

CHRISTIAN PROPHECY AND CANON IN THE SECOND CENTURY: A RESPONSE TO B. B. WARFIELD

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I. INTRODUCTION

Pressed on one side by Catholic claims to ecclesiastical miracles and on the other side by cold rationalism, B. B. Warfield responded by asserting the supremacy of Scripture over sham claims of miracles. He wished thereby to rob modernists of ammunition against supernaturalism. In that context Warfield dealt with prophecy and how a Reformed Christian should regard that bygone gift.

Warfield affirmed that there was a link between the completion of the Christian canon and the eclipse of the prophetic *charisma* at the close of the first century. He relied on two underlying proofs.

1. *Theological.* Warfield used an *a priori* argument: Continuing prophecies are inconsistent with a closed NT revelation. God has spoken through the apostles and has no newly-minted words for the Church:

Because Christ is all in all, and all revelation and redemption alike are summed up in Him, it would be inconceivable that either revelation or its accompanying signs should continue after the completion of that great revelation with its accrediting works.¹

2. *Historical.* Warfield maintained that contemporary prophecy is wanting from the records of the postapostolic Church. Because the close of the canon was his focal point, Warfield offered an earlier, tidier date than some other cessationists. For example, John Chrysostom had said of 1 Corinthians 12: “This whole place is very obscure; but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place.”² He then claimed that 1 Cor 13:8 (“But whether prophecies, they shall be done away with; whether tongues, they shall cease”) predicted the expiration date for glossolalia and prophecy: “For if both these were brought in in order to the faith [better “for the sake

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¹ B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Scribners, 1918) 28. For a detailed critique of Warfield’s methodology cf. J. Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993).

² Chrysostom *Hom.* 19.1 (NPNF 1 12.168), delivered in Antioch sometime between AD 386 and 398.

of (spreading) the faith,” *tēs pisteōs heneken*]; when that is every where sown abroad, the use of these is henceforth superfluous.”³ Of course, compared with the completion of the canon the definition and timing of “sown abroad” could be infinitely elastic.

Evangelicals in this century have made full play of Warfield’s paradigm, at times supporting his theological proof with 1 Cor 13:8–10 and interpreting *to teleion* (“that which is perfect/complete”) as the full canon.⁴ Thus what Warfield touched on only lightly has become the skeleton for many Reformed and dispensationalist cessationists who argue, for example, that (1) prophecy by its nature cannot coexist with a completed canon, (2) 1 Cor 13:8–10 predicted that prophecy would be done away with when the canon was completed, and (3) history records that in fact prophecy did end at that time. Regrettably, one notices little firsthand work with postapostolic writings or with the secondary literature.⁵

Testing Warfield’s thesis from the vantage point of the postapostolic literature, we will interact primarily with his historical proof and uncover ample evidence of the *charisma* of prophecy throughout the second century. We will also suggest with regard to his theological proof that early Christians expected all true prophecy to uphold the apostolic teaching and that prophecy was presumed not to yield new doctrine or normative revelation.

This study is based partly on electronic searches of Greek texts. The boundaries were noncanonical Christian writers of the first and second centuries plus selected authors from the third and fourth centuries (mainly Church historians and commentators on 1 Corinthians). Some observations on method are in order.

³ Chrysostom *Hom.* 34.2 (NPNF 1 12.202).

⁴ Cf. e.g. R. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (1967, 1972); R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (1979); V. Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God* (1983). W. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester: Crossway, 1988) 243–245, in effect concedes to the cessationists that once Scripture is complete there can be no more “words of God.” He claims that “ordinary congregational prophecy in New Testament churches did *not* have the authority of Scripture. . . . The function of congregational prophecy was often to provide very specific, localized information which was needed for the edification of the church and which could only be acquired through a revelation from the Holy Spirit.” This is exactly right, although Grudem adds to this his well-known view that prophecy was not infallibly transmitted from God to the Church. Outside of evangelicalism one may find many scholars who link the cessation of direct revelation with the assembling of the NT canon, notably A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (New York: Dover, 1961) 2.52–53.

⁵ At the least these should include a popular-level book, such as R. A. N. Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984), and such scholarly works as S. M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984); D. Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979); D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); *Prophetic Vocation in the New Testament and Today* (ed. J. Panagopoulos; NovTSup 45; Leiden: Brill, 1977); J. Reiling, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy: A Study of the Eleventh Mandate* (NovTSup 37; Leiden: Brill, 1973). Helpful articles include “Prophecy, Gift of,” *Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (ed. Burgess and McGee); “*prophētēs*,” *TDNT* 6.781–861; M. E. Boring, “Prophecy (Early Christian),” *ABD* 5.495–502.

(1) While my search turned up some fresh references outside the apostolic fathers it confirmed that the other secondary studies were generally trustworthy in locating the data.

(2) It reaffirmed the hermeneutical principle that one must not suppose that all instances of a concept will show up if one has all the references to the relevant word-group. My search of *prophē* could not turn up references to, for example, “speaking in the Spirit.”

(3) It underscored that these writers alluded relentlessly to the OT prophets and frequently to pagan or heretical prophets.

Toward the end of the process, these data were augmented with material culled from the electronic text version of the ante-Nicene fathers. We will organize our findings under the headings of apostolic fathers, apologists, polemicists, and late-second-century fathers.

II. APOSTOLIC FATHERS

The early contributors (notably Clement of Rome, who does not deal with Christian prophecy) may have overlapped with the apostolic period and thus the close of the canon. As it turns out, this will not substantially affect our survey.

From the late first or early second century comes the *Didache*, a manual of moral instruction and church order. It allowed the prophets unlimited scope after the formal eucharistic prayer: “But permit the prophets to offer thanksgiving as much as they desire.”⁶

The *Didache* addressed the issue of local and, unusually, itinerant prophets and gave directives for discerning the true from the false. These words would have far-reaching influence in later generations:

And any prophet speaking in the Spirit ye shall not try, neither discern; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. Yet not every one that speaketh in the Spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord. From his ways therefore the false prophet and the prophet shall be recognized. And no prophet when he ordereth a table in the Spirit shall eat of it; otherwise he is a false prophet. And every prophet teaching the truth, if he doeth not what he teacheth, is a false prophet. And every prophet approved and found true, if he doeth ought as an outward mystery typical of the Church, and yet teacheth you not to do all that he himself doeth, shall not be judged before you; he hath his judgment in the presence of God; for in like manner also did the prophets of old time. And whosoever shall say in the Spirit, Give me silver or anything else, ye shall not listen to him; but if he tell you to give on behalf of others that are in want, let no man judge him.⁷

That these various directives do not harmonize well shows the difficulty of balancing the need for discernment with the need for obedience. *Didache* 11.7 seems to mean that once it has been determined that a particular

⁶ *Did.* 10.7.

⁷ *Ibid.* 11.7–12.

prophet is “speaking in the Spirit” he is beyond criticism, lest Christians fall into the irremissible sin. A prophet is therefore either all true or all false. But how does the Church assess his genuineness before he, say, mandates charity? A prophet is to be rejected if he does not practice what he preaches or if he is anxious for personal gain, whether food, lodging, or money. But if the prophet is reputable and wishes to take up residence, then they ought to show him respect and support him.⁸

Karl Baus has the “impression that the editor of the *Didache* is here fighting for a prophetic ideal which was sinking in general esteem, no doubt in favour of the ‘teacher.’”⁹ This is plausible but hardly the only or the best explanation. Even in the middle of the first century Paul had to remind the Thessalonians: “Do not treat prophecies with contempt.”¹⁰

For centuries Christians enjoyed reading the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which was written in Rome (c. AD 90–150), possibly in stages. Hermas’ own experiences tended toward visions, angelic visitations, and voices from heaven. Compared with the *Didache*, Hermas presented more detailed archetypes of the true and false prophet. Naturally the prophet’s conduct was the clearest signal of his authenticity.

“How then, Sir,” say I, “will a man know which of them is the prophet, and which the false prophet?” “I will tell you,” says he, “about both the prophets, and then you can try the true and the false prophet according to my directions. Try the man who has the Divine Spirit by his life.”¹¹

The true prophet is tranquil, self-effacing, abstaining from evil and vain desire. The false prophet is proud and greedy.

⁸ *Ibid.* 13.1; 15.1.

⁹ K. Baus, *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine* (New York: Crossroad, 1965) 150.

¹⁰ 1 Thess 5:20 NIV.

¹¹ *Herm. Man.* 11.7 (ANF 2.27). The *Shepherd of Hermas* was placed outside of Scripture by the Muratorian canon, a Latin translation of a late second-century list: “But Hermas wrote the Shepherd quite lately in our time in the city of Rome, when on the throne of the church of the city of Rome the bishop Pius, his brother, was seated. And therefore it ought indeed to be read, but it cannot be read publicly in the Church to the people either among the prophets, whose number is settled, or among the apostles to the end of time.” R. E. Heine, “Gospel of John in the Montanist Controversy,” *SecCent* 6 (1987–88) 13, regards the clause “either among the prophets . . . or among the apostles” as a “rather ambiguous statement” proving that “prophecy ceased with the apostles.” His statement has been cited as definite proof that the Church during the Montanist crisis was cessationist and for that reason knew Hermas’ prophecy to be counterfeit; cf. F. D. Farnell, “When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?”, *BSac* 150 (1993) 196 n. 79. In actuality, however, the Muratorian canon is not ambiguous at all but uses conventional language that has parallels all over Christian literature of the second and third centuries. The full ante-Nicene formula was that the Scriptures consisted of the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the OT) and the gospels and the apostles (i.e. the NT); cf. e.g. *Diogn.* 11.6. More common was the shorter identification “the Prophets and apostles” (see Clement *Strom.* 1.9; Tertullian *Against Heresies* 44; Hippolytus *Fragments From Commentaries* [ANF 5.175]; Origen *Princ.* 2.6.6; 2.7.1; 4.1.14; Novatian *On the Trinity* 29; Methodius *Symposium* Disc. 7.1). The Muratorian canon thus pronounced that *Shepherd* had no place in either half of the Church’s canon because the number of the OT prophets is settled and because Hermas wrote after the apostles. It is significant that Farnell ignores the recommendation that *Shepherd* “ought indeed to be read” privately. *Shepherd* was removed from the category of false prophet on the one hand and canonical prophet on the other. This mediating perspective was endorsed by Athanasius *Festal Letter* 39.7 (NPNF 2 4.552).

Hermas also gave a striking picture of the prophet's role in the church: Prophecy is not clandestine but occurs when the Christian assembly prays and God decides to give a message.¹² True prophets never take money for their messages. Because God obstructs the attempts of false prophets, these people find themselves unable to feign prophecy before the assembled church. Instead, individuals come to consult them and offer payment. False prophets give empty predictions, designed to gratify the desires of the supplicant. They are moved by an earthly spirit or even the devil himself and may damage the unstable Christian.¹³

The *Shepherd of Hermas* is unusual in that later Christians regarded it as salutary, even inspired, even though it is filled with visions and revelations. How do we explain the acceptance given this book when in those decades the Elchasites were being excoriated for their "angelic" teaching on postbaptismal sin, and a few years later the Montanist revelations were rejected as novelty? There are sociological and theological reasons. (1) Hermas was a good churchman and did nothing to undermine catholic unity. (2) None of the teaching "revealed" to Hermas was particularly innovative. The angels dwelt on simplicity, chastity, humility and other known Christian virtues. Even when Hermas asked for a ruling on the possibility of postbaptismal repentance, the angel in *Herm. Man.* 4.3 gave an answer that was already among the existing interpretations of apostolic doctrine.

Scholars must remain tentative about the date and authorship of *Didache* and *Shepherd*, but the epistles of Ignatius of Antioch (martyred c. 117) are more firmly anchored in the second century. In the superscription to his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* he rejoiced that the Church has "obtained every kind of gift" and is "filled with faith and love, and is deficient in no gift," recalling 1 Cor 1:7.¹⁴

Ignatius recollected that while in Philadelphia he had uttered what was certainly understood as some sort of revelation:

For, when I was among you, I cried, I spoke with a loud voice: Give heed to the bishop, and to the presbytery and deacons. Now, some suspected me of having spoken thus, as knowing beforehand the division caused by some among you. But He is my witness, for whose sake I am in bonds, that I got no intelligence from any man. But the Spirit proclaimed these words: Do nothing without the bishop; keep your bodies as the temples of God; love unity; avoid divisions; be the followers of Jesus Christ, even as He is of His Father.¹⁵

Ignatius claimed not only that he was unaware of any schism but also that some had tried to mislead him. It is not clear whether he knew at once that he had gotten supernatural intelligence or whether he was able to deduce that from their reaction.

¹² *Herm. Man.* 11.8–9; cf. 1 Cor 14:30. This is also the reading by Reiling, *Hermas* 13. Aune (*Prophecy* 198) comments that true prophets could, according to Hermas, give "solo performances" in "private sessions," but attestation is lacking.

¹³ *Herm. Man.* 11.2–6, 12–13, 17.

¹⁴ ANF 1.86.

¹⁵ Ign. *Phld.* 7.1b–2 (ANF 1.83–84).

Polycarp, a younger contemporary of Ignatius, was martyred around the middle of the second century. The account of his death was drawn up almost immediately. It included a vision and a reference to other predictions:

And while he was praying, a vision presented itself to him three days before he was taken; and behold, the pillow under his head seemed to him on fire. Upon this, turning to those that were with him, he said to them prophetically, "I must be burnt alive."¹⁶

[Polycarp]. . . having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the Catholic Church which is in Smyrna. For every word that went out of his mouth either has been or shall yet be accomplished.¹⁷

Like Hermas, the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas* (early- to mid-second century?) regarded the gift of prophecy as a sign of God's presence in the congregation. Prophecy has apologetic value merely by existing:

How [does God dwell in us]? His word of faith; His calling of promise; the wisdom of the statutes; the commands of the doctrine; He himself prophesying in us; He himself dwelling in us.¹⁸

Thus many of the apostolic fathers implied that the churches were at home with prophecy and that the real concern was separating the false prophet from the true. The prophetic word was not for the inquiring individual. It was to take place in church meetings, and it seems to have been prompted by the Spirit on the spot. The message would contain no new teaching but the implementation of the apostolic *kērygma* (help the poor, submit to church leaders, give thanks to God), a reasonable interpretation of that *kērygma* (Hermas), or foreknowledge (Polycarp).

III. APOLOGISTS

Even though Paul taught that prophecy "is for believers, not for unbelievers," he foresaw its evangelistic usefulness. When the unbeliever encounters the prophetic word in the assembly, it may be that "he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner" and the "secrets of his heart will be laid bare."¹⁹ Justin Martyr turned prophecy to a different apologetic use. His *Dialogue with Trypho* is set in Ephesus around AD 135 and purports to record his discussions with a refugee rabbi. Justin argued that John the Baptist was the last Israelite prophet and that now the Church, the new people of God, enjoys the gift of prophecy:

For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time. And hence you ought to understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation have been transferred to us. And just as there were false prophets contemporaneous with

¹⁶ *Mart. Pol.* 5.2 (ANF 1.40).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 16.2 (ANF 1.42).

¹⁸ *Barn.* 16.9 (ANF 1.147).

¹⁹ 1 Cor 14:22, 24–25 NIV.

your holy prophets, so are there now many false teachers amongst us, of whom our Lord forewarned us to beware. . . . Therefore we are most anxious that you be persuaded not to be misled by such persons, since we know that every one who can speak the truth, and yet speaks it not, shall be judged by God.²⁰

It is accordingly said, "He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, He gave gifts unto the sons of men." And again, in another prophecy it is said: "And it shall come to pass after this, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and on My servants, and on My handmaids, and they shall prophesy." Now, it is possible to see amongst us women and men who possess gifts [presumably including prophecy] of the Spirit of God.²¹

Justin's opponent could scarcely have been expected to give an easy concession to the existence of Christian prophecy. Yet Justin held out this fact as striking evidence to one who would investigate the matter for himself. He was "most anxious" only that Trypho not be put off by the awkward presence of false prophets. Therefore Paul placed value on the content of prophecy as it moved the individual seeker. Justin, like Barnabas, pointed to the plain fact that the *charisma* existed among Christians.

IV. POLEMICISTS

The rise of false teaching in the second century threw prophecy into greater relief. This is reflected in the *ex eventu* prediction in *As. Isa.* 3.28–31 that one day the false prophets would far outnumber the true. The gnostics had their own visions and prophecies, as noted by Hippolytus *Ref.* 6.37. Hippolytus even named Philumena in 7.26 as the prophetess whose writings had influenced Apelles.

Nonetheless the focus of false prophecy from the 160s onward was a fast-spreading movement known as the new prophecy. It sprang up in Asia Minor, headed by Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla, and several other men. They announced that the millennium would come swiftly, with the new Jerusalem descending on the village of Pepuza. Their many utterances were taken down and swiftly circulated. According to their critics Montanus claimed that he and his followers were unique, latter-day organs of the Paraclete. Maximilla even declared: "After me there will no longer be a prophet, but the end."²²

The Church placed the Montanists (also known as Phrygians or Cataphrygians) beyond the pale of orthodoxy. For what reason? Were the polemicists guilty of sour grapes, depriving the Montanists of the prophetic advantage that was now wanting in the Catholic hierarchy? Not at all. In

²⁰ Justin *Dial.* 82 (ANF 1.240).

²¹ *Ibid.* 87–88 (ANF 1.243); see also *ibid.* 51–52 (ANF 1.220–221).

²² Quoted by Epiphanius *Pan.* 48.2.4. His statement is cited in R. E. Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon: Mercer, 1989) 29. Heine's work updates the older collection by P. de Labriolle, *Les Sources de l'Historique du Montanisme* (Fribourg: Librairie de l'Université, 1913). The best ancient secondhand sources are Epiphanius *Pan.* 48; Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.3–4, 14–19.

fact Eusebius, a conservative on the issue of apostolic succession, maintained that Montanus was able to get a head start in the 160s precisely because the prophetic gift was still widespread and provided him with camouflage:

It was at that very time, in Phrygia, that Montanus, Alcibiades, Theodotus, and their followers began to acquire a widespread reputation for prophecy; for numerous other manifestations of the miraculous gift of God, still occurring in various churches, led many to believe that these men too were prophets.²³

In the extant polemics of the second century no writer rebuffed the new prophecy on the basis of the known or assumed discontinuance of that gift. In fact at least one of the assailants claimed that the apostolic teaching—presumably Paul in 1 Cor 13:8–10—would not allow the Montanists to be the last manifestation of prophecy:

For if, as they claim, after Quadratus and Ammia at Philadelphia Montanus and his female disciples succeeded to the prophetic gift, let them tell us which of their number succeeded the followers of Montanus and the women. For the prophetic gift must continue in the whole Church until the final coming, as the apostle insists. But they point to no one, though this is the fourteenth year since Maximilla's death.²⁴

Epiphanius of Salamis, too, worked on Maximilla as a weak link of Montanism. In a statement that some have misread as cessationist he reasoned:

For if spiritual gifts must be received, and there is a need for spiritual gifts in the Church, how is it that they no longer have prophets after Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla? Has grace ceased? But grace is not ineffectual in the holy Church. God forbid! And if those who prophesied prophesied up to a certain time, and no longer prophesy, then neither Priscilla nor Maximilla have

²³ Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.3.

²⁴ Quoted by Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.17. The same text shows up in the fragments of Asterius Urbanus (ANF 7.337), although he seems to have written some decades too late to have made this statement. Perhaps Asterius and Eusebius were quoting the same earlier polemicist. With regard to women prophesying, the polemicists operated on a double standard. First, we are told, Montanism is out of line with the tradition of Catholic prophetesses such as Ammia and the daughters of Philip. Had not the apostle Paul (1 Cor 11:5; affirmed by Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.11.9) permitted Catholic women to prophesy? And had not Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 87–88) and many others viewed female prophecy as a sign that the Spirit was being poured out on Christians, including the “handmaidens,” in fulfillment of Joel 2:29? Also note that Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.13.4) did not criticize the false prophetesses for being women but for thinking they could receive the *charisma* from Marcus. The second line of argument is that female leadership is a sure sign of trouble (cf. Hippolytus *Ref.* 8.12). Epiphanius (*Pan.* 49) reported that one Montanist subgroup even had female bishops and presbyters. In the same way Philumena came under attack for her radical views (Hippolytus *Ref.* 7.26). Origen maligned the Pythian prophetesses (*Against Celsus* 7.3–5) and raised the question of why the Greek god Apollo would choose women over men—and nonvirgins at that. R. L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1987) 407, thinks that Origen thought all true prophets were male, but this reads too much into his polemic. Origen did say that prophetesses may not prophesy in the Christian assembly but that they may prophesy outside the church (*Catenae on Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians* 14.36; Heine, *Montanist* 99). In all of these cases, gender became an issue because their doctrine was unsound and because they had become too prominent. Sexist slander was a tool to raise up opposition to what was already thought to be heterodoxy.

prophesied after the prophecies which were approved by the holy apostles in the holy Church.²⁵

Epiphanius was speaking hypothetically: Either grace continues in the Church, or the *charisma* ceased before the Montanist prophetesses spoke—but it cannot be both. Thus even in the late fourth century this contemporary of Chrysostom was reticent about using an unqualified cessationist argument, probably because his second- and third-century sources failed to do so. Besides this, he disavowed that grace had ceased: “God forbid!”

There is a record of a riveting debate between a Catholic and Montanist²⁶ in which the Montanist found the fulfillment of “that which is perfect” in the coming of the Paraclete. The Catholic argued that he believed in the gift of prophecy but not in the false form it had taken in Montanus.

Irenaeus was likely thinking of Montanism when he complained of some who had set aside prophecy from the Church. The new prophets nullified John’s gospel when they denied the Paraclete to the apostles. They also ignored the apostle’s assurance that the gift was possessed by Christians even of common rank:²⁷

Others, again (the Montanists), that they may set at nought the gift of the Spirit, which in the latter times has been, by the good pleasure of the Father, poured out upon the human race, do not admit that aspect [of the evangelical dispensation] presented by John’s Gospel, in which the Lord promised that He would send the Paraclete; but set aside at once both the Gospel and the prophetic Spirit. Wretched men indeed! who wish to be pseudo-prophets, forsooth, but who set aside the gift of prophecy from the Church; acting like those (the Encratitae) who, on account of such as come in hypocrisy, hold themselves aloof from the communion of the brethren. We must conclude, moreover, that these men (the Montanists) . . . cannot admit the Apostle Paul either. For, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, he speaks expressly of prophetic gifts, and recognizes men and women prophesying in the Church. Sinning, therefore, in all these particulars, against the Spirit of God, they fall into the irremissible sin.²⁸

Of course the Montanists did not take this criticism lying down. In Carthage, some years after Maximilla’s death, both Tertullian and Perpetua quoted Joel 2:28 as confirmation that the Spirit would continue to transmit

²⁵ Epiphanius *Pan.* 48.2.1–2; Heine, *Montanist* 29.

²⁶ Found in Heine, *Montanist* 113–127, citing G. Ficker, *ZKG* (1905) 446–463.

²⁷ C. L. Rogers, Jr., “The Gift of Tongues in the Post-Apostolic Church (A.D. 100–400),” *BSac* 122 (1965) 139, strains to demonstrate that Irenaeus was associated with the Montanists and carried their letters to Eleutherus. Therein he repeats a persistent misreading of history. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.3–4 stated that Irenaeus was commended in a letter from the Gallic Christians and that they held an orthodox opinion on the Montanist issue.

²⁸ Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.11.9 (ANF 1.429); see also *ibid.* 3.17.1 (ANF 1.444). Irenaeus turned from Marcion to these “others” as he started off this paragraph, so these cannot be Marcionites, as might normally be suspected. Thus the editors of ANF decided to add the parenthetical reference to Montanists. Irenaeus *Haer.* 4.26.5 contains a strong affirmation that the Church is the sphere of the Spirit’s operation. Similar statements in the third century come from Novatian *On the Trinity* 29; Origen *Princ.* 2.7. The latter cites Joel 2:28 as a prooftext, as does the anonymous author of the third-century *On Re-Baptism* 15 (ANF 5.676) and the fourth-century Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Lectures* 17.19 [NPNF 2 7.129]).

new prophecies for the benefit of the whole Church.²⁹ Besides, Perpetua herself saw visions, and Tertullian spoke of ongoing messages.³⁰ It is unclear whether this was a local expression of Montanism or a view that was widely shared.

The Church had another reason for spurning Montanus, following the pattern laid down with the Elchasites, who had claimed that an angel had revealed to them a book that contained a new and better formula for baptism.³¹ Montanus was found guilty of “novelty.” The Paraclete announced not only the end of the world but also a more rigorous pattern of fasting; “monogamy,” which meant a ban on remarriage for widows; incitement of the faithful to rush headlong into martyrdom; attribution to the Church of the power to forgive sins; and proclamation that the soul has a human shape and ethereal colors.³² The anti-Montanist tracts, along with Tertullian’s counteroffensives, reveal that the Church in the latter half of the second century did not expect or tolerate prophecy that yielded new doctrine or authoritative revelation. The fathers did not quote the text of Christian prophecies or cite them for doctrinal proof.³³

Beyond the content of their message and the conventional character issues as recorded in Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.18, the Church found fault with the style of their prophesying. To begin with, Montanus may have claimed to be speaking for God in the first person: “I am the Lord God, the Almighty dwelling in man.”³⁴ On top of this Montanus sounded not like a Christian prophet but like a pagan oracle:

²⁹ Tertullian *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 63; *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 1.2–4. The Latin text and translation of the latter are readily accessible in H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 106–131. These martyrs are claimed for Montanism in Tertullian *On the Soul* 55.4–5, and some have thought that Tertullian edited the story of his fellow Carthaginians.

³⁰ Cf. e.g. Perpetua *Passion* 4.3–10; 8.1–4; Tertullian *On the Soul* 9; *Against Marcion* 5.15; *De Fuga* 1.1; 9.4.

³¹ Cf. Hippolytus *Ref.* 9.10–12; Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6.38.

³² For reference to fasting cf. Hippolytus *Ref.* 8.12; for remarriage cf. Tertullian *Against Marcion* 1.29; for martyrdom cf. *De Fuga* 9.4; for forgiveness by the Church cf. *On Modesty* 21; for colors of the soul cf. *On the Soul* 9. This last teaching was received in a vision by a woman, probably a Montanist. Scholars such as Fox, *Pagans* 410, believe that she was a Catholic whom Tertullian heard before becoming a Montanist. In *To the Psychics* 1 (ANF 4.102) Tertullian complained: “They are therefore constantly reproaching us with novelty, concerning the unlawfulness of which they lay down a prescriptive rule, that either it must be adjudged heresy, if (the point in dispute) is a human presumption; or else pronounced pseudo-prophecy, if it is a spiritual declaration, provided that, either way, we who reclaim hear (sentence of) anathema.”

³³ According to Hippolytus *Ref.* 8.12 the Montanists circulated “an infinite number of their books” and “volumes,” and they “allege that they have learned something more through these, than from law, and prophets, and the Gospels,” even though Hippolytus saw that “the majority of their books are silly.” The epistle of Ignatius to Hero, though spurious, gives an excellent summary of the Church’s viewpoint in the fourth century: “Every one that teaches beyond what is commanded, though he be [deemed] worthy of credit, though he be in the habit of fasting, though he live in continence, though he work miracles, though he have the gift of prophecy, let him be in thy sight as a wolf in sheep’s clothing” (Ign. *Hero* 2 [ANF 1.113]). Taken out of context, Clement *Strom.* 5.14 seems to dilute our claim: “Thus also the prophetic utterances have the same force as the apostolic word.” Nevertheless in context that loosely worded sentence does not refer to Christian prophets but to the Hebrew prophets next cited (Isaiah, Jonah, Malachi).

³⁴ As recorded by Epiphanius *Pan.* 48.11 (Heine, *Montanist* 3).

[Montanus] was filled with spiritual excitement and suddenly fell into a trance and unnatural ecstasy. He raved, and began to chatter and talk nonsense, prophesying in a way that conflicted with the practice of the Church handed down generation by generation from the beginning. Of those who listened at that time to his sham utterances some were annoyed, regarding him as possessed, a demoniac in the grip of a spirit of error, a disturber of masses. They rebuked him and tried to stop his chatter, remembering the distinction drawn by the Lord, and His warning to guard vigilantly against the coming of false prophets. Others were elated as if by the Holy Spirit or a prophetic gift, were filled with conceit, and forgot the Lord's distinction But the pseudo-prophet speaks in a state of unnatural ecstasy, after which all restraint is thrown to the winds. He begins with voluntary ignorance and ends in involuntary psychosis, as stated already. But they cannot point to a single one of the prophets under either the Old Covenant or the New who was moved by the Spirit in this way—not Agabus or Judas or Silas or Philip's daughters; not Ammia at Philadelphia or Quadratus; nor any others they may choose to boast about though they are not of their number.³⁵

This anti-Montanist was claiming that every true prophet, from the earliest Jerusalem church to the second-century prophets in Asia, kept his or her head while prophesying. It is clear from the record that neither Montanists nor Catholics suggested that this ecstasy was the gift of glossolalia, as some modern scholars believe. In fact Irenaeus (*Haer.* 5.6.1) mentioned that Catholics spoke in tongues, and he distinguished tongues from prophecy. He would also remark that while it is the Spirit speaking through a prophet he takes “form and shape in the likeness of the person concerned”—that is, a prophet sounds like himself or herself.³⁶ According to Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.17 a man named Miltiades wrote an attack, the theme and perhaps the title of which was “that a prophet ought not to chatter in a state of ecstasy.” Epiphanius devoted a long section to Montanist ecstasy in *Pan.* 48.3–7. Origen implied that a Pythian prophetess does not know what she is saying, but a true prophet does:

Moreover, it is not the part of a divine spirit to drive the prophetess into such a state of ecstasy and madness that she loses control of herself. For he who is under the influence of the Divine Spirit ought to be the first to receive the beneficial effects . . . and, moreover, that should be the time of clearest perception, when a person is in close contact with the Deity.³⁷

The Montanists were aware of their oddness. Tertullian argued in *Against Marcion* 4.22 and *On the Soul* 9 that ecstasy naturally accompanies the coming of the Spirit on a human being. He even wrote a treatise *On Ecstasy* in six books, now lost.

Ronald A. N. Kydd believes that the early Church exaggerated the strangeness of their utterances. He cites some references in which the fathers claimed that the Hebrews had prophesied in a trancelike state. The

³⁵ Quoted by Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.16–17.

³⁶ Irenaeus *Proof* 49 (ACW 16.80).

³⁷ Origen *Against Celsus* 7.3 (ANF 4.612), seemingly based on Clement *Strom.* 1.9 (ANF 2.310): “For the prophets and disciples of the Spirit knew infallibly their mind.” See Justin Martyr’s comparable description of the Sibyl in *To the Greeks* 37 (ANF 1.289).

new prophets were simply extreme examples of the charismatics who could still be found among the orthodox.³⁸ While Kydd is able to account for the acceptance of Montanism in some circles, he does not take into account the instant backlash against their ecstatic speech nor the acceptance of tongues and prophecy in the Catholic Church. One can argue endlessly over what constitutes ecstasy and what does not. What damages Kydd's proposal is that the Church fathers viewed Montanist ecstasy as a departure from the tradition that ran from the OT to their own day. The loose language of the fathers meant that Athenagoras of Athens could speak of the ecstasy of the Hebrew prophets, while in Alexandria Clement was stating that only false prophets spoke in an ecstatic state and yet were still in league against the Montanists.³⁹

Tertullian's eventual conversion to Montanism—if such it was—did not hinge on whether he could believe in the survival of the prophetic gift. Rather it depended on whether he could affirm that the Paraclete was handing out new dogma. As a Montanist champion he would write a tract in c. 208 on how to handle persecution:

Yes; and if you ask the counsel of the Spirit, what does He approve more than that utterance of the Spirit ["He that feareth is not made perfect in love"]? For, indeed, it incites all almost to go and offer themselves in martyrdom, not to flee from it; so that we also make mention of it.⁴⁰

But back of that is Tertullian's dependence on the Paraclete, who had given a new word against those who preferred to avoid martyrdom. One sees him struggling to give the new doctrine in ways that a non-Montanist could find convincing.

Tertullian tripped over himself again in his answer to the charge that the Montanist view of monogamy was novelty. In the end, his two defenses in *On Monogamy* 2 must be seen as contradictory: First, he asserted that Jesus had predicted that the Paraclete would teach the Church "many other things," and so the Spirit was free to add to or modify what had already been revealed. But Tertullian then turned around, and "waiving, now, the mention of the Paraclete" he argued that the Church has misunderstood the Bible all along and that "the rule of monogamy is neither novel nor strange, nay rather, is both ancient, and proper to Christians; so that you may be sensible that the Paraclete is rather its *restitutor* than *institutor*."⁴¹ Tertullian developed a bitter grudge against the bishop of Rome and his shifting attitude toward Montanism, a change that Tertullian blames on the Patripassianist heretic Praxeus: "By this Praxeus did a twofold service for the devil at Rome: he drove away prophecy, and he brought in heresy; he put to flight the Paraclete, and he crucified the Father."⁴²

³⁸ Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts* 35–36, 39–40.

³⁹ Contrast Athenagoras *Apology* 9 (ANF 2.133) with Clement *Strom.* 1.17 (ANF 2.319).

⁴⁰ Tertullian *De Fuga* 9.4 (ANF 4.121).

⁴¹ Tertullian *On Monogamy* 4 (ANF 4.61, italics in ANF).

⁴² Tertullian *Against Praxeus* 1 (ANF 3.597).

It seems that Montanism had found some tolerance under the bishop until other Christians, including the martyrs of Vienne and Lyon, enjoined him to take a harder line. Tertullian also charged that the bishop of Rome could bring forth no evidence that he himself had the prophetic gift.⁴³ But Tertullian was speaking in hyperbole. The Paraclete was rejected by Rome not because prophecy was supposed to be extinct but because Montanist prophecy was alien in form and content. A later Roman presbyter, Hippolytus (early third century), was favorable to the prophetic gift and supposedly had it himself, being called a “prophet of things to come” in the inscription of his *Ex interpretatione Ruth*.⁴⁴

Those who believe that the gift of prophecy is still operative today should think twice before they choose the Montanists as their precursors. In the dispute between the old Catholic Church and the Montanists, it may well be the Catholics who more closely resemble today’s charismatics. If we take seriously the Church’s written reactions to Montanism, then it is a labored conclusion that Montanism was somehow a charismatic revival of a neglected or deceased prophetic gift.⁴⁵

One further confirmation of our view comes from the anti-Marcionite polemics, starting with Tertullian’s. He cited Paul’s admonition in 1 Thess 5:19 to “quench not the Spirit” and threw down a gauntlet:

It is then incumbent on Marcion now to display in his church that spirit of his god which must not be quenched, and the prophesings which must not be despised. . . . And when he shall have failed to produce and give proof of any such criterion, we will then on our side bring out both the Spirit and the prophecies of the Creator, which utter predictions according to His will. Thus it will be clearly seen of what the apostle spoke, even of those things which were to happen in the church of his God; and as long as He endures, so long also does His Spirit work, and so long are his promises repeated.⁴⁶

This challenge is hardly surprising, coming as it does from a Montanist. But would the Catholic Church have attacked Marcion for despising the prophetic *charisma*? It could and it did: When Irenaeus refuted the doctrines of an unnamed group of heretics, probably the Marcionites, it was because they rebuffed the Holy Spirit, his gifts, and prophecy: “And others do not admit the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and reject from themselves the charism of prophecy, being watered whereby, man bears fruit to God.”⁴⁷ This criticism is reminiscent of the attack on the Montanists in *Against Heresies* (quoted above). Those pseudoprophets, however, did not reject the Spirit but became schismatic and exclusivist and “set aside the gift of prophecy from the Church.” This other group denied the Spirit’s work entirely. It is highly

⁴³ Tertullian *On Modesty* 21 (ANF 4.99–100).

⁴⁴ From H. Achelis, *Hippolyt’s kleinere exegetische und homiletische Schriften* (GCS 1/2; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897). Notice too Hippolytus’ emphasis on the Spirit in his *Apostolic Tradition*.

⁴⁵ See J. L. Ash, “The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church,” *TS* 37 (1976) 227–252.

⁴⁶ Tertullian *Against Marcion* 5.15 (ANF 3.462). He had already appealed to the Paraclete in 1.29 (ANF 3.294).

⁴⁷ Irenaeus *Proof* 99 (ACW 16.108–109).

significant that both the Montanist and the Catholic bishop could criticize Marcion for neglecting the gift of prophecy.

V. LATE-SECOND-CENTURY FATHERS

Even in the aftermath of Montanism, orthodox writers held firm to the belief that genuine prophecy was being practiced by Catholic Christians. In the 180s Irenaeus, lately transplanted from Asia Minor to Gaul, echoed Justin Martyr:

In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God.⁴⁸

Almost certainly Irenaeus had 1 Cor 14:22–25 in mind. He seemed to expect both prophecy and glossolalia to reveal God's mysteries (not, presumably, novel doctrines) and to unlock a few human secrets as well.

Some translate Irenaeus' statement as hearsay: "We hear of many."⁴⁹ In their hands Irenaeus is made to say that he had not witnessed prophesying but had heard the rumors like everyone else. This view rests on a basic mistranslation of the Greek text, quoted in Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.7 but now recovered in manuscript form: *kathōs kai pollōn akouomen adelphōn en tē ekklesiā prophētikā charismata echontōn kai. . .*⁵⁰ It is just barely possible to translate *pollōn akouomen adelphōn* as "we hear of many brothers." But *akouō* usually takes a genitive object without meaning "hear of." LSJ confirms that "hear of" is a potential but rare rendering of that verb. One cannot blame the Latin version for this misunderstanding either. It translates the phrase as *multos audivimus fratres*, using the accusative for the direct object "many brothers" to follow Latin usage and paraphrasing the present verb to a perfect tense ("we have heard"). The Latin does not necessarily change the sense, although Cleon Rogers⁵¹ and others would like to have it mean "we heard a long time ago." And the Latin *audio* is less equivocal than the Greek since, unlike *akouō*, it cannot take the meaning "hear of." The ANF reading quoted above is fine, as are these options: "In like manner we also hear/give an ear to/give heed to many brothers in the Church, who possess prophetic *charismata*."

Irenaeus used the present tense. He could very well have been describing his own churches in Gaul. That statement conforms to the following passage. No schismatic Montanist, Irenaeus defended the operation of the gifts in "the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world":

If, however, they maintain that the Lord, too, performed such works simply in appearance, we shall refer them to the prophetic writings, and prove from

⁴⁸ Irenaeus *Haer.* 5.6.1 (ANF 1.531).

⁴⁹ So for example F. R. M. Hitchcock, *The Treatise of Irenaeus of Lugdunum against the Heresies* (London: SPCK, 1916) 2.99: "We have heard of many brethren."

⁵⁰ From *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les hérésies*, 5.2 (SC 153; ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau and C. Mercier; Paris: Cerf, 1969).

⁵¹ Rogers, "Gift" 139.

these both that all things were thus predicted regarding Him, and did take place undoubtedly, and that He is the only Son of God. Wherefore, also, those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe [in Christ], and join themselves to the Church. *Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions.* Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years. And what shall I more say? It is not possible to name the number of gifts which the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world, has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ.⁵²

Irenaeus began this section with a point about Christ's human nature, against a docetic Christology. With help from the OT prophets he certified the reality of the incarnate Lord's miracles. He then swiveled from a defense of orthodox Christology to a vindication of the orthodox Church: Only the true followers of Jesus could boast such miracles as raising the dead or exorcism. He argued like Justin Martyr, except that Irenaeus was not distinguishing the Church from Israel but Catholics from heretics.

Despite the Montanist controversy Irenaeus did not reject prophecy out of hand nor identify it as a throwback. He recognized that there were false miracle workers—in the passage below, schismatic Montanists—but with the traditional criteria of *Shepherd* (which book he endorsed explicitly in 4.20.2) these could be spotted easily enough:

[God] shall also judge false prophets, who, without having received the gift of prophecy from God, and not possessed by the fear of God, but either for the sake of vainglory, or with a view to some personal advantage, or acting in some other way under the influence of a wicked spirit, pretend to utter prophecies, while all the time they lie against God. He shall also judge those who give rise to schisms, who are destitute of the love of God, and who look to their own special advantage rather than to the unity of the Church. . . . [True knowledge consists in] the pre-eminent gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy, and which excels all the other gifts [of God].⁵³

Earlier he had gotten down to cases. A certain Marcus was flattering rich women into thinking that he could bestow the gift of prophecy upon them. They were merely to open their mouths and say whatever occurred to them.

⁵² Irenaeus *Haer.* 2.32.4 (ANF 1.409, italics mine). Both 2.32.4 and 5.6.1 were cited approvingly by Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.7, who understood that they described the operation of gifts in Irenaeus' own day. He also quoted a portion of Irenaeus *Haer.* 2.31.2 that seems to say that Christians are no longer raising the dead, but he took it out of context. Irenaeus was saying only that certain heretics were unable to perform these miracles. Hippolytus, in a fragment in ANF 5.175, seems in context to be referring to Christian "prophets and martyrs who *in every city and country* are slain like sheep every day by the unbelieving, in behalf of truth" (italics mine). Chrysostom spoke of the ubiquitous Christian prophets in *Hom.* 22.2 (NPNF 1 12.186): "Secondly, prophets: For they used to prophesy. . . . And they were *much more numerous than under the old covenant*: the gifts not having devolved on some ten, and twenty, and fifty, and an hundred, but this grace was poured out abundantly, and *every Church had many that prophesied*" (italics mine).

⁵³ Irenaeus *Haer.* 4.33.6–7, 8 (ANF 1.508).

This they have done, as being well aware that the gift of prophecy is not conferred on men [better "on people," *tois anthrōpois*] by Marcus, the magician, but that only those to whom God sends His grace from above possess the divinely-bestowed power of prophesying; and then they speak where and when God pleases, and not when Marcus orders them to do so.⁵⁴

Absent among his criticisms of Marcus was the reasoning that prophecy had ceased, an argument that would have dispatched Marcus without further ado.

Irenaeus' testimony does not fill us with confidence toward Warfield's statement:

We can scarcely fail to perceive that the confinement of the supernatural gifts by the Scriptures to those who had them conferred upon them by the Apostles, affords a ready explanation of all the historical facts. . . . The number of those upon whom the hands of Apostles had been laid, living still in the second century, cannot have been very large.⁵⁵

But has Warfield explained the "many brothers" who still prophesied to the church in Irenaeus' day—a full eighty to ninety years after the death of John? No. We must therefore pronounce Warfield's point to be circular and unconvincing.

To round out the second century we mention a line of tradition that Melito of Sardis was a prophet. Some have lately suggested that he was speaking prophetically in his sermon *Peri Pascha*. In the conclusion he began to speak for Christ in the first person: "I am your remission, I am the passover of salvation, I am the lamb sacrificed for you," etc.⁵⁶ Nevertheless this is not to be taken as a prophetic word. (1) It would have been grossly out of character for a non-Montanist to speak in such a way. (2) Melito's sermon is awash with rhetorical devices, and this seems to be one more—a gripping way to dramatize the call of Christ to the Gentiles. According to Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.2 Melito wrote a book called *Peri politeis kai prophētōn*, but its contents are unknown.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) referred several times to prophecy. He used words like "prophetic" in *Paed.* 1.5 to describe the whole Christian canon and argued that all true prophets exercise their gift perfectly. He linked Jewish and Christian prophets together into one group and noted in *Strom.* 5.4 how the prophets' work leads to the perfecting of the Christian. The meaning of 1 Cor 13:8 is that Christians should know the superiority of love in all things, according to his *Quis Dives Salvetur?* 38.2. In his *Eclogae Propheticae* 12 he reminded the Church that inspired teachers, whether Hebrew or Christian, heal and perform miracles for the sake of confirming their divine messages.⁵⁷

In the middle of the third century the claim to ongoing prophecy began to falter. When Origen wrote his massive treatise *Against Celsus* one of his

⁵⁴ Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.13.4 (ANF 1.335), followed by Hippolytus *Ref.* 6.36 (ANF 5.92).

⁵⁵ Warfield, *Counterfeit* 24–25.

⁵⁶ R. White, *Melito of Sardis: Sermon "On the Passover"* (Lexington: Lexington Theological Seminary, 1976) 50.

⁵⁷ *Clementis Alexandrini opera quae extant* (ed. J. Potter; Oxon, 1715) chaps. 15–16.

concerns was to distinguish between Christian and pagan prophets. He reiterated Justin's defense of the Church against Israel with an appeal to the dwindling (but not absent) gift of prophecy:

For never have any of those who have not embraced our faith done any thing approaching to what was done by the ancient [Hebrew] prophets; and in more recent times, since the coming of Christ, no prophets have arisen among the Jews, who have confessedly been abandoned by the Holy Spirit on account of their impiety towards God, and towards Him of whom their prophets spoke. Moreover, the Holy Spirit gave signs of His presence at the beginning of Christ's ministry, and after His ascension He gave still more; but since that time these signs have diminished, although there are still traces of His presence in a few who have had their souls purified by the Gospel, and their actions regulated by its influence.⁵⁸

From Origen through the fourth century one may trace a gradual confinement of the prophetic gift to an elite, with "souls purified." In one version Cyprian restricted the *charisma* to the bishop.⁵⁹ Around the time that his friend Chrysostom was remarking on the passing of prophecy, Church historian Palladius recorded in the *Lausiaca History* the presence of prophecy and other miracles among the most pious monastics. And their contemporary Cyril of Jerusalem was using his own catechism, in which he wished his catechumens to that higher level: "And mayest thou be worthy of the gift of prophecy also! For thou shalt receive grace according to the measure of thy capacity."⁶⁰

VI. CONCLUSION

Many of today's cessationists rely on Warfield's decision to tie the end of prophecy to the completion of the canon (with or without the help of 1 Cor 13:8–10) and then predict or just assume that the data of the second century will bear them out.

We have shown that the cessationist cannot depend on the second-century fathers for support nor for agreement with the proposal that prophecy and canon cannot coexist. The many Catholic voices of that period agree on several propositions, many of which are directly traceable to Paul.

1. *Prophecy may coexist with a closed set of apostolic traditions* ("canon" would be too strong a word at this point in history) because (1) true

⁵⁸ Origen *Against Celsus* 7.8 (ANF 4.614); cf. also 4.93 (ANF 4.539): ". . . the most pure and holy of human souls, whom He inspires and endows with prophetic power." See also 2.8 (ANF 4.433): "For [the Jews] have no longer prophets nor miracles, traces of which to a considerable extent are still found among Christians, and some of them more remarkable than any that existed among the Jews; and these we ourselves have witnessed."

⁵⁹ Cyprian was credited with a prophecy in an epistle from Lucius *Ep.* 78.2 (ANF 5.406). Notice the application of 1 Cor 14:30 to church convocations in the epistle of Firmilian to Cyprian in *Ep.* 74.4 (ANF 5.391): "Whence also he who first speaks in prophecy is bidden to be silent if a revelation be made to a second. For which reason it happens of necessity among us, that year by year we, the elders and prelates, assemble together to arrange those matters which are committed to our care."

⁶⁰ Cyril *Catechetical Lectures* 17.37 (NPNF 2 7.133).

prophecy shall not produce new doctrines; (2) true prophecy shall confirm and uphold apostolic teaching as interpreted by at least some segment of the Church; (3) true prophecy may yield a timely and local application of apostolic truth, such as convicting people of sin, directing particular gifts to the poor, revealing to a martyr the details of his impending death, and reminding a church to obey its leaders.

2. *Prophecy is a sign of God's presence with the Church* in fulfillment of the predictions of the HB, Jesus, and the apostles. In one sense the cessationists are correct in viewing prophecy and other miracles as signs to confirm apostolic doctrine, but these signs continued to confirm that teaching against its rivals long after the apostles were dead: (1) Therefore the Church, not Israel, is the true people of God. (2) Therefore the orthodox, not the errorists such as the Marcionites or the gnostics, are following the true faith. (3) Therefore the orthodox with their continuing experience of prophecy (some say until the return of Christ) are following the true faith, not the Montanists with their experience of the gift ending with Maximilla.

3. *True prophecy may not be suppressed.* Some say that this is the irre-missible sin.

4. *Prophecy comes about at the moving of God.* He decides who will prophesy and when. God normally moves prophets while in the company of the Church. He has endowed particular men and women to be prophets.

5. *Prophets speak normally and naturally* after they realize that they have been prompted to give a message from God.

6. *Prophecy is unlike the soothsaying of pagan prophets*, who must be consulted with money, take a haughty attitude, and spew out false teaching.

7. *False prophecy, such as practiced by pagans or Christian errorists, often involves going into a trance or frenzied ecstasy.* Either they are feigning this state or are being moved by an evil spirit.

These testimonies come from every quarter of the second century, from the widest geographical distribution (Gaul, Rome, Asia Minor, Africa, Syria), and from the majority of the writers. They appear in books written not only by clerics but also by the layman Hermas. Until such time as we have credible evidence against their eyewitness accounts we should give their trustworthiness the benefit of the doubt.

The gift of prophecy did not suddenly cease at some point near the end of the apostolic era. Rather, it continued in the churches throughout the following century and into the next. During that period the Church enjoyed all the components of the emerging Christian canon and fresh specific guidance from the Spirit. The fading of the latter was first remarked on in the middle of the third century.