

## Ineffable Tongues: An Analysis of the Notion of Ineffability in Pentecostal Glossolalia

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In this text I will analyze the notion of ineffability present in one of the most common practices of Pentecostalism, which is known as glossolalia: speaking in strange or non-existent languages. I will begin by outlining several of the main conceptions of ineffability that have emerged in studies in philosophy of religion, which explain why this concept is essential in the consideration of various religious experiences and beliefs. Finally, I will show how in one of the most important religious movements of the last centuries a particular notion of ineffability gains strength. I will try to explain what this notion consists of and analyze the causes and implications it has in the understanding of Pentecostalism.

**Keywords:** glossolalia – ineffability – language – Pentecostalism

Every Saturday about fifteen people gather in the living room of Brother David's house, as everyone knows him. They take out their Bibles, read, pray and listen to the message that Brother David has prepared. At the end of the message, Sister Mary asks for a prayer because in the last few weeks she has been feeling severe pain in her right knee. She suspects that her osteoarthritis may be getting worse, as her doctor has recently suggested. Everyone stands up and stretches out their hands to where Sister Mary is sitting. Brother David takes Mary's head in his hands, while Sister Gloria – David's wife – touches the sick knee. They all begin to pray, some almost whispering; others walk around the room raising their voices and hands to the ceiling. Without a doubt, Brother David's voice is the loudest. Almost shouting, he begs the Holy Spirit

to manifest Himself and heal Sister Mary's knee. His plea is mixed with small sobs. The petitions become declarations. Everyone shouts, "You are healed in the name of Jesus! Let the arthrosis disappear, disappear right now!" The fervor increases. Suddenly, Brother David begins to repeat several words. Most of them sound like monosyllables, but no one could literally translate what he is saying. Some join in a kind of dialogue with Brother David, albeit with their own unintelligible words or syllables. The rest, as if they could somehow understand what the others are saying, exclaim over and over, "Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen!" Sister Mary begins to cry. After ten or fifteen minutes, the atmosphere gradually becomes quieter. Finally, Brother David slowly lowers his voice to conclude with a soft "Amen, glory be to the Lord." Grateful and still with tears in her eyes, Mary tells everyone that she has felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. As Brother David spoke in tongues, she says, an incomparable warmth invaded her right knee. At the end of the meeting, Sister Mary promises to offer her testimony of her complete healing.

Like this, there are many other episodes in which members of various Pentecostal communities acquire and put into practice the ability to speak in tongues, which they understand as a gift of the Holy Spirit. For Pentecostals, this practice is based on the Bible, where this gift is directly mentioned (Acts 2; I Corinthians 12 and 14). However, it is not clear what it means to speak in tongues.<sup>1</sup> One of the main interpretations states that it consists of the ability to speak other existing languages unknown to the speaker.<sup>2</sup> From this point of view, the gift has the purpose of allowing the expansion of the gospel. Another interpretation, more common among Pentecostals and other evangelical communities, like the charismatics, suggests that this gift enables the believer to speak a kind of angelic tongue (Davies 1952, 228).

In this article, I would like to show that the Pentecostal belief and practice of speaking in unknown or angelic tongues involves a notion of ineffability that is essential in the construction of some religious doctrines and experiences. To better understand this, I will describe the main definitions of the concept of ineffability, as well as their respective objections. Then, I will explain how glossolalia involves a kind of ineffability and examine its importance for Pentecostalism.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the different interpretations of this, see, for example, Ademiluka (2024) and Misiarczyk (2021).

<sup>2</sup> This practice is usually called xenoglossia. The Catholic Church and many mainline Protestant branches have adopted this interpretation Davies (1952) and Aquinas (1961).

## I. What is the Ineffable?

Keith Yandell (1975) states that there are several kinds of ineffability. He distinguishes two main types. The first, more radical, is what he calls the *strongly ineffable*. This occurs when there is no concept that can be applied to experiences or objects that are considered ineffable (Yandell 1975, 172). In a similar way to Augustine (1995) and Alston (1956), Yandell criticizes this form of ineffability because it involves a contradiction: by saying that something is ineffable, something is said about that which cannot be spoken of, namely, that it is ineffable (Yandell 1975, 173).

The second, more moderate understanding of ineffability, which Yandell calls the *weakly ineffable*, happens when there is no concept that applies both to the ineffable experience and to other experiences (Yandell 1975, 172). He argues that this definition is also problematic, since the concept of "experience" that designates the ineffable experience is also used for other experiences. Now, if instead of referring to ineffable experiences or objects with the terms "experience" or "object," common to other experiences and effable objects, one uses singular names such as "God," "Nirvana," and so on, the problem is not solved either, as Alston suggests (1956, 511). This is because, when we say things like "God is ineffable," it seems that the understanding of this sentence is based on the identification of "God" with concepts designating images or attributes such as "first cause" or "necessary being," among others (Alston 1956, 512 – 513).

To be comprehensible, singular concepts refer to other concepts that can be applied to effable objects or experiences. This leads Yandell to suggest an essential premise in his argument against the notion of ineffability, namely, that "no concept is an island" (Yandell 1975, 174). Thus, for Yandell it is either possible to use concepts common to other experiences to explain an experience that is ineffable – which would render it effable – or it is not possible, but such an experience becomes then incomprehensible, meaningless, and therefore irrelevant (Yandell 1975, 179).

However, just as Yandell and Alston, among others, reject the notion of ineffability, there are others who defend it (Hick 1989, Kukla 2005, Ho 2006). Chien-hsing Ho, for example, attempts to show that there are ways to affirm, without contradiction, the ineffability thesis, i.e., "that there is a transcendental reality or experience of some kind that cannot be expressed as it truly is by human concepts and words" (Ho 2006, 409). First, he adopts John Hick's proposal to distinguish between the substantial and formal attributes of things. According to this distinction, the ineffable can be defined as that about which

it is not possible to think or speak of its substantial attributes, but it is possible to speak of its formal attributes (Hick 1989, 239).<sup>3</sup>

Ho supports the position of Bhartrhari, who argues that it is possible to speak of the ineffable without falling into contradiction: "If a thing is said to be unsayable, some way or another or in all ways, by some words, then its state of being unsayable (i.e., its unsayability) is not denied by those words." (Bhartrhari 1994, 138).<sup>4</sup> For Bhartrhari, it is possible to employ a method of imposition-denial that allows to speak of the ineffable, or rather, to *indicate* the ineffable. When one says that something is ineffable, one imposes an attribute on it, but at the same time denies this attribute, since it is understood that it is not something that can be recognized as inherent to the ineffable thing. Thus, if one says "x is ineffable," there is no contradiction, since the term "ineffable" refers to the attribute of ineffability that is imposed on "x." It is a term by which something about "x" is indicated, but which, by denying that it is something inherent in "x," does not properly speak about "x." In short, this thesis suggests that the ineffable is that which cannot be communicated or expressed as it *truly is*, but which can be expressed or indicated indirectly (Ho 2006, 420).

Like Bhartrhari, Kierkegaard also proposed an indirect way of communicating the ineffable. For him, the ineffable occurs in subjective truths, which cannot be expressed in a language designed to communicate objective and universal truths (Kierkegaard 1992, 72 – 80).<sup>5</sup> This shows that, in order to better understand the various notions of ineffability, it is important to see why something is ineffable.

## II. Why the Ineffable is Ineffable?

There are at least two ways of answering this question. The first one has to do with the nature of the entity or experience of that which is considered ineffable. The second one refers to the limitations of language because of which something cannot be communicated.

As examples of the first answer, Yandell proposes the cases of Hinduism, Zen Buddhism and Protestantism (Yandell 1975, 172). The first affirms the

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Ho (2006, 412).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Ho (2006, 413).

<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard expounds his proposal in the intellectual context of Golden Age Denmark, which adopted the Hegelian claim to understand reality in its totality by identifying the form of thought with the content of the real. This is followed by a conceptual system that reflects universal thought. And since language is the result of thought, everything that is expressed in language must be universal (Hegel 2010).

ineffable by pointing to the existence of an ultimate reality beyond predication; the second, by pointing to the innermost individual experience; and the third, by referring to an aconceptual heavenly experience.

These cases are problematic since one must deal with the aforementioned problem of talking about the nature of entities or experiences that are essentially indescribable or inexpressible. Usually, these things are discussed with a mystical or religious approach.

It seems to be a little easier – or at least, not contradictory – to examine the conditions of language that explain why something cannot be expressed linguistically. André Kukla, drawing on Tarski's concept of language, shows that because of the semantic and syntactic rules that shape language the ineffable occurs when: "there might be some states of affairs that are not associated to any sentence by any semantic rule" (Kukla 2005, 10). Different degrees of ineffability are derived from this explanation: 1) by language-specific limitation, where  $x$  concept of language A is ineffable because its translation into language B is impossible; 2) by human language limitation, where  $x$  is ineffable because there is no word in any human language to refer to  $x$ ; 3) by nomological language limitation, where  $x$  is ineffable because there is no nomological language that can express it; and 4) by logical language limitation, where  $x$  is ineffable because it cannot be expressed by any logical language (Kukla 2005, 23 – 31).

Like Kukla, Sebastian Gäb (2020) says that a type of ineffability is possible, which consists in the inability to express something in a given language, according to its semantic and syntactic rules or conditions (Gäb 2020, 1830). But this would be a weak type of ineffability that arises when language is understood only "as a system of symbols which can be combined following certain rules to produce other symbols and which are assigned certain values (called meanings, or, more technically, semantic values) following other rules" (Gäb 2020, 1827).

For Gäb, language is also "what we use to convey thoughts" (Gäb 2020, 1827). According to this understanding of language, there would be a strong kind of ineffability if there is an inability to have conceptual mental contents that are expressible (Gäb 2020, 1834).

The distinction Gäb makes between these two ways of understanding language is closely related, as he shows, to the different notions of language in the so-called first and second Wittgenstein. Gäb argues that the first way focuses on the truth conditions of the elements that make up language

(Wittgenstein 1999, 47).<sup>6</sup> The second, on the other hand, considers the contextual particularities in which communicative activity occurs. In other words, this second form allows us to look at the use we make of language (Wittgenstein 1958, 20).<sup>7</sup>

While Gäb focuses on the intentions or mental states of the speaker as the decisive element for communicability or incommunicability (i.e. for ineffability in its strong sense), he suggests that communication also depends on a given context or situation. According to David Lewis:

[Language is] a social phenomenon which is part of the natural history of human beings; a sphere of human action, wherein people utter strings of vocal sounds, or inscribe strings of marks, and wherein people respond by thought or action to the sounds or marks which they observe to have been so produced (Lewis 1975, 3).

This contextual element of language makes us observe the social conditions and human behavior that mark the limits of what can and cannot be said.

As I will explain in what follows, in the absence of semantic and syntactic rules that explain the meaning of Pentecostal glossolalia, it is essential to examine some of the social conditions that frame this practice. This will allow us to better understand the notion of ineffability present in it.

### **III. Who are the Pentecostals?**

Pentecostalism is perhaps the modern movement that gives a more central place to glossolalia, at least in Christianity.<sup>8</sup> According to the Pentecostal discourse, the origin of this movement is found in the day of Pentecost, which is narrated in Acts 2:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each

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<sup>6</sup> Proposition 4.024, quoted in Gäb (2020, 1828).

<sup>7</sup> § 43, quoted in Gäb (2020, 1828).

<sup>8</sup> For a much more detailed discussion on Pentecostalism, see Albrecht – Howard (2014), Anderson – Hollenweger (eds.) (1999), Anderson (2007), Anderson – Bergunder – Droogers – Andre (eds.) (2010), Anderson (2013), Anderson (2014), Blumhofer (1989), Coleman – Hackett (eds.) (2015), Hollenweger (1972), and Hollenweger (1997).

of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1 – 4).

This story is not only the origin of the name of the Pentecostal movement, but also defines one of its essential doctrines and practices, namely, the belief that it is possible to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit and that this is manifested in different gifts, among them the gift of speaking in other tongues.

The account in Acts is undoubtedly the main root of modern Pentecostalism. However, it is also important to consider, as John Thomas Nichol (1966, 19) suggests, not only the other biblical narratives that speak about the manifestations of the Spirit in the communities of Ephesus, Caesarea and Corinth, but also the glossolalist movements that preceded Pentecostalism. One of the first groups to emphasize the supernatural gifts of the Spirit were the Montanists (2<sup>nd</sup> century). After the Protestant Reformation, some Anabaptist groups (16<sup>th</sup> century), Camisards and Jansenists (17<sup>th</sup> century) did the same. The next to incorporate the practice of glossolalia were the Shakers (18<sup>th</sup> century) in the United States, and the Irvingites in England. According to Nichol, the latter bore a considerable resemblance to the Pentecostals, since they were a marginalized group that understood glossolalia as a manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This baptism allowed them access to other gifts that the Church had possessed from the beginning but had kept hidden due to people's unbelief (Nichol 1966, 24). Finally, some argue that the direct ancestor of Pentecostalism is the so-called Holiness movement (19<sup>th</sup> century) (Balmer 2022, 77; Kay 2011, 14 – 15).

A general observation of the roots of Pentecostalism allows us to describe it as an heir of the Pietist, Puritan and Methodist Protestant tradition, which migrates in exile to the United States. There it is impacted by the fervor of the great awakenings, in which the second coming of Christ is patiently awaited, before the great tribulation. It is a tradition that believes in the importance of fundamentalism, at least in terms of biblical rigorism and moral conservatism (Rojas 2023).

These currents, many of them considered sects, establish various aspects of the Pentecostal spirit. Although some of these movements did not incorporate glossolalia, they enabled Pentecostalism to build a set of principles that supported this practice. For example, the centrality of Scripture, the emphasis on the experiential aspect of faith – often accompanied by ecstatic and supernatural manifestations – the imperative of a godly or morally upright life and, of course, the belief in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are, in

addition, other formal elements such as house gatherings, the use of tambourines, exotic dances during prayer, “and the familiar posture of upraised arms, a gesture of openness to the Holy Spirit” (Balmer 2002, 77), among others.

Thus, it is no coincidence that the event with which the beginning of modern Pentecostalism is usually marked is the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in Los Angeles. After the Civil War and the rapid rise of what the Holiness movement called “modernism,” many demanded a new revival of faith (Nichol 1966, 25 – 26). Charles Fox Parham responded to this call with a series of sermons on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He spoke of its clear manifestations through miracles of healing, prophecy, and, especially, the ability to speak in other tongues (Nichol 1966, 27). Parham also founded a couple of Bible Colleges, where the only textbook allowed was the Bible (Nichol 1966, 32). William J. Seymour attended the Bible School in Houston. He was a Holiness preacher, son of former slaves, and he would be responsible for bringing to California the fervor for the revival of Pentecostal experiences.

Seymour was invited to preach at the Asberry home in Los Angeles. After several days of worship, many testified of being baptized by the Spirit and began to speak in tongues. Crowds from all over came to witness the revival that was taking place. Seymour had to look for a larger venue for his sermons. He found an old building, an old Methodist church, on Azusa Street (Nichol 1966, 33). Thousands were baptized. Men and women, black and white, people of the middle class, but especially poor people, were convinced that they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit; the manifestation of this was that the Spirit enabled them to speak in tongues.

#### **IV. Semantic and Syntactic Ineffability of Glossolalia**

According to J.G. Davies (1952)

[i]t has become a commonplace of New Testament scholarship that the speaking with tongues discussed by St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians refers to incoherent ecstatic utterances of the kind to be witnessed at revivalist meetings. On this basis it is then argued that the account of Pentecost in Acts 2, where glossolalia is identified with speaking in foreign languages, was either written by someone not a close companion of St. Paul and unacquainted with the phenomenon at first hand or reinterpreted, and also misinterpreted, by a later editor (Davies 1952, 228).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A similar, more recent analysis can be found in Misiarczyk (2021).



Davies problematizes this interpretation and examines two important points: the first is that the passage in Acts 2:1 – 13, in which the gift of speaking in tongues is mentioned, must be understood together with Genesis 11:1 – 9, which recounts the division of the people after the emergence of the different languages at Babel. If this passage of Genesis is considered, it seems evident that the gift of speaking in tongues narrated in Acts alludes to the reunification that happens when it is possible to preach the message of Jesus in other languages (Davies 1952, 228).

The second point deals with more problematic passages such as I Corinthians 14, in which Paul seems to suggest that glossolalia consists of speaking unintelligible tongues, although he also says that these tongues must be able to be interpreted (Davies 1952, 229). Davies argues that the primary meaning of the word ἑρμηνεύειν, used by Paul to refer to the interpretation of tongues, is translation (Davies 1952, 230).

If glossolalia is understood as the ability to speak in foreign languages, then it is only a case of weak ineffability. Although from the point of view of the glossolalist her words belong to a language she does not know, this language possesses the semantic and syntactic conditions that allow its meaningful expression and translation.

However, the glossolalia practiced by modern Pentecostals consists of a series of sounds that, although they may have certain patterns, lack meaning and a definite syntactic structure. Can this form of glossolalia be a case of strong ineffability? From a perspective that understands language as a set of signs or sounds with meaning, it seems that Pentecostal glossolalia is completely non-conceptual. But this, according to analyses such as Yandell's, would reduce it to being a meaningless and irrelevant experience.

This has caused Pentecostals to receive harsh criticism such as that of George Cutten,<sup>10</sup> who thought that the gift of tongues was “received only by non-verbal individuals of low mental ability in whom the capacity for rational thought ... was under-developed” (Hine 1969, 212 – 213). In addition to being associated with episodes of schizophrenia,<sup>11</sup> hysteria or even spiritual possession (Hine 1969, 213), it was also considered to be children's babbling or the sounds of an animal.

With this in mind, one could argue that Pentecostal glossolalia is a case of strong ineffability, since it seems that Pentecostal glossolalists are incapable of

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<sup>10</sup> Cutten (1927) *Speaking with Tongues*. Quoted in Hine (1969, 212 – 213).

<sup>11</sup> This is an issue that continues to be studied. See, for example, Kéri et al. (2020).

having meaningful mental states when speaking in tongues. This would make this practice irrelevant. For Pentecostals, however, it is not only relevant, but essential to their beliefs and religious life.

## **V. The Social Conditions of Pentecostal Glossolalia**

Hine (1969), in line with J.W. Samarin (1968), says that: “the vast majority of Pentecostal tongue speakers ‘received the gift’ in the context of a religious group, as part of a larger set of behavioral patterns and ideological formulations” (Hine 1969, 121). The role played by this social context is so important that many studies on glossolalia tend to refer specifically to the communities – geographically and culturally delimited – where this practice occurs.<sup>12</sup>

In his study, Hine points out some behavioral and doctrinal patterns present in several of these communities, some of which even suggest that glossolalia is a behavior that can be learned. One such pattern is observed through a linguistic analysis of the sounds emitted during glossolalia. These, although they have no determined meaning, are not random sounds. Citing James Jaquith (1967), Hine shows the similarities between the patterns of the natural language intonations of glossolalists and those of the phonemes (phones) and syllables of glossolalia (Hine 1969, 220). This makes it possible to assert that glossolalia is an a-semantic (or pre-semantic) linguistic practice not isolated, but embedded within traditional discursive forms specific to a particular linguistic community.

This is reinforced by other studies on glossolalia sound patterns in some Pentecostal communities. This shows important communicative implications. Richard A. Hutch, for example, argues that glossolalia sounds can be a bridge between non-linguistic and non-cognitive elements, and existential notions or concepts. For him, “glossolalia, like mantras in some eastern religious ritual practice, is composed of sounds modulated by movements of the tongue, larynx, lungs, and lips” (Hutch 1980, 264). These, Hutch continues, are very similar to “other very evident pre-semantic (and pre-verbal) human sounds. I refer to the sounds of crying and laughing” (Hutch 1980, 264). According to Hutch, these kinds of sounds have a connection to deep existential notions: laughter connects with joy, the sacred, the good and life, and crying with pain, evil, the demonic and death (Hutch 1980, 265).

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, on glossolalia in Nigeria (Ademiluka 2024), in Brazil (Bonfim 2015), in South Korea (Harkness 2021), in the former USSR (Balakin – Moskvina 2023).

The transition between pre-semantic sounds and certain notions or concepts is facilitated by the contexts in which glossolalia occurs: For example, this may account for the particular style of Christian charismatic prayer meetings: tongue-speaking is usually juxtaposed to scripture reading, which itself is based upon semantic communications of the religious meanings of the Old and New Testaments. It also may be followed with whispered semantic utterances like, "Praise Jesus, praise the Lord. Thank you Jesus..." So from scripture reading to post-glossolalic praises, the entire ritual process gets carried through: semantic structure yields to liminal non-semantic utterances, and finally the personal, social, and cultural meanings of one's faith are reinforced (Hutch 1980, 264 – 265).

A similar analysis to Hutch's is that of S.V. Balakin and Y.A. Moskvina (2023), who reproduce and examine glossolalia in one of the sermons of Dmitry Leo, the religious leader of the charismatic church "The Father's Blessing" in Kiev. In this study, the authors argue that Dmitry's glossolalia expressions alternate with sentences in natural language where imperative verb forms appear that move to action. Balakin and Moskvina also mention the musical elements that often accompany such sermons and the reactions that these and other elements cause in the members of some Pentecostal communities during glossolalia: "rhythmic movements of the body to the beat of music, spasms, sweating, reddening of the skin, crying, and salivation" (Balakin – Moskvina 2023, 050042-3).

Thus, although it seems that there is no semantic content in glossolalia, it is part of a ritual that involves other elements that, as a whole, communicate something. For glossolalists, speaking in tongues is not just another part of this communication, but is the essential element that gives force or legitimacy to that which wants to be expressed. This idea, I would like to argue, is best observed in the study that Evandro Bonfim conducted in the Catholic charismatic community of Canção Nova in Brazil (Bonfim 2015).

Bonfim also affirms that it is possible to identify patterns in the sounds of glossolalia, but, for him, these patterns are directly related to the doctrinal principle that glossolalia is a manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To further explain his point, Bonfim employs the notion of linguistic ideology, which:

refers to the concepts that guide the use of language in a given group, in other words, the culturally informed use of language and its relations with social organization. Contact between different linguistic ideologies makes

explicit the nature of certain cosmological and ontological orientations, materialized in language practices (Bonfim 2015, 78).

In the case of the Canção Nova community, the linguistic ideology is presented in the practice of glossolalia, whose sounds are the least close to human sounds or meaningful words. Thus, it is clear that the one who speaks is not really the person who emits these sounds, but the Spirit. And that what is spoken is not human language, but angelic language (Bonfim 2015, 79).

In his detailed study of the phonemes of the Canção Nova community, Bonfim finds sounds comparable to the sounds of nature, such as wind and water: "For example, verbal or non-verbal manifestations of divinity are closely related to the sounds of natural elements, as in John 12:28, 29, where the voice of God is perceived as thunder" (Bonfim 2015, 83).

Although not all communities share the same sounds and structures of glossolalia practiced in the Canção Nova community, it seems that a common characteristic of the linguistic ideology in Pentecostal glossolalia is that it refers to a kind of supernatural language, which indicates an ineffable connection with the divine. This would confirm Samarin's (1968) interpretation of glossolalia as a display of "the unconventional use of speech 'as an expression of the ineffable.'"<sup>13</sup>

The connection with the divine that, for Pentecostals, occurs in glossolalia has several decisive implications for the development of their faith, although this cannot be put into meaningful words. To begin with, the moment when a person receives the baptism of the Spirit and can speak in tongues is usually associated with the moment of conversion. For many, speaking in tongues is in fact the confirmation of having been converted (Ademiluka 2007, 70).

For Pentecostals, as for other evangelical movements, conversion implies being born again, which involves the adoption of a new lifestyle based on moral rigorism and conservatism. As the study by Balakin and Moskvina (2023), among others,<sup>14</sup> suggests, this change of life is also motivated by the leaders, and even by the congregation itself, through glossolalia.

In short, glossolalia indicates that one is on the right path to God and, therefore, to moral rectitude. The path that begins with conversion progresses with every Sunday service, prayer group or Bible study meeting. Speaking in tongues also confirms Pentecostal interpretation of the Scriptures. Glossolalia

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Hine (1969, 220).

<sup>14</sup> See Hine (1969, 219).

becomes “an undeniable affirmation of the ‘rightness’ and validity of their fundamentalist belief system” (Pattison 1974, 445).

Pentecostal glossolalists who, as fundamentalists, experience a dissonance between their beliefs and culture (Pattison 1974, 441 – 445),<sup>15</sup> find in glossolalia a way to relieve the tension that exists between them and the modern world. The latter regards their angelic language as the manifestation of a trance or a state of schizophrenia; but with the confidence of being on the right side,<sup>16</sup> they can condemn this world.

## VI. Conclusion

Pentecostal glossolalia is connected with a type of ineffability understood as the impossibility of expressing something through signs and sounds with meaning. Although it is possible to recognize certain patterns in its phonemes and structures, glossolalia does not comply with a system of semantic and syntactic conditions that allow it to be considered a meaningful language. However, it is this very lack of meaning (according to the standards of our natural language) that allows glossolalia to be understood as a manifestation of the ineffable connection with the supernatural. Contributing to this are the verbal (prayers, scriptures, etc.) and non-verbal (music, natural sounds) elements that constitute the rituals in which glossolalia arises. Thus, glossolalia has a great relevance for the communities that practice it and make it a confirmation of their most essential beliefs.

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<sup>15</sup> On this same subject, see Rojas (2023).

<sup>16</sup> This confidence could also be interpreted as a type of narcissism. On this, see Castelein (1984).

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