

Christian Ethical Perspectives on Speaking in Tongues (glossolalia) as a Mandatory Requirement for Selecting a Church Leader



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ABSTRACT

Speaking in tongues has a long history in the church, dating back to Christ's apostles (Acts 2:4). While theologians like John Calvin, St. Augustine, and Chrysostom view it as outdated, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians assert its relevance today. This belief drives many to attempt speaking in tongues, often interpreting their inability as a sign of not being fully born again or lacking the Holy Spirit. Consequently, some Christians may imitate others to showcase their reception of the Holy Spirit. This qualitative analysis through interviews explored the Christian ethical perspectives on requiring this gift before one becomes a church leader. It argues that the ability to speak in tongues is a supernatural gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit, which cannot be acquired through human effort or training. Therefore, making it a prerequisite for church leaders risks encouraging imitation rather than a genuine spiritual experience. The paper contributes to the debate on speaking in tongues in the church.

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Publication History

Received:

2nd February, 2025

Accepted:

1st May, 2025

Published online:

30th May, 2025

Keywords: *Christian Ethics, Speaking In Tongue, Mandatory Requirement, Church Leader*

INTRODUCTION

In Christendom, the act of speaking in tongues originated with the Apostles of Christ (Acts 2:4). This phenomenon re-emerged during the 1906 Azusa Street Revival, led by William J. Seymour, where evidence of speaking in tongues, miracles, and other spiritual experiences was reported.¹ Despite these manifestations across various strands of Christianity, scholars like John Calvin, St. Augustine, and Chrysostom contend that speaking in tongues is antediluvian, with Calvin arguing that it was limited to the Apostolic age.²

In contrast, Pentecostals maintain that the gift of tongues persists today, asserting historical evidence of its authenticity and its continuation until Christ's return.³ For Pentecostals, speaking in tongues is a vital medium of prayer and a necessary sign of having been "baptised in the Spirit,"

¹ Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, "The Influence of Azusa Street Revival in the Early Developments of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 44, no. 3 (2016): 321–35.

² Erik H. van Alten, "John Calvin on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in His Commentary on Acts," *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship=Koers: Bulletin Vir Christelike Wetenskap* 82, no. 2 (2017): 1–13.

³ Confidence Worlanyo Bansah, "Is Speaking in Tongues Real Today? An African Christian Perspective," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, vol. 17, 2016.

indicating salvation and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for holy living.⁴ However, while the gift cannot be acquired through human effort or training, many Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians strive to emulate the experience of speaking in tongues, even if they do not possess the gift. This leads to the perception among many Christians that an inability to speak in tongues signifies a lack of true rebirth and the Holy Spirit's presence.

The Church of Pentecost requires individuals to speak in tongues as evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit baptism before becoming church leaders, including Apostles, Pastors, and Elders. However, Jesus, in Matthew 20:25-28, highlights leadership qualities without mandating speaking in tongues. Similarly, 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 outline qualifications for church leaders. This practice raises ethical concerns that have been overlooked in scholarship and church discussions. This paper analyses the Christian ethical perspectives on emphasising speaking in tongues as a requirement for becoming a church leader in The Church of Pentecost.

This paper addresses the following research questions: What is the church's theological understanding of speaking in tongues? How are leaders selected in the church? Why is speaking in tongues a mandatory requirement for choosing church leaders?

Beliefs and Practices of The Church of Pentecost

Given its focus, this paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive historical narrative of the origin of The Church of Pentecost. Instead, it offers a brief history of the church and highlights its core beliefs and practices to connect the main discussion to the church.

The foundational history of The Church of Pentecost is rooted in an indigenous Christian initiative led by Peter Newman Anim around 1917. Disenchanted with the spiritual stagnation in his church (the Presbyterian Church), Anim sought a more fulfilling spiritual experience. This led him to form a Christian prayer group that later affiliated with two USA-based Christian institutions. His first encounter was with the Philadelphia-based Faith Tabernacle Movement prompted by reading their periodical, *The Sword of the Spirit*.⁵ From this, he developed a doctrine centred on faith in biblical miracles and healing without medication. His second influence came from the Pentecostal movement through another magazine from *The Apostolic Faith*, a USA-based movement in Portland, which emphasised the importance of the Pentecostal experience for every believer, particularly the practice of "speaking in tongues." This doctrine and the act of speaking in tongues, understood as empowerment of the Holy Spirit, contributed to the significant numerical growth of the group between 1930 and 1932.⁶

By this time, Anim has developed an ethos and a set of beliefs rooted in previous associations. These encompass a strong focus on continual prayer, a conviction in divine healing without any form of medication (whether preventive or curative), the phenomenon of speaking in tongues or glossolalia and a robust evangelistic ethos. Anim's group first encountered the British Apostolic Church in June 1935, subsequently adopting the name "The Apostolic Church of Gold Coast" as a local branch of the Apostolic Church in the UK. Anim was ordained as a pastor in the Apostolic denomination by the Pastor Perfect of the Apostolic Church, UK, in Asamankese.⁷ In October 1936, Anim's group requested a permanent resident missionary from the Apostolic Church-UK.⁸ This request resulted in the dispatch of James and Sophia McKeown to Gold Coast, Accra on March 7, 1937. McKeown's primary mission was to serve as a superintendent missionary for the Apostolic Church in the Gold Coast, headquartered in Asamankese, to establish its doctrine and practices and to further evangelise the nation.

McKeown's arrival initially generated significant conflicts, leading to the dissolution of the original Apostolic Church of Gold Coast. This breakup arose from doctrinal differences; Anim's group

⁴ Paraskeve Eve Tibbs, "The Holy Spirit, Pentecost and Speaking in Tongues: An Orthodox Christian View," *Annual Resource Companion of the Department of Religious Education, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*, 6 (2004).

⁵ Robert W. Wyllie, "Pioneers of Ghanaian Pentecostalism: Peter Anim and James McKeown," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6, no. 2 (1974): 109-22.

⁶ Kafui E. Asem, *A History of the Church of Pentecost*, vol. 1 (Accra: Pentecost Press Ltd, 2005), 18, 19.

⁷ Asem, *A History of the Church of Pentecost*, 20.

⁸ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (CPCS, 2001), 107.

advocated for faith healing without recourse to medication. Despite his belief in divine healing through prayer, McKeown also trusted in the potency of medicines and believed it did not contradict biblical instruction.⁹ This faith-healing debate generated a series of disagreements and confrontations between Anim and McKeown, ultimately causing the two leaders to part ways and form separate groups. Those who followed Anim became known as Christ Apostolic Church members, while McKeown continued his missionary work under the name of the Apostolic Church of Gold Coast.

As the conflict with Anim's group subsided, McKeown's relationship with his parent church began to deteriorate, primarily due to governance issues in the mission field and his reservations about the Apostolic Church's belief in directive prophecy.¹⁰ The relationship became increasingly strained when the Apostolic Church in the Gold Coast invited a revival movement from the USA – the Latter Rain Evangelistic Team, led by Dr. Thomas Wyatt. This invitation contradicted the Apostolic Church-UK's earlier refusal of a revival programme in 1952. These issues ultimately resulted in James McKeown's dismissal from the fellowship of the Apostolic Church in May 1953. In 1960, amidst the controversy, McKeown went on furlough.

The conflict between the Apostolic Church of Gold Coast and McKeown's Gold Coast Apostolic Church persisted and escalated nationally. Some members of the Ghana Apostolic Church (the McKeown group) initiated a reconciliation process between the two groups. On 21 July 1953. The head of State ruled that the two groups should remain separate entities. All properties acquired by the churches before 21 May 1953, the date of McKeown's secession, would belong to the Bradford side. Any properties acquired afterwards would remain the property of each respective group. The McKeown group was also advised to adopt a different name. Following this suggestion, the Ghana Apostolic Church changed its name to The Church of Pentecost on 1 August 1962.

Beliefs and Practices

The Church believes the Bible is an infallible and comprehensive source of divine inspiration and authority.¹¹ It affirms the existence of the One True God, Elohim, the creator of the universe, revealed as the Triune God: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Church teaches that all humans have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, making them subject to eternal punishment and in need of repentance. Humanity's need for a Saviour is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, whose deity, virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming to judge the living and the dead are central to this belief.

Core beliefs of the Church include repentance, justification, and sanctification. Individuals must repent and confess their sins before God, believing in Jesus's sacrificial death to achieve justification. Sanctification occurs through the Holy Spirit's work and God's gift of eternal life. The Church practices baptism by immersion for converts who have reached the age of responsibility, typically 13 years. Infants and children are dedicated to the Lord instead of being baptised. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, is for all members in full fellowship. The Church believes in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit for all believers, evidenced by speaking in tongues and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit's gifts and fruits.

Additionally, the Church believes that healing from sickness and disease is provided through atonement, but does not oppose the use of medication by qualified practitioners. Tithing and free offerings are encouraged to further God's Kingdom, as God blesses a cheerful giver. Finally, the Church holds to the belief in Christ's second coming and the resurrection of the dead, where the saved are resurrected to life and the unsaved to condemnation.

Speaking in Tongues

Among Pentecostals and Charismatics, speaking in tongues is a common practice.¹² This phenomenon

⁹ Asem, *A History of the Church of Pentecost*, 6.

¹⁰ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Pentecostalism and the Transformation of the African Christian Landscape," in *Pentecostalism in Africa* (Brill, 2015), 100–114.

¹¹ The Church of Pentecost., *The Constitution of The Church of Pentecost* (General Council of The Church of Pentecost, 2016), 7-9.

¹² Kgatle, "The Influence of Azusa Street Revival in the Early Developments of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa," 1-7.

is referred to as “glossolalia” among Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Lutherans.¹³ The term *glossolalia* is a combination of two words: the noun *glōssa* meaning “tongue” (as the organ of taste), “speech or “manner of speech” or “language”, and the verb *laleo*, meaning “to speak”, “to tell”, “to utter”, or “to preach.” From this, we derive expressions like “to speak in”, “with a tongue,” or “tongues.” While “glossolalia” as a word is not found in the New Testament, it is formed from the previously mentioned noun *glōssa* and verb *laleo* (Mark 16:17; Acts 10:44-46; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 14:21).¹⁴ According to William J. Samarin, glossolalia, as commonly understood, refers to both a specific linguistic event and the religious experience associated with it.¹⁵ For many, this is defined as a Christian experience because it is linked to speaking in tongues, as mentioned in the New Testament. In addition to glossolalia, there is the term *xenoglossia*, which is believed to have been coined by Charles Richet (as *xénoglossie* in French) at the turn of the century when he reported on his investigation of “automatic writing in foreign languages” to the London Society for Psychical Research. *Xénoglossie* refers to the demonstration of knowledge of a language that one has not learned through normal ways. Samarin observes that this phenomenon is included in the Christian definition of glossolalia, although the term itself is not commonly used among Charismatics. He indicates that speaking in tongues is not restricted to Christian groups, alluding to reports of individuals among Muslims in India who have recited portions of the Qur’an in its original language, Arabic, without prior learning.

Speaking in tongues remains one of the most passionately debated subjects in church history today. With diverse denominational and doctrinal backgrounds, a division exists among theologians from the southern and northern hemispheres.¹⁶ As a concept in the study of religion, it has garnered various definitions and differing receptions from scholars. Some older studies have predominantly been negative, providing psychological and pathological explanations.¹⁷ These studies often described speaking in tongues as occurring solely in altered states of consciousness, operating under the biased assumption that these states are abnormal and, therefore, pathological. Another category of theories, including Felicitas Goodman’s 1972 theory of glossolalia as an artefact of trance, views speaking in tongues as exclusively occurring in a trance state, interpreting it both as a therapeutic response to normal stress and as a pathological condition. In this paper, speaking in tongues is understood as a religious phenomenon whereby an individual or group (congregation) utters a language that is unintelligible to them, which is primarily believed to be a gift bestowed on them without any human exertion, initiation, or training, but by the volition of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Initial Evidence of Speaking in Tongues

Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gift of speaking in tongues are essential in Pentecostal Christianity. For Pentecostals and Charismatics, this serves as evidence of God’s presence in the believer’s life. This doctrine, as it is often termed, was propagated by the founders of Pentecostalism. Mookgo S. Kgatle observes that Charles Parham, for example, framed the theological principle that supported speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of Holy Spirit baptism. William Seymour embraced this message and implemented it in Los Angeles at Azusa Street, from where it spread to other parts of the world, including South Africa.

In the words of Hollenweger, “the doctrine of initial evidence: each believer is expected to undergo, after and different from conversion, a second religious crisis experience whose outward sign is speaking in tongues.”¹⁸ Often, a believer’s inability to speak in tongues prompts others to think such a person lacks the Holy Spirit’s baptism. Pentecostals believe that speaking in tongues is the most significant confirmation of the Holy Spirit’s baptism. Hence, a more accurate term to describe the

¹³ Harry W. Lowe, “Speaking in Tongues: A Brief History of the Phenomenon Known as Glossolalia, or Speaking in Tongues.,” *Pacific Press Publishing Association*, (USA, 1965).

¹⁴ Ervin Budiselić, “Glossolalia: Why Christians Can Speak in Tongues in a Church Service without Interpretation,” *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2016): 177–201.

¹⁵ William J. Samarin, “Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism,” *Religious Studies* 9, no. 4 (1972).

¹⁶ Confidence Worlanyo Bansah, “*Is Speaking in Tongues Real Today? An African Christian Perspective*,” 1–6.

¹⁷ William J. Samarin, “*Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism*,” 48 – 55.

¹⁸ Walter J. Hollenweger, “After Twenty Years’ Research on Pentecostalism,” *Theology* 87, no. 720 (1984): 403–12.

connection between speaking in tongues and Spirit baptism is “concomitant”.¹⁹ Stephenson also notes that “the act of speaking in tongues is not merely one of the concomitants of being Spirit-filled, but is the most natural and regular manifestation of the Spirit-filling involving an invasive or irruptive expression of the spirit that radically alters one’s relationship with Jesus Christ.”²⁰ When a person experiences the coming of the Spirit in this fashion, the most natural and spontaneous response is speaking in tongues. The ability to manifest this phenomenon has been established as a mandatory requirement for church leadership among Ghana’s Pentecostals and Charismatic Christian groups.

However, this paper argues that speaking in tongues should not be a mandatory requirement for selecting a church leader, as such a requirement raises numerous ethical issues. It risks inducing aspiring leaders to be fake, mimic, or learn the gift. This paper emphasises that the capability to speak in tongues is a supernatural flair bestowed on an individual or group by the volition of the Holy Spirit. Thus, no amount of human exertion, initiation, or training could aid in acquiring this gift of the Spirit.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a purely qualitative approach, as articulated by Cartik Kothari, emphasising the understanding of individuals’ and groups’ subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings.²¹ Qualitative research typically employs in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. This approach is particularly apt for exploring the complexity and diversity of human experiences, leading to nuanced findings. Given the fluid nature of the variable under investigation, the study adhered to the principles of epoché and eidetic intuition proposed by Edmund Husserl. The principle of epoché helped exclude preconceived notions, while eidetic intuition focused the analysis on essential information, allowing the facts of religion to speak for themselves.²²

For participant selection, purposive sampling was employed to identify individuals or groups likely to provide valuable insights into the research objectives.²³ A total of thirty (30) participants were sampled from five (5) congregations of The Church of Pentecost: one each from Cape Coast, Elmina (Central Region), Kumasi (Ashanti Region), Ajumako Ochiso (Central Region), and Kintampo (Bono East Region). These locations were chosen because one of the researchers happens to be a member of The Church of Pentecost and worships with these congregations. Although the participant count may appear small, it is justifiable for qualitative research. Verschuren & Doorewaard and Corrine Glesne argue that smaller samples in strategic sampling allow for in-depth interrogation.²⁴ The sample included twenty (20) men—five (5) presiding elders, five (5) elders, five (5) deacons, and five (5) head pastors—as well as ten (10) women, comprising two (2) deaconesses from each church.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed the ethical principle of voluntariness, ensuring that participants were not coerced into participation.²⁵ They were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and informed of their right to discontinue their involvement at any time, though none chose to opt out. Participants received thorough briefings on the study’s focus and its significance to the church, academia, and Christianity in Ghana before data collection. The principle of justice/fairness was also upheld, granting each individual an equal opportunity to express their views without resentment or marginalisation, and respecting their rights with dignity. Consequently, the exact responses from participants were utilised in this research.

¹⁹ Kgatle, “The Influence of Azusa Street Revival in the Early Developments of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa,” 2.

²⁰ Christopher A. Stephenson, *Pentecostal Theology According to the Theologians: An Introduction to the Theological Methods of Pentecostal Systematic Theologians* (Marquette university, 2009), 85.

²¹ Cartik R. Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques, New Age International*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: New Age International, 2004), 3.

²² Cox James K., *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion, (Rev. Ed.)*, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 28 - 30.

²³ Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*, 59.

²⁴ Piet Verschuren and Hans Doorewaard, *Designing a Research Project* (Utrecht, 2010), 164; Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (USA: Pearson Education, Inc., 2016), 131.

²⁵ Beauchamp, T. L., & Childress, J. F.. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. (Oxford University Press, 2019).

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Church's Theological Understanding of Speaking in Tongues

In response to the research question regarding the church's theological understanding of speaking in tongues, field data indicate that it is both a gift and an important phenomenon within The Church of Pentecost. Participants noted that tongues serve as a heavenly language and as visible evidence of the Holy Spirit's baptism, endorsing an individual for ministry within the church.²⁶ This understanding aligns with the church's seventh tenet, which asserts belief in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit for all believers, marked by the initial evidence of speaking in tongues, alongside the operation of the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ Consequently, one might argue that those unable to speak in tongues have not received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and should not be appointed as church leaders.

However, it is crucial to clarify that the term "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" refers to being equipped or empowered by God's Spirit for the tasks assigned by Jesus to the church. Therefore, judging a person's inability to speak in tongues as a lack of the Holy Spirit's baptism could mislead and unfairly restrict their leadership potential. Moreover, speaking in tongues is not identified in the New Testament as the sole proof of receiving the Holy Spirit.²⁸ Every believer in Christ possesses the Holy Spirit, yet not all believers speak in tongues.²⁹ Thus, while a person can be baptised by the Holy Spirit, they may still be unable to speak in tongues.³⁰

How are Leaders Selected in the Church?

In response to the research question regarding how leaders are selected in the church, the study's participants identified recommendation and nomination as the primary methods.³¹ They indicated that through the recommendation or nomination by the district pastor or presiding elder, facilitated by the local presbytery, the church is informed of the list of individuals proposed for leadership roles. The presbytery publicizes this list to solicit feedback from congregants concerning the acceptability or rejection of these individuals, particularly if there are concerns about their character, competence, or relationship with the congregation.

The participants also stressed that the nominees should inherently possess the ability to speak in tongues, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and demonstrate a commitment to God's work. They believe that a leader aspiring to serve God's children must exhibit evidence of a renewed mind, be born again, and be filled with the Holy Spirit to engage with the Spirit of God and maintain dedication to God's mission. Upon unanimous approval of the names by the local presbytery, the candidates are interviewed by their heads. Those who qualify undergo further interviews by the District Pastor. The Area Pastor ultimately interviews those who have successfully passed the District Pastor's level and ordains those who meet the qualifications for their respective leadership positions within the church.³²

A consistent theme throughout this process is the emphasis on speaking in tongues. Although some participants indicated that aspiring leaders must also exhibit character traits such as honesty, integrity, humility, and truthfulness, they emphatically stated that evidence of speaking in tongues is essential. From the field data, it may be inferred that a person who exemplifies all these moral traits but cannot speak in tongues – as the first evidence of the Holy Spirit's baptism – cannot be made a leader.

Reasons Why Speaking in Tongue is Mandatory for Choosing a Church Leader

The research question, "What are the reasons why speaking in tongues is mandatory for selecting church leaders?" drew many responses. The participants argued that speaking in tongues represents the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person, and anyone aspiring to be a leader must undergo this baptism. Referencing Acts 1:8 ("but you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you..."), the

²⁶ Interview with Pastor Joseph, Eld. Kwabena, Eld. Sapor, Deacon Solomon, Deaconess Matilda, and Deaconess Theresah on August 6, 2023.

²⁷ The Church of Pentecost., *The Constitution of The Church of Pentecost*.

²⁸ See Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14.

²⁹ See 1 Corinthians 12:29-31.

³⁰ Hollenweger, "After Twenty Years' Research on Pentecostalism."

³¹ Interview with Deacon Solomon, Eld. John, Deacon Samuel on August 6, 2024.

³² Interview with Pastor Joseph, Eld. Kwabena, Eld. Sapor, and Deaconess Juliet August 13, 2024.

participants contended that, for a leader to be empowered to do God's work, they must demonstrate the ability to speak in tongues, which signifies the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without this sign, it becomes challenging to ascertain the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person who is to fulfil His work.³³ It was revealed that the initial act of speaking in tongues also indicates that the Holy Spirit dwells among the congregation, guiding, instructing, and directing the leader along the right path. The participants emphasized that speaking in tongues is essential, as it is a heavenly language that allows one to commune with God and engage in spiritual warfare.³⁴

The participants also contended that a person's ability to speak in tongues reflects their spiritual maturity and capability to handle spiritual issues concerning themselves and the church. They believe that spiritually mature individuals understand and lead God's people efficiently. Without such maturity, a person may act with a carnal mind, which, as reflected in Romans 8:6-8, leads to death.³⁵ In other words, a person's capability to speak in tongues, in the view of the participants, sensitises the leader or the believer to the promptings of the spirit, empowering them to witness and live a holy life.

Christian Ethical Perspectives

Ethics involves the reflection and evaluation of moral principles and norms, which are standards for right and wrong established by society to regulate behaviour.³⁶ It questions and justifies the judgments made about the actions of moral agents in that group.³⁷ Christian ethics, also referred to as moral theology³⁸, constitutes a systematic exposition of the moral teachings and exemplary life of Jesus Christ as applied to the comprehensive existence of individuals within society.³⁹ This field scrutinises the ethical conduct expected of Christians, positing that any actions that contravene the teachings of Jesus and the Biblical scripture are deemed unethical. The present analysis explores the Christian ethical perspectives on instituting speaking in tongues as a mandatory requirement for selecting church leaders, employing foundational principles such as honesty, integrity, purity, transparency, truthfulness, justice, and faithfulness derived from Christian virtue ethics to substantiate its arguments.⁴⁰ These principles are crucial as they provide a framework for evaluating the morality of an action. Thus, actions embodying deception or dishonesty, untruthfulness, or unfaithfulness, violate ethical standards and are deemed unethical.

In light of Hollenweger's observation that not all believers will speak in tongues after the Baptism of the Spirit, The Church of Pentecost must reconsider its rigid stance on speaking in tongues as evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit's baptism.⁴¹ This inflexible position raises Christian ethical concerns regarding deception among aspiring church leaders, whose inability to speak in tongues may impede their leadership ambitions. Such actions exemplify deceit and wrongdoing, violating ethical principles and highlighting the importance of Christian virtue ethics, which focuses on an individual's character and motivations when evaluating unethical behaviour.⁴²

³³ Interview with Deaconess Abigail, Deaconess Theresah, Eld. Augustine, Deaconess Matilda, Deaconess Elizabeth, Eld. Emma, Deacon Ben, and Deacon Joe on September 17, 2024.

³⁴ Interview with Pastor Joseph, Deacon Solomon, Eld. John, Deaconess Matilda, Deaconess Juliet, Deaconess Abigail, Eld. Kwabena, Eld. Augustine and Deaconess Elizabeth on October 8, 2024.

³⁵ Interview with Deacon Joe, Deacon Solomon, Deacon Samuel and Pastor Joseph on October 15, 2024.

³⁶ Craig A Boyd and Don Thorsen, *Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy: An Introduction to Issues and Approaches* (Baker Academic, 2018), 3; Judith A. Boss, *Ethics for Life: A Text with Readings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 6; Louis P Pojman and James Fieser, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (Wadsworth Publishing Company California, 1990), 2.

³⁷ Joseph Migga Kizza, *Ethical and Social Issues in the Information Age* (Springer, 2003), 33; Godwin Azenabor, "The Golden Rule Principle in an African Ethics and Kant's Categorical Imperative: A Comparative Study on the Foundation of Morality," 2008, 230.

³⁸ Ronald Preston, 'Christian Ethics', In Singer, Peter (Ed.). *A Companion to Ethics*. Blackwell Companion to Philosophy. (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991, 1993): 93.

³⁹ Henlee H. Barnette, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman, 1961): 3; Daniel R. Heimbach, Toward Defining Christian Ethics: An Evaluation of Contrasting Views. *Global Journal of Classic Theology* 8, no. 3 (2011): 16; Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, 2nd ed. (USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2010): 15.

⁴⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

⁴¹ Hollenweger, "After Twenty Years' Research on Pentecostalism."

⁴² Heimir Geirsson and Margaret R Holmgren, *Ethical Theory: A Concise Anthology* (Broadview Press, 2018).

Determining the authenticity of speaking in tongues is complex. Benny Hwata argues that some individuals may feign their ability, while others mimic various methods.⁴³ Mookgo S. Kgatle recounts a Tsonga man who pretended to speak in tongues among the Zulus, exploiting their unfamiliarity with the language.⁴⁴ When he repeatedly said ‘*va kadziya va jika*,’ they mistakenly believed he was praying in tongues, while he was actually saying ‘*they climb and get off*.’ This suggests that it is erroneous to judge those who babble in tongues as being baptized in the Holy Spirit while viewing those who cannot speak in tongues as lacking the Spirit’s baptism and indwelling. Hollenweger articulates this succinctly:

Within and beyond Pentecostalism, there exists criticism of this doctrine and practice. Notably, Pentecostal churches (for instance, in Chile or certain countries in Europe) dispute the doctrine of ‘the initial physical sign’ and maintain that this sign does not consistently accompany the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in lots of Pentecostal churches, a significant proportion of the members (and occasionally some pastors) have never spoken in tongues.⁴⁵

Church leaders are ethically expected to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, which centres on human character rather than emphasising gifts like speaking in tongues. This focus can disadvantage those who exhibit the fruits but lack the gift, fostering feelings of inferiority and undermining the church's diversity (see 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). As Mookgo S. Kgatle notes, while many speak in tongues, they often lack the character traits indicative of the Spirit's fruit.⁴⁶ Some cannot even teach the word of God or cite scripture. Although speaking in tongues signifies the reception of the Holy Spirit, other signs of Spirit baptism – like the fruit of the Spirit – should be recognised and emphasised. The Bible does not present speaking in tongues as a universal sign of spiritual maturity or leadership. Instead, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 stress that leadership qualifications focus on character, wisdom, and faithfulness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends that the church review its policy on selecting leaders, as some capable individuals may not speak in tongues. Instead, the church should focus on those who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, lead morally upright lives, and have a commendable record within the church.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the act of speaking in tongues as a mandatory requirement for selecting church leaders, using The Church of Pentecost as a case study. This church was selected because it holds as its religious ethos that before a person occupies a leadership position or assumes a leadership role within the church, he or she must speak in tongues as evidence of being born again and having received the Holy Spirit. Finding this problematic, the paper has analysed the act of speaking in tongues through a qualitative study and outlined some Christian ethical perspectives on this staunch position held by the church. It is argued that a person’s capability to speak in tongues results from the Holy Spirit’s choice to grant that supernatural gift to an individual; therefore, no amount of human effort, initiation, or training can assist in acquiring this spiritual gift. Consequently, it should not be a mandatory requirement for selecting a church leader, as such a requirement risks leading aspiring leaders to counterfeit the gift.

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⁴³ Benny Hwata, “An Investigation of Different Phases of Pentecostal Experience in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM)” (University of South Africa Pretoria, 2005), 89.

⁴⁴ Kgatle, “The Influence of Azusa Street Revival in the Early Developments of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa,” 1.

⁴⁵ Walter J. Hollenweger. *After twenty years*, 406.

⁴⁶ Kgatle, “The Influence of Azusa Street Revival in the Early Developments of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa,” 1.

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