

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition

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My assignment, I take it, is to reflect from a biblical and Reformed perspective on issues raised by the charismatic movement, especially where the latter diverges and so poses a challenge to Reformed theology and church life. Such issues are in fact not new on the agenda of our Conference. Previously papers have been given on baptism with the Holy Spirit (Abbotsford 1989, Prof. J. van Bruggen) and on

New Testament prophecy (Zwolle 1993, Prof. N. Wilson).¹

Two general areas evidently present themselves for consideration: 1) the significance of Pentecost/ Holy Spirit baptism, and 2) the question of the cessation of certain gifts of the Spirit. Anything like an in-depth treatment of either area is out of the question here. Accordingly, my approach will have to be selective. I will proceed by concentrating on aspects that I judge we best concern ourselves with as a conference of Reformed churches. That will include noting points on which, within the Reformed community, differences in assessing the charismatic movement persist. Obviously, there is room for differences of opinion about what ought to receive our attention. I look forward to the discussion to follow to correct imbalances in my presentation. For clarity's sake I should perhaps say at the outset that when I speak of "the charismatic movement" I do so in what has become its customary sense, that is, including both Pentecostals and those elsewhere who would describe themselves as non-Pentecostal charismatics.

¹ Proceedings, 1989, 186-205; 1993, 116-135.

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PART I

PENTECOST/THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT/CHRIST, THE SPIRIT, AND THE CHURCH/THE CHRISTIAN

1:1. Pentecost is not part of the *ordo salutis* but of *historia salutis*

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Virtually everything the New Testament teaches about the work of the Holy Spirit either looks forward or traces back to Pentecost. So, what really happened then, what is the significance of that event,² is a large and all-important question.

Giving sound answers to that question, I suggest, depends, to a considerable degree, on recognizing and not blurring a basic distinction: the distinction between the history of salvation (*historia salutis*) and the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*), the distinction, in other terms, between redemption in its once-for-all accomplishment and its continuing application to sinners, between Christ's finished work and the ongoing appropriation of its benefits by God's people.

In introducing this categorical distinction here, I should make clear, I am using the expression *ordo salutis* in a somewhat broader than usual, though, I believe, still appropriate sense. In view are not only matters like regeneration, conversion, and justification—identical for every believer—and sanctification—true of every believer but in varying degrees—but also spiritual gifts and empowerment—varying from believer to believer. In other words, *ordo salutis*, as employed here, refers to everything included in individual and corporate experience within the covenant people of God.

What is crucial for a proper overall understanding of Pentecost/Holy Spirit baptism, then, is to recognize that it has its place within the history of salvation (*historia salutis*), not the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*). The significance of Pentecost is primarily redemptive-historical, not experiential. While it would certainly be wrong to polarize these two aspects (an issue we will return to below), the point of what took place on the day of Pentecost is not to provide a paradigm or to set a standard for a particular experiencing of the Spirit, whether individually or corporately.

² Various and, I take it, interchangeably described in Acts as being “baptized with” (1:5), the “coming upon” of (1:8), “outpouring” of (2:33), “gift” of (2:38), the Spirit.

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1:2. The Importance of the relationship between “Lord” and “Spirit”

“A Reformed pneumatology,” W. H. Velema has written, “will only be able to be sound, when it correctly sees the relationship between *Kurios* and *Pneuma*.”³ In my judgment it is difficult to exaggerate not merely the truth but the pivotal truth of this statement. Specifically, it points us to where the primary significance of Pentecost lies: in revealing the unique bond that exists between the now exalted Christ and the Spirit. Negatively, where that tethering, along with its most important consequences, is not adequately appreciated, there Pentecost/Holy Spirit baptism remains essentially misunderstood.

Persisting misconceptions in this respect, it seems fair to say, are what characterize the distinctive emphases of the charismatic movement. But similar misperceptions, or at least similarly inadequate perceptions, of Pentecost are found elsewhere, including some Reformed and Presbyterian circles. Accordingly, we ought, before anything else, to clarify the meaning of Pentecost by focusing on the relationship between Christ and the Spirit.

1:3. 1 Corinthians 14:45

I begin with the in some respects difficult, but the most striking and pointed declaration of this relationship in the entire New Testament, the final clause of 1 Corinthians 15:45: “the last Adam became the life-giving Spirit.” This affirmation, central to both Paul’s christology and pneumatology, offers as well, I suggest, a one-sentence commentary, in effect, on Pentecost and its significance. The following brief observations will have to forego the careful exegesis which may be necessary for some, though an effort in that direction has been provided in endnotes.

1) *pneuma* in 1 Corinthians 15:45 is definite and refers to the person of the Holy Spirit.⁴ Paul knows of no other “life-giving” *pneuma* than the Holy Spirit.

³ Cited by L. Floor (*Hy wat met die Heilige Gees doop* [Pretoria, 1979], following the title page), from *De leer van de Heilige Geest bij Abraham Kuyper* (s’Gravenhage, 1957), 246: “Een gereformeerde pneumatologie zal alleen dan zuiver kunnen zijn, wanneer ze het verband tussen *Kurios* en *Pneuma* goed ziet.”

⁴ Among Reformed interpreters who take this view, a view held especially by more recent exegesis across a broad front: H. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, 1956), 387/*Magnalia Dei* (Kampen, 1931), 369; R. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption [=The Centrality of the Resurrection]* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1987/1978), 78-92; J. Murray, *The Epistle To the Romans* (Grand Rapids, 1959), 1:11; H. Ridderbos, *Paul. An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1975), 88, 222-3, 225, 539/*Paulus. Ontwerp van zijn theologie* (Kampen, 1966), 90, 243, 247, 602; J. Versteeg, *Christus en de Geest* (Kampen, 1971), esp. 43-67; G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, 1979/1930), 10, 168-69, 184, 312.

This conclusion rests on a couple of interlocking, mutually reinforcing considerations that appear to me to be decisive.

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2) “The life-giving Spirit,” it should not be missed, is not a timeless description of Christ. Rather, he “became” (*egeneto*) such. The time point of this “becoming” is his resurrection or, more broadly, his exaltation.⁵ To put it in key terms of the chapter itself: as “firstfruits” of the resurrection-harvest (vv. 20, 23) he is “life-giving Spirit” (v. 45), and as “the life-giving Spirit” he is “the firstfruits.”

As resurrected, the last Adam has ascended; as “the second man,” he is now, by virtue of ascension, “from heaven” (v. 47),⁶ “the man from heaven” (v. 48). All told, the last Adam, become “the life-giving Spirit,” is specifically the *exalted* Christ.

3) In the immediate context (vv. 42-49), “life giving” contemplates Christ’s future action, when he will resurrect the mortal bodies of believers (cf. v. 22). It seems difficult to deny,

a) πνευμα in verse 45 and πνευματικον (“spiritual,” vv. 44a, b, 46) are cognate noun and adjective. The adjective, particularly as it is paired antithetically here with ψυχικον and in the light of the only other New Testament occurrence of this antithesis earlier in 2:14-15, has in view the work of the Spirit and what is effected by him. This is further confirmed by Paul’s consistent use of the adjective elsewhere (e.g., Rom 1:11; Eph 1:3; Col 1:9); Eph 6:12 appears to be the only exception. In 2:6-16 the activity of the Spirit—his sovereign, exclusive work in giving and receiving God’s revealed wisdom—is the primary focus of the immediate context. In contrast to the unbeliever (ψυχικος ανθρωπος, v.14), “the spiritual man” (ο πνευματικος, v. 15) is the believer (cf. vv. 4-5) as indwelt, enlightened, motivated, directed by the Spirit. The longstanding effort to enlist this passage in support of an anthropological trichotomy (with πνευματικος here referring to the human spirit come to its revived ascendancy), I take it, is not successful and ought to be abandoned; see J. Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2 (Edinburgh, 1977) 23-33, esp. 23-9.

b) The participial modifier in verse 45b points to the same conclusion. The last Adam did not simply become πνευμα but “life-giving” πνευμα (πνευμα ζωοποιου). Paul’s use of this verb elsewhere proves decisive, especially his sweeping assertion in 2 Corinthians 3:6: “the Spirit gives life.” Few, if any, will dispute that here “the Spirit” (το πνευμα) is “the Spirit of the living God” just mentioned in verse 3, in other words, the Holy Spirit. And in Romans 8:11, a statement closely related to the 1 Corinthians 15 passage, the “life-giving” activity of raising believers bodily is attributed to the Spirit (cf. John 6:63).

It should not be missed that virtually all the standard English translations at least obscure the sense of verse 45 by rendering “spirit” with a small “s.” Notable exceptions are *The Living Bible* (and now *The Living Translation*) and *Today’s English Version*; they, correctly I believe, capitalize “Spirit.” A survey, though not exhaustive, of translations in other languages that distinguish upper and lower case—Dutch, Afrikaans, French, Spanish, Portuguese—discloses the same obscurity. The only exception I have found is *Die Bybel* (Kaaipstad: Verenigde Protestantse Uitgewers, 1959).

⁵ The flow of the reasoning in chapter 15 makes that virtually certain. It would make no sense for Paul to argue for the resurrection of believers as he does, if Christ were “life giving” by virtue, say, of his preexistence or incarnation—or any consideration other than his resurrection. This is in no way to suggest that his preexistence and incarnation are unimportant or nonessential for Paul; they simply lie outside his purview here.

⁶ With the immediate context in view, this prepositional phrase is almost certainly an exaltation predicate, not a description of origin, say, out of preexistence at the incarnation. As such (“from heaven,” “the man from heaven,” v. 48), he is the one whose image believers (“those from heaven,” v. 48) will bear (fully, at the time of their bodily resurrection, v. 49; cf. Phil 3:20-21).

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however, in light of the overall context of Paul's teaching, that his present activity, also, is implicitly in view. The resurrection life of the believer, in union with Christ, is not only future but present (e.g., Gal 2:20; Col 2:12-13; Col 3:1-4). Christ, as resurrected, is already active in the church in the eschatological, resurrection power of the Spirit. Here is a key consideration for understanding Pentecost, one we will return to it in greater detail below.

4) In view, then, is the momentous, epochal significance of the resurrection/exaltation for Christ personally—his own climactic transformation by and reception of the Spirit, resulting in a new and permanent equation or oneness between them.⁷ This is not to deny that previously Christ and the Spirit were at work together among God's people.⁸ But now, dating from his resurrection and ascension, their joint action is given its stable and consummate basis in the history of redemption; now, at last, such action is the crowning consequence of the work of the incarnate Christ actually and definitively accomplished in history. This consummate relationship Paul captures by saying, Christ, the last Adam, became the life-giving Spirit.

It bears emphasizing that this oneness or unity, though certainly sweeping, is at the same time circumscribed in a specific respect; it concerns their activity, the activity of giving resurrection (=eschatological) life. In this sense it may be dubbed "functional," or, to use an older theological category, "economic" (rather than "ontological"⁹), or "eschatological," without in any way obliterating the distinction between the second and third persons of the Trinity.¹⁰

⁷ Bavinck's way of stating this truth is striking: "But the Holy Spirit has become entirely the property of Christ, and was, so to speak, absorbed into Christ or assimilated by Him [... *als het ware door Christus in zichzelf opgenomen*]. By His resurrection and ascension Christ has become the quickening Spirit" (*Our Reasonable Faith*, 387/*Magnalia Dei*, 369).

⁸ Prior to this time, already even under the old covenant, Christ preincarnate and the Spirit were conjointly present and at work; 1 Cor 10:3-4, whatever their further exegesis, point to that. Cf. 1 Pet 1:10: The Spirit comprehensively at work in the Old Testament prophets is specifically "the Spirit of Christ."

⁹ Although, as noted, involved is a real change/ transformation experienced by Christ, in terms of his true humanity. His is now, by virtue of the resurrection and ascension, what he did not previously possess, a *glorified* humanity (cf. 2 Cor 13:4).

¹⁰ The scope, the salvation-historical focus, of Paul's argument needs to be kept in view. Essential-eternal, ontological-trinitarian relationships are outside his purview here. He is concerned not with who Christ is (timelessly, eternally) but what he "became," what has happened to him in history, and that, specifically, in his identity as "the last Adam," "the second man," that is, in terms of his true humanity.

It is completely gratuitous to find here, as the historical-critical tradition has long and characteristically maintained, a "functional" christology that denies the personal difference between Christ and the Spirit and so is irreconcilable with later church formulation of trinitarian doctrine. The personal, parallel distinction between God (the Father), Christ as Lord, and the (Holy) Spirit—underlying subsequent

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5) The last clause in 1 Corinthians 15:45 connects closely with Paul's subsequent statement at the beginning of 2 Corinthians 3:17: "the Lord is the Spirit," where "the Lord" (ο κυριος) likely refers to Christ and an equation between him and the Spirit is affirmed.¹¹ Here, too, essential, trinitarian identities and relationships are not being denied or blurred, but are quite outside Paul's purview. His focus, clear from the immediate context (see esp. v. 18), is the conjoint activity of the Spirit and Christ as *glorified*.¹² The exaltation experienced by the incarnate Christ results in a (working) relationship with the Holy Spirit of new and unprecedented intimacy. They are one here, specifically, in giving (eschatological) "freedom" (3:17b), the close correlative of the resurrection life in view in 1 Corinthians 15. That correlation is particularly unmistakable in the phrasing of Romans 8:2: "...the *Spirit of life* in *Christ Jesus* has set me *free*...."

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1:4. The correlation of the work of the Spirit and the work of Christ

We may note here that this exaltation-based equation underlies everything Paul teaches about the work of the Spirit in the church. For Paul there is no work of the Spirit within the believer that is not also the work of Christ.

That appears, for instance, in Romans 8:9-10. In short compass, "you...in the Spirit" (9a), "the Spirit...in you" (9b), "belonging to Christ" (9d, virtually equivalent to the frequent "in Christ"), and "Christ in you" (10a)—all the possible combinations—are used *interchangeably*; they hardly describe different experiences, distinct from each other, but

doctrinal formulation—is clear enough in Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:13; Eph 4:4-6); cf. esp. in recent literature, G. Fee (*God's Empowering Presence. The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody, MA, 1994], 825-45, esp. 839-42), who admirably demonstrates Paul's clearly trinitarian understanding of God. Paul's trinitarian conception of God is not at issue but is properly made a presupposition in the interpretation of 1 Cor 15:45.

¹¹ This is the also the view of the other writers cited above in n. 4. A growing number of exegetes currently argue that "the Lord" in v. 17a applies Exodus 34:34, just cited in v.16, to the Spirit, and they minimize or even eliminate any christological reference from vv. 17b-18; e.g., L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory* (Sheffield, 1991), 256ff.; J. Dunn, "2 Corinthians III. 17—"The Lord Is the Spirit,"" *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., 31/2 (Oct. 1970), 309-20; Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 311-14; S. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel* (Tübingen, 1995), 396-400; R. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, 1989), 143-4; N. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh, 1991), 183-84. But v. 17b ("the Spirit of the Lord") already distinguishes between "the Spirit" and "the Lord," so that the latter likely refers to Christ, in the light of what immediately follows in v. 18. There, "the glory of the Lord" is surely not the glory of the Spirit in distinction from Christ, but the glory of Christ; in beholding/reflecting that glory, Paul continues, believers are being transformed into "the same image," and that image can only be the glory-image of the exalted Christ. In the verses that follow, 4:4 ("the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God"), especially, points to that conclusion (note as well Rom 8:29 and 1 Cor 15:49). The only transforming glory believers behold "with unveiled faces," which Paul knows of, is "the glory of God in the [gospel-]face of Christ" (4:6), mediated, to be sure, to and within them by the Spirit.

¹² We may say that the "is" (εστιν) of 2 Cor 3:17 is based on the 'became' of 1 Cor 15:45.

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the same reality in its full dimensions. There is no relationship with Christ that is not also fellowship with the Spirit; the presence of the Spirit is the presence of Christ; to belong to Christ is to be possessed by the Spirit.

This congruence is so, in our experience, not because of some more or less arbitrary divine arrangement, but preeminently because of what is true prior to our experience, in the experience of Christ—because of who the Spirit now is, “the Spirit of Christ” (9c), and who Christ has become, “the life-giving Spirit.”¹³ So, elsewhere, for “you to be strengthened by [the] Spirit inwardly” is for “Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:16-17).

7

The Spirit as ‘vicar’ of Christ

We may go on to note briefly that the statements of Paul so far considered connect with and reinforce emphases present in the teaching of Jesus. In John 14:12ff. the imminent departure-ascension of Jesus (“because I go to the Father,” v. 12; cf. 20:17) will entail, at the request of the ascended Jesus, the Father’s giving the Spirit to the disciples¹⁴ (v. 16).¹⁵ The before and after of the Spirit’s presence in view pivots on Jesus’ glorification; the former is a function of the latter (cf. 7:39). Pentecost¹⁶ has the same epochal, once-for-all significance as Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

This promised sending of the Spirit (14:16-17), however, carries with it another promise. “I,” Jesus continues (v. 18), “will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” In context, this almost surely means that the coming of the Spirit in view, as such, involves the coming of Jesus himself. Jesus’ departure is not a loss but “profitable” (16:7), because the

¹³ That Paul does not intend an absolute identity, denying the personal distinction between Christ and the Spirit, is clear later on in this passage: the Spirit’s interceding here, within believers (vv. 26-7), is distinguished from the complementary intercession of the ascended Christ there, at God’s right hand (v. 34).

¹⁴ It is important to keep in mind that the “you” addressed throughout this passage is not all believers indiscriminately, irrespective of time and place, but those who “were with me from the beginning” (15:26), who “now,” at the time of Jesus’ speaking, are “not able to bear” the “many things” he “still” has to say to them (16:12). To them, proximately, Jesus fulfills the promise to send the Spirit (20:22) and so, through that sending, to the church in all ages.

¹⁵ Cf. v. 26: “whom the Father will send in my name”; 15:26: “whom I will send to you from the Father”. This arrangement was intimated earlier in 7:39: “For the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

¹⁶ I will have to leave to the side here the relationship of the “Johannine Pentecost” (20:22) to Acts 2; see my *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1979), 39-41.

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consequent sending of the Spirit is also his own return; in this sense, his going (bodily) is his coming (in the person of the Spirit).¹⁷

The Spirit, then, we may say, is the “vicar” of Christ. As “the Spirit of truth,” he has no agenda of his own; his role in the church is basically self-effacing and Christ-enhancing (16:13-14 especially point to that), so much so that his presence in the church is, vicariously, the presence of the ascended Jesus.

In a virtually identical vein, the now *resurrected* Jesus who, as such, has been “given”¹⁸ universal authority and power (*exousia*), declares in the well-known words that sanction the Great Commission: “I am with you always until the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). This declaration is best read not—at least not primarily—as an affirmation of divine omnipresence but as a promise of Pentecost and its enduring consequences. Again, the presence of the Spirit is the presence of Christ; Jesus will be with the church to the very end in the power of the Spirit. If Pentecost means anything, then, it means the exalted Jesus is here to stay, to be with his church, permanently.

It is hardly an invalid reading of Pauline (or Johannine) theology into Luke-Acts to recognize similar emphases there. Briefly, the overlap between the close of the Gospel (24:44ff.) and the beginning of Acts (1:3-11) is calculated to show that during the forty-day interim until his ascension, the resurrected Jesus taught the apostles (Acts 1:2), from the Old Testament (Luke 24:44-47), that the recent and impending events concerning him are epochal, decisive junctures in the coming of the kingdom of God (cf. esp. Acts 1:3); his sending/baptizing with the Spirit on Pentecost is as climactic an event, and as essential to the messianic work of salvation foreseen in the Old Testament, as are Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

Peter reinforces that point, in fact it is a major emphasis, toward the close of his (essentially Christ-centered) Pentecost sermon. In Acts 2:32-33, following out of his focus on the earthly activity, death and especially the resurrection of Jesus (vv. 22-31), he closely conjoins, in sequence: resurrection—ascension—reception of the Spirit¹⁹—outpouring of the Spirit. The last, Pentecost, is coordinate with the other events, conjoined with them in

¹⁷ The second coming or, alternatively, his brief, temporary resurrection appearances hardly qualify as this coming, which from the immediate context (vv. 17-23) is at the very least closely conjoined (if not identical) with the imminent (“in a little while,” v. 19) dwelling/showing/ being of the Spirit (and the Father, v. 23) in/to/with believers, in distinction from the world.

¹⁸ That is, power he did not have previously but now does, as a result of the resurrection.

¹⁹ This reception is not in conflict with what Luke has previously reported: that Jesus already received the Spirit at the Jordan (Luke 3:22) and even at conception (1:35). Involved is a staging or heightening principle that finds its climactic realization in the ascension (along with its reflex—the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost).

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an especially intimate way; it is climactic and final on the order that they are; it is no more capable of being a repeatable paradigm event than they are. Resurrection—ascension—Pentecost, though temporally distinct, constitute a unified complex of events, a once-for-all, redemptive-historical unity, such that they are inseparable; the one is given with the others.

With this we have come full circle; back, in effect, to 1 Corinthians 15:45. The sequence Peter delineates in Acts 2:32-33 Paul telescopes by saying that Christ, as resurrected and ascended, has become “the life-giving Spirit.”

1:6. Pentecost as part of *historia salutis*

Pentecost, then, is an event, an integral event, in the *historia salutis*, not an aspect of the *ordo salutis*; Pentecost has its place in the once-for-all, completed accomplishment of redemption, not in its ongoing application or as a paradigm for individual Christian experience. To assess the primary significance of Pentecost as an empowering or gifting experience enjoyed by some believers in distinction from others and “beyond” salvation seen as the forgiveness of sins, as happens in the charismatic movement and elsewhere,²⁰ is seriously inadequate. Such an appraisal in fact makes too little, not too much, of Pentecost. There is nothing “second order,” or “subsidiary,” or “additional” about Pentecost.

In fact, without Pentecost there is no salvation. Period. Why? Because without what Pentecost documents the definitive, unrepeatable work of Christ for our salvation is incomplete. The task set before Christ was not only to secure the remission of sin but, more ultimately, as the grand outcome of his Atonement, life as well (e.g., John 10:10; 2 Tim 1:10)—eternal, eschatological, resurrection life, or, in other words, life in the Spirit.²¹ Without that life “salvation” is obviously not only truncated but meaningless. And it is just that life, that completed salvation, and Christ as its giver²² that is openly revealed at Pentecost. Pentecost publicly attests the finality and full sufficiency of Christ’s saving work, that he has become “the life-giving Spirit.” Pentecost is the redemptive-historical Spirit-seal (cf. Eph. 1:13) of Christ to the church on the forgiveness and eschatological life secured in his death, resurrection, and ascension.

²⁰ So, e.g., J. Williams, *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1990), 2: 177, 189, and esp. 205-07.

²¹ Paul’s metaphors for the Spirit as “deposit” (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14) and “firstfruits” (Rom 8:23), especially, highlight the inherently eschatological nature of his presence and work in the church and within believers.

²² Christ, not the Spirit, it should not be overlooked, is the active subject on Pentecost (just as John prophesied, Luke 3:16).

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Pentecost, along with the resurrection and ascension, marks Christ out as having received the Spirit—as the result of and reward for his obedience unto death (cf. Phil 2:8-9)—in order to give the Spirit (Acts 2:33); Pentecost shows the exalted Jesus to be the messianic receiver-giver of the Spirit. The soteriological “newness” of Pentecost, to use more formal, explicitly doctrinal terms, is not—at least not in the first place—anthropological-individual-experiential but christological and ecclesiological-missiological. Pentecost means two things especially: 1) The Spirit is now present, at last and permanently, on the basis of the finished work of Christ; he is the *eschatological* Spirit. 2) The Spirit is now “poured out on all flesh” (Acts 2:17), Gentiles as well as Jews; he is the universal Spirit.²³

The difference, then, that Pentecost makes is primarily a difference for *Christ*, not believers. A contrasting profile emerges so far as the before and after of Pentecost are concerned: from the angle of *historia salutis* there is a radical, night-and-day, virtually all-or-nothing difference. Everything is staked on Christ’s actual accomplishment of salvation; before Christ there is nothing, after his coming and work, everything. From the angle of *ordo salutis*, however, there is essential continuity. Before and after differences (old and new covenants) in experiencing the Spirit there no doubt are. But, as far as I can see, Scripture is not particularly concerned to spell them out. Such differences resist neat, clear categorization and can only be loosely captured by terms like “better”²⁴ or “enlarged,” “greater,” “fuller.”²⁵

In this connection it strikes me that Pentecostal/charismatic authors have remarkably little to say about the closing words of Luke’s Gospel (24:52-53). This, after all, is the note Luke chooses to end on, the impression he wishes to leave with Theophilus until Part Two arrives. This closing includes the following elements: the apostles and other disciples (v. 33), now, since their contact with the resurrected and just ascended Jesus, with hearts inflamed (v. 32) and minds opened (v. 45), worshipping “with great joy,” and “praising God,” “continually” and publicly (“in the temple”). All this sounds fairly impressive to me, and is in full continuity with their (Spirit-filled) experience after Pentecost. This is just one more indication how little the primary point of Pentecost is individual Christian experience or empowerment, postconversion or otherwise.²⁶

²³ See my *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 13-41.

²⁴ Suggested by the writer of Hebrews’ comparison between old and new covenants (e.g., 11:40).

²⁵ Comparatives used by the Westminster Confession of Faith (20:1) in describing Christian liberty.

²⁶ But what about the experience, undeniable and undeniably remarkable, of the 120 at Pentecost and of others subsequently involved in the rest of what is best viewed as the Pentecost event-complex, recorded in Acts (8:14ff.; 10:44-48. /11:15-18; 19:1-7)? Here I can only touch on this much-debated question by suggesting that the inclination, present especially in the charismatic movement, to take these experiences in Acts as providing enduring, normative models of individual empowerment, distinct from or even subsequent to conversion, stems from the failure, in effect, to distinguish adequately between *historia salutis*

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Finally here, in its climactically Christ-centered significance, Pentecost fulfills “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4; cf. 2:33; Luke 24:49). This identification gives our salvation-historical outlook on Pentecost its full breadth. Pentecost is the fulfillment of that promise at the core of all old covenant expectation, the primeval promise that shaped the subsequent course and outcome of covenant history—the promise to Abraham that in him all peoples would be blessed (Gen 12:2-3). That is how Paul, for one, views Pentecost in Galatians 3:14: through the redemption accomplished by Christ, “the promise of the Spirit” is at the very least integral, perhaps even identical,²⁷ to “the blessing of Abraham” come to the Gentiles.

All in all—from a full, trinitarian perspective—Pentecost points to the epochal fulfillment of the ultimate design and expectation of God’s covenant purposes: God in the midst of his people in triune fullness. Pentecost brings to the church the initial, “firstfruits” (cf. Rom 8:23) realization of the Emmanuel principle on an irrevocable because eschatological scale.

1:7. The experience of the Spirit

The impression is widespread, particularly within the charismatic movement, that maintaining the epochal, once-for-all, redemptive-historical significance of Pentecost

and *ordo salutis*. In the event-complex of Acts 2:32-33, for instance, it is at the very least anomalous to view one event (Pentecost) as a repeatable model for individual Christian experience and the other three (resurrection, ascension and reception of the Spirit) as nonrepeatable, once-for-all events. (Too often Acts is mined for experiential models, as a more or less loose anthology of vignettes from “the good old days when Christians were *really* Christians.”) In fact Acts documents, just as Jesus foretold (1:8) and as Luke makes clear enough, a *completed* history, a unique epoch in the history of redemption—the once-for-all, apostolic spread of the gospel “to the ends of the earth,” from Israel to the nations (v. 8 is not a promise to all believers or to every generation of the church indiscriminately but proximately to the apostles; the concrete antecedent of “you” (ὤμας) in v. 8 is “the apostles” (τοῖς ἀποστόλοις) in v. 2); cf. also the parallelism of “Gentiles” and “ends of the earth” in Isa 49:6 cited in 13:47). In Col 1:6, 23 Paul hints at the completion of this world-wide, *apostolic* expansion of the church through his own ministry (a completed expansion open, of course, to the postapostolic future beyond).

Undoubtedly, the empowering experience of the disciples at Pentecost, for instance, was postconversion. But that was because it was part of the unique experience, marked by attesting signs and wonders (cf. Heb 2:3-4), of that generation of the church, of which by the nature of the case there could only be one. Theirs is the experience of those who happened to live at that time, the initiation of “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4), when, once for all, God’s Son actually became incarnate, suffered, died, was raised, ascended, and, inseparably and in consequence, sent the Holy Spirit to the church. “Their experience is epoch-crossing, and consequently atypical and non-paradigmatic in nature” (S. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* [Leicester, 1996], 80; see also *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 22-28; R. Gaffin, Jr. in ed. W. Grudem, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids, 1996), 37-41.

²⁷ Depending on how exactly the two purpose clauses are to be related. Note the citation of the promise of the covenant, Gen 12:3, in v. 8.

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means denying that the Holy Spirit baptism has any experiential significance or implications. That impression, however, would be the farthest from the truth. Undeniably, the Spirit come at Pentecost is the author of varied and profound experiential realities in believers; as such, he is the source of not just some but *all* Christian experience. There can be no question from the viewpoint of the New Testament: not to experience the Spirit—in a vital, transforming, and thus powerful way—is not to have the Spirit at all. That is not, or at least should not be, at issue between the Reformed tradition and the charismatic movement, nor within the Reformed community.

1 Corinthians 12:13 points to the individual believer's share in the Spirit come at Pentecost. This, the one New Testament reference, apart from those in Luke-Acts, to being "baptized with²⁸ the Spirit," shows how the epochal, once-for-all event (*historia salutis*) subsequently becomes effective in the life of the believer (*ordo salutis*). Two points are plain: (1) "All" (in Christ's body, the church, cf. v. 12), not just some, have been Spirit-baptized; "all" have a share in the Pentecostal gift. (2) That experience takes place at the point of coming "into" the fellowship of Christ's body (that is, at conversion), not subsequently.²⁹

Something of the full range of experience that flows from sharing in this gift is captured especially by Paul's command (to the church) to be "filled" with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). As the (present tense) form of this imperative in Greek makes clear, this "filling" presence of the Spirit is to be an ongoing, ever-repeated concern for every believer. And as the verses that immediately follow show (5:19-6:9),³⁰ in the ebb and flow that varies from believer to believer, this filling is (to be) an all-controlling dynamic that transforms attitudes and actions in every area of life—in worship and interpersonal relations within the church, in marriage and the family, on the job. Elsewhere, believers are to seek the Spirit's diverse and well-apportioned gifts constantly given for the edification and mission of the church (e.g., Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-11, 28-31; Eph 4:7-13). Negatively, believers are exhorted against "grieving" (Eph 4:30) and "extinguishing" (1 Thess 5:19) the ongoing work of the Spirit in the church as real dangers.

²⁸ The preposition *εν* here almost certainly has the sense "with" or "in," referring to the element of baptism, not the instrumental sense "by"; see, e.g., the Pentecostal commentator G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 1987), 605-6.

²⁹ It appears that increasingly even Pentecostal commentators recognize that Holy Spirit baptism as a distinct postconversion experience is not taught here; see, e.g., the clear-headed exegesis of Fee, *First Corinthians*, 603-6; *Empowering Presence*, 178-82.

³⁰ In the flow of the discourse, the four participial clauses in vv. 19-21 expand on "be filled with the Spirit" (v. 18), and vv. 22-6:9., in turn, elaborate the fourth, "being subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (v. 21).

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These observations may, and need to be, developed much more extensively than I am able to do here. But I hope they at least suffice to show that emphasizing the once-for-all, christological significance of Pentecost is not at odds with recognizing, indeed emphasizing, that the Spirit come at Pentecost is the source of Christian experience. Pentecost, in its significance for Christian experience, is not to be assessed in terms of some particular aspect(s) of the Spirit's activity, in distinction from other aspects. Rather, Pentecost brings the Spirit in the full range of his activity in the church/within believers, on the basis, as we have seen, of the finished work of Christ and as the culminating fruit of that work.

1:8. Pentecost a once-only event

In this connection we may go on to note that some recent Reformed writers reject the notion that Pentecost is a singular or epochal event in the once-for-all accomplishment of our redemption. In fact, for some their rejection is most emphatic. One of the major conclusions of Prof. van Bruggen, in his address to this Conference in 1989, is that "Being baptized with the Holy Spirit' is not a once-for-all event," a view that earlier in the address he assesses as "impossible."³¹ Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones registers his disapproval in even stronger, more unsparing terms.³²

It seems to me, if I understand these authors correctly, that their rejection rests on a certain degree of misunderstanding which stems, at least in part, from not clearly maintaining the *historia salutis-ordo salutis* distinction. That misunderstanding may be seen from what they see threatened or denied by the notion of Pentecost as a once-for-all event. For van Bruggen, it is that Pentecost (the "being poured out of/being baptized with the Spirit") is "a permanent reality in which believers share again and again and in different ways," "a continuing reality of the work of Jesus Christ in his believers."³³ And Lloyd-Jones draws the surely remarkable (I would have to say for myself, astonishing) conclusion that if Pentecost is a once-for-all event, then "it is very wrong to pray for revival!"³⁴

But why disjunctions like these? They appear to betray a certain misperception of what is intended by the expression "once for all." It is not merely an emphatic synonym for "once." It does not mean, as these authors seem to think, something like "simply having

³¹ ICRC *Proceedings*, 1989, 205, cf. 195, 199.

³² "Today there is a great deal of very loose and dangerous talk and writing about what happened on the day of Pentecost. People accept uncritically the explanation that what happened on the day of Pentecost was once and for all and never to be repeated" (*Revival* [Westchester, IL, 1982], 15). The same rejection controls much of the argumentation, I'm informed, in Y. P. Chah, *The Future of Korean Reformed Theology* (in Korean); see also the criticisms of J. Byun, *The Holy Spirit Was Not Yet* (Kampen, 1992), 105-6.

³³ ICRC *Proceedings*, 1989, 200, 204.

³⁴ *Revival*, 15.

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happened in the past with no consequences for the present.” That is no more true of Christ’s baptizing with the Spirit than it is for his death, resurrection, and ascension, with which (especially the ascension), as we have seen (Acts 2:32-33), Pentecost forms a single event-complex. The accent here falls on “once-for-allness,” on the reality enduring for all times and places of what has taken place definitively and unrepeatably in the past.³⁵ In fact, it is just the-once-all nature of Pentecost that guarantees the *permanent* presence of the Spirit in the church and within *every* believer, in all of his rich and varied activity (cf. again 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13- 14).³⁶

In terms of the covenantal structure of the Christian life, Holy Spirit baptism is an indicative, not an imperative. The New Testament never commands believers to seek to be baptized with the Spirit. Rather, as we were just noting, a share in that baptism is presupposed for every believer (1 Cor 12:13³⁷ [37]), and that they share in the gift of the Spirit come at Pentecost is the absolutely essential basis for exhorting believers concerning *every* aspect of the Spirit’s ongoing activity in their lives.

1:9. Conclusion

All told, then, in its postapostolic era as well, the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church is also the truly Pentecostal church. As such, as Schilder long ago reminded us,³⁸ 38 the church is not to be caught up in a (redemptive-historically anachronistic) “Back to

³⁵ The sense is exactly that of the New Testament use of *απαξ* and *εφαπαξ* applied especially to the death of Christ but also to his ascension, to accent their finality and abiding efficacy (Rom 6:10; Heb 7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10; 1 Pet 3:18; cf. Jude 4).

³⁶ An epochal, once-for-all understanding of Pentecost seems particularly and emphatically clear in chapter 19 of Bavinck’s *Our Reasonable Faith*, which opens with the statement, “The first work which Christ does after His exaltation to the right hand of the Father is to send the Holy Spirit” (386). The elaboration that follows accents the final and definitive nature of this sending. See also esp. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 79-92.

³⁷ According to Van Bruggen, this baptism is the Spirit’s activity in granting diverse gifts to believers (*Proceedings*, 1989, 201). That, it seems to me, is most unlikely. Unity and diversity are certainly equal concerns in chapter 12 taken as a whole—the one body with the many parts. But surely in v. 13, following on the thought of v. 12, the accent is on unity, not diversity (note, e.g., the three-fold occurrence of “one” and the doubly accented “all” in v. 13, with no corresponding terms for diversity). Further, the Spirit’s baptizing activity here is not on those who already have a place in an existing entity, but his action by which they are brought “into” that entity (the “one body”), that is, the action by which they are (initially) united to Christ (cf. v.12); the force of the preposition *εις* may not be glossed over here and made synonymous with a stative “in.” (I should perhaps add here that in my view, the baptism of v. 13a does *not* refer to water baptism, although it is certainly one of the benefits of union with Christ, sealed by water baptism. Also, my view, at least as far as I am aware, has nothing to do with the alien notion of “corporate personality,” imposed on Paul [as Byun, *Holy Spirit*, 107, 108 alleges]).

³⁸ Footnote is missing.

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Pentecost " nostalgia. Its motto, instead, ought to be "Forward from Pentecost ... in the Christ-conforming power of the life-giving Spirit."

PART II

THE QUESTION OF CESSATION

15

An issue that continues, in large part, to divide between the Reformed tradition and the charismatic movement is whether certain gifts of the Spirit, essential to distinctive charismatic spirituality, are present in the church today. Specifically, the debate focuses on prophecy and tongues, and, to a lesser extent, the gift of healing.³⁹ With the complexity of this issue and the time limits on us here in view, I confine myself to some reflections on the disagreement currently present within the Reformed community as to whether a credible case can be made from Scripture, with the passing of the apostles from the life of the church, for the cessation of these gifts, particularly prophecy.

2:1. Objections to cessationism

A number of Reformed writers hold that such a case cannot be made and that we should be open, in varying degrees, to the possibility or perhaps even expect that one or more of these gifts may occasionally be given today.⁴⁰ Further, and more significantly, in 1991 the synod of the Reformed Churches of Australia adopted, and subsequently has acted to defend, the view that prophecy continues today, and so may be expected and sought.⁴¹

³⁹ If it is necessary to say so here, the issue is not whether all spiritual gifts have ceased; they have not (what is at issue is whether or not revelatory word gifts continue). Even less is the issue that all who hold to the cessation of gifts, like prophecy and tongues, do so because they are trapped in an Enlightenment, deistic mind-set that has no place for the direct, supernatural activity of God in creation or within believers (although that may be true of some cessationists). No work of the Spirit, I take it, is more radical, more impressive, more miraculous, and more thoroughly supernatural, than the work he does—now, today, a work of nothing less than resurrecting people who are nothing less than "dead in transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1, 5). Beyond any human capacity—rational-reflective, intuitive-mystical, or otherwise—he makes them "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). Also not at issue is whether God heals today in medically hopeless situations, in response to the prayers of his people (cf. Jam 5:14ff.), only whether the gift of healing is given today to some, in distinction from others.

⁴⁰ E.g., L. Floor, *Heilige Gees*, 96-100/*Die doop met de Heilige Geest* (Kampen, 1982), 179-85, W. Jonker, *Die Gees van Christus* (Pretoria, 1981), 228-36, 242-45; J. Maris, *Geloof en Ervaring—van Wesley tot de Pinksterbeweging* (Leiden, 1992), 243-50; cf. J. Versteeg, *Het gebed volgens het Nieuwe Testament* (Amsterdam, 1976), 58-61.

⁴¹ The Pastoral Guidelines adopted by the synod and the report ("Word and Spirit") on which they are based, are perhaps most easily accessible in the *Theological Forum* of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, vol. XX/2&3 (Sept. 1992): 2-48. This double issue also includes a Response I was asked to provide (49-56).

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An overall objection to the argument for cessation is that “it is clearly a too-simple and too-mechanical conception of things.”⁴² Such a “strep-theologie,” as it has been labeled, involves positing a discontinuity, a break, between the apostolic and postapostolic periods of the church that draws more from the New Testament than it will bear. More particularly, substantial objection is taken to the view of most cessationists that the continuation of prophecy in the church today would undermine the sufficiency and completeness of the biblical canon. To the contrary, these noncessationists maintain, New Testament prophecy is not on a par with existing Scripture or apostolic teaching but has a lower (nonbinding, presumably fallible) authority, so that cessationists are deemed guilty of creating a false and entirely unnecessary dilemma. I respond to these objections here in reverse order.

2:2. A lower view of N. T. prophecy

There are a number of problems with the lower authority view of prophecy which I can do little more than indicate here.⁴³

First, this view does not have an adequate explanation for Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5, where within the apostle’s sweeping outlook (2:11ff.), the prophets are pictured, along with the apostles, as part of the foundation of the (one) church-house being built by the exalted Christ in the period between his resurrection and return.⁴⁴ The (New Testament)

⁴² “Dit is egter klaarblyklik ‘n té eenvoudige ‘n té meganiëse voorstelling van sake” (Jonker, *Die Gees*, 243, who also considers cessationist argumentation to be relatively “*krampagtig*” (“desperate”), 244).

⁴³ The authors cited above (n. 40), apart from Floor, do not so much argue this view as assume it (as more or less self-evident?). Here I interact particularly with the extensive argumentation of W. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL, 1988) and *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1994), 1049-61; cf. 1031-43, which overlaps with Floor and the Report of the Reformed Churches of Australia; among other proponents, D. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, 1987), 91-100; R. Clements, *Word and Spirit. The Bible and the Gift of Prophecy Today* (Leicester, 1986). Special note should be taken here of the extensive critique of Grudem’s views to which Norris Wilson devoted his 1993 paper to this Conference (*Proceedings*, 116-135). My own objections, briefly expressed here, are substantially the same. Among more recent Reformed critiques, see esp. G. Knight, III, *Prophecy In the New Testament* (Dallas, 1988), O. Robertson, *The Final Word* (Edinburgh, 1993), and R. Ward, *Blessed by the Presence of the Spirit* (Melbourne, 1997), 60-67, 81-87.

If prophecy were equivalent to preaching, then obviously there can be no objection to it continuing today. But this often held view of prophecy, I take it, is almost certainly not the (revelatory) gift in view in the New Testament in passages like 1 Cor 12-14, Eph 4. Nor should there be objection, it’s perhaps worth adding here, to what today is often called prophecy—spontaneous, more or less unreflecting Spirit-prompted insight into the application of biblical truth to contemporary needs and situations in the church.

⁴⁴ In view here (as well as in 3:5) are not Old but New Testament prophets, and revelation given through them, along with the apostles, from the vantage point of the realized eschatological endpoint of redemptive history; the concern of the immediate context, 2:11ff., is not the unity/continuity between old and new covenants, but the newness of the new—the inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in the church. This view, I take

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prophets, like the apostles, belong to the (temporary) time of laying the church's foundation, not the period of the superstructure that follows. Specifically, their foundational role, together with the apostles, consists in providing a foundational, once-for-all revelation to the foundational, once-for-all redemption accomplished by the "cornerstone," Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11).⁴⁵

Second, the two explicit instances of nonapostolic prophecy in the New Testament—the prophecies of Agabus in Acts 11:28 and 21:10-11—do not support the view that it was nonbinding and/or fallible.⁴⁶ To the contrary, there is no indication in these passages that Agabus spoke anything less than the inspired word of God. In fact, the lower authority view of prophecy is unable to offer a single supporting New Testament example.

it, is not subject to serious question exegetically; see, e.g., Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 89-92, my *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 93, and, representative of the virtually universal consensus of recent commentators and monographs, A. Lincoln, *Ephesians. Word Biblical Commentary*, 42 (Dallas, 1990), 153. Hardly convincing, in my judgment, is the contrary argumentation of J. Roberts, *Die opbou van die kerk* (Groningen, 1963), 122-129.

Grudem argues at length that here the "prophets" are not the prophets mentioned elsewhere in Paul but the apostles ("apostle-prophets," "apostles who are also prophets," *Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 45-63). ... But, grammatically, that is highly unlikely at best. See esp. D. Wallace, "The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-kai-Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament," *Grace Theological Journal*, 4.1 (1983), 59-84. Nor is it likely contextually; in 4:11, Paul's next reference to prophets, in a related context (concern with the makeup of the church), he clearly distinguishes them from the apostles (4:11; cf. 1 Cor. 12:28).

⁴⁵ This verse is important as indicating the revelatory matrix for the eventual emergence of the completed New Testament canon.

⁴⁶ Grudem, for one, has gone to considerable effort to indict Agabus with (well-intentioned, minor) error in the latter instance (*Gift of Prophecy*, 96-102; *Systematic Theology*, 1052-53; so also Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 97-98.) In general, this attempt suffers from the demand for pedantic precision imposed on Agabus. J. Hilber observes pertinently, "If one's judgment is rigid enough, similar 'errors' in OT predictions can also be cited" ("Diversity of OT Prophetic Phenomena and NT Prophecy," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 56 (1994), 256). Here I can only observe further that Acts 21:11-14 need to be read with an eye to Luke's overall narrative flow, noted above (the worldwide, foundational, apostolic spread of the gospel to include non-Jew as well as Jew). Read in that framework, what transpired at Caesarea, including Agabus's prophecy there, is most naturally read as a fuller account that parallels the tightly compressed description of what was said to Paul earlier at Tyre (v. 4—urged "through the Spirit" not to go on to Jerusalem). For a more extensive response to this view, see *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 65-67.

Both these instances, in turn, illustrate the sweeping truth expressed earlier by Paul himself in giving the Ephesians elders an overall account of his unique ministry: "I know only that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me" (20:23). The fact that on both occasions disciples (perhaps even Agabus himself and others who prophesied) sought to dissuade Paul in no way compromises the Spirit-breathed, infallible truthfulness of what was prophesied. Also, if Agabus made errors, that apparently was lost on Luke. There is no indication that he records this incident other than as it serves his overarching purpose to show the advance of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. What Agabus says is "what the Spirit says to the churches" (cf., e.g., Rev. 2:7).

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Third, some brief comments may be made about several texts frequently offered as evidence that (nonapostolic) prophecy has a lower authority.

In 1 Corinthians 14:29, the passage most often cited in support of the lower authority view, the verb applied to prophecy *diakrino* has a broad semantic range; it may have a variety of senses, depending on the particular context, and may be variously translated (“evaluate,” “test,” “judge,” “weigh”). Here there is nothing in Paul’s usage to demand that, because what is prophesied is subject to “testing,” it is therefore fallible or had a lower authority.⁴⁷

It is difficult to see how 1 Corinthians 14:36a provides convincing evidence of lower authority prophecy. Paul’s question there (“did the word of God originate with you?”) is almost certainly addressed not to the prophets specifically but to the whole church at Corinth, in relation to other churches (see v. 33b). Together with the question in the latter part of the verse, it is “biting rhetoric”;⁴⁸ it has the force of something like “Does the truth begin and end with you?,” “Do you have a corner on the gospel and its implications?”

Nor does Paul’s peremptory command to the prophets in verses 37-38 establish their lower authority. No more than his sharp rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2:11-14 means that the latter did not teach with full, infallible authority when he properly exercised his apostolic office. At issue here (and throughout this passage) is not the *content* of prophecy (and its relative authority), but the *conduct* of those who prophesy.

Of itself 1 Thessalonians 5:20 (“do not treat prophecies with contempt”) does not seem to carry much weight, if for no other reason that in 2 Corinthians 10:10 Paul uses the same verb to describe his opponents derogatory assessment of his preaching, as “beneath contempt” (New English Bible). True, this applies to the formal side of his speaking (his “style”), in distinction from that of his letters, but a disparaging reflection on *content* as well can hardly be eliminated.

⁴⁷ Note that the Bereans “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true,” and are commended for doing so (Acts 17:11). Does that testing mean that what Paul taught them did not have full, infallible, apostolic authority? Hardly. No more, then, does the testing of prophecy mean that it has a lower, less than fully inspired authority. Pertinent here is the substantial semantic overlap, over the entire range of their usage, that exists between the verb “examine” (*anakrinw*) in Acts 17:11 and its cognate *diakrinw* in 1 Cor. 14:29. That overlap, an overlap that includes as well the use of “test” (*dokimazw*) in 1 Thess. 5:21, can be seen most conveniently in the semantic domain analysis of J. Louw & E. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York, 1988), 331-32, 363-64 (esp. sec. 27.44-45, 30.108-09).

⁴⁸ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 710.

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Fourth, 1 Corinthians 12:28, it seems to me, presents the lower authority view of prophecy with a monumental predicament. Here the order is expressed: "... first apostles, second prophets, third teachers," There is general agreement that this ranking has to do with value or usefulness.⁴⁹ If that is so, then the lower authority view is left with the following conclusion: in the church, prophecy, always subject to evaluation as fallible and therefore never binding on anyone, is more useful and edifying than teaching based on God's clear, authoritative, and inerrant word! Prophecy takes precedence over such teaching! An obviously unwanted and unacceptable conclusion, I would hope. Yet how, on this view, can it be avoided?

Finally, virtually all who hold the lower authority view insist that such prophecy as does or may occur today is always subordinate to Scripture and must be tested by it, so that its unimpaired sufficiency and authority is not only not threatened but maintained.

But, we must ask, how will such testing take place? Prophecy in the New Testament (e.g., Agabus), and as it allegedly takes place today, sometimes has a specificity that simply can't be evaluated by existing Scripture. For instance, a particular course of action urged upon an individual or group on the basis, say, of the contents of a dream, can't be judged by the Bible other than where the proposed action would involve violating a biblical commandment.

For the rest, it is a matter of trying to judge "apples" by "oranges." Scripture by its very nature is silent just on those details that give the dream its specific and distinct (and sought-after) "revelatory" significance and appeal.⁵⁰ [50] The tendency of this view, no matter how carefully qualified, is to divert attention from Scripture, particularly in practical and pressing life issues.

2:3. The organic nature of revelation

Rather than it being the cessationist position that is "too mechanical," it is those who hold that prophecy does or at least may, in principle, continue today, I suggest, who have too abstract and too inorganic a conception of the origin and nature of the New Testament canon and so of the role of New Testament prophecy. What this view fails to assess is that the prophetic activity described in the New Testament takes place, by the nature of the case, in an "open canon" situation (relative to our 27 book canon); in other words,

⁴⁹ E.g., Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 190; Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 69.

⁵⁰ Furthermore, unlike the Scriptures (and general revelation), which are always accessible and open to interrogation apart from their interpretations, on this view there is no access to the underlying revelation nor any way to distinguish it from its fallible report/"interpretation" by the one prophesying. Question (which, unless I've missed it, is not really addressed by advocates of this view): why would God reveal himself in such an ambiguous, not to say "inefficient" way?

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prophecy occurs at a time when the New Testament documents were still in the process of being written. To put it another way, the “canon” (=where God’s word may be found) for the church during its foundational, apostolic period was a fluid, evolving entity, made up of three factors: 1) a completed Old Testament; 2) eventual New Testament and other inspired documents, no longer extant (e.g., the “previous letter” mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9), as each was written and then circulated; and 3) an oral apostolic and prophetic voice. Provocatively stated, the church at the time the New Testament was being written, was not and could not yet be committed, as a formal principle, to the *sola Scriptura* of the Reformation; they lived, to be sure, as we do today, by God’s word, but in doing so they lived by a “Scripture plus” principle of revelation and authority. The noncessationist view being considered here, certainly despite its intention and its clear desire to subordinate contemporary prophecy to Scripture, nonetheless takes us back, anachronistically, to the open canon situation of the early church. But that happens without the control of a living apostolate or, apparently, of those with the companion gift mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:10, which most likely functioned for infallibly distinguishing between true and false prophecy.

This view, it remains difficult for me to see otherwise, opens the door to revelation in the life of the church today that is neither (inscripturated) special, redemptive revelation nor general revelation. What is affirmed is a third kind of revelation that goes beyond both. It is more than “revelation” in the sense of the Spirit’s illumination for today of already revealed truth (Eph. 1:17; Phil. 3:15),⁵¹ more than thoughtful reflection and prayerful wrestling, prompted by the Spirit, about contemporary circumstances and problems in the light of Scripture. In view is additional, immediate revelation, that functions, especially where guidance is concerned, beyond Scripture and so unavoidably implies a certain insufficiency in Scripture that needs to be compensated for.⁵²

But God does not reveal himself, as this view would in effect have it, along two tracks— one public, canonical, for the whole people of God, infallible and completed; the other private, to individual persons and groups, fallible and continuing. I do little more than assert that here, but that assertion, I take it, the fabric of Scripture from beginning to end,

⁵¹ The issue, then, is not whether God can be said to “reveal” himself today; of course he does. But in what sense?

⁵² To put my concern here another way, this view blurs the essential difference between being “led” by the Spirit (Rom 8:14) and being “borne” by the Spirit (2 Pet 1:21). The former, the privilege, note, of all, not just some, believers, is not to be confused with the latter, the special, revelatory, redemptive-historical role of some, long since over. To use Calvin’s classic figure of the Bible as the eyeglasses indispensable for understanding ourselves and the rest of creation (e.g., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Philadelphia, 1960], 1:6:1[Vol. 1, 70]; 1:14:1[160]), prophecy, on this view, is an additional lens that enhances vision; it temporarily augments or, on occasion, may even replace the Scripture-lens. That seems a fair assessment, especially in the light of how prophecy is usually understood to function today.

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as a covenant-historical record, massively supports. During this century, especially, I remind us, we have become increasingly aware that the Bible is a redemptive—or covenant-historical record, not a systematic-theological textbook or a manual of ethics (as there has been a long tendency to treat it, at least in practice); it is “not a dogmatic handbook but a historical book full of dramatic interest.”⁵³ But there is need as well to recognize, much more frequently than has so far happened, the redemptive-historical rationale not only for the *content* but also for the *giving* of revelation. Here, once again, the *historia salutis-ordo salutis* distinction proves crucial. Revelatory word is tethered to redemptive deed, in the sense of once-for-all accomplishment, not its ongoing application.⁵⁴ [54] With the completion of the latter (redemption) comes the cessation of the former (revelation).

2:4. The working of the Spirit

Finally, I wish to say here that any sound theology of the Holy Spirit will be left with a certain remainder, an unaccounted-for surplus, an area of mystery. The cessationist position, at least as I wish to maintain and defend it, is least of all driven by a rationalistic discomfort with the supernatural or a desire to have everything tied up in a nice, tidy little package. The truth of John 3:8a, for instance, has to be respected; the sovereign working of the Spirit, like the wind, is ultimately incalculable.

At the same time, however—and this appears to be an increasing danger in our time—we ought not to embrace a kind of “whimsy of the Spirit,” a heightened preoccupation with the unexpected and incalculable and unusual in what he is presently doing in the world. For in his own sovereignty the Spirit has seen fit to circumscribe his activity and to structure what he does today largely according to the patterns revealed in Scripture. Those patterns, not what may take place beyond them, need be and must be our only concern. The truly incalculable in the Spirit’s working today ought to remain just that, unexpected and, more importantly, unsought. Conversely, what can be anticipated ceases to that extent to be unpredictable.

It seems to me that this point is being missed by proponents of the view that the New Testament leaves prophecy an open and live, but no more than optional, possibility today. In the New Testament there is nothing optional or merely possible about prophecy. It was a normal and integral part of church order and life. When God’s people gathered for worship there was nothing unusual about the occurrence of prophecy; it was

⁵³ G. Vos, *Biblical Theology. Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, 1948), 26; “The circle of revelation is not a school, but a ‘covenant’” (17).

⁵⁴ See esp. the comments of Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 14-17; “Revelation is so interwoven with redemption that, unless allowed to consider the latter, it would be suspended in air” (p. 24).

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an expected element in their worship (e.g., 1 Cor 12-14). For the church today prophecy is either mandatory and therefore ought to be sought (1 Cor 14:39), or it has ceased. To entertain some other, presumably more “moderate” option only confuses the church, with the unhealthy consequences I have already tried to indicate.

The cessationist view is accused—I’ve heard it often enough—of trying to “put the Spirit in a box.” But we must not fail to recognize that for now (that is, in the postapostolic era of the church), until Jesus comes, according to Scripture, the Spirit has sovereignly chosen to “box” himself in. The dimensions of this “box” we may never minimize; they are large and liberating, indeed awesome. But, in the freedom of the Spirit, they are fixed. That was the rediscovery granted especially to the Reformation and led, inevitably, to its two-front stance—against the tradition principle of Rome, on the one hand, against the Radical Reformation with its claims of extrabiblical revelations, on the other. On both fronts it asserted what it saw threatened: the inseparability of word and Spirit (*Spiritus cum verbo*), the unbreakable bond between the Spirit’s working and the inscripturated word.

That struggle is not over; it is in fact perennial and carries the potential for undermining the power of the Reformation today. In the name of the Spirit, some continue to place church tradition on a virtual par with Scripture and others claim new revelations and guidance apart from Scripture. Nothing on a par with Scripture and nothing *apart* from Scripture—that remains the critical issue. Of that Reformed churches surely owe it to the Lord of the church continually to remind both themselves and those in the charismatic movement.

“For the church today prophecy is either mandatory and therefore ought to be sought (1 Cor. 14:39), or it has ceased. To entertain some other, presumably more ‘moderate’ option only confuses the church, with the unhealthy consequences I have already tried to indicate.”

Dr. Richard Gaffin

A paper delivered at the International Conference of Reformed Churches, in Seoul, Korea, on October 20, 1997.

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