas Paul's Corinthian discussion focuses on tongues as a *gift* exercised within corporate worship. The difference lies in *function*, not *essence*.

Devotional tongues are available for all believers – Paul affirms, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues" (1 Cor 14:5).⁶⁶ Ministry tongues, by contrast, are a *charisma* given for the edification of the congregation. This is the glossolalia of chapter 12, where Paul lists it as a specific gift – "to another speaking in different kinds of tongues" (v. 10) – and concludes with a rhetorical question, "Do all speak in tongues?" (v. 30). The implied answer is no. The distinction is clear: while ministry tongues are distributed selectively, devotional glossolalia is for all.

Thus, while it is correct to say, "I do not speak in tongues because that is not my gift," referring to public ministry tongues, it is *incorrect* to conclude, "Therefore God does not want me to speak in tongues at all." Not everyone is gifted to lead worship, yet all are called to sing. Not everyone is called to lead public prayer, yet all are called to pray. Similarly, while ministry tongues are given only to some, devotional glossolalia is offered to all believers. To reject this is to miss both the overflow of being filled with the Spirit and the continuing prayer and praise he desires to release.

The believer who speaks in tongues publicly is already one who prays in tongues privately, though the reverse is not always true. Many who pray or sing in tongues regularly may never experience the gift of tongues for ministry. This ministry gift depends wholly on the Spirit, who "distributes to each one, just as he determines" (1 Cor 12:11). All tongues – whether devotional or ministry – are given by grace, never earned or achieved. Ministry glossolalia, like every *charisma*, may be earnestly desired (v. 31). Such desire does not compel the Spirit, but it prepares the heart for his sovereign action.

Praying and singing in tongues may rightly occur within corporate worship, but for the congregation to be edified through understanding, ministry tongues must be accompanied by interpretation (1 Cor 14:13-16). Without interpretation, praying in the Spirit remains a genuine act of devotional prayer within the gathered community, strengthening the individual rather than instructing the body. In such cases, Paul directs the glossolalist to "speak to himself and to God" (14:28) – a personal devotion expressed within the corporate assembly. Yet even this shared devotional practice nurtures profound spiritual unity as the congregation together lifts their hearts to God.

Far from being chaotic, simultaneous glossolalia is deeply biblical – an enacted sign of communal worship and unity-in-diversity under the Spirit. Macchia insightfully notes that Pentecost does not erase Babel's diversity but

⁶⁶ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 844. According to TDNT, the verb *thelo* carries the sense of authoritative intent, always carrying the force of a resolute will, not mere wish or desire (3:49). The RSV captures Paul's force: "*I want you ...*" The same usage appears in 1 Corinthians 10:1; 11:3; and 12:1, where *thelo* is rightly rendered "*I want*" or "*I do not want*."

heals its confusion. Augustine observed, “Through proud men, divided were the tongues; through humble apostles, united were the tongues.”⁶⁷ Thus, congregational tongues rehearse the church’s eschatological future: many peoples gathered around Christ, praising God’s mighty works as one.

(5) The “Least Gift” Objection

A common objection to simultaneous glossolalia is that tongues are the “least” of the gifts, since Paul lists it last in several catalogues of the *charismata* (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28; 13:8-10). Biblical scholar F. F. Bruce, for example, speaks of “nine forms of ‘spiritual manifestation’” as “probably in descending order of value,”⁶⁸ placing tongues and interpretation of tongues at the bottom. On this reading, a practice based on the “least” gift should not dominate public worship. Yet the assumption of “least because it’s last” does not necessarily follow. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul lists “faith, hope, love,” then concludes, “but the greatest of these is love.” Love is last – but certainly not least.

A Peculiar Sign of God’s New Supernatural Work

Williams suggests that tongues and interpretation may appear last because they were the final *charismata* to appear. The other seven gifts have Old Testament precedents; these two do not. In a climactic way, they embody the Spirit’s self-expression – human voices speaking as the Spirit gives utterance and interpretation.⁶⁹ From the outset, glossolalia carried a sign-character: when the disciples spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost, it marked an unprecedented act of divine self-disclosure – God inaugurating a new supernatural age.

Glossolalia is often dismissed as strange or undesirable – written off as emotional excess, explained psychologically as disorder, or treated as taboo.⁷⁰ The American linguist William Samarin claimed that “anybody can produce glossolalia if he is uninhibited and discovers what the ‘trick’ is – essentially, the free flow of nonsense syllables.”⁷¹ Williams responds emphatically: “Anyone who has truly spoken in tongues knows that there is no possible comparison of

⁶⁷ Macchia, *Spirit-Baptized Church*, 144.

⁶⁸ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Eerdmans, 1996), 119, quoted by Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 844.

⁶⁹ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 829.

⁷⁰ John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1972), 54-55. Kildahl dismisses glossolalia as a sign of “hypnotisability”; Christianity Today, “New Policies on Divorce and Speaking in Tongues,” September 18, 1987, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/1987/09/new-policies-on-divorce-and-speaking-in-tongues>. The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board has developed a policy that “disqualifies missionary candidates who actively participate in, or promote the practice of speaking in tongues.” Further, “any missions personnel already appointed, approved, or endorsed by the mission board who become involved in glossolalia will be counselled by a mission board representative. Continued participation in speaking in tongues would result in their dismissal.”

⁷¹ William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (The Macmillan Company, 1972), 227-28.

it with human gibberish.”⁷² Dominican priest Simon Tugwell likewise insists, “You cannot engineer tongues.”⁷³ This does not deny that counterfeit expressions may occur, but such cases are exceptional, not normative.

For the glossolalist, the perspective is radically different. The experience may feel peculiar – speaking a language never learned – yet it remains a profound sign of God’s activity. Glossolalia is evidence of a miracle: speech not manufactured by human effort but inspired by the Spirit. In all its strangeness, it testifies to divine visitation and the Spirit’s abiding power. Tongues remain, and continue to be, a special sign.

Tongues Were Important to Paul

More than two decades after Pentecost, Paul still viewed glossolalia as a cherished spiritual practice: “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you” (1 Cor 14:18).⁷⁴ His repeated references in 1 Corinthians 14 demonstrate that the phenomenon was widespread in Corinth. Indeed, he assumes the possibility that “the whole church” might speak in tongues (v. 23). For those who did not, Paul expressed his desire that they might: “I want you all to speak in tongues” (v. 5). His purpose was never to prohibit glossolalia but to regulate it for edification. His final instruction is clear: “Do not forbid speaking in tongues” (v. 39).

Tongues as Transcendent Prayer

Paul links glossolalia directly with prayer: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful” (1 Cor 14:14). Tongues are Spirit-given utterances that transcend conceptual thought. Paul neither dismisses glossolalia as “unfruitful” nor excludes understanding; he affirms both dimensions: “I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding” (v. 15). When a believer prays or sings in tongues, the vocal organs act, yet the words themselves are supplied by the Spirit. The Spirit does not compel or override the speaker; the will remains free while the utterance originates deeper than intellect or emotion – at the level of the human spirit inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Glossolalists brings multiple benefits to the believer’s devotional and communal life:

a. Praying Without Ceasing

The first benefit is the ability to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions” (Eph 6:18). Unlike prayer of the mind, which requires deliberate thought, praying in the Spirit can flow continuously – even amidst daily activities. It is the practical means of fulfilling Paul’s exhortation to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17).

⁷² Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669.

⁷³ Simon Tugwell, *Did You Receive the Spirit?* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 63.

⁷⁴ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669. It also indicates that Paul spoke frequently in tongues. In fact, to put it in everyday terms, Paul was the “champion” in this practice—“more than you all.”

b. Praying the Will of God

The second benefit arises when “we do not know what we ought to pray for ... the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” (Rom 8:26). These groans are Spirit-given utterances beyond human language. Gunkel calls them “glossolalic-ecstatic outbursts,”⁷⁵ and New Testament scholar J. Behm saw in them the Spirit coming “to aid the believer in his weakness and represent him before God ... by glossolalia.”⁷⁶ Paul continues, “And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God” (v. 27). Glossolalic prayer thus moves the believer beyond the limits of mental petition into the Spirit’s own intercession, perfectly aligned with God’s will.

c. Praying in Revelatory Mysteries

Third, in tongues, believers “utter mysteries by the Spirit” (1 Cor 14:2). Glossolalia is Spirit-empowered communion that transcends ordinary knowledge and expression. Dunn describes the glossolalist as “holding a secret conversation with God ... the subject matter is the eschatological secrets known only in heaven.”⁷⁷ Paul roots this in the Spirit’s depths: “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10). To speak in tongues is to participate in this divine communion. Such mysteries may also concern present realities, for “we have ... the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us” (v. 12). Praying in the Spirit does not replace prayer of the mind but deepens it; one may begin in glossolalia and, as the Spirit grants interpretation, move to intelligible speech with greater insight and confidence: “I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding” (1 Cor 14:15).

d. Praying in Spiritual Warfare

Fourth, glossolalia empowers believers for spiritual battle: “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph 6:18). Pentecostal theologian Mark J. Cartledge highlights tongues “as a key tool in the armory ... a means of personal and corporate prayer and empowerment, enabling committed and self-sacrificial service to the community for the sake of the gospel.”⁷⁸ Anecdotal evidence from many Asian Pentecostal contexts likewise suggests that glossolalia frequently functions as a prayer language of deliverance in spiritual warfare.

⁷⁵ Gunkel, *Die Wirkungen des Heilige Geist (The Influence of the Holy Spirit)*, 80-81. On page 66, Gunkel also points to the cry, “Abba, Father” in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6, noting: “In Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6 as well, glossolalic utterances are cited [by Paul] as words of the Holy Spirit.”

⁷⁶ J. Behm, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley (Eerdmans, 1959), 813.

⁷⁷ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 244, quoted by Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 669.

⁷⁸ Mark J. Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006), 111, quoted by Ackland, *Glossolalia*, 83.

e. Praying that Unites and Comforts in Suffering

Fifth, glossolalia offers the grace of shared lament and mutual strengthening. Praying in tongues together allows believers not only to celebrate resurrection life but also to carry one another's suffering and burdens through Spirit-inspired intercession. Macchia writes:

There are also gifts like speaking in tongues and intercessory prayer that allow members to groan together in ways too deep for words for the liberty of the Spirit to come (Rom. 8:26), groaning that helps them to bear the suffering of others so as to comfort them with the hope at the horizon of our shared faith. We suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice (1 Cor. 12:26).⁷⁹

In this way, simultaneous glossolalia becomes not only a sign of joy and unity but also a channel of shared lament, compassion, and hope.

f. Praying that Edifies the Soul

Finally, glossolalia edifies the believer personally. Paul declares, "Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves" (1 Cor 14:4). Through this Spirit-given language – whether in worship, intercession, or warfare – the believer is built up inwardly. Jude links the same dynamic: "Building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20). Because the human spirit is the deepest aspect of the self, its strengthening affects the whole person. New Testament scholar Gordon D. Fee notes, "Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain."⁸⁰

Modern neuroscience lends support to Paul's claim. A University of Pennsylvania study scanned believers as they prayed in tongues.⁸¹ During glossolalia, the brain's frontal lobes – regions linked to language production and control – grew quiet, while areas connected to relational awareness became more active. Neuroscientist Andrew B. Newberg explains that this reflects "relinquishing control while gaining a very intense experience of how the self relates to God."⁸² Participants reported feeling peaceful, energised, and spiritually refreshed – not entranced or dissociated. These findings suggest that glossolalia engages the person at a level deeper than conscious thought, providing a plausible neurological basis for the inner strengthening Paul describes. In this sense, glossolalia fulfils Isaiah's promise of "rest" (Isa 28:11-12) and Paul's reference to it in 1 Corinthians 14:21 bringing the believer into the Spirit's refreshing rest.

This is not to exaggerate the role of glossolalia; countless believers have grown spiritually without ever speaking in tongues. Yet praying and singing in

⁷⁹ Macchia, *Spirit-Baptized Church*, 321.

⁸⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1987), 657.

⁸¹ Andrew B. Newberg et al., "The Measurement of Regional Cerebral Blood Flow During Glossolalia: A Preliminary SPECT Study," *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 148, no. 1 (2006): 67-71, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2006.07.001>.

⁸² Constance Holden, "Tongues on the Mind," *Science*, November 2, 2006, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.science.org/content/article/tongues-mind>.

tongues remain unique expressions of supreme praise, joy, and intercession through which believers experience profound spiritual upbuilding. To pray in the Spirit, as Jude exhorts, is to “build yourselves up in your most holy faith” (Jude 20). Surely all believers need such edification.

A Hallmark of Asian Pentecostal Spirituality

From Seoul to Surabaya, Coimbatore to China’s underground churches, believers gather to lift their voices together in the Spirit. This practice has produced extraordinary growth, boldness, and resilience. The following examples illustrate how simultaneous glossolalia shapes worship, fuels evangelism, and sustains Pentecostal churches under both prosperity and persecution.

Yoido Full Gospel Church

The most influential Pentecostal church in Asia is David Yonggi Cho’s Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC) in Seoul. One hallmark of its worship is the practice of *tongsung kido* (“crying out together loudly”), where individuals lift their petitions and emotions to God simultaneously – without self-consciousness or fear of disturbing others. This distinctive form of prayer has been part of the Korean prayer movement since the early 1900s.⁸³

At YFGC, *tongsung kido* begins with the invocation of God’s name three times – *Chu-yoi! Chu-yoi! Chu-yoi!* (“Lord! Lord! Lord!”) – after which thousands of congregants pray simultaneously in tongues.⁸⁴ Current senior pastor, Younghoon Lee, notes that most members, many from impoverished backgrounds, pour out their pain and hardship before God. The *Chu-yoi sam chang* (“Lord, three times”) expresses the sigh of a life marked by suffering.⁸⁵ Korean theologian Tae-Young So observes that such passionate, simultaneous glossolalic prayer “originated from the saints in the Korean church who had no place to hope but God in their lives of absolute despair.”⁸⁶

The results of these prayers have been extraordinary. Under Cho’s ministry, YFGC reached 100,000 members by 1981; 400,000 by 1984; 700,000 by 1992; and 750,000 by 2008.⁸⁷ Under Lee, simultaneous praying in tongues has

⁸³ Yohang Chun, “Tongsung Kido (A Unique Korean Prayer),” United Methodists of Upper New York, May 10, 2017, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.unyumc.org/news/article/tongsung-kido-a-unique-korean-prayer>.

⁸⁴ Nicholas Harkness, “Glossolalia and Cacophony in South Korea: Cultural Semiosis at the Limits of Language,” *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 3 (2017): 476, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/amet.12523/full>.

⁸⁵ Younghoon Lee, “The Role of Prayer and its Centrality in Sustaining the Effectiveness of Global Christianity,” in *Voices Loud & Clear*, ed. Kong Hee et al. (Regnum Books International, 2024), 87, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0j0vaTRY8r0>.

⁸⁶ Tae-Young So, “Chu-Yoi Sam Chang That Includes Spirituality of Lamentation and Education in the Format of Prayer,” *YoungSan Theological Journal* 40 (2017): 115.

⁸⁷ Yoido Full Gospel Church 60 Years History Compilation Committee, *Yoido Full Gospel Church 60 Years History* (Seoul Logos, 2018), 72.

continued unabated, and the church's expansion has not stopped: by early 2025, membership has already surpassed 900,000.⁸⁸ Lee echoes his mentor (Cho) in affirming that prayer – *specifically, simultaneous glossolalic prayer* – is the key to revival.⁸⁹

Bethany Church Nginden and Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Gatot Subroto

In Indonesia, Pentecostals stand at the forefront of revival in evangelism and missions. Bethany Church Nginden in Surabaya is one of Asia's most influential mission-sending churches, with a 30,000-seat main campus and over 200,000 members.⁹⁰ Its founder, Abraham Alex Tanuseputra, championed simultaneous glossolalia as vital to evangelism and growth, urging the congregation to pray and sing fervently in the Spirit.⁹¹

In 1988, Tanuseputra released Niko Njotorahardjo to Jakarta, where Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Gatot Subroto was birthed. Under Njotorahardjo's leadership, more than 1,200 churches and 8,200 cell groups have been established.⁹² With 350,000 members, GBI Gatot Subroto is one of Indonesia's largest churches. From its earliest services, members have been encouraged to pray and sing in tongues simultaneously. Pastor Njotorahardjo explains:

When people speak in tongues together, each one is directly communicating with God. They experience His presence and glorify Him. Some receive miracles, healing, deliverance, peace, guidance, and breakthroughs. Most importantly, their lives are transformed so that they become witnesses, and the Lord adds souls. This will continue until the greatest and final harvest before the Lord Jesus comes again.⁹³

Indian Pentecostal Assemblies

India ranks eleventh on the *Open Doors World Watch List (2025)* for Christian persecution,⁹⁴ yet David and Ketzy Prakasm's Indian Pentecostal Assemblies (IPA) in Coimbatore has grown into a dynamic church-planting movement of over 131,000 members. Nearly all its 3,000 congregations devote time each week for simultaneous glossolalia. Pastor David explains:

Every time everyone prays together in tongues, a holy boldness comes upon us and the anointing for evangelism is released. The supernatural power of the Holy Spirit is activated, transforming ordinary believers to do extraordinary things for God.

⁸⁸ Younghoon Lee, personal conversation with author, January 17, 2025.

⁸⁹ David Yonggi Cho, *Prayer, Key to Revival* (Broadstreet Publishing, 2019), 1.

⁹⁰ Global Church Network, "10 Global Churches Larger Than America's Largest," January 18, 2012, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://gcnw.tv/2012/01/18/10-global-churches-larger-than-americas-largest/>.

⁹¹ Agus Gunawan, personal conversation with author, September 14, 2025. Agus was Abraham Alex Tanuseputra's secretary.

⁹² Philip Suciadi Chia, "From the East to the West: From the Third Pentecost Phenomenon in Indonesia to the Asbury Revival," *Transformation* 2025 42, no. 2 (2024): 162.

⁹³ Niko Njotorahardjo, personal conversation with author, September 15, 2025.

⁹⁴ Open Doors, "World Watch Ranking: India," accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/india/>.

This outpouring results in remarkable church growth and a great harvest in missions, just like the Early Church in Acts 2.⁹⁵

The Chinese House Church (Jiating Jiaohui)

China ranks fifteenth on the *Open Doors World Watch List (2025)*. As unregistered congregations are shut down and state-approved churches restricted,⁹⁶ Christianity – especially Pentecostalism – continues to grow. Prominent house-church leader Brother Shi recalls how, in 1988, a meeting that was to close with the Lord’s Prayer erupted into prolonged singing and praying in tongues. Believers trembled, wept, repented, and received boldness to preach. From a congregation of about one hundred, his house church multiplied to twenty-six churches with thousands of new believers within eighteen months. Shi testifies:

When we all pray in tongues together, we experience God face to face. Tongues brings courage, intimacy, and revelation. It gave us strength to carry the cross and follow Jesus and suffer for the sake of the gospel. Many of us became very bold and answered the call to become full-time preachers, to share the good news of salvation throughout China. We may not be seminary-trained, but when we prayed in tongues together, the Holy Spirit often granted us understanding into difficult passages of Scripture during our Bible study sessions. After all these years, we have remained grounded in the sound doctrine of the Word through the faithful guidance of the Spirit.⁹⁷

Among China’s five major house-church networks, practically all embrace Spirit baptism and simultaneous glossolalia. In the *Fangcheng* network, a pivotal moment also came in 1988, when missionary Dennis Balcombe taught on the grace of tongues.⁹⁸ Over the next two decades, the movement grew explosively.

Sister Lydia, an eyewitness of the *Fangcheng* revival, recounted how leaders often gathered in *chai qian* meetings for worship, simultaneous glossolalia, prophecy, and healing.⁹⁹ By 2007, the movement had reached ten million members despite intense persecution.¹⁰⁰ One lasting legacy was the *Canaan Hymns*,¹⁰¹ composed by Sister Xiaomin (often with Lydia) – over one thousand songs, many of them spontaneously inspired during congregational glossolalia.

Lydia recalls, “Tongues bring deep peace. Tears flow freely as His presence descends. Our lives were changed.”¹⁰² The *Fangcheng* revival demonstrates how

⁹⁵ David Prakasm, personal conversation with author, September 12, 2025.

⁹⁶ Open Doors, “World Watch Ranking: China,” accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/china/>.

⁹⁷ Brother Shi, personal conversation with author, May 1, 2025.

⁹⁸ Selena Y. Z. Au and Dik Allan, “Self-Narration and Theological Formation of Contemporary Chinese House Church Networks,” in *Asia Pacific Pentecostalism*, ed. Denise A. Austin et al. (Brill, 2019), 74, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁹⁹ Au and Allan, “Contemporary Chinese House Church Networks,” 75.

¹⁰⁰ Persecution.org, “Jailed Chinese Pastor Rongliang Near Death,” September 26, 2007, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://persecution.org/2007/09/26/jailed-chinese-pastor-rongliang-near-death/>.

¹⁰¹ Au and Allan, “Contemporary Chinese House Church Networks,” 75.

¹⁰² Sister Lydia, personal conversation with author, May 8, 2025.

Spirit baptism and simultaneous glossolalia fuelled one of China's greatest Christian awakenings, imparting power, boldness, peace, joy, and revelation to a persecuted church.

Conclusion

Qualitative case studies and interviews across several Asian contexts indicate that simultaneous glossolalia consistently nurtures spirituality, empowerment, unity, and boldness among Pentecostal congregations. Congregational tongues are not a marginal curiosity but a defining sign of Pentecostal experience – one that connects believers to the life and vitality of the apostolic church. Why, then, abandon a practice that has served the movement so well? Rather than diminish it, Pentecostals should recover and deepen it.

For those who have not yet experienced glossolalia, Menzies offers a balanced encouragement:

Tongues serves as an important symbol for Pentecostals. While it is possible to experience Pentecostal power without speaking in tongues, it is not the full biblical experience. Earnest Christians who have not spoken in tongues must not allow their inability to discourage them in their spiritual growth or mission. Tongues is neither a sign of Christian maturity nor is a lack of tongues a sign of immaturity. Stay hungry for God and rejoice with others when they speak in tongues. Allow their utterances to serve as reminders of our common bond with the apostolic church.¹⁰³

It is time for Pentecostals to reclaim what has been muted. The embourgeoisement of Pentecostalism may have produced middle-class respectability, but at the cost of one of the movement's earliest and most powerful marks. Scripture, history, and the vibrant witness of Asian Pentecostalism all attest to the enduring value and power of congregational tongues.

If Pentecostal churches are to remain faithful to their apostolic roots, they must not sideline but wisely embrace simultaneous glossolalia. Far from repelling seekers, when it is taught and modelled with spiritual sensitivity, this distinctive refreshes both believers and newcomers with an authentic encounter of God's love and presence. In recovering it, Pentecostals reaffirm their identity and prepare the church for the greatest harvest yet to come.

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¹⁰³ Robert Menzies, *Pentecost*, location 1378.

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