



ISAIAH 28:11-13 AND TONGUES AS SPIRITUAL LANGUAGES IN CHRISTIAN LITURGY IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examined the spiritual phenomenon of the use of strange or unlearned tongues in Christian liturgy in Nigerian context. Lots of arguments have been generated and writers have delved into this issue from both academic and spiritual angles but not from the liturgical perspectives of it within the ambit of Pentecostal liturgical speaking in tongues. Even though there are divided opinions on its relevance outside the Pentecostals, it forms a unique feature among the Pentecostals. It explores the nexus of the use of tongues and Christian liturgy and how it provided a spiritual link between the human and the supersensible world. The phenomenological and participatory observatory methods were adopted in the study. The purpose of the study was to inform the readers that Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity also countenances African cosmological views about supersensible world and adopted use of spiritual languages to communicate with the incorporeal world. Theory adopted was Intercultural Hermeneutics, which gave room for the nexus between the biblical teaching and contextualization of such within African setting by virtue of their similarities. Finding revealed that speaking in tongues is crucial to Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity, incorporated into their worship, strongly encouraged both at congregational and personal worship and abused to an extent. The conclusions are drawn on the note that human language is given by God and in the absence of spiritual language, the liturgy is still acceptable and worshippers should not feel inferior to those who are gifted in tongues.*



INTRODUCTION

When man was created according to the Jewish creation story, God breathed on him “a breath of life”, so he was responsive to God and his environment (Gen. 2:7). This breath gave him life and self-consciousness on earth. One major thing that happened to man was that he received a command from God to fulfill certain obligations as stated in Genesis 1:27-28 and 2: 15. This partially happened through communication and use of language. The very first language God used to communicate with man was not recorded perhaps it was not the focus of the Yahwist writer and salvation history of the Holy Scripture and of Genesis Creation accounts. One thing that is clear was that there was a communication between God and man, but the language used was not recorded nor known to mankind. How Adam and Eve, the first family on earth spoke to each other was not the concern of the writer of Genesis either. It was agreed that the whole earth had one spoken language then and were free in communication.

This remained until the language confusions occurred at the Tower of Babel. Everyone who could understand each other cleaved to each other and formed a tongue, people, language and tribe (Archer, 1985:217-220). So, it followed that in their crude religious activities, they used the language they understood to pay obeisance to the objects of their worship. One crucial thing was the fact that man could not carry out his worship as a mute but as a speaker before his gods. The use of language in worship had been from Adam and it is a vital force man must engage in his attempts to worship his divinities.

Exegesis of Speaking and Tongues

The Greek word $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\omicron\lambda\alpha\lambda\iota\alpha$, *glossolia*, from which we derived the English equivalent speaking in tongues originally conveys the idea of “to utter a sound, to emit a voice, or make one’s self heard; as a result, to utter certain words or form words with the instrument of mouth, or to speak (Thayer, 1978, 368). The particular attention is directed at the sound and pronunciation of the words and in general the form of what is uttered. Its nearest equivalence is $\lambda\epsilon\gamma\omega$, *lego*, meaning, “I say”, which was generously employed by Jesus Christ in the Beatitudes and other discourses. The word refers to the meaning and substance of what is spoken. $\lambda\alpha\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$, *lalein* is an infinitive type of $\lambda\epsilon\gamma\omega$, *lego*, which is derived from $\lambda\alpha\lambda\epsilon\omega$, *lalew*, meaning, ‘I speak’ or ‘I am speaking’ which is first person singular and an indicative active case in Greek grammar.

It is the view of Thayer (1985, 368) that $\lambda\alpha\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$, *lalein*, has as its primary meaning “to utter one’s self” and this opens the door of the understanding of the word. At the same time, it enables us easily to understand its very frequent use in the sacred writers to denote the utterances by which God indicates or gives proof of His mind and will, whether immediately or through the instrumentality of his messengers and heralds. In a nut shell, *lalein*, has primarily the following meaning among others:

1. To utter a voice or emit a sound;
2. To speak articulate words or sounds;
3. To talk, which describes the sound in its outward form;
4. To use word in order to express what is in the inner mind or one’s thought etc.



From the above, it is glaring that speaking cannot be inward but a production of words or sound in outward forms for articulates expression. This brings about proper understanding and meaning to the hearers (Thayer, 368).

Tongues on its own, from the Greek word, *glossa* primarily means the “organ of speech”. It is a member of the body that responsible for philology and phonetics (cf. Mk. 7:33, 35; Lk. 1:64; 24:24; Jas. 1:26; 3:5, 6, 8; 1 Pet. 3:10). *Glossa*, the tongue, as a metaphor stands for the language of a tribe or ethnic other than one’s non-native language. Such was the theological import of Acts 2:13 when it was commented that the apostles and other disciples spoke in the “tongues”, the language of people in Diaspora. The Greek expression connotes the idea of speaking in other tongues or languages than one’s mother tongues. Basically, it refers to speaking in “foreign”, tribal language other than one’s own language. Another dimension is introduced in Acts 2:4, 6,11 when the apostles and disciples spoke in “foreign” language with the aid of the Holy Spirit but which the hearer understood.

Mark 16:17 gives speaking with new tongues as a sign for the believers in Jesus Christ in their missiological and evangelistic campaigns. According to 1 Corinthians 14:7 “tongue” is counted as a special gift given to men. Banwell (1982:145), submits that a people speaking in tongues rapt in an ecstasy and no longer quite master of their own reason and consciousness, pour forth their glowing (bubbling) spiritual emotions in strange utterances rugged, dark, disconnected, quite unfitted to instruct or to influence the minds of others. Certain points are generated by this position. One, the issue of ecstasy is associated with speaking in tongues. Two, loss of “reason and consciousness”, which is not always the case as the people still know that they in worship mood and possessed by the Spirit. Three, Banwell fails to fit the situations very well because the hearers are worshippers in the spiritual settings and they understand the mystery of speaking in tongues. So, the language spoken is not “rugged”, “dark”, “disconnected”, and quite unfitted” to them but bring inspiration and joy to them.

According to Banwell, this view is traceable to the “Hebraistic conception that the organ functions semi-independently when employed in the praises of God and has seeming independence of action” (1982, 145). Beyond the Hebraistic notion, the worshippers hold to the view that it is a work of the Holy Spirit in action among them and a sign of the presence of the Divine. Thayer succinctly expresses the same idea but under a more rigorous conception of inspiration “where it is believed that, nothing human in an inspired man was thought to be active except the tongue, put in motion by the Holy Spirit (1978, 368).

In a traditional or classical Pentecostal setting in Nigeria, the mechanical theory of inspiration is strongly adhered to without question. This may partly be due to the level of religiosity of the people. This is extended to the issue of tongues speaking in their liturgy. It is only the tongues as a human organ that is in use under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This could be to the intent of ascribing a sense of spirituality to the utterance and the speaker under the supersensible power. The relationship between the use of tongue as a biological organ of speech and speaking in tongues can be grammatically explained. The Greek word *εν*, meaning *in* is a dative use. Dative case in Greek is used to express the indirect object in a sentence. Further use of dative connotes the use of instrument by which something is done (Wenham, 45-46).⁷ Thus *λαλειν ιν γλωσσα*, *lalein in glossa*, with iota subscript underneath could be rendered as “speaking with the instrument of tongue”. After all, tongue is a symbol of speech. But in the spiritual and liturgical atmosphere, this is not the traditional



interpretation given to it. It is rather believed to be speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit during the liturgy.

There has not been any area of divergence among the orthodox and Pentecostals more than the area of speaking in tongues as a foreign language in their liturgy. C.P. Wagner (1986,19) writes that the forced out Methodist Pastor, Williams Hoover was once accused of teaching the doctrine of ... the baptism by fire, miracles of faith healing... the gift of tongues, prophecies.... This is to show the extent this “spiritual language” can bring divisions among believers.

Isaiah 28:10-13 and the Origin of Tongues as Spiritual Language in the Pentecostal Liturgy

Many Pentecostals in Nigeria especially, found the origin and biblical source for their tongues in the prophecy of prophet Isaiah 28:10-13:

For precept must be upon precept,

precept upon precept,

Line upon line, line upon line,

Here a little, there a little;

For stammering lips and another tongue,

He will speak to this people....

The chapter 28 of Isaiah starts with the condemnations of Ephraim as a proud nation. This refers to Samaria, which was the capital of Northern Israel. The essence of her pride, which was her beauty was compared with a fading flower. This was a metaphorical expression of the nothingness of self-glory and nothing to be proud of indeed. Even though her pride and beauty have reached a climax like a mountain, she would suddenly fade away like a flower cut down its flowery stage and its beauty. As a drunkard rushes to fall, so Samaria will fall. But Judah would survive for a while after the destruction of Ephraim. Unfortunately, she too has committed sin like Ephraim. She stumbled in judgement and her priests also had committed sins. They had forgotten the law of their God. They proved that they were not ignorant of the law but they were full of wine. Because of the hardness of their hearts, they tried to ridicule the teaching of Isaiah and asked: Who will he teach knowledge?.... Are they children or weaned babies that he would be repeating words in their hearing?

tzav latzav, tzav latzav,

gav laqav, gav laqav,

meaning,

for precept upon precept,

line upon line, line upon line,



here a little, there a little-Isa. 28:10

mocking Isaiah in the way he spoke to them as if he was teaching children. If the people of Judah would not hear from a Hebrew among them, Yahweh would call for foreign people with unknown language, even though Assyrian and Babylonian languages were parts of the Semitic languages but totally different from Hebrew language they spoke. Isaiah therefore prophesied thus:

For with stammering lips and another tongue

He will speak to this people-Isa. 28:11

The punishment of Judah would be from foreign languages of the Babylonians if they could not listen to the prophet that God raised up for them in order to correct them and call them to order.

There it is mentioned that Yahweh would speak to His people in the “stammering lips” and “tongue”. What this stammering and distinguished tongue language meant to the immediate speaker and hearers has been lost in history. But the Pentecostals have taken this passage to be prophecy about the coming “spiritual tongues”, which has been made popular by the events on the day of Pentecost. To the people of Judah, it was a sign of punishment but the Pentecostals have taken the passage to another level of interpretation (*sensor plenior*) of the passage to be a prophecy from Isaiah on speaking in tongues during their liturgy.

The actual biblical claim of this religious language in the liturgy of many Pentecostals goes back to the experience of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. As a gift, it appeared on the Day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (Act 2:1-3). It marked the attention drawing focal point and “external” mark that something internally spiritual has occurred to the assembled but fearful disciples. The Lucan emphasis on the word “began to speak in tongues” connotes the theological import of its newness, starting point and spiritual mark of evidence of “Promise of the Father” prophesied by Jesus Christ (cf. Lk. 24:49; cf. Mk. 16:17). Guthrie notes that “in spite of the great speeches in Acts (1970, 359), the first and impacting one was delivered by the Holy Spirit through “tongue speaking” (Act 2:1-3).

The miraculous nature of this phenomenon is made clear in the context that “other tongues” means language different from their own (the hearers’). By implication, this language was previously unknown to the speakers for the amazement of the crowd coming from many lands, as caused by the fact that Galileans could speak these various languages (Hiebert, 1987:1023). Most Nigerian Pentecostals accept this spiritual and miraculous nature of tongues in their liturgy.

It is widely held that speaking in tongues is the language of the Holy Spirit. In Nigerian Christianity, whosoever has accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Saviour is expected to go a step further and receive the Holy Spirit. This is commonly called “Holy Spirit baptism” among the believers. According to the widely held belief among the Pentecostals, the initial sign and evidence of baptism of the Holy Spirit in the life of the speakers is speaking in this spiritual language. Nearly all Nigerian Pentecostals strongly believe that once you can speak in tongues, you have received the Holy Spirit. As a result, this is viewed as a gift given to the church not minding its interpretation. Unfortunately, it is



evident that not all the Pentecostals speak in tongues as experience has shown but doctrinally, all Pentecostals believe in the sign of speaking in tongues by believers.

Speaking in Tongues as a Spiritual Link between the Divine and Human

One interesting thing about tongues speaking is its consideration as a spiritual language. It is of the view that the speakers do not know what they are saying. Their human minds are considered not to be partakers of the spiritual communication. It is only their inner spirit which is thought to be through the inspiration the Holy Spirit that is communicating with the spiritual realm. The Pentecostals hold that spiritual gifts are strongly operational in the church of the modern world as in the early days of the Apostles and disciples. For example, it is clearly stated in the United Church of the Cherubim and Seraphim that:

...they are gifts to the church to ascertain the wish of God and to know the future for the preparation of the people of God for their heavenly home. They are also channels through which the Lord speaks to his people directing their affairs and protecting them against evils... they are infallible finders of God for believers on earth and also the means by which God speaks to his people (1954 Constitution).

It follows that speaking in tongues being one of them provides a platform for spiritual link between the Divine and human. The *Aladura* who formed the classical Pentecostals especially among whom this trend is much at home always feel the presence of the divine presence of Godhead in their midst when there is speaking in tongues during their liturgy. A sign of the presence and manifestation of the Godhead is *glossolalia* utterances and bubbling during the liturgy. The Divine is believed to have come down to the midst of His people when there are manifested speaking in tongues. Regardless of the gender of the speaker, the person speaking under an influence of Spirit possession is addressed in masculine nouns and pronouns simply because he or she is not regarded to be real speaker but God the Holy Spirit. He is accorded much reverence during and after this spiritual exercise. This was witnessed during a visit of the author to a sacred prayer mountain of Cherubim and Seraphim at Erinmo-Ijesa.

Most people who possess spiritual gifts exercise in the congregation serve as intermediaries. Omoyajowo (1982,128) aptly captures this and writes, “they are possessed by the Holy Spirit who reveals the will of God and the destiny of the individual, guides through dangers, and fills men with new powers of prophesy, utterance, prayer and healing”. He also submits that visioners, dreamers and prophets give warnings about the present and the future and in some cases, these warnings are revealed in ‘tongues (Omoyajowo).

African cosmological views include a spiritual world with Deity and divinities. This spiritual world, they believe can be reached, contacted and manipulate through the use of potent words and languages. African Christianity does not exclude this spiritual realm either. Tongues are strongly believed to be spiritual language employed by the Nigerian Christians



to reach the spirit worlds. It is believed that it provides the spiritual link to the Divine Being. The in-depth spiritual urge to have an intercourse with the Divine and control the spiritual realm have the tongues as spiritual vehicle and it appears to be stubbornly persistent among the Pentecostal and *Aladura* Christians. As long as these in-depth remains with man and it taught among the classical Pentecostals and new Pentecostal, it will continue to mark the trait of Pentecostals in Nigerian Christianity. It is regarded as the language of the Holy Spirit which can only be imparted by Him. So, whoever speaks in this language is believed to be speaking the language of the Holy Spirit. This thought raises a theological question: how do we ascertain the Spirit behind the inspiration of the speakers? Besides, speaking in strange languages is not limited to Christianity alone. Other traditional worshippers under the influence of spirit possession also go into frenzy and speak in other esoteric tongues. Nevertheless, the biblical background of speaking tongues, and the Christian historical antecedents among others form the difference between the Christians speaking in tongues and the traditional expressions of the same.

Speaking in Tongues as Spiritual Languages in Pentecostal Christian Liturgy in Nigerian Context

The idea of speaking in tongues was a forbidden fruit in the mainline churches in the latter end of nineteenth and early twentieth century's in Nigerian Christianity. But it was a trademark of Pentecostal pioneers in Nigeria especially the Precious Stone Society also known as Diamond Prayer Band at Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State which turned to Nigeria Faith Tabernacle later on (Oshun, 1983:105). According to Adegboyega (1978, 38-39), "it was an awesome experience when two of the members of the Faith Tabernacle in one of the Tarry Meetings in the year 1930 at Lagos received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a wonderful way speaking in tongues and prophesying".

Adegoke (n.d. 46-48) states that in Cherubim and Seraphim Church beliefs, "speaking in tongues" is a celestial language or any other earth(ly) language other than the one learned, which is being spoken through an individual under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is a belief among the C&S faithful that speaking in tongues can be expressed in any existing (known) earth languages. It could be heard in celestial languages that can be interpreted by the Spirit to deliver prophecy through which the church is edified. It is also believed that tongue can be expressed in mystery celestial languages spoken only to God and are uninterpretable by humans or angels. It is boastfully stated and expressed that "in C&S, Arabia, Hebrew and other African languages are spoken by Yoruba speaking members who have never heard or spoken any of these languages (Adegoke, 136-135).

As a spiritual language, C&S would sing and praise God in tongues. Many of the prophetic messages in the church are delivered through tongues. Many of worship hymns in the church are tongues inspired and interpreted. Any time visions are delivered in celestial tongue or any unknown or unlearned language to the believer, there would be need for interpretation by another person who has the gift. The interpretation itself is believed to be a spiritual gift.

According to Omoyajowo (1982), what characterizes speaking in tongues is that it takes place in the church among a congregation. As an eye witness of some incidents on a prayer mountain that belongs to C&S, it usually started with some preambles in prayers. Then it moved on to specific prayer on the descent of the Holy Spirit. Instructional words were given to the members to "open their minds", repeated several times in Yoruba language, *si okan*



paya, meaning, one should not give room for distraction but give a full concentration and expectation to receive the Holy Spirit. Specific prayers on invitation of the Holy Spirit were offered followed by choruses that were related to the same purpose. As this continued, one or two members began to experience some emotional gesticulations and began to utter some strange and unknown and/or unlearned languages. At times, it could be in a loud voice to arrest the attention of the leader that there has been a manifestation or descent of the Holy Spirit. Some, as they went into frenzy, may be highly emotional and be “jumping” or “staggering while some may not. Every action demonstrated under this influence was considered spiritual and constituted part of the “spirituality” of the tongues spoken.

Omoyajowo opines that the C&S recognizes the gifts of tongues as a manifestation of the Spirit (1982) in their liturgy. When the speakers are in ecstasy they are believed to be in spirit or possessed by the Spirit while their senses are temporarily suspended. Also, Omoyajowo quoting Swete who rightly captures this and writes, “in the elevation of heart and mind by which men were enabled to magnify God, to speak mysteries, to pray in the Spirit and sing in the Spirit, even at moments when the understanding was unfruitful and the tongue refused to utter intelligible sounds (1982).

As a spiritual language of liturgy, it is sought in tarry meetings in the Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church and the Apostolic Church. Tarry meeting is a praying session exclusively on teaching of the Holy Spirit and serious prayers for His baptism. It is sometimes called *Iwona fun Emi Mimo* in Yoruba language, meaning “seeking, expecting and waiting” for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is theological rooted in the command of Jesus Christ to the Apostles in Luke 24⁴⁸⁻⁴⁹. The obedience of the Apostles to this command led to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. In a typical setting in the Apostolic Church, during the service, rooms are deliberately given to those who have gift of tongues to utter them with interpretation for the edification of the church. This is to show how tongues form part of the Pentecostal liturgy of the church.

Adegoke (46-48) describes the situation in Cherubim and Seraphim Church thus:

The church encourages and permits the act of speaking and interpretation of tongues... tongues may manifest once a believer is in a state of spiritual vision... even songs are rendered in tongues.

It is apparent that tongues are part of the liturgy of C&S. It manifests during singing, clapping and especially during a prayer session. Tongues are uttered in the liturgy in order to show the spiritual aura of the service. The religious ones take it for granted that speaking in tongues during the liturgy makes it spiritual. It is strongly held that tongues speaking during a liturgy convey the message of spirituality to the worshippers and the presence of the supersensible.

In Christ Apostolic Church, a foremost Pentecostal church in Nigeria, speaking in tongues is believed to be an initial sign of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Emphasis is strongly laid on the baptism of Holy Spirit for all members. Speaking in tongues is allowed in her liturgy at anywhere; be either during a regular worship or special worship. The church ministers such as Evangelists, Lady Evangelists, Pastors and Prophets and even the Mid-Wives in charge of maternity wing of the church, nearly all speak in tongues. Another dimension to this spiritual language in her liturgy is the fact that it goes simultaneously with interpretation by the gifted when words of prophecy are being delivered to the members.



Praying in tongues is allowed in the public during Sunday worship especially as a result of intense prayers and it is common among the youth and various prayer groups within the church. Those who speak in tongues during intense prayer sessions are given few minutes if there can be interpretation followed by the speaker. But if there is none and nobody could do that at the moment, the pastor or prophet conducting the service would ring the prayer bell for calmness. In most cases, there would be another person coming up with messages from the Holy Spirit as the church is bountifully endowed with spiritual gifts (Oshun).

Another thing of interest in tongues as a spiritual language in the liturgy of the church is issue relating to prophetic office. When a prophet is consulted for divine direction and counseling, tongues plays major roles in his prayer for the members and this has psychological as well as spiritual healing propensity and effects on the troubled souls being prayed for. It could be said that speaking in tongues during this prophetic consultation enhances the spirit of the prophet as a sign of “being in the spirit” or “inspired” to receive messages from the Divine. People on consultation process would feel that the “Spirit” is working on the minister-prophets or inspiring him for the receipt of the message they want to hear or receive.

The prophets pray in tongues to make the atmospheres look spiritual, different from where the members are coming from and bringing them to the divine presence. The prophets pray in tongues during the prayers, at times give words of prophecy, or interpret vision or trance they see in the course of prayer. Some of these prophets are not university degrees holders, but they were trained in the church theological seminaries while some are not learned in terms of reading and writing in English language. They could only read Yoruba version of Holy Bible. But when it comes to speaking in tongues, some speak in other related and common languages such English, Latin and other unlearned languages under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A typical example was Prophet Samuel A. Omojuwa in Christ Apostolic Church, *Oke-Alafia* (Mount of Peace) at Akure, Ondo State (Adejuyigbe, 1993, 1-3).

Among the neo-Pentecostals in Nigeria, speaking in tongues is regarded as a spiritual language that Satan and demons do not understand. It is widely held that Satan and his cohorts understand all other human languages except the tongues spoken under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Corroborating this, Anozia opines that the gift of casting out demons is one gift best used by those who are highly gifted in tongues. The language for dealing with evil spirits swiftly is never a human language (Anozia, n.d. 7). This is to support the view that tongues speaking is the language of Holy Spirit. Satan and demons do not understand it. Further, Anozia, holds the view that tongues as a spiritual language is efficacious in dealing with the demons and casting them out. He says, the most powerful tongues for casting out demons are usually mono-syllabic tongues (Anozia, 11). So, it is a common characteristic of all the neo-Pentecostals to speak in tongues during church worship, specific ministrations, and most especially, when they are engaged in spiritual warfare and casting out of demons. They believe that it brings confusions to the demons since they do not understand it. So, it is fond of the Pentecostals to sing a chorus to establish this spiritual thought in the course of ministration thus:

Amen, Amen

We bind the Devil,



We loose God's power,

In this place,

We speak in tongues,

Devil lose control

Forever and ever

Amen

Or interchangeably

Amen, Amen

We bind the Devil,

We loose God's power,

In this place,

We speak in tongues

Demons are confused

Forever and ever

Amen.

This is sung interchangeably depending on wish one wants to sing.

This is sung to celebrate the religious idea that Satan and demons do not understand tongues that are spoken. But how demons response to spiritual command and languages they do not understand during the deliverance and obey remains a super sensible matter and mysterious to all to critically examined.

Truly, the biblical and Christian traditions on tongues hold the view that it is a language of prayer and self edification (cf. 1Cor. 14:14, 33; Rm. 8:26). During the liturgy of many neo-Pentecostal churches, speaking in tongues forms part of its features. Some do not even remember their mother tongues again when it comes to prayers but tongues. The quest for tongues has led many Pentecostal leaders to make the issue free for all. It is commonly called "praying in the Holy Ghost" and all are charged to enter into *glossolalia* during the service. Those who have not experienced this are called upon to open their mouth and begin to utter some syllables, believing that few moments to that time, the Holy Spirit will take control of their tongues. This has led to confusions among young believers in faith. Some members have been intimidated unconsciously in the service because they could not gain the tongues. The evangelical brethren have criticized this practice many times, while the Pentecostals have also accused them that they do not understand the mystery and more of the Holy Spirit. Theologically, a reference to Acts chapters 2, 10 and 19 where the cases of tongues and prophecy came up in the Scripture, it was "after" the Holy Spirit had come upon the believers that they spoke in tongues and prophesied and not "before". This has made



tongues speaking mechanical among some neo-Pentecostal circles and led to its abuse as a spiritual language in their liturgy.

With all these prevalent issues surrounding tongues in the liturgy of the Christians, one thing interesting is that fact that it is still a strategy of conversion or crowd pulling into many of these neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. It is held that it brings excitements, joys and makes the worship lively according to the members and to the liturgy against the stereotyped one in others. Nowadays, people change denominations for a number of reasons. Famuyide (2002:43) succinctly captures this in his remark about modern trends and various factors responsible for going to church. He reported cases of many young ones when he asked: why they attended churches? And a young man responded thus:

.... Also, I love the way they speak in tongues.

It puts me in high spiritual plane and makes

me feel I'm a real born again.

As a result of the religious excitement attached to tongues in neo-Pentecostal churches, a lot of youth flog to these churches. It became a strategy of conversion, crowd pulling and a means of changing churches from one assembly to another for the youth. The leaders of these churches encourage their members to speak in tongue, "praying in the Holy Ghost", "praying in the Spirit", "praying in the spiritual language", "praying in our spiritual mother tongues" and "praying in the language that Satan cannot understand". These have become clauses and terminologies that are used when they wanted to spur the members into this exercise.

At the same time, it has led to rebellion among the youths and it is a factor of spiritual division in among many denominations. Some youths are drawn to many of the charismatic leaders and attracted to their teaching on tongues and other doctrinal issues. As a result, some parents cannot take their children to the churches they attend and hold key positions therein due to the issue of speaking in tongues. Even, some wives attend other denominations other than their husbands' because of this and many other reasons. Some youths now see the older churches as not being spiritual as long as they do not speak in tongues while the neo-Pentecostal churches are regarded as being spiritual ones. Instead of uniting the body of Christ, it has led to the division of many brethren. It should be noted that with these attendant relating problems attached to tongues speaking in the Christian liturgy in Nigerian context, it has established itself as a spiritual language in the liturgy of both classical and neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.

A Critique of Speaking in Tongues in the Christian Liturgy in the Nigerian Context

People from antiquity have the religious notions that gods have secret languages that are unknown to ordinary mankind, which they must learn or speak while in the cult for worship. The classical theory of Hermes being the spokesman between gods and man both in Greek and Roman mythology readily comes one's mind. Unknown to many Christians nowadays, speaking in strange tongues has elements of secrecies in all religions from the ancient world. Besides, it has been an element of spirit related affinity and greatly considered to be a mark of spirituality. Whoever spoke in tongues would be regarded as possessing the gods in him. Tongues were regarded as languages of gods and the ancient magicians engaged the force of these languages during their performances either to threaten, or for invocation reasons and/or



keep certain secrets from the uninitiated ones around the precincts and quarters of the shrines and sacred sites. Most importantly is the fact that speaking in strange languages is to keep the secrecy of the religious practices from the uninitiated ones unless it is unravelled or interpreted for their understanding.

Inasmuch they believed that gods have coded languages, which only the priests or the initiates understood, those who were immersed with the worship of the gods could only speak in the language of the gods. Juxtaposing this along with the teaching of the Apostle Paul in the First Corinthians 12-14, those who should speak in tongues must be Spirit-possessed. The language remains within the worshipping church as a means of prayers to God, and personally hiding some secrets to oneself or revealing the heart of the strangers to them while in the midst of the Christians when it is interpreted. The church interpreter plays the roles of Hermes, the Greek interpreter for Greek gods. It should be noted that not all is expected to speak in tongues or everyone should pray to speak in tongues and interpret the tongues.

Early Christians saw tongues as marks of spirituality and nearness to God and possessing the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ, who spoke through them. Though they did not recon with the magicians who sighed and spoke in strange languages for invocation purposes, they could appreciate the fact that oriental religions around them accommodated speaking in strange languages. They perceived their own speaking in tongues as majorly authentic, original, direct language for the true God, who is different from the Greek or Roman gods or pantheon of gods that surrounded them in the Mediterranean world. They might share the same features together but the origins of who was speaking within them are mutually and distinctively different from the gentiles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tongues speaking in Nigerian Pentecostal churches and liturgies are part and parcel of the features of their worship. It is a cardinal trademark and distinguishing emblem of the Pentecostals from mainline churches. It is another battle line between these two sects within Christianity. One insists that you can speak in tongues in faith and practice while the others to some extent believe in tongues in faith and not in practice. It is a pertinent mark of difference if you ask from somebody saying which church or denomination do you belong to? The quick answer will be “I am a Pentecostal”. The conotational meaning of this is that he or she belongs to a church where they speak in tongues and a bit flashy in their appearances. Some can even say, “I belong to an orthodox church before, but now I go to a Pentecostal church”.

Without doubt, tongues speaking as a spiritual language in Christian liturgy in Nigerian context are a phenomenon that calls for critical attentions. The prophets and other ministers in older Pentecostal and *Aladura* churches such as Christ Apostolic Church, The Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church, The Church of the Lord (*Aladura*) and host of others encourage this as they do. It features in their prayer sessions, during prophetic consultations, in worship, personal devotions and spiritual ministrations such as deliverance-exorcism. Tongues speaking as a spiritual language are an exciting net that catches the young ones to the neo-Pentecostal churches nowadays and it becomes a trait of many of them. It is regarded as a spiritual means of communication with the spiritual realm, gain vision, revelation and enrich one's spirit and spiritual life. It is believed that if religion is related to



the spiritual world and a matter of spirit, then there must be spiritual language to address this which is readily provided for by speaking in tongues.

Inasmuch tongues are a gift, it is given by the Holy Spirit as He will (cf. 1Cor. 12:7). The insistence that all must exercise this gift calls for caution. He who does not have this gift should concentrate on the ones he has the gift and use them for the work and progress of the gospel. The spiritual intimidation that is unleashed on those who do not have this gift should be addressed and avoided for it is not the prerogative of the one to judge the other for the gift he or she does not have. Theologically, it is after one has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit that one is expected to exercise this speaking in tongues ability and not before as we witness among some Pentecostals today. Emphasis should be laid on praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit who can in turn empower the organ of speech to express spiritual languages or tongues rather than learning it as any other biological language in schools. Teaching people on how to speak in tongues is antithetical to biblical examples and plain value of the biblical texts in the New Testament. Church leaders encourage their members to speak in tongues as the Holy Spirit baptizes and gives the gift, which is biblical; tarry meetings for the endowment spiritual gifts should also be encouraged for this gift and other spiritual gifts. The abuse of teaching members on how to speak in tongues should be avoided and discouraged for it ridicules the work of the Holy Spirit and places man in the position of the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is not a dividing gift in the early church during the apostolic age and should not be a mark of division in the church in the twenty first century. The church should rather concentrate on the unity of the body of Church rather than focusing on one gift that is meant for the edification of individuals and the church as a body.

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