

CHARISMATIC PROPHECY:
A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL PERPSECTIVE

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“Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts,
and especially that you may prophesy.”¹

Consider this description of a Pentecostal² church:

In 1927 the Lord revealed to [Maria Fraser] that he ‘would establish a work where all the gifts of the Holy Spirit would operate freely, a work after the Lord’s heart, where sin would not be able to persist. When sinning Pentecostals or visitors came to her daily hours of prayer at 10 a.m. or to the regular weekly services, their inmost thoughts were revealed. Wizards had to hand over their potions, defrauders of the insurance companies and murderers were unmasked, adulterers uncovered and sent back to their wives; a cancerous tumour formed on the face of an elderly Pentecostal pastor, and vanished only when he confessed the sins he had committed during the Boer War. . . . [T]he new Latter Rain Assembly experienced periods of heavenly ecstasy, singing in tongues in harmony, holy dances, laughing in the Spirit and visions of angels.’³

This account of the Latter Rain Assemblies of South Africa shows a pentecostal church in its early stages of development when it was “still led by prophets and spontaneous inspirations”⁴ as opposed to one lead pastor. This church received a prophetic message that it would be a place where “the Holy Spirit would bring into full operation all the nine gifts of the Spirit.”⁵ This church was the inverse of the Samuel/Israel paradigm. In 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites rejected prophetic leadership and asked for a King. God acquiesced to their demands. This Apostolic Church rejected human leadership and relied on the Holy Spirit who would speak chilling words such as, “Adam, Adam, you are busy biting an apple which will cause much pain. You are in love with your brother’s wife!”⁶

¹ 1 Corinthians 14:1 NRSV.

² I capitalize Pentecostal when referring to a specific denomination or fellowship, and leave it lowercase when referring to the broader movement.

³ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 141.

⁴ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 145.

⁵ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 145. “Nine gifts” refers to Paul’s list in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11.

⁶ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 146.

“The notion of prophecy is a *Leitmotiv*, both in Scripture and in the church.”⁷ A better metaphor could not be chosen. Like the four-note rhythmic sequence from the first movement of Beethoven’s fifth symphony (three eighth notes followed by a half note, perhaps the most popular theme in all classical music), prophecy repeatedly punctuates scripture. To extend the metaphor further, Beethoven continually modified this *leitmotiv* throughout the movement by inverting it and transposing it into different ranges and modes. The experience of prophecy in scripture is similarly diverse. Balaam, paid to curse Israel, ended up prophesying a blessing (much to the chagrin of his benefactor).⁸ Yahweh transferred the Spirit that was on Moses to seventy elders and they prophesied for a time.⁹ Ezekiel lay on his side while cooking starvation rations over dung to prophecy the destruction of Jerusalem.¹⁰ Jesus self-identified as a rejected prophet.¹¹ The church was birthed with the pouring out and the reception of the Spirit that inspires prophecy.¹² The early church was led by teachers and prophets.¹³ The gift of prophecy was given to early believers—a measure of grace given by the risen Christ.¹⁴ This sampling demonstrates the multiplex witness of prophecy in scripture as many variations on one theme. The example of the Latter Rain Assemblies of South Africa suggests that prophecy in pentecostalism is similarly diverse. Gifts of prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge were all mixed together within the vibrant Spirit-led community.

The pentecostal movement has latched onto the theme of prophecy with restorationist fervor. This desire for prophecy is rooted in an experiential reading of scripture. Pentecostals are interested in these biblical texts “not simply for what they teach us about ancient history or ideas

⁷ Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 1.

⁸ Numbers 22:1–24:25.

⁹ Numbers 11:24–25.

¹⁰ Ezekiel 4:1–17.

¹¹ Luke 4:24; 13:34.

¹² Acts 2:17–18.

¹³ Acts 13:1

¹⁴ Ephesians 4:7, 11.

. . ., but because [they] expect to share the kind of spiritual experience and relationship with God that we discover in Scripture.”¹⁵ Although there is a tension within pentecostalism between fundamentalism (scripture first) and experientialism (experience first),¹⁶ pentecostalism at its best understands scripture and experience as a generative hermeneutical spiral. In this way pentecostalism resonates deeply with practical theology. Both have exchanged the theory-to-practice paradigm for a richer critical correlation. For pentecostals, “The man with an experience is never at the mercy of the man with a doctrine.”¹⁷ Pentecostals hear the *leitmotiv* of prophecy in scripture and *expect* that God will commune in a similar way with them in their world.

Practical theology is the ideal perspective from which to study prophecy. This discipline has the tools to unpack the rich complexity of this foundational pentecostal practice. Practical theology thrives in a multidisciplinary environment such as the study of charismatic prophecy where church history, biblical exegesis, and empirical investigation meet. Swinton and Mowat define prophecy as “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.”¹⁸ This definition provides a framework to deepen our understanding of charismatic prophecy. Charismatic prophecy is a practice of the church which must be reflected upon theologically in order for us to understand its redemptive purpose in the world.

¹⁵ Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 5.

¹⁶ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 310.

¹⁷ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 57.

¹⁸ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 7.

CHARISMATIC PROPHECY: A PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH

Practice Theory

Charismatic prophecy is a *practice* of the pentecostal church. Bordieu's perspective is particularly helpful here. Bordieu lived in an intellectual climate of dichotomy. On one side were the subjective accounts of practice from existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre who championed radical human freedom and agency. On the other side were the structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss who emphasized the role of social structure in determining human practice.¹⁹ Both the subjective and objective are evident in the practice of charismatic prophecy. Subjectively, the prophet²⁰ is free to receive the divine impulse and to incarnationally²¹ share it with others. Objectively, the history of the pentecostal church has significant weight. As the practice is passed down through generations, it accumulates baggage: the quirks and idiosyncrasies of one generation become the structural elements of the next. Rex Davis describes how charismatic prophecy can go awry when the traditions of the church begin to *determine* the practice: "Prophecies can sometimes be banal. Couched in Biblical language and with an Old Testament cadence, they can sound a little like a stream of consciousness on a theme from Isaiah or Habakkuk, or a loose catalogue of remembered quotations, polished up and freshly uttered."²² Conversely, when human agency is unhinged from scripture and tradition, charismatic prophecy can become a hotbed for all sorts of unimpeachable error and lunacy because, "God told me so."

Bordieu accounted for both structure and agency in his theory of *habitus*: "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures."²³ These structures are not

¹⁹ Smith, "Theories of Practice," 248.

²⁰ I use "prophet" to refer to someone who practices charismatic prophecy today. No broader theology framework such as the office of a prophet is assumed.

²¹ Muindi, "Nature and Significance of Prophecy," 232.

²² Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description," 109.

²³ Smith, "Theories of Practice," 249.

deterministic, though. Social structure “is always available as the raw material for creative agency, or ‘regulated improvisations.’”²⁴ Häring describes how the subjective and objective accounts converge in practice: “The individual man has a history and is history. He is conditioned by history and he can shape history.”²⁵ Both the social structure and the human/divine agency of charismatic prophecy must be accounted for in any holistic understanding of the practice.

Existing Studies on Charismatic Prophecy

Mark J. Cartledge is the first person to have studied charismatic prophecy from an empirical theological perspective. Realizing “the sheer paucity of anything but popular literature on contemporary prophecy,”²⁶ he set about doing his own investigation that would combine his interests of practical theology and the charismatic movement. In the late 1980s Cartledge studied prophecy in the Church of England diocese of London. This study became his Ph.M. dissertation, “Prophecy in the Contemporary Church: A Theological Examination.”²⁷

The second study of charismatic prophecy comes from Cartledge’s Ph.D. student, Samuel W. Muindi. In 2012 Muindi published his dissertation, “The Nature and Significance of Prophecy in Pentecostal-Charismatic Experience: An Empirical-Biblical Study.” Muindi used a multitude of data-gathering methods including “documentary analysis, participant observation, field notes, focus group interviews and in-depth interviews”²⁸ to understand the practice of charismatic prophecy in the Redeemed Gospel Church of Kenya.

²⁴ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 102–3.

²⁵ Häring, *The Christian Existentialist*, 26.

²⁶ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 1.

²⁷ I contacted the author for a copy of this dissertation but it was not available. Cartledge directed me to the three academic articles he published based on his dissertation.

²⁸ Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 63–4.

While Cartledge and Muindi have conducted the only two empirical studies on charismatic prophecy, two other studies are worth noting. Steven Foster Latham's 1999 Ph.D. thesis, "Is There Any Word from the Lord? Schools of Contemporary Christian Prophecy," is helpful in providing five different models for situating contemporary prophecy. Closer to home, Adam Stewart and Andrew Gabriel have done significant quantitative work on the spirituality of Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) credential holders. They conducted a survey which received information from 1,730 credential holders—a response rate of fifty-eight percent.²⁹ While this study does not specifically focus on prophecy, the theme was included in their study of the frequency of key behaviours.³⁰

The Challenges of Studying Charismatic Prophecy

Charismatic Prophecy is difficult to study for a number of reasons. First, the practice is God-inspired by definition, and how can one study the numinous? This dilemma of studying an inspired process has already been overcome in a separate field. There was a time when creative writing was not studied critically since "creativity was seen to be located in the divine or the sublime."³¹ A phenomenological approach that focused on the situation itself has overcome this hurdle. Inspiration *can* be studied indirectly. The Gospel of John offers a helpful analogy: while you cannot see the wind, "you hear the sound of it."³² We can study that which our senses perceive. This, however, leads to the second problem: the difficulty of studying something indirectly. Cartledge described the dilemma well: "Any activity of the Holy Spirit must also have a 'natural' component in order to be perceived in the space-time continuum. However, the

²⁹ Stewart and Gabriel, "Highlights," 1.3.

³⁰ The findings from this study were made available in different forms. The "Highlights from the 2014 Survey of PAOC Credential Holders" is posted on the study's website, "Beliefs and Practices of PAOC Clergy: Then and Now." The findings were then condensed into three articles which appeared in *Enrich*: "Missional Vitality and the Future of the PAOC," "Spiritual Vitality Among PAOC Credential Holders," and "Theological Vitality in the PAOC Today."

³¹ Harper, "Creative Writing," 162.

³² John 3:8 NRSV.

evidence of the Spirit's activity can only be indirect (John 3:8). We have the phenomena or effects from which inferences are drawn."³³ Piecing these effects into a compelling picture is akin to piecing together a puzzle of identically shaped pieces. They can be fit together in different ways to create different pictures. A critical correlative cycle between experience and scripture is required to discern the final picture. Third, there is a personal dilemma. As a pentecostal practitioner, I walk the line described by Paul: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything."³⁴ In sum: be receptive but not naïve. The research process by definition is rigorous and must include testing while at the same time avoiding a hermeneutic of suspicion which can lead to contempt. "Charismatics face the tension between contempt and gullibility."³⁵ As a Christian practice led researcher, I live in two worlds. On one hand, I need to collect and interpret data objectively. On the other hand, I will have to set aside the role of researcher if I am to engage fully in the vibrant spirituality of my own congregation.

Defining Charismatic Prophecy

Contemporary prophecy has a wide range of meanings in modern society. The term covers everything from secular social commentary³⁶ to the directive prophetic practice of the Apostolic Church.³⁷ Three definitions which build on each other will provide a basic understanding of the practice.

Max Turner defines charismatic prophecy as "oracular speech which was based on a revelatory impulse (p. 46). This 'revelation' contained 'particularistic knowledge—not merely general principles that could be deduced, for example, by illuminated reading of the Torah, or

³³ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 74.

³⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 NRSV.

³⁵ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description," 119.

³⁶ Roberts, "Jon Stewart."

³⁷ Thomas, "Teaching and Practice of the Apostolic Church."

from the Gospel Tradition, or from apostolic didache' (p. 12)."³⁸ There are three key elements to this definition. First, there is a revelatory impulse at the root of the practice. That is, the prophet is not simply a clever person, but one who believes that they are receiving something from God. Second, the impulse leads to oracular speech. That is, the prophet speaks that which was revealed by God. Third, the content of the revelation contains particularistic knowledge. For Turner, the prophet's message must be more than the overflow of a rich devotional life. Turner's definition is a good place to start. Muindi and Cartledge expand the definition on the basis of their empirical research.

For Muindi, "Charismatic prophecy is an invasive oracular utterance inspired by a perceived immediacy of divine presence, or the Holy Spirit, which, perceptually, impacted the human deep unconscious dimension with revelatory impulses."³⁹ Muindi keeps Turner's oracular speech/utterance while dropping his claim for particularistic knowledge. Muindi clarifies Turner's phrase, revelatory impulse, in three ways. First, Muindi uses the powerful term invasive. The revelatory impulse is something from outside which intrudes on the prophet. Second, this invasion is perceived as an immediacy of the divine presence. The prophets speak when they recognize the presence of God. Third, the Holy Spirit communicates to prophets by impacting their deep unconscious dimension. This is a more difficult clarification to understand since one cannot be unconscious and consciously speaking simultaneously. Cartledge sheds light on this unconscious dimension in his work on interpreting the Toronto Blessing through Patrick Dixon's altered state of consciousness (ACS) lens. An ACS is "that state between our normal waking state and our unconscious sleeping state. It is the state of the daydream or the vision."⁴⁰ These are complex states which "have been used by the Holy Spirit as a means by which

³⁸ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy and New Testament Prophecy," 18.

³⁹ Muindi, "Nature and Significance of Prophecy," 255.

⁴⁰ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 181.

revelation has been imparted.”⁴¹ These visionary states are common in scripture. For example, God reconfirmed his covenant with Abram as the sun was going down and Abram was on the edge of sleep.⁴² Daniel Tappeiner draws a connection between the “revelatory state of mind”⁴³ and the hypnagogic state: “that particular state of consciousness experienced by an individual which precedes and leads to another state called sleep.”⁴⁴ While there is no consensus, there are phenomenological models and biblical examples for understanding the communication of the divine impulse to the human deep unconscious dimension.

Mark Cartledge provides the fullest definition of charismatic prophecy:

In the charismatic movement the term ‘prophecy’ is used in a technical sense to refer to a message from God to someone (an individual, group, local community, nation or society) by means of a spokesperson. This usually occurs through the medium of a revelatory experience—that is, an experience such as a vision, dream, mental picture, words coming to mind, or other such experiences, through which the person believes that God is communicating directly.⁴⁵

For Cartledge, the message is transferred *from God through a spokesperson to a recipient*. The recipient of a prophetic message can be as unique as a person or as broad as a nation. The revelatory impulse Turner and Muindi described is expanded by Cartledge. It can include a variety of experiences.

In his study, Cartledge informed his interviewees that “the subject matter under consideration was ‘prophetic experiences’ in general.”⁴⁶ This broad idea yielded at least eleven ways in which the revelatory impulse connected with the spokesperson (prophet). This list is worth examining.

⁴¹ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 190.

⁴² Genesis 15:12.

⁴³ Tappeiner, “Psychological Paradigm,” 27.

⁴⁴ Tappeiner, “Psychological Paradigm,” 27.

⁴⁵ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy and New Testament Prophecy,” 17.

⁴⁶ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy,” 79.

1. *Pictures*. While praying for a friend's marriage, the prophet saw a tangled heap of metal her friend could not sort out until a man with a blow torch arrived to help. The picture was interpreted as Jesus coming to do what the woman could not do to untangle her marital difficulties.⁴⁷
2. *Words*. Either one word or a small phrase would come to the mind of the prophet such as, "I will show you the way, remember I am always with you."⁴⁸
3. *Inspired Prayer*. While praying for a contemporary event, the prayer takes on a new intensity as the revelatory impulse guides the person praying.⁴⁹
4. *The Interpretation of Tongues*. A person asked God for healing, feeling despondent that God had not answered. She then began to speak in tongues. Following this "some words came into her mind which she believed were the interpretation. . . . 'My child do not strive, just rest and rest in my love and grace and gentleness.'"⁵⁰
5. *Dreams and Visions*. A woman sat in her bedroom and saw a cross made of light pulsating. She reflected on the vision and interpreted it as an exhortation from God for her to do the will of God while avoiding the things of the world. A scripture (1 John 2:15a, 17b) guided her interpretation of the vision.
6. *Audible Voice*. A person was called to ministry when she explored churches in a new town. As she pushed open the door of the church "a voice seemed to flow through my mind, which said: 'Your life will be closely bound up with this church' It was audible enough to make me actually begin to turn around to see if there was anybody speaking."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 79.

⁴⁸ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 80.

⁴⁹ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 80.

⁵⁰ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 80.

⁵¹ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 81.

7. *Reception of Knowledge.* A person knew that he would have a motor-cycle accident before it happened. On the day he knew the day the accident would happen he changed his route on the way home but the accident happened anyway.⁵² (Perhaps public transit would have been a better choice!)
8. *Scripture Verses Coming to Mind.* During a Bible study discussion one participant opened her Bible to Hebrews 10:25 and felt that God had given her the answer to the questions they were discussing.⁵³
9. *Physical Sensation.* In this scenario a person felt pain in her chest while she prayed in a group for a person. She shared the sensation and they prayed until the pain went away. Release from pain was an indication that God had answered their prayer.⁵⁴
10. *Subjective Impressions.* This category covers those undefinable events which are difficult to describe. Some people have trouble trying to express how the divine impulse is revealed.⁵⁵
11. *Compulsion to Speak Out or Write Something Down.* One person always prays with a journal at hand. On one occasion he felt like he needed to record a message: "Tell my people I do love them. There is no need to fear. I will guide them if they will but trust me."⁵⁶

As this lengthy list indicates, there are a variety of ways in which people receive the divine impulse. This list demonstrates how situations "are complex, multifaceted entities which need to be examined with care, rigour and discernment if they are to be effectively understood."⁵⁷

⁵² Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 81.

⁵³ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 81.

⁵⁴ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 82.

⁵⁵ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 82.

⁵⁶ Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 82.

⁵⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 15.

Cartledge, through a process of complexification, accounted for all the data in its rich diversity and illuminated the multiplex nature of charismatic prophecy.

Another key insight Cartledge derived from his empirical study was the context or meta-practice of prophecy. A survey of early pentecostal experience might suggest that congregational worship is the normal context of charismatic prophecy. This is how many within the PAOC understand the practice today. Cartledge discovered something broader. “[H]owever charismatic prophecy is defined precisely, what people describe results from the context of prayer and worship.”⁵⁸ While congregational worship is certainly included in Cartledge’s understanding, many people in his study described the divine impulse outside this setting. The common ground was prayer, not location.

This study is not without its critics. In a scathing response to Cartledge’s study, Ottmar Fuchs wrote,

Nothing is revealed, that could not be checked in some Christian writing by masses of people and that would not be repeated in tireless repetition from the pulpits of churches, time and time again: God loves you, he wipes away your tears, he is with you and will not leave you! The messages are therefore anything but new and hardly contain anything that could not be absorbed in a far more accurate way elsewhere. They are definitely short of innovation and stand inversely proportional to the emotional use of immediateness in which they are experienced. From this perspective, charismatic experiences are exceptional experiences of obviousness.⁵⁹

Fuchs is correct in recognizing the immediate and non-doctrinal role of charismatic prophecy. He has support with Turner’s inclusion of particularistic knowledge in the definition. Cartledge and Muindi leave this out of their definitions. However, in the very study Fuchs criticized, Cartledge wrote, “Prophecy does not, and is not, expected to provide the same doctrinal foundational role

⁵⁸ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy,” 88.

⁵⁹ Fuchs, “Charismatic Prophecy and Innovation,” 92.

that it did in New Testament times (cf. Eph. 2:20).”⁶⁰ This should not be construed to minimize the significance of what has been said. There are both biblical and practical reasons to view messages that may seem generic as legitimate expressions of prophecy. Biblically, Hebrew prophecy often did not provide new revelation but conveyed God’s revealed word to the situation. The Hebrew prophets constantly called Israel back to true covenant faithfulness using messages that may be perceived from the outside as redundant. Practically speaking, what Fuchs understands as “tireless repetition” and “short of innovation” may be the life-giving voice of God to a person. An empirical investigation on the impact of these words on the person would provide better data and grounds for judgment than a dismissal of the existing data based on a presupposed definition.

CHARISMATIC PROPHECY: CRITICAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Practical theology from a pentecostal perspective encounters a significant challenge when it comes to the critical correlation of scripture to practice. “Almost all Pentecostal denominations and holiness groups teach: The Bible is the inspired word of God and its content is infallible divine revelation. [It] is the infallible rule of faith and conduct.”⁶¹ Bonhoeffer sets up the choice between situation and scripture in direct terms: “It is not our judgement of the situation which can show us what is wise, but only the truth of the Word of God. . . . It will always be true that the wisest course for the disciple is always to abide solely by the Word of God in all simplicity.”⁶² Essentially: if scripture is normative, then the interpretation of the practice has to be interpreted from within a scriptural understanding. However, the hermeneutical task—the interpretation of scripture as well as practice—changes with every generation. Browning emphasizes interpretations “because the practical theologian never has access to either the raw,

⁶⁰ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy,” 87.

⁶¹ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 291.

⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 155.

uninterpreted Christian fact or the unbiased and uninterpreted reality of ordinary experience.”⁶³ Theological humility will be required to bring the interpretation of scripture and practice into generative dialogue. Cartledge provides a helpful way to reflect biblically on charismatic prophecy.

Mark Cartledge on the Use of Scripture in Practical Theology

Cartledge explored the tension between scripture and experience with the question, “*How do academic practical theologians actually use Scripture in their theology?*”⁶⁴ While there were some practical theologians who engaged the text in a sustained manner, he found many who used scripture minimally if at all.⁶⁵ Some even treated the Bible as a problem to be overcome. Rosemary Radford Ruether and the women-church movement, for example, have created alternative liturgies such as the exorcism of patriarchal texts from scripture.⁶⁶

In an effort to overcome the scarcity of scripture in much of practical theology, Cartledge constructively offered five dimensions to a practical theological reading of scripture. First, such a reading will be “*hermeneutically reflexive*”.⁶⁷ Practical theologians need to declare their theological presuppositions. A charismatic theologian and a cessationist would shape and investigate charismatic prophecy in radically different ways. Second, a practical theological reading of scripture will “pay attention to the *explicit or implicit praxis of communities and individuals* described or inferred in the text.”⁶⁸ It is not enough to know that Paul spoke in tongues more than any of the Corinthian believers⁶⁹ without considering the beliefs and theological assumptions that underlie Paul’s praxis. Third, a practical theological reading will

⁶³ Browning, “Practical Theology and Religious Education,” 80.

⁶⁴ Cartledge, *Mediation of the Spirit*, 34.

⁶⁵ Cartledge, *Mediation of the Spirit*, 34–41.

⁶⁶ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 187–93.

⁶⁷ Cartledge, *Mediation of the Spirit*, 45.

⁶⁸ Cartledge, *Mediation of the Spirit*, 45.

⁶⁹ See 1 Corinthians 14:18.

“pay attention to *agency and the relationship between the different agents* in the biblical texts.”⁷⁰ This is particularly important in reflecting on prophecy since there is an incarnational agency portrayed. The relationship between the divine impulse and the prophet needs to be described. Fourth, a practical theological reading of Scripture “will treat the text as *holistic* and seek to trace trajectories across different genres wherever possible.”⁷¹ The *leitmotiv* of prophecy spans multiple genres from historical narrative to prophetic/apocalyptic, from gospel to epistle. An isolationist reading of key texts such as the nine-fold list of 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 will not do justice to the redemptive purpose of prophecy throughout the canon. Finally, a practical theological reading will “consciously bring *contemporary questions and issues emerging from lived reality* to the text.”⁷² In order to do this, skill in both fields is required. Both “exegetical and theological rigor in the interpretation of texts and sociocultural sophistication in the mapping and reading of the contemporary situation”⁷³ are required if theological reflection is to be critically correlative.

A Scriptural Look at Charismatic Prophecy: Two Approaches

Stronstad: Narrative Approach

Pentecostal scholar Gordon Fee in his popular introduction to hermeneutics stated, “unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is merely narrated or described can never function in a normative way.”⁷⁴ This approach to hermeneutics is flawed in many ways. It not only relegates the majority of scripture (i.e. narrative) to secondary status, it dismisses the didactic intent of the authors of narrative, and it ignores the narrative structure that underlies even the didactic passages. Narrative theology, which appeared in the early 1970s, has risen in

⁷⁰ Cartledge, *Mediation of the Spirit*, 46.

⁷¹ Cartledge, *Mediation of the Spirit*, 46.

⁷² Cartledge, *Mediation of the Spirit*, 46.

⁷³ Cartledge, *Mediation of the Spirit*, 46.

⁷⁴ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 97.

popularity as a reaction to the “deficiencies of modernity”⁷⁵ and the newly recognized importance of “analogies, types and narratives.”⁷⁶ Narrative theology has found a pentecostal proponent in Roger Stronstad. For Stronstad, the Luke-Acts narrative should be interpreted normatively. Paul’s didactic passages to the church in Corinth on prophecy need to be situated within the narrative.

Stronstad titled his book *The Prophethood of All Believers* because for Luke, this is his “all-embracing, pervasive category for the people of God.”⁷⁷ Luke-Acts presents Jesus as the eschatological anointed prophet who summed up no less than five Old Testament prophetic traditions. He is “the prophet like Isaiah, the prophet like Elijah and Elisha, like the rejected prophets, the royal prophet, and the prophet like Moses.”⁷⁸ It is clear why his followers referred to him as “a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”⁷⁹ After Jesus’ ascension, he fulfilled the words of the prophet Joel⁸⁰ by pouring out his Spirit onto his disciples.⁸¹ This is analogous to the way in which God took “some of the spirit”⁸² that was on Moses and put it on the seventy elders. When “the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.”⁸³ Using the Septuagintal background of Luke-Acts, Stronstad demonstrates that “‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ is the introductory formula, and the direct speech which follows is a pneuma discourse, that is, prophecy inspired by the Spirit.”⁸⁴ Stronstad then shows how this small

⁷⁵ Downey, “Perspective on Narrative Theology,” 292.

⁷⁶ Downey, “Perspective on Narrative Theology,” 293.

⁷⁷ Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 111.

⁷⁸ Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 112.

⁷⁹ Luke 24:19 NRSV.

⁸⁰ Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:16–21.

⁸¹ Acts 2:1–4.

⁸² Numbers 11:25 NRSV.

⁸³ Numbers 11:25 NRSV.

⁸⁴ Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 62.

community of prophets “rapidly grows to become the eschatological nation of prophets—the prophethood of all believers.”⁸⁵

Stronstad’s argument is much more thorough—these are merely the broad strokes. If he is correct, the prophethood of all believers has enormous implications for the practice of charismatic prophecy today. If the church is the eschatological prophetic community, then everyone is a prophet with the potential to prophecy. This is the corollary of leading with narrative. If you begin with Paul’s didactic material to Corinth, then only some people are especially gifted to speak prophetically. If you begin Luke’s narrative, then everyone is a *de facto* prophet whether they understand it or not.

Here we can see the critical correlation of scripture and practice working together. Cartledge’s investigation of practice revealed a variety of prophets in a variety of situations. This gives weight to Stronstad’s interpretation of the Luke-Acts narrative that every believer is a *de facto* prophet. This interpretation of scripture in turn has the potential to free prophetic practice from some of the limiting factors of an exclusively Pauline theology.

Cartledge: New Testament Definitions

With the broad narrative context of prophecy in mind, we can turn to Paul’s didactic instructions to Corinth. When Cartledge asked his interviewees to consider prophetic experiences in general, he found that the practice of prophecy covered more categories than the specific Pauline category of prophecy. Cartledge broadened his definition of prophecy to include the gifts of prophecy, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and tongues and interpretation.⁸⁶ In addition to these categories, he noted the discernment of spirits as an accompanying revelatory gift.⁸⁷ Different

⁸⁵ Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 80.

⁸⁶ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description,” 88–95.

⁸⁷ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description,” 95.

lists of spiritual gifts⁸⁸ contain various *charisma* which overlap in various ways. The revelatory gifts which Cartledge identified form a more robust picture of prophecy.

These charismatic demonstrations of the spirit are governed by a programmatic Pauline criterion: “those who prophecy speak to other people for their *upbuilding* and *encouragement* and *consolation*.”⁸⁹ Paul’s broader concern in this section of 1 Corinthians is to submit the exercise of spiritual gifts to love as demonstrated by the broad chiastic structure of 11:2-14:40 which points towards the centre: 1 Corinthians 13.⁹⁰ As love upbuilds, so should prophecy. “[T]he aim of prophecy is the growth of the church corporately, which also involves the growth of its individual members.”⁹¹

As stated earlier in response to Fuchs, charismatic prophecy does not supply new doctrinal truth: it is a practice which communicates God’s word to the situation. In a way this is analogous to the whole field of practical theology. Charismatic prophecy, like practical theology, focuses on interpreting situations. It is not systematic but fragmentary in nature.

CHARISMATIC PROPHECY: ITS REDEMPTIVE PURPOSE IN THE WORLD

For Swinton and Mowat, the practices of the church alone do not complete the purpose of practical theology—these must intersect with the practices of the world. In contrast to the practices of the world, Christians are those who recognize the world as creation and God’s purpose in Jesus Christ as redemption. The practices of the church therefore have a *teleos* that the world does not.⁹² Muindi’s research of charismatic prophecy in Kenya demonstrates two key features of the practice which have broad implications for the world.

⁸⁸ See Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:8–10; Ephesians 4:11.

⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:3 NRSV, emphasis mine.

⁹⁰ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, 295.

⁹¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 658.

⁹² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 8–9.

The Sacramental Nature of Charismatic Prophecy

Charismatic prophecy in a Kenyan context shares features of African spirituality which “accentuates ecstatic ‘spirit possession,’ or ‘divine seizure,’ and ‘supernatural’ revelations.”⁹³ It is not a calm dispassionate experience but an emotive moment. This emotive connection between God and a person is “deemed to be a sacramental experience.”⁹⁴ This sacramentality is evidenced by the subject’s description of their experience. They felt “[p]hysical sensations,” an “[o]verwhelming compulsion to speak,” a “sense of being physically overpowered,” a “sudden rush of energy into body,” and an “overwhelming joy.”⁹⁵

Hans Boersma notes that “at the heart of sacramental ontology is a deep seated desire of the human spirit for a sacramental or *perichoretic* union with God.”⁹⁶ While pentecostals may be historically uneasy with sacramental language (The PAOC doctrinal statement refers to baptism and communion as “ordinances”⁹⁷) it is clear that the notion of sacrament lies at the heart of charismatic prophecy.

The *Parakletic* Nature of Charismatic Prophecy

“The basic function of charismatic prophecy is *paraklesis*.”⁹⁸ The Holy Spirit’s role as *paraklētos* is to “glorify [Jesus], because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”⁹⁹ That is, the Holy Spirit, through charismatic prophecy, assures the church and even the world of the current presence of the risen Christ. Drawing on speech-theory, Muindi noted that the significance of charismatic prophecy goes “beyond what may be deciphered from an exegetical

⁹³ Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 211.

⁹⁴ Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 211.

⁹⁵ Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 221.

⁹⁶ Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 216–7.

⁹⁷ PAOC, “Fundamental and Essentials Truths,” 5.7.2.2. It should be noted that the Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths is currently undergoing a revision called a “refreshing.” While it is unclear what might change, there has been no indication that the language of ordinances will be revised.

⁹⁸ Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 230.

⁹⁹ John 16:14, NRSV.

analysis of the linguistic content of the prophecy utterance.” The impact of the prophetic speech-act transcends grammar and “has far reaching . . . effects on individual and congregational lives.”¹⁰⁰ To quote the well-worn maxim of McLuhan, “The medium *is* the message.”

The sacramental-parakletic nature of Charismatic prophecy has obvious implications for the church. The congregation can take courage and comfort that the risen Christ is present with them as they prophesy. The implications for the world lie in two areas. In the first place, charismatic prophecy emboldens and empowers the church to function as “Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, and Spirit-empowered”¹⁰¹ ministers in the world. The same Holy Spirit who created the eschatological community of prophets to encounter their world on the Day of Pentecost is creating that community and adding to it anew today. On a more immediate level, the “perlocutionary effect of a prophetic utterance is more than the illocutionary intention that is conveyed in the content of the utterance.”¹⁰² Prophetic speech, regardless of its content, is the sort of practice which can convict an unbeliever of sin (as in the introductory example from the Latter Rain Assemblies of South Africa) and then cause the person to worship and declare, “God is really among you.”¹⁰³ In this way, the broader vision of prophecy as evidenced anemically by liberal social commentary and biblically through the life and work of prophets like Abraham Heschel and Walter Brueggemann¹⁰⁴ can stretch beyond the congregation and participate in God’s redemption of the world.

A CONTEXTUAL CONCLUSION

The paucity of data on charismatic prophecy that Cartledge lamented still exists in the PAOC.

The current social context of Canada is very different from Kenya a decade ago and the United

¹⁰⁰ Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 243.

¹⁰¹ Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 212.

¹⁰² Muindi, “Nature and Significance of Prophecy,” 242.

¹⁰³ 1 Corinthians 14:25 NRSV.

¹⁰⁴ Barkley, “Sunday Morning Prophets.”

Kingdom three decades ago. In Canada, the picture is confusing. On the one hand, personal discussions with a variety of Pentecostal leaders have indicated a downturn in prophetic activity in the PAOC. This fits Stewart and Gabriel's interpretation of their study data that "[e]ngagement in some spiritual practices traditionally associated with the gifts of the Spirit . . . experienced a decline in frequency."¹⁰⁵ In contrast with this, whereas in 1985/6, credential holders prophesied on average five times per year, that figure has now doubled.¹⁰⁶ This indicates a "departure from the overall narrative of decline in spiritual practices."¹⁰⁷ The reason for this anomaly is uncertain. Stewart and Gabriel suggest that the emphasis has shifted from traditional manifestations such as *glossolalia* to "less emotive and intimate applications, such as prophecy."¹⁰⁸ This interpretation, if accurate, contradicts the sacramental nature of prophecy as described by Muindi. There is certainly more practical theological work to be done in order to understand and contextualize the prophetic practice of Canadians. Faithfulness to scripture, history, and a world awaiting redemption demand nothing less.

¹⁰⁵ Stewart and Gabriel, "Spiritual Vitality," 27.

¹⁰⁶ Stewart and Gabriel, "Spiritual Vitality," 26, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Stewart and Gabriel, "Spiritual Vitality," 28.

¹⁰⁸ Stewart and Gabriel, "Spiritual Vitality," 28.

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