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"It was he Who Gave Some to be": Toward an Understanding of the Role of the Female Prophet in the Lutheran Church

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"IT WAS HE WHO GAVE SOME TO BE": TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE OF THE FEMALE PROPHET IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

Murphy, Ann I. "'It Was He Who Gave Some To Be': Toward an Understanding of the Role of the Female Prophet in the Lutheran Church." STM thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2014, 131 pp.

This thesis addresses some of the ambiguities and inadequacies in Lutheran theological reflection regarding the prophetic office and attempts to integrate theological constructions pertaining to revelatory spiritual gifts, inspiration, the Ministry, and women's roles in the church so that they more consistently inform one another.

INTRODUCTION

> And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
>
> —Joel 2:28–29

Luther cited the above passage to support his case against the Roman priesthood which did not allow certain people to be priests. Luther believed that Pentecost ushered in a new order where there would no longer be a respect of persons. According to Luther, the prophet Joel spoke about a new age when not just Levites or certain kings and princes would be priests of God. Instead, in this new age "there will be both menservant prophets and maidservant prophets."[1] Therefore social status and gender would no longer be a barrier to the priesthood, and the prophetic spirit would no longer be reserved for a select few. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, prophecy and the gifts of the Spirit would be abundantly imparted to both sexes without partiality. Moses's request, "I wish that the entire Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"[2] becomes a possibility with Pentecost.

We link Joel's prophecy to Pentecost because the apostle Peter quoted Joel's prophecy to explain the events of that day. At the time, Peter did not have a full understanding of the meaning of Joel's prophecy, especially that the Gentiles were to be included in the outpouring of God's Spirit. For Peter, ethnicity, social class, and gender dictated one's lot in life. But things were

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[1] Martin Luther, "Lecture on Joel," in *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi,* ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 18 of *Luther's Works,* ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), 108–09.

[2] Num. 29:11. All Scripture quotations unless otherwise indicated are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version, (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

changing. Joel's prophecy held sweeping ramifications which were only beginning to be comprehended. Many of the disciples resisted the changes being implemented by the Holy Spirit. They struggled to make sense of what God was doing, and what they should be doing as a result.

The prophet Joel pointed to a time when the spiritual gift of prophecy would be sovereignly poured out according to God's grace regardless of one's status or gender. Yet, as Luther indicated, the church of his day, much like the early church, had not fully come to terms with the truth of this impartiality. Today we continue to grapple with the full implication of Joel's prophecy. What does it mean? Does the spiritual gift of prophecy still exist today? If so, how do we define what prophecy is? What is its role in the church? And, if God pours out his prophetic spirit on both males and females equally, what is the role of the female prophet?

Even Luther's commentary on Joel 2:28–29 raises as many questions as it answers. Luther explains this passage means that there will now be both male and female prophets, but he goes on to state that there is no longer any "revelation of the Holy Spirit other than Holy Scripture."[3] At the same time, Luther provides for a continuation of direct revelation, which he refers to as "divine illumination," given to individual believers through dreams, visions, and the gift of prophecy.[4] However, while Luther includes the gift of prophecy under the category of "divine illumination," he continues on to a limited definition of prophecy, describing it as the clear preaching and interpretation of Scripture. In other words, on one hand Luther appears to associate prophecy with "divine illumination," while on the other hand he disassociates prophecy with revelatory spiritual gifts, and instead equates prophecy with well-reasoned sermon preparation and skilled delivery.

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[3] Luther, "Lecture on Joel," 109.

[4] Ibid., 108.

Why Luther makes the jump equating prophets to preachers in his commentary on Joel is not clear. But in many of his other writings Luther also associates the preaching office with prophets and equates prophesying to preaching.[5] That Luther understands Joel to be prophesying regarding prophesying as preaching and teaching becomes clearer as Luther adds in his commentary on Joel that "sons as well as daughters will prophesy and teach without difference" because "to each will be given the authority to teach and preach, neither through man nor by man but divinely by God."[6] In essence, Luther claims that Joel is prophesying that some day every believer will be a prophet, in that they will be preachers and teachers.

But the question must be raised if Joel is indeed prophesying about the gift of prophecy as understood in the Old Testament sense, or the gifts of preaching and teaching as they have come to be defined in the New Testament sense, or if Joel is prophesying that the indwelling Spirit would be available to all who have a right heart, and his gifts, including prophecy, distributed impartially and abundantly. The latter seems the best choice. Prophecy as a spiritual gift bestowed upon all who are members of the priesthood of believers seems too much, regardless of how it might be defined. Paul never says that all believers are endowed with the spiritual gift of prophecy. Rather, Paul states that every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift, but he

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[5]"For the office of preaching as I said before, was exercised by the prophets rather than by the priests." Martin Luther, "Psalm 110," in *Selected Psalms, II,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 13 of *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia 1956), 318; and "The office of preacher or bishop is the highest office, which was held by God's Son himself, and as well by all the apostles, prophets, and patriarchs." Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry III,* ed. Eric W. Gritsch, vol. 41 of *Luther's Works,* ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 359. Luther's assigning of the preaching office to prophets can be seen throughout his writings.

[6] Luther, "Lecture on Joel," 106.

also repeatedly states that some believers will have the gift of prophecy, while others will have different gifts.[7]

The subject of prophecy and the ministry of prophets has also been a somewhat muddled topic historically for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). The LCMS did broach the issue of the female prophet at its 2001 Convention when then President Gerald Kieschnick stated, "I also believe that our Synod should explore the clearly acceptable biblical role of prophetess and its implications for women in the church in the twenty-first century."[8] However, to date this topic has received little formal theological reflection within the LCMS. This thesis suggests that the role of the prophetess poses a problem for the LCMS for three primary reasons. First, the way the LCMS has dealt with the charismatic movement in the past has resulted in a marginalization of spiritual gifts. Second, some Lutheran dogmaticans believe the period of divine inspiration and revelation ended with the closure of the canon, meaning that prophecy understood as a revelatory spiritual gift has also ceased. And third, theological documents relating to the Ministry are at times unclear and inconsistent, or do not specifically address the role of the prophetess.

As a large church body, the preserver of a rigorous Reformation confessionalism,[9] and arguably one of, if not the most influential confessional Lutheran churches in the world, an analysis of LCMS theological reflection on the question of whether a confessional church body can allow for the prophetic office is worthy of attention. This thesis will also serve to help clarify

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[7] "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge . . . to another prophecy." 1 Cor. 7–12; and "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?" 1 Cor. 12:29.

[8] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Convention Proceedings 2001* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2001), 114.

[9] Hermann Sasse, *The Lonely Way—Selected Essays and Letters,* trans. Matthew C. Harrison et al. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2001), 1:54–55.

issues connected to the Ministry. Additionally, the related issues concerning spiritual gifts and the role of women in the church continue to spark interest within the Synod. Finally, as the LCMS furthers its missionary outreach in areas which did not participate significantly in the Enlightenment and where the dogmatic debates of the seventeenth century hold little importance, it may be confronted with a less encumbered experience of spiritual gifts like prophecy.

In Chapter 1 I will set the stage for the present dilemma over prophecy in the Missouri Synod by treating the way charismatic practices and spiritual gifts have been handled in the past. Historically the Missouri Synod has handled the issue of charismatic practices and spiritual gifts poorly. Many of the documents published by The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR) have been either dismissive or sternly critical of spiritual gifts like prophecy. The CTCR produced documents in 1972 and 1977 that maintained most Lutheran theologians believed that prophecy was limited to the apostolic church[10] and that "God has not promised to reveal His will to us directly and immediately (without means), as for example through visions and dreams."[11] One of the primary concerns in these two reports is the theological implication of a second "baptism in the Spirit" on the sufficiency of the means of grace. The CTCR cites the Smalcald Articles "we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through the external Word and sacrament,"[12] and concludes that "it is contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and therefore dangerous to the salvation of men, to teach: . . . God gives guidance and leadership to the church today

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[10] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St Louis, January 1972), 23.

[11] "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, April 1977), 6.

[12] "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," CTCR, 6. The document quotes the "Smalcald Articles" III.VIII.10 from "The Smalcald Articles" (hereafter cited as "SA") in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,* trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Fortress Press: 1959), 313.

through visions and dreams or direct prophecy."[13] Prudence is in order, but this leap in logic is too far. The Bible does not state that God will stop providing guidance to his church supernaturally through prophecy, dreams, or visions. The passage in Joel suggests otherwise.

But the 1972 and 1977 reports side step the significance of prophecy and prophets for the life of the church by asserting the premise that the pattern revealed in Scripture points to the decline and cessation of the more miraculous gifts, such as prophecy. In the 1972 report the CTCR also includes an analysis on 1 Cor. 13:8–10, an important passage dealing with whether prophecy should be understood as continuing or ceasing in the church. But the report's evaluation of this passage is equivocal and undeveloped. On the one hand, the report concludes that if 1 Cor. 13:8–10 is used to advocate for the continuation of charismatic gifts in the church, then also "one must conclude that not only tongues, prophecy and knowledge will continue to exist in the church but also . . . prophets, since they too are included among the spiritual or charismatic gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:28. On the other hand, 1 Cor. 13:8–10 should not be used to prove the opposite" as these passages refer to an "eschatological context and do not prove that such gifts will end with the apostolic age."[14] The report does not develop what Paul means when he says in 1 Cor. 13:9 "for we know in part and prophesy in part," and in verse twelve, "Now I know in part, then I shall know fully." The question is not answered whether it is more correct to say that prophets in the church will only prophesy in part and imperfectly until the last day, or, that the Bible nowhere promises the continuation of New Testament prophecy and thus it has ceased. The report seems to simply desire the second answer. Therefore, while the report

[13] "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," CTCR, 10.

[14] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 28.

acknowledges that the Bible does not explicitly state that prophets will cease in the post-apostolic church, it cautions that

> Lutherans have always believed that through the Word and sacraments the Holy Spirit bestows on the believer *all* the blessings and spiritual gifts that are ours in Christ. . . . Neo-Pentecostal theology, . . . with its claim that God communicates directly with believers through prophecy, visions, tongues, or other means, easily leads to a practical (if not theoretical) diminution of the significance of the means of grace.[15]

The claim made in these two CTCR reports that the spiritual gift of prophecy diminishes the significance of the means of grace is confusing. In its 1972 report the CTCR defines prophecy as "the God-given ability to interpret Scripture correctly and to apply its message of Law and Gospel to the needs of men. It is the gift of expressing what the will of God was in a given situation."[16] "He who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. Such a person edifies the church."[17] Yet at the same time the CTCR states that not only will God not provide guidance to the church today through prophecy, but that it is dangerous to one's salvation to believe God will do this.[18] Following the report's logic, it would seem that in addition to prophecy, all preaching that correctly expresses Law and Gospel could also potentially be harmful to one's salvation. The way the CTCR positively explains and defines prophecy but then proceeds to negatively warn about its dangers does not make sense. Nonetheless, the 1972 and 1977 reports proceed to prohibit prophecy and marginalize other spiritual gifts.

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[15] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 33–34 (emphasis original).

[16] Ibid., 19.

[17] Ibid., 21.

[18] "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," CTCR, 10.

A theological report issued ten years later, "Evangelism and Church Growth with Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement Part I," clarifies that the Confessions do not specifically discuss spiritual gifts but do instruct us that "in matters of salvation" God deals with us through the means of his external Word and sacraments.[19] The report addresses the prophetic office by referencing the Smalcald Articles which state that even prophets received their spiritual gifts "only after God had given them a previous word of promise."[20] Again, the overriding concern is that spiritual gifts be clearly distinguished from the means of grace. However, while on the one hand the report makes a provision for the prophetic office, on the other hand the cessationist assertion previously rendered by the CTCR is nonetheless upheld, namely, that God will not use prophets today to guide and lead the church as this would be "contrary to the Scriptures and dangerous to the salvation of people."[21]

The most recent theological report issued by the CTCR dealing with spiritual gifts likewise holds that New Testament prophets spoke under inspiration and likely engaged in preaching and expounding the Scripture.[22] The report links the prophets referenced in Eph. 2:20 to the New Testament office of prophet listed in Eph. 4:11, but concludes "it is difficult to distinguish with any degree of precision the activities of teachers from those of prophets."[23] Regarding the cessation of spiritual gifts the report states "it is certainly possible that some of the gifts Paul mentions would cease to exist after a period of time, particularly if and when the need for those

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[19] "Evangelism and Church Growth with Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement, Part I" (hereafter cited "Evangelism and Church Growth"), A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, September 1985), 17.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] "Spiritual Gifts," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, September 1994).

[23] Ibid., 26.

particular gifts within the church ceased to exist. . . . This might be the case with such gifts as . . . prophets."[24] Yet, the report warns that "we dare not 'box the Spirit in'"[25] and does not rule out prophets and prophecy, but rather advises that Lutherans need to look to the teachings on vocation to understand the appropriate use of any spiritual gift.[26]

While the 1994 report yields a more open tenor toward spiritual gifts, it nevertheless can not bring itself to commit one way or the other to the continuation of certain spiritual gifts. While granting the possible continuation of prophecy and prophets, the report neither provides reflection on what their continuation might mean for the Missouri Synod, nor does it suggest methods regarding how to incorporate prophecy into the life of the church. In summary, the Missouri Synod's theological reports dealing with spiritual gifts have been inconsistent, confusing, and at times incoherent. My hope is to move beyond the politics of the time to a more theologically coherent and biblically adequate view of prophecy and prophets in the Christian church.

A significant issue for the Missouri Synod related to answering the question regarding the role of the prophetess is its theology of revelation, and the relationship of revelation to inspiration and the Scripture. In Chapter 2 I will discuss how the doctrinal positions related to revelation, inspiration and the Scripture associated with the Lutheran dogmatic tradition have created a problem for the Missouri Synod related to its theological reflection on the continuation of revelatory spiritual gifts such as prophecy. Robert Preus demonstrates that Lutheran dogmaticians from the seventeenth century onward viewed Scripture as inspired revelation, and

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[24] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 18.

[25] Ibid., 30.

[26] Ibid., 47.

inspired revelation as doctrine, and therefore held that inspiration and revelation ceased with the closure of the canon.[27] The cessationist view was primarily a response to the "Scripture plus" principle advanced by Roman Catholic theology which held that tradition, councils, and Popes were not only an additional source of revealed truth, but stood in authority over the Scripture.[28] Responding to Catholic theology, the dogmaticians formulated narrowed views on the doctrines of revelation and inspiration that located these attributes solely with the Scripture and the writers of Scripture, in order to uphold the inerrancy of Lutheran doctrinal propositions. The truncated views of inspiration and revelation associated with the Lutheran dogmatic tradition have created difficulty for the Missouri Synod when it comes to an adequate theological reflection on prophecy and the prophetic office.

Francis Pieper, one of the Missouri Synod's foremost theologians, subscribed to the position of the early dogmaticians and by doing so laid the foundation for the Missouri Synod's cessationalist stance. Pieper held that divine revelation ended with the closure of the canon[29] and maintained that Christ now performs his prophetic office through preachers and teachers who explain and expound the apostolic word.[30] The narrow definitions of revelation and inspiration inherited from the dogmaticians leave little room for the continuation of inspired speech, revelation, and prophets in the church today. If the Missouri Synod acknowledges the continuation of prophecy, its cessationist stance on revelation and inspiration would need some adjustment. Yet, in an interesting twist, following dogmaticians like Quenstedt and Balduin,

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[27] Robert D. Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture,* 2nd ed., Concordia Heritage Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981), 2.

[28] Ibid., 5.

[29] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1:210.

[30] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), 2:339.

Pieper makes an allowance for the continuation of revelation concerning non-doctrinal matters. In this chapter I also discuss whether Pieper's provision for non-doctrinal revelation might be a helpful way to look at the prophetic office today. I then will propose solutions that help make a positive step toward reconciling the continuation of prophecy with the discontinuation of canonical writings.

That prophets and prophecy were important in the early church is clear from the New Testament Scripture. Prophets served a variety of functions and held distinct leadership roles in the church. It certainly appears that Paul assumed that prophetic activity would be a normal and ongoing part of Christian worship.[31] Lutheran confessional documents also include prophets among the gifts that Christ gives to his church,[32] cite and edify contemporary prophecy,[33] and refer to the prophet-speakers in 1 Cor. 14:30–33 as preachers.[34]

The point of departure for the Lutheran Confessions was the Lutheran view on justification by grace which contrasted sharply with Roman Catholicism which relied on prescribed good works for salvation and stressed the objective efficacy of the sacraments. It also contrasted significantly with the Anabaptists and other Enthusiasts "who boast that they have the Spirit

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[31] Acts 13:3–3; 1 Cor. 12–14; 1 Thess. 5:19–21.

[32] See paragraph 26 of the "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope" (hereafter cited as "Tr"). Tr 26 states, "Furthermore, the ministry of the New Testament is . . . scattered throughout the whole world and exists wherever God gives God's gifts: apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers [cf. Eph. 4:11]." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 334. All quotations of the Lutheran Confessions have been taken from this edition. See also Tr 60–67 which cites Jerome who relates that congregations were originally presided over by a pool of presbyters and links this pool of presbyters to the Eph. 4:11 offices. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord,* 340–41.

[33] The "Apology of the Augsburg Confession" (hereafter "Ap") XXVII cites a Fransciscan prophet-monk named John Hilten who was known to have "predicted many things," and who prophesied about a reformer who would "come in the year of our Lord 1516" and destroy the monastic system (Ap XXVII.1–4). "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 277–78.

[34] See Article XXVIII, paragraph 54 of the "Augsburg Confession" (hereafter "AC").

apart from and before contact with the Word" and "without the preaching of the Scriptures."[35] The Smalcald Articles counter these faulty views by stating "it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before."[36] And again, "Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament."[37] Thus, the Confessions offer the corrective that justification and all that follows it spring from "the external Word that comes first."[38] Yet, the Confessions make some distinction between how God deals with us in justification and subsequently in our progress toward sanctification. Frequent mention is made of the new spiritual impulses that the Holy Spirit creates in the reborn.[39] It is precisely because of this new inner word, or spiritual impulse, that "we also begin to love our neighbor"[40] because once we are reborn the Holy Spirit imparts "other gifts" to us that help us walk in God's will.[41] The Solid Declaration adds that subsequent to conversion the believer is impelled by the Holy Spirit and needs to cooperate with the Spirit's guidance and leadings.[42] We are able to do this, although in great weakness, because the Holy Spirit imparts "new powers and gifts" in us at conversion so that we may "do good to the extent that God rules, leads, and guides" us by his

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[35] SA III.VIII.3–6, in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 322.

[36] SA III.VIII.3–6.

[37] SA III.VIII.10.

[38] SA III.VIII.7.

[39] Ap II.35, Ap IV.123–25, 136.

[40] Ap IV.125.

[41] Ap IV.132.

[42] The "Solid Declaration" (hereafter "SD") II.65–66, in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 556.

Holy Spirit.[43] The Confessions teach that no spiritual gift comes before justification. It is only with justification that spiritual gifts are planted in us and then breathed to life as the Holy Spirit continues his work in us. The Solid Declaration goes as far as concluding that differences in Christians will be detected. Some will be stronger "in the Spirit" while others weaker.[44]

If the Scriptures and Confessions allow for the continuation of spiritual gifts and speak of prophets as one of the risen Christ's gifts to his church, then it seems prudent that the nature and purpose of the prophetic ministry should be explored. But the potential existence of an ongoing prophetic ministry also gives rise to numerous issues. For example, what is the role of the prophetic office? How does the ministry of the prophet relate to the ministries of pastors and teachers? Does the distinction between the immediate nature of the prophetic call and the mediate nature of the congregational call effect how the prophetic ministry functions? Further, how is prophetic proclamation to be evaluated? And, importantly for this paper, what do we do with the female prophet?

Because Scripture designates prophets as a distinguished ministry, the question of the role of the prophetess also impinges upon the issue of women's ordination.[45] But Scripture also informs us concerning some of the things women may and may not do in the church,[46] and for this reason the LCMS has remained consistently opposed to the ordination of women.[47]

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[43] SD II.66.

[44] SD II.68.

[45] Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28.

[46] 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12.

[47] See the CTCR report "Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice, Introduction and Part I" (hereafter cited "Women in the Church"), A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, Sept. 1985), 35, which states: "Those statements which direct women to keep silent in the church and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office." This report reaffirmed the position taken in its 1969 report, "Woman Suffrage in the Church, Parts I and II" (hereafter cited "Woman (continued next page)

However, the Missouri Synod's interpretations of key texts used to prohibit women from authoritative speaking in the church have been inconsistent, and their applications varied. For example, while 1 Cor. 14:34 prohibits women from "speaking," the understanding of what "speaking" refers to in this passage has been interpreted by the Missouri Synod in variety of ways, including the prohibition against: preaching, the asking of questions, voting, prophesying, and all speaking whatsoever.

Theological reports on women's roles in the church also view the role of prophets and prophesying differently than theological reports issued on spiritual gifts and the Ministry. While reports on women state that both males and females functioned as prophets, they also conclude that the prophetic role is distinctively different from the pastoral and teaching roles.[48] Meanwhile CTCR reports which deal with the subject of spiritual gifts indicate that it is difficult to distinguish between the roles of teachers and prophets, and that these roles likely overlapped.[49] Yet, while functions of these ministries may overlap, Paul does portray prophets distinct from teachers and pastors by using different terminology to refer to each.[50] But the Bible also suggests that the ministry of the prophet belongs to the whole church community. Like pastors and teachers, prophets also help prepare "God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."[51]

Suffrage in the Church"), A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, (CTCR), (St. Louis, 1969), 2.

[48] "Women in the Church," CTCR, 9.

[49] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 26.

[50] "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?" 1 Cor. 12:29; and "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." Eph. 4:11.

[51] Eph. 4:12.

Theological documents produced by the LCMS related to the office of the Ministry do not adequately address the topic of the prophetic ministry and its relationship to the church. Neither do they specifically address the role of the prophetess. In Chapter 3 I will look at the subject of the female prophet holistically by consulting what the Scriptures, Confessions, early Lutheran Fathers, and significant writings of the Missouri Synod have to say about the office of the Ministry, the role of prophets, and the place of women in the church.

Chapter 4 provides my contribution to the dilemma of the prophetess in the Missouri Synod. In this chapter I will attempt to address positively the issues surrounding the continuation of prophecy and the place of the prophetess in the life of the church. The question will surface whether gender should conflict with, prescribe, nullify, or have no bearing on one's prophetic calling. In Chapter 5 I offer some brief concluding remarks.

In summary, this thesis offers a survey of various LCMS positions on prophecy. Those positions may be characterized in some cases as ambiguous or unclear or contradictory. This thesis also offers a way to categorize LCMS theological reflection involving these positions on prophecy under three major areas: spiritual gifts, canon-based cessationism, and the Ministry. Finally, this thesis argues that there is room in the otherwise ambiguous theological position statements of the LCMS for the gift and office of prophet that refers neither to the pastoral office nor the general privilege of the priesthood of the baptized to speak the Word of God. This office of prophet assumes a view of God's Word which is inclusive of direct revelation which must be subordinated to the biblical Word.

My hope is that a better understanding of the ministry of the prophetess will serve to help us better understand that the "office of the Word" or the "office of the Ministry" includes more than the "pastoral office" which comes through a mediate call. I also hope that a better

understanding of the ministry of the prophetess will serve to clarify and encourage the service of women in the church. My ultimate goal is to carve out the space needed in the Missouri Synod for the exercising of this gift of Christ to his Church, and that I will do so in a biblically and confessionally consistent manner, upholding the truthfulness and authority of Scripture as the norm of faith, and allowing for the actualization of prophecy and the blessing it will bring for the "upbuilding and encouragement and consolation of the church."[52]

[52] 1 Cor. 14:3.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MISSOURI SYNOD'S DEBATE OVER SPIRITUAL GIFTS

As noted in the Introduction, there is a clear discrepancy between the New Testament witness on prophecy and theological accounts of prophecy in the LCMS. On the one hand, the New Testament teaches that prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit and testifies repeatedly that prophets and prophetesses had significant and expected roles in the life of the Church. On the other hand, the subjects of prophecy and prophets have received limited theological development within the Missouri Synod and finds very little if any place in congregational life.

This lack of development is not due simply to ignorance or failure of attention, although there may be a lot of both. Rather, it arises for definite theological reasons. In this chapter we will examine one set of those theological reasons: the prominent negative views on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and also an anxiety about claims to have them.

These negative views and this anxiety were raised and discussed widely in the Missouri Synod in historic debates surrounding the spiritual gifts claimed by the so-called "charismatic movement." The critical evaluation of spiritual gifts and harsh dealings with pastors in the 1960s –1980s who claimed to have received many of the spiritual gifts referenced in the New Testament resulted not only in the marginalization of spiritual gifts, but in some cases even their prohibition.

But the theological arguments advanced during these recent debates reached back to the Reformation itself, especially in its criticism of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is a heresy concerning

the Word of God, and so it is unsurprising that these criticisms of spiritual gifts in general would have a decisive impact on theological accounts of prophecy, prophets, and prophetesses in particular.

In this chapter I will begin by outlining the debate over the charismatic movement in the LCMS in the 1960s. Then I will focus on the evaluations in LCMS documents, examining their positions and arguments and noting specifically what theology of prophecy arises from them. Finally I will offer some conclusions as they pertain to the subjects of prophecy and prophets.

The Charismatic Movement in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

The topic of spiritual gifts became a major issue in the Missouri Synod during the 1960s with the emergence of the charismatic movement especially when it arose among LCMS pastors and congregations.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the precise beginning of the charismatic renewal movement in America, Rev. Dennis J. Bennett drew attention to the inroads the movement was making within mainline denominations when he decided to speak to his Episcopal congregation about his own charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit.[1] Organizations such as the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI), which garnered a following from pastors and parishioners from a wide range of denominations, also served to further the spread of charismatic revivals in the middle and late twentieth century.[2]

The charismatic movement draws its name from the Greek word, *charismata,* the biblical term used for spiritual gifts. The manifestation of spiritual gifts is the characteristic element in

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[1] Dennis J. Bennett, "Personal Story: God's Strength for This Generation," Christian Renewal Associations Inc., http://www.emotionallyfree.org/index.html (accessed December 7, 2013).

[2] Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 53.

the charismatic renewal movement, with speaking in tongues being both the most widely experienced spiritual gift as well as one of the most controversial.[3] The charismatic renewal movement spread so rapidly in the 1960s that *The New York Times* considered it the most important religious phenomenon occurring on the American religious scene.[4]

By the 1960s, calls for charismatic revival were also evident in the congregations of the LCMS. Charismatic pastors within the Missouri Synod held their first renewal gathering in 1968, and by 1971 it was estimated that over two-hundred LCMS pastors claimed charismatic experiences, including the "baptism in the Holy Spirit."[5] Lutheran charismatics described "baptism in the Holy Spirit" as a spiritual infilling where "the Spirit is allowed to express Himself more fully in and through the Christian's life."[6] Some of the most significant LCMS voices at this time included Pastor Rodney Lensch, Dr. Theodore Jungkuntz, and Pastor Delbert Rossin. By 1987 Rossin, with the help of other LCMS charismatics, formed "Renewal in Missouri," or RIM, which garnered much attention as the voice of charismatic renewal in the LCMS. RIM attempted to positively advocate renewal practices with LCMS hierarchy. It also sought to counter Pentecostal stereotypes as well as the biases against supernatural and

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[3] Larry Christensen, "The Charismatic Movement: An Historical and Theological Perspective, Part One: Considering A Remarkable Renewal," Lutheran Renewal, 2009, http://www.lutheranrenewal.org/The_Charismatic_Movement2.pdf (accessed December 8, 2013).

[4] Edward Fiske, "Pentecostals Gain Among Catholics," *New York Times*, November 3, 1970. Referenced in Larry Christensen, "The Charismatic Movement: An Historical and Theological Perspective, Part One: Considering A Remarkable Renewal," Lutheran Renewal 2009, http://www.lutheranrenewal.org/The_Charismatic_Movement2.pdf (accessed December 8, 2013).

[5] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 5.

[6] Ibid., 11.

miraculous gifts. RIM also held national, district, and regional conferences, and issued newsletters and publications about charismatic renewal.[7]

During these tumultuous early years of the charismatic movement in the LCMS, the Missouri Synod continually warned of its dangers, and went as far as preventing charismatic Lutherans from attending seminary and suspending charismatic pastors. Several of the early key leaders in the charismatic movement were pushed out or led to resign from the Missouri Synod.[8] Rodney Lensch, ordained in 1959, ended up resigning in 1969. Don Pfotenhauer, ordained in 1955, was suspended. He, along with approximately half of his congregation, ended up leaving the Missouri Synod. Dr. Theodore Jungkuntz, ordained in 1963 as a parish pastor and a professor at Valparaiso, also ended up leaving the Missouri Synod. Other charismatics found it possible to remain in the Missouri Synod, some quietly, others not so quietly. For example, Rev. Delbert Rossin maintained his synodical affiliation while also chairing RIM from 1987 to 2005. Despite their marginalization, it has been estimated that between the years 1968 and 2000, pastors who claimed charismatic spiritual gifts or were supportive of the movement increased from 44 to over 600.[9]

But the general tenor of the LCMS towards the charismatic movement was negative. Dr. David Scaer, a long-time professor of systematic theology at Concordia Theological Seminary,

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[7] Renewal in Missouri (RIM), "History of RIM," Renewal in Missouri (RIM), http://home.comcast.net/~gracelife/rim/rim.htm (accessed May 20, 2013).

[8] Adam Horneber, "Serving the Renewal or the Ecumenical Movement?—Analysis of the Theology and Practice of 'Lutheran Charismatic Renewal Services' 1972 Until the Present," (1982), 15–19, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, http://www.wlsessays.net/files/HorneberLutheranCharismaticRenewal.pdf (accessed December 12, 2013).

[9] See "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 5, and also RIM, "History of RIM," RIM, http://home.comcast.net/~gracelife/rim/rim.htm (accessed May 20, 2013).

Fort Wayne, summarizes well the official outlook of the Missouri Synod during the 1960s–1980s:

> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has recognized the attractions and the various dangers connected with the Charismatic Movement. The synod through its conventions, its Commission on Theology and Church Relations, and its seminaries has definite policies directed against the movement and attempting to prevent charismatically oriented pastors from entering its ministry. Church leadership has not been inarticulate on this issue. Along with the officially adopted statements of the synod and its agencies, essays have alerted both the clergy and laity to the dangers of the movement.
>
> Lutherans see the charismatic understanding of a direct working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians as a dogmatic violation of their concepts of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Word and Sacrament. On these issues Lutheran theology and the Charismatic Movement are incompatible. Those bound to the Lutheran Confessions have shared a common abhorrence of the movement.[10]

The 1969 Synodical convention directed the CTCR to "make a comprehensive study of the charismatic movement with special emphasis on its exegetical aspects and theological implications."[11] At the heart of the debate was the theological implication of the "baptism of the Spirit" which an estimated two-hundred LCMS pastors claimed to have experienced.[12] By means of this "second" baptism, some claimed that additional spiritual gifts had been imparted to them for ministry. These Lutherans maintained that the various spiritual gifts talked about in Scripture are still being given to Christians today. These gifts include prophecy: "[P]rophecies exist in the church today even as in apostolic times. God still speaks directly to His children,

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[10] David P. Scaer, "The Charismatic Movement as Ecumenical Phenomenon," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, no. 1–2 (1981): 81–83.

[11] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 3. See LCMS *Convention Proceedings 1969,* Resolution 2-23 (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1969), 90.

[12] Ibid., 5.

communicating to them information to guide and direct them in a given situation in temporal matters."[13]

In 1972 the CTCR issued its report, entitled "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," and it was meant to address the tension in the Missouri Synod over certain neo-Pentecostal practices. Of particular concern for our purposes was the report's claim about charismatics that they might hold that communication from God could come "not in connection with the sacraments nor with hearing the written or spoken Word, but at times of prayer or even in dreams."[14] As we will examine at greater length later, this document pressed inconsistently a cessationist view on spiritual gifts.

The controversy over charismatic gifts, however, did not subside. In 1977 the CTCR issued a second document, "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," to reiterate the Missouri Synod's "doctrinal stance" taken in its 1972 report on the charismatic movement. Like the 1972 report, the 1977 report was concerned with the potential theological implications of the "baptism in the Spirit" and points to the cessationist pattern of Scripture and the traditional stance of Lutheran theologians to support the discontinuation of certain spiritual gifts:

> Neither the Scriptures nor the Lutheran Confessions support the view that this gift of the Spirit necessarily includes such extraordinary spiritual gifts as tongues, miracles, miraculous healings, and prophecy (1 Cor. 12). According to the pattern revealed in the Bible, God does not necessarily give His church in all ages the same special gifts. He bestows his blessings according to His good pleasure (1 Cor. 12:11).[15]

In an attempt to reconcile the differences between charismatic Lutherans and the Missouri Synod, three meetings between the Missouri Synod hierarchy and charismatic pastors were held

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[13] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 10.

[14] Ibid.

[15] "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," CTCR, 8.

during 1984–1986. Reconciliation did not occur. The following year fifty-three charismatic Lutherans became "vulnerably visible" and founded RIM in an effort to seek a common theological understanding with the LCMS hierarchy regarding spiritual gifts. According to the RIM website, "It is our view that the majority of the Synod has mostly heard only warnings and negative in put relative to these matters. The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions also have many positive and encouraging things to say on these issues."[16]

The 1989 Wichita Convention directed the Missouri Synod to continue to dialogue with RIM representatives. Three meetings between the two parties were held between 1991–1992, and a list of six affirmations and rejections were mutually agreed upon. The six affirmations were (1) salvation by grace alone through faith alone based on Jesus' atonement for our sin, (2) Scripture as the sole judge of all theologies and experiences, (3) the granting of gifts based on the sovereign discretion of the Holy Spirit, (4) spiritual gifts being for the benefit of the church and not for individual edification, (5) progress toward spiritual maturity seen in spiritual fruit rather than the workings of spiritual gifts, and (6) the possibility that God may equip the church today with the same gifts found in the New Testament church and so we must not "quench the Spirit by neither praying for nor expecting God's presence and power in building His church" but rather be vigilant to test and discern the spirits. Rejected was that (1) spiritual gifts or experiences provide us assurance of salvation, (2) experiences judge Scripture, (3) Scripture teaches that some gifts no longer exist or that all must continue to exist, (4) each congregation must have all gifts mentioned in the New Testament to be spiritually complete, (5) spiritual gifting should result in a prideful spiritual elitism, and (6) if miraculous signs do not occur today

[16] RIM, "History of RIM," RIM, http://home.comcast.net/~gracelife/fim/rim.htm (accessed December 7, 2013).

it is because faith is lacking, and that suffering or prosperity point to God's favor or lack there of.[17]

Moreover, by the 1980s related debates in the LCMS over evangelism and "spiritual gifts" arose. These debates focused around the theology and practices of the so-called "Church Growth Movement." The Church Growth Movement is generally held to be the brainchild of Donald A. McGavran. McGavran was concerned about the lack of converts associated with many missionary programs. Upon returning to the United States after over thirty years as a missionary in India, McGavran founded the Institute of Church Growth. Five years later, in 1965, he moved his Institute to Fuller Seminary where he founded Fuller's School of World Missions.[18] McGavran describes The Church Growth Movement as

> an application of Biblical, theological, anthropological, and sociological principles to congregations and denominations and to their communities in an effort to disciple the greatest number of people for Jesus Christ. Believing that "it is God's will that His Church grow and His lost children be found," Church Growth endeavors to devise strategies, develop objectives, and apply proven principles of growth to individual congregations, to denominations, and to the worldwide Body of Christ.[19]

The basic tenants of this Church Growth Movement elevate evangelism over the means of grace and understand conversion as partially a human responsibility. The utilization of spiritual gifts, methodologies to determine receptivity to Jesus, and strategic planning all serve the primary objective of evangelism and the ability to maximize strategies for optimum church growth.[20]

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[17] RIM, "RIM and Synod Dialogues Move Toward Agreement," RIM, http://home.comcast.net/~gracelife/rim/rim.htm (accessed December 7, 2013). Affirmation 6 is a quote from "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 25.

[18] "Evangelism and Church Growth," CTCR, 20.

[19]Donald McGavran and Win Arn, *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 127–30, quoted in "Evangelism and Church Growth," CTCR, 43.

[20] "Evangelism and Church Growth," CTCR, 21–29.

Out of these discussions and debates came two other relevant CTCR documents. In 1987 the CTCR issued a report entitled "Evangelism and Church Growth with Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement," (hereafter cited "Evangelism and Church Growth") to respond to issues arising in the Missouri Synod concerning charismatic gifts and the Church Growth Movement. This report provides a corrective to previous reports by clarifying that the Confessions do not specifically address spiritual gifts, but instead do instruct clearly that in "matters of salvation" God only deals with us through means.

The most recent theological report issued by the CTCR dealing specifically with spiritual gifts was produced in response to the directive given at the 1989 convention to respond to the continuing question of spiritual gifts in the LCMS, particularly concerns raised related to spiritual gift inventories.[21] This report, "Spiritual Gifts," was published in 1994 and also interacts with the ideas of the Church Growth Movement, particularly those held by C. Peter Wagner. It was produced on the heels of the initial round of meetings between the Missouri Synod and RIM and the six item "Affirm-Reject" statement agreed upon in 1991. After summarizing the basic elements of the Church Growth Movement's take on spiritual gifts and spiritual inventories, the report provides its own biblical analysis of these topics.

Prophecy in View of the Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology

In the Missouri Synod it has been taken for granted that there are gifts of the Holy Spirit, and that prophecy is among them. The obvious evidence for this is the widespread (but not universal) insistence in Lutheran theology—including the LCMS—of cessation, that is, that

[21] LCMS *Convention Proceedings 1989,* Resolution 3-16, "To Study the Subject of Spiritual Gifts" (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1989), 119.

miraculous and revelatory spiritual gifts ceased with the death of the last apostle. This is clearly true of the CTCR reports produced in response to the charismatic movement.

That kind of response, however, amounts to begging the question, as we can see from the inconsistent and conflicting theological statements to support their cessationist claims. The dilemma the Missouri Synod faced over the possibility that all the spiritual gifts referenced in the New Testament might continue to exist today, including revelatory gifts like prophecy, can be seen in the Missouri Synod's first CTCR report on spiritual gifts "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology."

The main position of this report stresses that extraordinary spiritual gifts are not necessary among all churches of all times. The report explains that Lutherans historically have upheld the sufficiency of the means of grace for the equipping of the saints for their mission in the world. "Beyond the Word and sacraments nothing is needed to equip the church for its task, for through them the Spirit gives life, power, and growth to the church."[22] Therefore, an additional "spiritual baptism" is not necessary. "The view of the Lutheran Confessions [is] that the fullness of the Holy Spirit is bestowed on believers when they are converted.... This view recognizes, of course, that the Holy Spirit continues to give His gifts and blessings to believers after their conversion."[23] But the report explains these gifts as means of grace. For this the report cites the Confessions, which state "we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament."[24] It also cautions,

> Lutherans have always believed that through the Word and sacraments the Holy Spirit bestows on the believer *all* the blessings and spiritual gifts that are ours in

[22] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 29.

[23] Ibid., 28.

[24] Ibid., 29.

> Christ. The view that God gives His Holy Spirit apart from the 'external word' is rejected by the Confessions as 'enthusiasm.' Neo-Pentecostal theology, with its emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a new source of power and assurance for the Christian and with its claim that God communicates directly with believers through prophecy, visions, tongues, or other means, easily leads to a practical (if not theoretical) diminution of the significance of the means of grace.[25]

Thus the report argues that these gifts and other special spiritual gifts are unnecessary for a full Christian life, and even suggests that seeking them can be dangerous. Moreover, while recognizing that the Bible does not explicitly state that prophets and prophecy will cease in the post-apostolic church, the document further defends its position by noting also that Lutheran theologians have "rather consistently held that the extraordinary charismatic gifts mentioned in Acts and 1 Corinthians were no longer given after the close of the apostolic age."[26] However, the document does not adopt the cessationist position advanced by some. Its position on gifts in the present age is summarized in this passage:

> It is noteworthy that the Scripture nowhere promises or encourages us to hope that extraordinary charismatic gifts will become the possession of the Christian church throughout the centuries. The pattern set in Scripture may actually indicate the opposite. While gifts of the Spirit are spoken of throughout the Bible, different gifts were given at different times in history depending on the needs of the Kingdom. The church can be sure that the Spirit will grant it those blessings that it will need to build the church, but it will remember that the Lord may have other gifts in mind for His people than those He granted the Christians in apostolic times. The church today must not reason in a manner that would lead us to conclude that because the Holy Spirit gave Samson the ability to fight lions or David the talent to govern, we can therefore expect Him to endow us similarly. The church must not conclude that because the Christian community in apostolic times had members who could speak in tongues, therefore the church today must possess similar gifts or it is somehow incomplete. It must not contend that because the church of the apostles had in its midst those with the ability to perform miracles of healing, therefore the church of the twentieth century must have members with similar gifts or it lacks an essential characteristic of the body of Christ. To be sure, the Lord may choose to give such gifts; but He gives

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[25] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 33–34 (emphasis original).

[26] Ibid., 23.

> to His church according to His good and gracious will and in keeping with His promises.[27]

Turning specifically to its handling of prophecy, the document proves inconclusive about the possibility of prophecy in the present age. In its discussion concerning the continuation of revelatory spiritual gifts the report provides an evaluation of 1 Cor. 13:8–10:

> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

The report issues no definitive conclusion regarding the meaning of this text. Instead, it asserts that this passage cannot be used to prove either the continuation or cessation of charismatic gifts. On the one hand, the report concludes that if 1 Cor. 13:8–10 is used to advocate for the continuation of charismatic gifts, then also "one must conclude that not only tongues, prophecy and knowledge will continue to exist in the church but also . . . prophets, since they too are included among the spiritual or charismatic gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:28. On the other hand, 1 Cor. 13:8–10 should not be used to prove the opposite"[28] as these passages refer to "an eschatological context and do not prove that such gifts will end with the apostolic age."[29] The report does not develop what Paul means when he says in 1 Cor. 13:9, "for we know in part and prophesy in part," and it does not discuss the implications of Paul's statement in verse twelve, "now I know in part, then I shall know fully." Further, the report does not say whether it is more correct to say that prophets in the church will only prophesy in part and imperfectly until the last day, or that the Bible nowhere promises the continuation of the New Testament office of prophet

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[27] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 24.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

and therefore it has ceased. Nonetheless, while the report acknowledges that the Bible does not explicitly state that prophets will cease in the post-apostolic church, it handles this question by relying on Lutheran tradition which holds charismatic gifts have ceased and that the Bible contains no explicit promise for the continuation of certain spiritual gifts.

The report also attempts to solve the interpretive issue surrounding the continuation or cessation of the revelatory gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (1 Cor. 13:8–10) by replacing the phrase in this text "when perfection comes," with the idea "when they have served their purpose,"[30] although acknowledging that "perfection" is to be taken in the eschatological sense.[31] The report surmises that the pattern manifest in Scripture points to the decline and eventual cessation of miraculous gifts like prophecy based on the assumption that there was no longer a need or command from the Lord to use them. For example, the report maintains that Paul focuses on the fruits of the spirit and the less extraordinary spiritual gifts in the qualifications of church leaders, and concludes that that the more spectacular gifts had accomplished their God given purposes during this particular historical point in time and thus disappeared.[32] The report also makes note that our Lord's final instruction in the Great Commission was not inclusive of miraculous gifts. In contrast, "In the New Testament the primary emphasis is that the Spirit equips the church to meet the world's need for the Gospel. . . . For this reason the apostle strongly emphasized the importance of proclaiming Christ in a clear,

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[30] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 21. While maintaining that 1 Cor. 13:8–10 can not be definitively used to prove the continuation or cessation of prophecy, the report later issues the definitive opinion that, "Other gifts of the Spirit such as prophecies, tongues, and knowledge are imperfect and incomplete in this life and shall therefore pass away when they have served their purpose."

[31] Ibid., 24.

[32] Ibid., 16–17. The report provides the following scripture lists as evidence that the more miraculous gifts were in decline: Eph. 4:4–11; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:7–9.

intelligible manner (1 Cor. 14:1–12)."[33] The report concludes that the biblical narratives that speak about miraculous gifts such as prophesy, were given "as historical accounts and without any indication that they are to be considered promises also to future generations," and suggests that the Holy Spirit now equips the church with "the less spectacular gifts" because these are the types of gifts needed for the clear proclamation of the Gospel. [34]

Specifically regarding the role and function of prophecy, the report explains that while prophecy may involve prediction, its primary purpose includes "the God-given ability to interpret Scripture correctly and to apply its message of Law and Gospel to the needs of men. It is the gift of expressing what the will of God was in a given situation."[35] The report acknowledges Paul's preference for prophecy over other spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues, because of its role in the edification of the church. "He who prophesies speaks to men for their up building, encouragement, and consolation. Such a person edifies the church."[36] The report also understands that prophesying may also involve "a testimony" of faith by which an unbeliever may be made aware of his sins with the result that he ends up worshiping God. The report concludes, "Using the gift of prophecy in that way may result in winning people for Christ."[37] Yet, while associating prophecy with preaching and commending it as such, the report concludes: "Neo-Pentecostal theology, . . . with its claim that God communicates directly with believers through prophecy, visions, tongues or other means" is harmful to Lutheran theology.[38]

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[33] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 17.

[34] Ibid., 23.

[35] Ibid., 19.

[36] Ibid., 21.

[37] Ibid., 22.

[38] Ibid., 34.

This reflects concern about enthusiasm, which is the most significant theological issue connected to the topic of prophecy.

The 1977 report reiterates the earlier concern that the charismatic movement fosters enthusiasm, that is, that some Lutherans claim "direct spiritual illumination apart from the Word."[39] As in the earlier document, it seeks to counter the charismatic movement's claim that extraordinary spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophecy are to be expected in churches of all ages. In the case of prophecy, the basic contention is: "God has not promised to reveal His will to us directly and immediately (without means), as for example through visions and dreams."[40] The report does note that in the past God dealt with prophets through dreams and visions. But, while acknowledging the prophetic ministry in principle, the report turns this truth into a reason to look away from all claims of prophecy: "God has revealed his will directly and immediately to the prophets, the apostles, and other holy men of God, and through them He has made His will known also to us."[41]

The fear about claims to prophecy is subjectivism. According to the report, the Confessions speak against "all forms of subjectivism which imply that the Holy Spirit deals directly with a person apart from Word and sacraments."[42] The report cites the Smalcald Articles, "we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through the external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil (SA III, viii, 9–10)."[43] This would seem to be the basis for its later conclusion: "It is

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[39] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 3.

[40] "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," CTCR, 6.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 13.

[43] Ibid., 6.

contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and therefore dangerous to the salvation of men, to teach: ...That God gives guidance and leadership to the church today through visions and dreams or direct prophecy."[44] This claim clearly marginalizes the very idea of prophecy for the contemporary church and stands as a significant issue for any theology of prophecy in the context of the LCMS.

The 1987 CTCR report, "Evangelism and Church Growth," relays that the Holy Spirit "gives Christians gifts of grace, skills and aptitudes" which help them to be God's instruments in bringing the Gospel to the world.[45] But, while the report holds that the utilization of gifts such as teaching, encouraging, and exhorting, are appropriate in the service of the gospel, the utilization of prophetic gifts are not. The report associates gifts related to the prophetic ministry with the Law and therefore in conflict with the means of grace. The report states, "The Lutheran church, therefore, rejects any tendency to confuse Law and Gospel . . . by attempting to build the church with means other than the Word and sacraments."[46] Thus, we should not attempt to use "[the] social gospel, legalism in its popular forms, universalism, miracles of healing, direct revelations through visions and dreams or direct prophecy"[47] to build the church. But the report's position conflicts with statements made in the 1972 report, "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," regarding the role of the prophetic ministry. The 1972 report states that prophecy includes the "God-given ability to interpret Scripture correctly and to apply its message of Law and Gospel to the needs of men. It is the gift of expressing what the will of God was in a given

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[44] "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," CTCR, 10.

[45] "Evangelism and Church Growth," CTCR, 16.

[46] Ibid., 13.

[47] Ibid.

situation."[48] The 1972 report also contends for an evangelistic role for prophecy. When prophets prophesy "which involves a testimony of their faith, and an outsider is present, there is the possibility that the unbeliever will be made conscious of his sin and unbelief. The secret sins of his heart may be revealed, and the result might well be that such a one repents and worships God.... Using the gifts of prophecy in that way may result in winning people for Christ."[49] The evangelistic role attributed to prophecy in the 1972 report contrasts starkly with the claims in the 1987 report that prophecy is not evangelistic, but instead harmful to one's salvation.

The 1987 report addresses the prophetic office by citing the Smalcald Article's explanation of how God calls prophets. God called and endowed prophets "only after God had given them a previous word of promise."[50] Once again, while seeming to make a provision for the prophetic office, ultimately the cessationist assertion previously rendered by the CTCR is upheld and reiterated, that it is "contrary to the Scriptures and dangerous to the salvation of people: . . . to teach 'that God gives guidance and leadership to the church today through visions and dreams or direct prophecy.'"[51] Why prophetic guidance and leadership, which are distinct from "matters of salvation," would be considered harmful to one's salvation is not explained. The report maintains elsewhere that while "strategies" are not a means of grace, the church "has found them to be useful in carrying out its mission program," and "accepts with thanksgiving all methodological insights and wisdom that will enhance and facilitate the proclamation of the

[48] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 19.

[49] Ibid., 22.

[50] "Evangelism and Church Growth," CTCR, 17.

[51] Ibid., 17–18, quoting "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," CTCR, 7.

Word."[52] Why prophetic guidance would be considered harmful while human strategic rationale would be considered beneficial is given no explanation.

The 1994 report "Spiritual Gifts" contrasts markedly with earlier reports. It does not suggest cessationism and leaves room for the continuation of the prophetic ministry. Despite their insistence that God gives gifts to his church according to his sovereign will, the 1977 and 1987 reports nevertheless play down not only the importance but even the possibility of these gifts in churches of the present age. Moreover, the 1987 document warns that it is also "harmful to one's salvation" to believe that God might use prophecy to help lead and guide the church. There are no such comparable statements in the 1994 report. Instead, the 1994 report suggests that there may no longer be a need for certain gifts, but leaves the possibility open.

Significantly, the 1994 report connects the prophets referenced in Eph. 2:20 to the prophets listed in Eph. 4:11. By doing so, this report considers the prophets of the New Testament both foundational to the church as well as possessing revelatory gifts. The report also points out that the New Testament prophet's message was always "to be tested as to its genuineness and truth (1 Thess. 5:21; cf. 1 Cor. 14:37–40)."[53] This also suggests that any contemporary Christian prophecy should neither be looked upon as purely foundational nor be equated with doctrine, but rather be allowed and evaluated.

In its biblical analysis of the prophetic office, the 1994 report concludes that one of the functions of prophets in the early church was the preaching and expounding of Scripture. This agrees with the 1972 report's description of prophets possessing "the God-given ability to

[52] "Evangelism and Church Growth," CTCR, 18, 42–43.

[53] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 26.

interpret Scripture correctly and to apply its message of Law and Gospel to the needs of men."[54] The 1994 report also discusses whether the prophets referenced in the various gift listings could potentially be the fulfillment of Joel 2:28–30. The report notes the potential for the prophethood "to be available to all Christians following the coming of the Spirit in his fullness at Pentecost,"[55] but concludes, based on Eph. 2:20 and 4:11, "that there were some who regularly functioned as prophets and were an identifiable group."[56] Prophets are individuals with personal ministries "whom God has appointed in the church."[57] Yet the report also states that "It is difficult to distinguish with any degree of precision the activities of teachers from those of prophets. Teaching may involve a source less direct than that of prophecy, conveying instead the 'tradition' of the church."[58]

The 1994 report notes that the different gifts discussed in the various gift listings appear ad hoc. The ad hoc nature of the gift listings, coupled with the understanding that God in his sovereignty gives gifts as he wills, is the reason the report understands that the various listings of gifts should not be seen as all encompassing, but illustrative. Therefore, the report concludes that some gifts may cease if no longer needed, while new gifts may appear. In this way the report allows for the possible cessation of the office of prophet, but does not prescribe that it be so. "It is certainly possible that some of the gifts Paul mentions would cease to exist after a period of time, particularly if and when the need for those particular gifts within the church has ceased. . . .

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[54] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 19.

[55] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 26.

[56] Ibid., 26.

[57] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 25.

[58] Ibid., 26.

This might be the case with such gifts as . . . prophets."[59] Yet the report emphasizes that God, in his sovereignty, grants gifts "as he wills" and warns that "we dare not 'box the Spirit in.'"[60] As in other reports, this report likewise cautions that an overemphasis on spiritual gifts could potentially lead to the diminishment of the office of the Ministry and potentially re-characterize the pastoral office as one of equipping and mobilizing the saints, away from administration of the means of grace.

While the report leaves open the possibility of the continuation of prophecy and the prophetic ministry, the report also advises that Lutherans need to look to the teachings on vocation to understand the appropriate use of any spiritual gift.[61] The report also advises, "There is a close relationship between gifts and gifted persons. The lists of gifts include both abilities and persons. Paul speaks of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10) and prophets (1 Cor. 12:28), of teaching and teachers. He moves freely between the two and makes little distinction between them."[62] The report explains, "Spiritual gifts and tasks of the church also go hand in hand. 'Neither gifts without tasks nor tasks without gifts is a tolerable situation. God's call is not merely to privilege, but also to responsibility. There is work to do.'"[63]

"Spiritual Gifts" has a markedly different tone than previous reports on spiritual gifts. In its summary comments the report remarks that spiritual gifts and their role and function in the church have been "neglected areas of the church's life and theology."[64] The report markedly

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[59] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 18.

[60] Ibid., 30.

[61] Ibid., 47.

[62] Boyd Hunt, *Redeemed! Eschatological Redemption and the Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 52, quoted in "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 31.

[63] Ibid., 55, quoted in "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 31.

[64] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 46.

steps away from previous reports and acknowledges the possibility of the continuation of prophecy. However, it stops short of providing practical helps for engaging spiritual gifts in the church. And, while the report insists that "gifts and tasks of the church also go hand in hand," it does not broach the topic of the female prophet.

A concluding word on spiritual gifts and prophecy was provided subsequent to the publication of "Spiritual Gifts" after officials in the Missouri Synod met with RIM three more times. The outcome of these sessions was another "Agree-Reject" statement which was signed by synodical President Dr. A.L. Barry, RIM Chairman Rev. Delbert Rossin, and ten others who attended these meetings.[65] The eight item Agree-Reject statement was seen as a reconciliation between the parties. Agreements included the affirmations that: salvation is promised only through the means of grace, the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows gifts to accomplish His purposes, unity is expressed doctrinally with love, and the Scriptures are sufficient for salvation and as the source and norm for teaching and spiritual knowledge. The final affirmation states,

> "The New Testament speaks of a gift of prophecy that God used on occasions such as those mentioned in Acts 11:27 and Acts 21:10, when He chose to supply practical guidance and helpful information regarding temporal matters to his covenant people. The New Testament also warns about false prophets . . . and exhorts His people to test critically that which purports to come from the Lord."[66]

This final statement also included the rejection "[t]hat a prophecy from God will ever contradict that which is already revealed in Scripture (Deut. 13:1–4; cf. Luther, AE, vol. 24, p. 369) or fail

[65] RIM, "RIM-LCMS Dialogues (A Concluding Report)," RIM, http://home.comcast.net/~gracelife/rim/rim.htm (accessed December 7, 2013).

[66] Ibid.

to be accurate in announcing something concerning the future (Deut. 18:21–22)."[67] Five years after this mutual agreement was reached, RIM issued its final newsletter and closed shop.[68]

Conclusions

In summary, theological reflection on spiritual gifts by the LCMS during the 1960s–1990s that minimizes the presence or use of spiritual gifts is directed against the claim by charismatics that all such spiritual gifts are to be expected in our churches today. While cessationism was the position of many earlier Christians, it is not embraced in CTCR documents. Instead, LCMS documents argue that extraordinary spiritual gifts are not necessary in the churches of every age, but the means of grace are. As a result, we should understand that not all or even any of the special gifts observed among the earliest Christians need be present in churches today. Specific concerns about the continuation of prophecy are rooted in concerns about enthusiasm. However, when dealing with the topic of spiritual gifts more generally ("Spiritual Gifts"), the tenor toward spiritual gifts shifts, and the continued existence of "extraordinary" spiritual gifts like prophecy is viewed more positively. All gifts may continue, but no particular gift is understood to be a requirement for all churches in all times.

The claim in the 1977 report that spiritual gifts such as prophecy are condemned in the Confessions as enthusiasm is given a cursory correction in the 1987 report "Evangelism and Church Growth" which admits that the Confessions do not specifically address spiritual gifts but rather affirm that "in matters of salvation 'we should and must constantly maintain that God will

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[67] RIM, "RIM-LCMS Dialogues (A Concluding Report)," RIM, http://home.comcast.net/~gracelife/rim/rim.htm (accessed December 7, 2013).

[68] RIM, "RIM to Close," *Jesus Alive Today, Final Addition, Newsletter of Renewal in Missouri (RIM)* September 2005, Issue #60, http://home.comcast.net/~gracelife/rim/sept2005.pdf (accessed December 8, 2013).

not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament.'"[69] Neither do the Confessions provide an explicit statement regarding the continuation or cessation of what the Missouri Synod has labeled the more "extraordinary" spiritual gifts. Instead, the Confessions are most concerned with justification by grace through faith and the role of the objective external Word and sacraments in accomplishing this justification. In this way the Confessions provide a corrective to Roman Catholicism and the Enthusiasts. The Confessions do, however, make some distinctions between how God deals with us in justification and subsequently in our progress towards sanctification. For example, the Confessions speak of the new spiritual impulses that the Holy Spirit creates in the reborn.[70] "First, the Spirit reveals Christ, . . . Then he also brings the other gifts: love, prayer, thanksgiving, chastity, endurance, etc."[71] The Apology's inclusion of John Hilten's contemporary prophecy suggests at least some level of openness to prophecy by the confessors.[72]

The CTCR's reports maintain that there is no explicit promise from God that he will continue the extraordinary charismatic gifts, and conclude that certain gifts have passed from the church because there is no longer a need for them. But many of the passages cited to show that the Spirit now equips the church with "the less spectacular gifts" because these are the types of gifts needed for the clear proclamation of the Gospel, actually point to the importance of the prophetic ministry and its usefulness for clear communication and the edification of the church. For example, the report cites 1 Cor. 14:1–12 as an example of Paul's strong emphasis on the "importance of proclaiming Christ in a clear, intelligible manner," but this passage speaks to the

[69] "Evangelism and Church Growth," CTCR, 17, quoting SA III.VIII.10.

[70] Ap II.35, Ap IV.123–25, 136.

[71] Ap IV.132.

[72] Ap XXVII.1–4.

advantages and merits of prophecy for the clear proclamation of the gospel over other spiritual gifts.[73]

While it could be maintained that the Bible does not contain the explicit word "promise" related to the continuation of spiritual gifts, neither does the Bible contain an explicit statement that "God does not promise" to continue to do so. Rather, the New Testament does contain several passages which tell us about the spiritual gifts that the risen Christ gives his church. Among these gifts are prophets and prophecy. Concluding that the prophetic ministry has ceased because its continuation is not explicitly promised in the New Testament is a conclusion based on omission and a matter of strained biblical interpretation. It could just as easily be argued that the numerous references to the prophetic ministry as an important and significant gift to the church from the ascended Lord imply a promise of their continuation, especially in view of 1 Cor. 13:8–12 which locates the cessation of prophecy with the Lord's return. Further, the conclusion that prophecy is no longer needed raises the question, why not? How is prophecy being defined in order to suggest it is no longer needed? How has it been determined that spiritual gifts such as prophecy are no longer needed, while other spiritual gifts, such as mercy and giving continue to be needed, and thus continue to be imparted by the Holy Spirit? CTCR reports jump from the assertion that God has not explicitly promised that prophecy will continue to the conclusion that the gift of prophecy has not only ceased, but that it is in fact harmful to

[73] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 17. Elsewhere this report cites four other passages to indicate that today less spectacular spiritual gifts are bestowed because these gifts focus on the clear communication of the Gospel: Eph. 4:4–11; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:7–9. But the Ephesians and Romans passages specifically reference prophets and prophecy. The 1 Timothy and Titus passages deal with the requisite character traits of church leaders not spiritual gifts. The 1 Cor. 14:1–12 passage cited above refers to Paul's preference of prophecy over tongues.

one's salvation. But one could also argue that there is no explicit promise in Scriptures related to the continuation of the pastoral office unless, perhaps, the promise referenced in Joel 2:28–29 is interpreted as applying to the pastoral or teaching offices. These reports simply make a poor case in substantiating the claim for the discontinuation of prophecy based on the pattern in Scripture and lack of promise. The leap is too far. In light of the way "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology" describes the positive evangelical benefits of prophecy and the role of prophecy in the edification of the church, including the interpreting and application of Scripture, it could be argued that rather than being harmful to one's salvation, the continuation of prophecy would be important for the church in any age.

So what position does the Missouri Synod hold regarding prophecy? The issue has been controversial. Early pronouncements assert the cessation of prophecy, later declare it may continue. Until recently, the negative critique of contemporary prophecy and the dire warnings issued about its harmful effects would seem to have created a rather stifling environment for it.

CHAPTER TWO

REVELATION, INSPIRATION, AND THE WORD OF GOD

One of the significant theological factors behind why the continuation of prophecy in particular, and therefore also the prophetic office, continues to create discomfort for the Missouri Synod relates to its views on revelation and inspiration. These views have created difficulty for the Missouri Synod related to its theological reflection on, and the acceptance of, revelatory spiritual gifts, including prophecy. The view that the divine period of revelation closed with the completion of the canon lies underneath the negative assessment of charismatic spiritual gifts found in the CTCR reports published between 1970 and 1990 that we examined in the previous chapter.

The Missouri Synod's doctrinal stances on revelation and inspiration stem from the Scripture principle[1] of the Lutheran dogmatic tradition. Because prophets receive revelatory information and are understood to speak under inspiration,[2] their continuation is problematic to theological constructions that connect the closure of the canon to the discontinuation of revelation and inspiration. Because of the way that the Missouri Synod has held that Scripture, as the Word of God, is inspired revelation, the continuation of prophetic gifts calls into question its understanding of the nature of Scripture and the purpose of revelation and inspiration. For this reason, many Lutheran dogmaticians rejected continued claims to "modern day revelation" and

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[1] See Preus, *Inspiration,* 1–12 for further explanation of the Lutheran Scripture principle which holds that Scripture is the only source for revealed doctrinal theology.

[2] 2 Sam. 23:2; Mic. 3:8; Acts 13:2; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:21; Heb. 1:1; Rev. 1:10; etc.

held that inspiration and revelation attached only to the biblical canon and its writers. This continues to be the view held by many in the Missouri Synod today.

The fear for anyone (not only Lutherans) who holds a cessationist position could be summed up as: "If the New Testament names more than one revelatory gift—as it apparently does—that opens the possibility that writings by non-apostles could be inspired."[3] For this reason cessationists have ruled New Testament era prophets out of discussion for the possibility of prophecy in present times, and they have done this in two basic ways: either New Testament prophets were not prophets in the Old Testament sense, or they became extinct after they served their purpose in the early church. But both positions are inadequate. The former position cuts off the continuation of the prophetic spirit from the Old Testament into the New. The latter claims a position not found in the New Testament itself, and is dependent upon a human determination of prophetic purpose tied solely to the production of inspired infallible texts. The New Testament, however, nowhere indicates that prophecy was a temporary gift. In fact, as we have noted already, the New Testament shows that it understood the gift of prophecy in line with that of the Old Testament when it saw the new age as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning prophecy, as Peter did on Pentecost (Acts 2, citing Joel 2). Neither does the New Testament indicate that the gift of prophecy was given only for purposes of canonical writings, because the idea of a New Testament canon itself is not present in the New Testament itself. And the New Testament does not teach even that the prophetic charism was given only to the apostles. In fact, as the just-mentioned Acts sermon shows, the gift was for any and all of God's people.

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[3] Robert L. Thomas, "Correlation of Revelatory Spiritual Gifts and NT Canon," *Masters Seminary Journal* (1997): 11.

But if cessationism is an untenable *theoretical* position (it may be a correct *historical* judgment), then any Lutheran theological account of prophecy and the offices of prophets and prophetesses must be coordinated with and consistent with the theology of the Word of God, including the Scriptures. For the theology of the Missouri Synod specifically, the key question is: "How can the Missouri Synod reconcile its claim that revelation ceased with the closure of the canon, while at the same time allow that prophecy may still continue today?" In this chapter I take up this question. My objective is not to provide an exhaustive study of the theology of revelation and inspiration, but rather to offer some observations how the continuation of prophetic revelation can co-exist with the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the normative written Word of God.

Inspiration and Revelation in Lutheran Theology

Francis Pieper is rightly regarded as the most influential dogmatician in the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He was the author of a dogmatic theology that is still required reading in LCMS seminaries, and he was the principal drafter of the "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod," which the LCMS adopted as an official doctrinal statement in 1932.[4] Because of his particular kind of influence, as a touchstone both for the teaching of future pastors and for the doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod, he is also an obviously representative theologian on many topics. This is certainly the case with the topics of biblical inspiration and revelation.

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[4] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950–57); The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod" (St. Louis: Concordia, N.D.); The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "Doctrinal Position on Modern Day Revelation," http://www.lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition (accessed August 21, 2013); and Francis Pieper, "A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod," trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1897). The 1897 version authored by Pieper is the original version of the doctrinal position subsequently adopted by the Missouri Synod.

Pieper is also "representative" because he insisted that faithful theology was a *repristination* theology.[5] For Pieper, "repristination" meant in the first case reproducing the doctrine of the Scriptures, which is why he held "citation theology" to be a good thing.[6] Innovation in theology, by contrast, was vice, not a virtue. Repristination for Pieper also meant following the pattern of thinking and of words of faithful theological forerunners. Chief among these was Martin Luther, but the dogmaticians of Lutheran orthodoxy were also included.

For this reason, it makes sense for our study to examine the theology of the Lutheran tradition that Pieper and, through him and others like him, much of the Missouri Synod consciously sought to repristinate. It also makes sense for our study to take up an important Missouri Synod contribution to this scholarship, and it is very convenient that major studies both of the dogmaticians in general and of their doctrine of Scripture in particular come from another well-known and influential Missouri Synod theologian, Robert Preus, long-time professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and later president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne.[7] As we will see, there is a great deal of consistency between the account of Preus about the dogmaticians of Lutheran orthodoxy and the theology of the Scriptures given by Pieper, which purports to follow the Lutheran dogmaticians.

When turning to Luther, the claim could be made that Luther's understanding of the "preached word" was a charismatic one. Reclaiming the presence of Christ in the preached word

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[5] David R. Scaer, "Francis Pieper," in *Refo500 Academic Studies,* ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, vol. 10 of *Twentieth-Century Lutheran Theologians,* ed. Mark C. Mattes (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 20; Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 1:134.

[6] David R. Scaer, "Francis Pieper," 20–24.

[7] Robert D. Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970). Robert D. Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture,* 2nd ed., Concordia Heritage Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981).

was one of the most significant contributions of Luther's Reformation.[8] Luther believed the oral word was the living, active, and effective word which worked repentance and led to Christ. It can do this, Luther held, because true preaching *is* God's Word. Therefore, when the preacher speaks, Christ is speaking and present. People encounter the self-giving Christ through the proclamation of His self-imparting Word. Robert Preus explains that the dogmaticians concurred that preaching the Gospel "brings Christ Himself to those who hear it."[9] Hermann Sasse says it this way, "The Deus revelatus is hidden under the poor human nature which he did not despise to take upon Himself.... And thus it is in all of His doings.... In the simple human word of preaching the living God speaks to the hearers."[10] For Luther, the Gospel was, in its deepest nature, the oral word addressed personally to the individual, rather than the written form of the Word.[11]

Things changed, however, as the Reformation continued into the seventeenth century. The focus of theology turned to questions about the Scriptures as the Word of God and to their interpretation. In the first case, Lutheran dogmaticians had to defend Lutheran theology to a predominately Catholic Europe. The bloody Thirty Years War ended in 1648, but the division between Protestants and Catholics remained. One of the significant differences between Catholic and Lutheran theology involved the source of authority in the Church. The Catholic Church held that it, through its councils, unwritten traditions, and ultimately the Pope, provided Scripture with its authority. The Lutheran dogmaticians argued that Scripture, rather than unwritten

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[8] Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 13–14.

[9] Preus, *Inspiration,* 191–92.

[10] Herman Sasse, "De Scriptura Sacra: The Doctrine of the Written Word," trans. R. Gehrke, (privately printed, ND), 16.

[11] Ibid., 17.

tradition and decrees of the Pope, is the only authoritative norm for doctrine. They held that "all the things which it is necessary to know about God and the worship of Him have been supernaturally revealed through the means of inspired men in the written Word of God."[12] Because Scripture was inspired, "its authority is above and beyond that of the church . . . it is absolutely divine and authoritative."[13] According to Preus, "Their entire theological position against Rome stood or fell with the doctrine of *sola scriptura.*"[14] Later, with the rise of critical-historical interpretations of the Scriptures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the question of the Bible's authority became even more pressing and the need to respond in depth even more urgent. In their polemics on both fronts, the Lutheran dogmaticians responded with the doctrine of *sola scriptura* and developed a theological account of the Scriptures that emphasized their divine origin, their truthfulness, their authority, and their sufficiency for all matters of faith and life.

This meant, among other things, that the theology of the Word of God focused on the Scriptures. This focus was maintained in the dogmatic theology of Francis Pieper and in the official theology of the LCMS. For this reason, it will be helpful to consider more closely the theology of the dogmaticians on the Scriptures, especially concerning inspiration and revelation.

In the first place, we must recognize that the *inspiration of the Scriptures* was the linchpin in the Lutheran argument. The dogmaticians utilized the doctrine of inspiration to substantiate the divine attributes of the Scripture, including its inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency.

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[12] Preus, *Inspiration,* 2.

[13] Ibid., 98.

[14] Ibid., 93.

What, then, did the dogmaticians think that inspiration was? They understood inspiration as "the act whereby God conveyed to men both the content of that which He wished to be written for man's sake and the very words expressing that content."[15] Inspiration was considered an "'absolutely unique and extraordinary action'"[16] by which God superintended the writing of Scripture. Inspiration "is that which makes Scripture what it is, namely, the Word of God, and is that which distinguished Scripture from all other books."[17] As such, inspiration, it was maintained, could be attached only to Scripture and the process of its composition.

Of course, this was a momentous move, and one that bears directly on the question of this study. Because inspiration attached only to Scripture, the dogmaticians held inspiration ceased with the closure of the canon. Because inspiration was viewed as the Word of God and a form of revelation which occurred concomitant with the writing of Scripture, revelation, it was reasoned, also ceased. In fairness, I should note that some dogmaticians distinguished revelation from inspiration. Preus points out that, for Calov, revelation was understood as the "means by which God speaks to us,"[18] in contrast to inspiration which was "that which makes revelation divine."[19] But a common position has been that inspiration *constituted* revelation. "Revelation is always a communication and therefore a word, a word which is inspired by God."[20] Moreover, while Scripture was considered "a species of the genus revelation," theology "is narrowed down to

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[15] Preus, *Inspiration*, 27.

[16] Ibid, 28, quoting Johnannes Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica sive Systema Theologicum* (Leipzig, 1702), 1:69.

[17] Ibid., 4, quoting Abraham Calov, *Theologia Positiva,* (Wittenberg, 1682), 24.

[18] Ibid., 30, quoting Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata,* (Dresden & Leipzig, 1719), 2:1106.

[19] Ibid., 31, citing Calov, *Systema Iocorum theologicorum* (Wittenberg, 1655–77), 1:280.

[20] Ibid., 30–31.

Scripture as revelation."[21] Following this logic, the dogmaticians reasoned that "with the completion of the canon, immediate revelation ceased."[22] Therefore, Scripture became the "exclusive source" of divine revelation.[23] God will now only speak to us today "mediately through His revealed word in Scripture."[24] The dogmaticians concluded that

> after God had made known to man what was necessary for his salvation and this knowledge had been perfectly inspired in a canon, He ceased revealing Himself immediately. Therefore the church today is to look for the supernatural revelation of God only in Scripture, for outside Scripture and the preached Word there is today no revelation, only false enthusiasm.[25]

It was important for the dogmaticians to argue against Roman Catholic theologians who held that Scripture obtained its authority from the church and could be supplemented by the Pope. Until this time, Lutheran theologians had not dealt with Scripture as its own locus.[26] As Preus explains, "Their primary purpose in expending so much effort on the inspiration of Scripture is not so much to substantiate this doctrine itself, as to employ it in support of these divine properties of Scripture, and especially of the principle of *sola scriptura.*"[27] Once again, the question behind the question about the inspiration of Scripture was authority in the Church. The dogmaticians sought to sustain their conviction of the Scriptures as the sole source for the doctrine of the Church. Indeed, they equated Scripture to doctrine.[28] With this, there simply

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[21] Preus, *Inspiration*, 2.

[22] Ibid., 2.

[23] Ibid., quoting Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (n.p., 1610–25), 2:8.

[24] Ibid., 31, referencing Gerhard, *Loci Theologici,* 2:18.

[25] Ibid., 31–32, referencing Johann Wilhelm Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positiva,* 2nd ed. (Jena, 1704), 70; Gerhard, *Disputationum Theologicarum,* Part 2 (Jena, 1625), 245; Calov, *Systema,* 1:613.

[26] Ibid., 9, 26.

[27] Ibid., 76.

[28] Ibid., 82.

could be "no inerrant, inspired and normative Word of God apart from and in addition to Scripture."[29]

The narrow definitions of revelation and inspiration which tied them to Scripture and Scripture to inerrant doctrine would seem to leave no room for the continuation of prophetic speech. Yet, as Robert Preus notes, when the dogmaticians stated that the Word of God ceased with the closure of the canon, what they meant was "there is today no inerrant, inspired and normative Word of God apart from and in addition to Scripture."[30] Inspiration which resulted in normative doctrine was an "'absolutely unique and extraordinary action'" which related only to the Scriptures.[31] Following Preus's understanding, one does not necessarily have to conclude that all revelation has ceased; the possibility for other revelatory forms of the Word of God remain open. For example, Preus remarks that Calov, while holding that "Scripture is the only source of theology," also understood that "revelation . . . is not confined to Scripture."[32] The dogmaticians certainly held the oral word in preaching was also God's Word. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned efforts of the early dogmaticians against the papacy left doctrines of revelation, inspiration, and the Word of God that were not elaborated with the clarity needed to answer questions about prophecy in the contemporary church.

Inspiration and Revelation in the Theology of the Missouri Synod

Francis Pieper laid the foundation for the Missouri Synod's cessationlist stance by subscribing to the position of the early Lutheran dogmaticians regarding the discontinuation of

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[29] Preus, *Inspiration*, 23.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 28, quoting Questedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica sive Systema Theologicum,* 1:69.

[32] Ibid., 32n2, referencing Calov, *Systema*, 1:773.

biblical revelation. Pieper addresses the topic of modern day revelation, prophecy, and the prophetic office in *Christian Dogmatics.* In his arguments for a closed canon, Pieper asserts that "the period of divine revelation" ended with the apostles.[33] According to Pieper, only the apostles could possess prophetic revelatory gifts. Pieper held that New Testament prophets were a different class of prophet from those of the Old Testament and he rejected the idea that New Testament prophets spoke under a "special influence of God" because their messages were subject to testing to see if they aligned with the "words of the Apostles and Prophets (Eph. 2:20)."[34] Citing Eph. 2:20, Pieper claimed that the apostles stood in the place of the Old Testament prophets. Therefore, those referred to as "prophets" in the New Testament were simply proclaimers and interpreters of the apostolic word. According to Pieper, unlike their counterparts in the Old Testament, New Testament prophets did not receive divine revelations, because revelation equated to doctrine, and Pieper believed it was impossible for Scripture to be "explained, corrected, and supplemented" through subsequent revelation.[35] "With the Word of the New Testament Apostles, God's revelation of the doctrine to His Church is entirely complete."[36] "Our Lord and His Apostles hold out no promise to us that there will continue to be ever-new revelations; . . . the period of divine revelation is closed."[37] Continuing revelation would either be superfluous or negate the sufficiency of Scripture. Thus, unlike the prophets of the Old Testament, New Testament prophets neither wrote Scripture nor received revelation

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[33] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 1:210.

[34] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 2:451n85.

[35] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 1:207.

[36] "Modern Day Revelation," The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=4938, (accessed March 11, 2011). This position statement regarding contemporary revelation had been on the Missouri Synod's website for several years. It relies on Dr. Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1:129–30.

[37] Ibid.

regarding doctrine. "In the time of the New Testament God added the writings of the Apostles to the books of the Prophets as the foundation of faith"[38] so that now "God's revelation of the doctrine to His Church is entirely completed . . . making the Word of his Apostles the basis of faith for the entire New Testament era."[39] Citing Eph. 2:20, Pieper concluded that "God's revelation of Himself in the Word . . . is the source and the only source, of Christian theology, or the saving knowledge of God."[40] Thus, Pieper considered those in the Reformed church to be enthusiasts because of their view of the immediate salvific operation of the Holy Spirit, as are those in the Catholic Church who view the Pope standing above the Scriptural word. Pieper writes, "all who divorce the operation of the Holy Ghost from the Word of Scripture make private or immediate revelations their principle in theology. It is essentially correct to embrace them all under the general title *Schwaermer,* or '*enthusiasts.*'"[41] With the death of the last apostle, "the period of divine revelation is closed. All Christians to the end of time come to faith through the Word of the Apostles (John 17:20). The Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (Eph. 2:20)."[42]

Citing 1 Cor. 13: 8–10, Pieper technically locates the cessation of prophecy at the second coming, but equates the reference to prophecy in this passage to Scripture, which although imperfect and partial, are nonetheless trustworthy and sufficient for salvation.[43] But Pieper's interpretation of 1 Cor. 13:8–10, especially his identification of "prophecy" and "Scripture," is

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[38] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 1:194.

[39] Ibid., 1:194–95.

[40] Ibid., 1:58.

[41] Ibid., 1:208.

[42] Ibid., 1:210.

[43] Ibid., 1:430.

doubtful. The passage is immediately preceded and succeeded by references to prophecy as not only one of the many spiritual gifts God gives his church, but the spiritual gift that should be desired most.[44] This passage also suggests that Paul considered revelatory spiritual gifts potentially available to all, and not the exclusive possession of the apostles.

Nevertheless, Pieper maintained that Christ now performs his prophetic office through preachers and teachers whose task it is to explain and expound the apostolic word. "At His ascension to heaven Christ did not abdicate His prophetic office, but He still performs it–mediately."[45] Christ does this "by means of His inspired Word" and now "gives the Church teachers and preachers (Eph. 4:11)" who are bound "to the infallible Word of the Apostles."[46] Christ now "builds up, maintains, and governs His Church exclusively through His Word and the Sacraments."[47] Today's prophets are the preachers and teachers who proclaim Scripture "in proportion" to the extent their words agree with correct doctrine.[48] The prophetic office is now perfected and continues through the pastor's republication of the inscripturated word.[49]

However, while Pieper upholds the principle of *sola scriptura,* it is significant that he nevertheless makes a concurrent allowance for revelation concerning non-doctrinal matters. In other words, neither prophets nor revelation have really ceased. Pieper categorizes John Hilten's prophecy referenced in the Confessions as such, as well as the New Testament prophet Agabus's prediction of famine and his warnings to Paul about Paul's fate in Jerusalem. Pieper notes that

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[44] 1 Cor. 14:1, 12:10.

[45] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 2:339.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:388.

[48] Ibid., 2:451–52n85.

[49] Ibid., 2:340–41n23.

both Quenstedt and Balduin concur that God may grant revelation concerning anything except those things pertaining to the articles of faith.[50] Quenstedt writes, "We must distinguish between revelations which pertain to, or attack, an article of faith, and those which concern the state of the Church or the State, social life, and future events."[51] According to the Lutheran dogmaticians, the articles of faith include "only those doctrines the knowledge of which is necessary to salvation."[52] Likewise, C. F. W. Walther distinguished between "articles of faith" and other "Biblical doctrines."[53] Walther cites the "doctrine of usury" as an example of a doctrine found in Scripture which is not an article of faith.[54]

This means, in actuality, Pieper and the older Lutheran dogmaticians provided for the continuation of revelation by distinguishing between two kinds of doctrine: doctrine related to the articles of faith for which divine revelation was considered to have ceased, and other doctrinal matters of the church, such as moral, social, and other issues, which they held could be open to the continuation of divine revelation. Thus, it can be maintained that cessationism, broadly construed, is not necessary to the Lutheran position. Scriptural revelation has ceased, but this does not need to mean that all revelation has ceased. It can mean this, but it does not need to mean this. New Testament prophecy is different than Scriptural revelation. There are no additional articles of faith to be added to Scripture. God's full revelation culminated in Christ. But, as Pieper notes, there are nevertheless still Agabuses in the church.

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[50] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 1:211n23.

[51] Ibid., quoting Quenstedt, *Systema,* 1:75. Pieper also cites Balthasar Balduin who writes "We do not doubt that God to this day at times reveals to some men future things pertaining to the state of the Church or the State, to be announced for the use of men."

[52] "A Review of the Question, 'What Is a Doctrine?'" A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, 1965), 9.

[53] Ibid., 9.

[54] Ibid., 10.

Understood within Pieper's framework, a pertinent question for the LCMS becomes what to do with this "second type" of prophet. Following Pieper, it would appear that New Testament prophets could be defined as proclaimers and interpreters of the inscripturated word, who also receive revelatory guidance regarding matters not concerning new articles of faith. But Pieper's distinction between two types of prophets and two types of revelation leave many significant unanswered questions. One of those questions is why New Testament writers would use the designation "prophet" if the term was discontinuous with the Old Testament designation. Neither does Pieper address why prophets and prophecy, if the prophetic ministry was to be included within the functions of pastors and teachers, would have separate and therefore redundant references in the various New Testament gift listings. Pieper's assumption that the pastoral office absorbed the prophetic office would indicate that the pastoral office includes prophetic gifts. But a distinguishing feature of the prophetic office is its relationship with revelation.

Both Pieper and Preus acknowledged that supernatural revelation occurs in other forms besides propositional speech. Pieper and the old dogmaticians acknowledged that God may continue to speak his revelatory word if unrelated to new articles of faith. Preus explains God's nature as a speaking God who continues to speak to us personally today and bemoans that most neo-orthodox theologians never adequately considered the old Lutheran views. According to Preus, neo-orthodox theologians generally fell into two camps, either God was considered the subject of revelation revealing himself, or God was considered the object of revelation as he revealed objective truths about himself. "That revelation could embrace both of these alternatives is a possibility not seriously entertained. Yet this is precisely what occurs and what the Lutheran

Church has taught throughout its history."[55] The historical Lutheran view "spoke of revelation as something objective, something there, something always available, but at the same time spoke of the continuity of revelation *(Deus revelans),* of God who discloses Himself and speaks to us *now."*[56] Like the old dogmaticians, Pieper and Preus stood strong against the theological tide of their respective times which wanted to replace the truth and authority of the Scripture with relative value judgments. But the question of what exactly to do with the continuing nature of revelation was not specifically addressed.

The continued tendency to conflate all God's speech with inspired Scripture can be seen in the doctrinal position adopted by the Missouri Synod in 1932. This doctrinal position states, in part, Scripture is "the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21."[57] The Missouri Synod's continued grappling with the relationship between God's Word, revelation, inspiration, and Scripture is also seen the 1975 report "The Inspiration of Scripture."[58] "The Inspiration of Scripture" attempts a forward step in developing a much needed theology of revelation by untangling revelation from inspiration and explaining that one can occur without the other. The report defines revelation as "every disclosure that God has given to men of His being, will, purposes, and acts whether this be through general revelation in the thing which He

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[55] Robert Preus, "The Doctrine of Revelation in Contemporary Theology," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9, no. 3 (1966): 116.

[56] Ibid (emphasis original). Preus notes that the Lutheran understanding of revelation allows for both objective and personal revelation because of the view "that Scripture *is vere et proprie* God's Word (in the sense that it *is* God's power and revelation)." Both revelation as truth and revelation as a continuing dynamic in the church were positions subscribed to by the dogmaticians, although they emphasized revelation as doctrinal proposition in their polemics against the Roman church.

[57] "A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod," The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1.

[58] "The Inspiration of Scripture," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, (CTCR), (St. Louis, March 1975).

has made and in His continuing providence, or through special revelation as in theophanies, visions, and dreams, in the Word of the Lord that came to the prophets for the instruction of His people, or in the incarnation of His Son."[59] In contrast, inspiration refers to

> the guidance of the Holy Spirit under which the Biblical authors recorded what God had revealed to them about the mysteries of His being and the meaning of His mighty acts in human history for man's salvation and under which they wrote concerning any other subject, even if it was about a matter of which they had knowledge apart from revelation.[60]

The report concludes that while they can be related, inspiration can occur with or without revelation, and revelation can occur without inspiration. "No revelation was needed for him [Paul] to know that his memory failed him about how many people he had baptized in Corinth, or to know that he wanted his cloak and books, or to know it was his opinion that in view of the impending distress it might be better not to get married."[61]Therefore, Scripture does not equate strictly to revelation. While it may involve revelation "inspiration is the operation of the Holy Spirit which makes the words of Scripture God's Word"[62]and theologically normative.[63]

Unfortunately, while the report attempts to make some progress towards an understanding of revelation, the tendency to conflate all prophetic revelation with inspired normative writing can be seen when the report reverts back to more familiar ground and concludes the canon is closed because the office of prophet has ceased. The report reasons that other writings from Christians cannot be canonical "because the office of prophet and apostle no longer exist in the

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[59] "The Inspiration of Scripture," CTCR, 3.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 4.

[62] Ibid., 7.

[63] Ibid., 15.

church."[64] Clearly, the report still equates prophets and prophetic revelation to Scripture. If one has ceased, the other must necessarily also. But it is problematic to connect all revelation to inscripturated words. Pieper and other Lutheran dogmaticians understood that there must be a distinction made between types of revelation. All revelation does not have to be connected to Scripture. But the report simply reverts to the over generalized assertion that revelation equates to inspired Scripture, and inspired Scripture equates to doctrine. Therefore the report concludes that inspired prophetic revelation ceased with the closure of the canon.

Inspiration, Revelation, and Prophecy

Because of its focus on Scripture as the sole source of inspired doctrinal revelation, a theology of inspired revelatory prophecy has not been adequately developed in the LCMS. Yet the denial of the continuation of prophecy cannot be derived biblically. And, to deny that prophecy does not involve revelation or inspiration is inconsistent, to say nothing of being unsupported, by the biblical witness. While theological writings in the Missouri Synod have gone as far as making a distinction between biblical inspiration and revelation,[65] and have affirmed that the discontinuation of prophecy cannot be derived biblically,[66] they stop short of developing the necessary outcomes of these conclusions.

As noted above, even the old Lutheran dogmaticians and Pieper acknowledged the continuation of at least some forms of revelation or prophecy. A broadly defined cessationism was not necessary to their position because they understood New Testament prophecy as something different than biblical revelation. Their formulations attempted to uphold the

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[64] "The Inspiration of Scripture," CTCR, 19.

[65] Ibid., 4.

[66] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 25.

principle of *sola scriptura* while making allowance for the reality of the New Testament gift of prophecy. More importantly, the apostle Paul certainly speaks of prophecy as an ongoing revelatory gift in the church[67]and Luke frequently writes about the revelatory gifts of New Testament prophets.[68]

One way the LCMS could allow for the continuation of prophecy today is to simply follow the lead of "The Inspiration of Scripture" and not require that revelation and inspiration be equated. This would define Christian prophecy as non-inspired revelation and which therefore would not possess normativeness or infallibility which the LCMS ties solely to the event of inspiration. This also would accommodate Pieper's distinction between revelation related to doctrine and non-doctrinal matters. But this solution raises definitional issues regarding inspiration and the nature of the Word of God.

Under the auspices of the doctrine of inspiration, theories have been developed to explain the formation of Scripture, the purpose of which is to secure the Scripture's divine authority. But the fact that Scripture is God breathed says more about its origination than the process by which it was written.[69] The Bible contains neither a detailed doctrine on Scripture nor a clear account of their inspiration. We know that the Old Testament Scripture was "breathed by God."[70] It was not the product of man's will, but had its divine origin from God as men spoke "carried along by the

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[67] "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation . . ." 1 Cor. 14:26; and "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent." 1 Cor. 14:29–30.

[68] "Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius)." Acts 11:27–28.

[69] Jeremy Begbie, "Who is this God?—Biblical Inspiration Revisited," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43, no.2 (1992): 260.

[70] 2 Tim. 3:16.

Holy Spirit."[71] But outside of 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Pet. 1:19–21, little is said in Scripture about itself, and Scripture provides no explanation of inspiration or how it occurs. Sasse notes that because Scripture is a result of God's enlivening Spirit, "the doctrine of Inspiration is an essential part of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."[72] As such, it would follow that "the person and work of the Holy Spirit can not be by-passed" in understanding the meaning of inspiration.[73] And we should also say that neither can we by-pass the God who inspires, nor can we by-pass the purpose for His out-breathing, which is man's reconciliation with God through Christ. For this reason the doctrine of inspiration should not be located within the doctrine of Scripture, but within the doctrine of God.

My intention for the purposes of this paper is not to develop a theology of the Holy Spirit or a doctrine of inspiration, but to maintain that any doctrine of Scripture has to take into account the person and work of the Holy Spirit. And, that same Holy Spirit who moved the biblical authors to write Scripture continues to live and work in every believer. To the extent the Holy Spirit moves any believer to speak or act in certain ways we may claim inspiration. For example, the Christian who is moved to pray for a loved one and finds out later that he prayed right at the time his loved one was in a car accident, may be considered to have been inspired to pray. Likewise, the preacher may be inspired as he thinks about, composes, and delivers a sermon. Similarly, inspiration moves the prophet to act and speak in certain ways. The revelatory nature of the prophetic gift results in receiving truth and its application that the prophet could not have

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[71] 2 Pet. 2:21.

[72] Hermann Sasse, "Inspiration and Inerrancy—Some Preliminary Thoughts," *Concordia Journal,* 36 no. 2 (2010): 113.

[73] Begbie, "Who is this God?—Biblical Inspiration Revisited," 260.

arrived at without supernatural intervention. Inspiration is the process of being moved by the Spirit to do or say something as a result. Therefore we might say that "inspiration is . . . a divine movement and therefore a divine moving."[74] The New Testament Scriptures resulted from the apostles who were uniquely commissioned and moved by God to record their apostolic testimony.[75] Inspiration will relate to the task the Holy Spirit has called the believer to and moves him or her to perform. Thus "inspiration is not primarily a textual property."[76] While inspiration is indeed related to canonicity, it is not identical to it.

The Lutheran Confessions do not contain an article that treats the area of Scripture or inspiration or revelation. The Confessions simply say that the prophetic and apostolic writings are to be the norm by which all teaching is evaluated.[77] It was the later dogmaticians who dealt with the topics of revelation and inspiration. But, following Pieper and the distinction made between revelation and inspiration advocated in "The Inspiration of Scripture," it appears possible for Confessional Lutherans to maintain that prophetic revelation, at least in some form, continues today.

Another issue surfaces at this point because some also hold that one of the reasons the Bible is inerrant is because it is the Word of God. The reasoning continues that, as the word of God, any continuing prophetic revelations would also need to be normative and infallible. But Paul reminded prophets at Corinth that they only comprehended their prophecies imperfectly, as

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[74] John Webster, *Holy Scripture, A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36.

[75] John 17:20, 20:31.

[76] John Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 36.

[77] See paragraph 1 of the Introduction of the "Epitome of the Formula of Concord" (hereafter cited "Ep") in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord,* which states: "We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone."

in a dim mirror.[78] We see this "imperfect" comprehension of prophetic revelation in the case of the New Testament prophet Agabus. Agabus relayed the word of the Holy Spirit to Paul: "'Thus says the Holy Spirit, this is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"[79] The disciples, and apparently Agabus as well, weighed and judged the word of the Holy Spirit incorrectly and advised Paul not to go to Jerusalem. This demonstrates that prophecy, filtered through fallible human minds, may be incorrectly interpreted, spoken, and applied. The subsequent unfolding of events would provide the more complete understanding of the prophetic word of revelation which Agabus, along with the other disciples, only comprehended "in part." For this reason we are not only to "test the spirits," but also the content and interpretation of their message. For this we use the Scripture, the acknowledged authoritative rule and norm.

As a respected and established prophet, it could be reasoned that Agabus spoke many things which were based on revelation, but which were not recorded in Scripture, much like the many words of encouragement the prophets Judas and Silas spoke to the church at Antioch which were also never inscripturated. Nevertheless, the speech of these prophets can be understood to be practical and edifying for the church at a particular point in historic time.[80]

There is a reason why some things are recorded in Scripture and others are not. And our Lutheran Confessions are clear that Scripture alone must remain the rule and norm for judging all articles of faith.[81] The apostolic writings were produced under a divine commission making them qualitatively different than all other writings and teachings, even if those other writings and

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[78] 1 Cor. 13:9–12.

[79] Acts 21:10–11.

[80] Acts 15:32–33.

[81] Ep Introduction.

teachings come by way of revelation or inspiration. Following John Theodore Mueller we might even say that "all divine revelations culminate" in Christ.[82] Paul tells us that all wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ who is the full revelation of God.[83] Indeed, the risen Christ tells us he is the fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets.[84] Nothing can be added to the unsurpassable revelation of God in Christ.

But then what is the Word of God? As Hermann Sasse notes, "The doctrine concerning the Holy Scripture must proceed from the statement, and is in fact, nothing else but an unfolding of the statement: the Holy Scripture is God's Word."[85] So the question arises, what do we mean when we say something is God's Word? From Scripture we know that God's Word exists in various forms. Prophets in both the Old and New Testaments received the revelatory Word of the Lord. Sometimes this Word was recorded, sometimes not. Sometimes God's Word had to do with the command to repent and turn to God, sometimes it had to do with anointing kings, military advice, famines, and other practical matters. God's Word does not always result in propositional truth, nor does is always result in written Scripture.

The old Lutheran dogmaticians gave ultimate significance to the Word of God as a means of grace, or more precisely, to the Gospel as a means of grace. This can be seen by their attachment of the attribute of perfect sufficiency to Scripture. Explaining the sufficiency of Scripture, Gerhard writes, "The Scriptures fully and perfectly instruct us concerning all things necessary to salvation."[86] Quenstedt states that Scripture sufficiently contains what is "necessary

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[82] John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St Louis: Concordia 1934), 96–97.

[83] Col. 1:15–20, 2:3.

[84] Luke 24:25–27.

[85] Hermann Sasse, "De Scriptura Sacra," 6.

[86] Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics,* 137, quoting Gerhard.

to be known for the Christian faith and life and, therefore, for the attainment of eternal salvation."[87] The dogmaticians acknowledged that the sufficiency of Scripture related to its main objective, "namely faith in Christ and eternal salvation."[88] "All things necessary to a saving knowledge and worship of God and to an attainment of everlasting blessedness are sufficiently contained in the written Word of God."[89]

Likewise, Pieper wrote that Scripture includes "everything that men must know to obtain salvation."[90] Pieper elaborates that although Scripture does not address many issues of daily life and does not relate all divine mysteries, it nonetheless "teaches perfectly whatever we need to know to obtain eternal life."[91] Following this same line of thinking, more contemporary theologians, like reform theologian Nelson Koolsterman, conclude that divine sufficiency does not mean that Scripture contains "all the practices and regulations required by the church for its own organization."[92] Indeed, there are continually new situations and questions to which we must interpret and "apply the truth as it is in Christ."[93] Sasse says the same thing another way when he states that "Christ is the real content of Holy Scripture."[94] Indeed, Jesus tells us that the Scriptures "bear witness about me."[95] Old Testament prophets foretold of him, the apostles witnessed to him. Jesus tells us that after his death and resurrection people will come to believe

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[87] Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics,* quoting Quenstedt.

[88] Preus, *Inspiration,* 147, quoting Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae,* 151.

[89] Ibid., 149, quoting J. A. Scherzer, *Anti-Bellarminum,* 149.

[90] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:317.

[91] Ibid., 1:318.

[92] Nelson D. Koolsterman, "The 'Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic' and the Sufficiency of Scripture in Light of the History of Dogma," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 195.

[93] Begbie, "Who Is This God? —Biblical Inspiration Revisited," 281–82.

[94] Sasse, "Inspiration and Inerrancy—Some Preliminary Thoughts," 115.

[95] John 5:39.

in him through the words of the apostles.[96] The testimony of the apostles carries the promise of eternal life, and these words are preserved for us in the written Word of God. In this sense, the New Testament Scripture is the unique testimony to the once for all perfect self-revelation of God in Christ, the Word made flesh. By extension, the written Word is the authoritative witness to Christ, who is the Word of God, and whose words the writers of the New Testament inscripturated with their witness for our salvation. The apostle John tells us that Scripture was written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."[97] The written and proclaimed Word is powerful because it brings Christ who is in union with it.[98]

So how are we to understand contemporary prophecy today, and what is its relationship to the Word of God? On one hand we must speak of revelation reaching its fulfillment in Christ and the writers of the New Testament bearing normative witness to this revelation. On the other hand we know that revelatory prophecy continued in the New Testament church as the Holy Spirit continued to work to bring to a fuller understanding the normative revelation of the Christ-event. The apostle John wrote that Scripture can not contain all the Words of God.[99] The Bible simply does not speak to every issue, nor was it meant to. But the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in our Christ are innumerable. Although all revelation culminates in Christ, it is still being communicated in and with the historical activity of salvation. Therefore some scholars believe one of the ways God continues to actualize the revelation in Christ is through his prophets which he places in the church.

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[96] "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word." John 17:20.

[97] John 20:31.

[98] Preus, *Inspiration,* 192.

[99] John 21:25.

Wayne Grudem, evangelical theologian and co-founder of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, offers what he sees as a corrective to both those in the cessationist school and those involved in the charismatic movement. Following Pieper in some respects, Grudem acknowledges prophets still exist in the church today. Also like Pieper, Grudem is clear that divine infallible verbal inspiration is located only with the New and Old Testaments.[100] According to Grudem, contemporary Christian prophets are not verbally inspired and their authority is not equal to the unique authority of the Scripture. Grudem maintains, much like Pieper did, that the role of the Christian prophet today does not have to do with setting new church doctrines. But unlike Pieper who sees the prophetic role swallowed up in the office of pastor, Grudem sees an important continuing role for New Testament prophets. There has always been more to prophecy than doctrine. Part of the prophetic function is "bringing things to mind when the church is gathered for worship," and providing "'edification, encouragement, and comfort' which speaks directly to the needs of the moment and causes people to realize that 'truly God is among you.'"[101]

Niels Christian Hvidt takes Grudem's position one step further. Hvidt adds that "Christian prophecy may be a word of God just as we read of God revealing himself in Sacred Scripture, although it has a different status. While Chrisitan prophecy is not revelation on par with the Bible," as a Word of God "postcanonical Christian prophecy can indeed serve to elucidate points of Scripture that are not clear or that Scripture contains in an implicit way only." Therefore prophecy can play a vital role in the church "in the correction and actualization of our

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[100] Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1988), 15, 167–68.

[101] Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 15. Grudem is referencing 1 Corinthians 14.

understanding of revelation."[102] Because Lutheran's hold that Scripture interprets Scripture, an initial reaction to Hvidt's statements might be that Scripture is clear and thus there is no need for its further elucidation. At the same time, even within Lutherandom, Scriptures used in the interpretation of other Scriptures have led to significant differences in the understanding of the Scripture. Scripture is clear regarding its chief article of justification, but there are many other passages which are difficult to interpret. Understanding the meaning of Scripture is the result of the Holy Spirit renewing our minds. This is a supernatural gift of God. Hvidt is simply stating that Christian prophecy is not canon-forming, but a supernatural gift which is canon-expressing. Hdvit believes prophecy "has always been marked precisely as the inspired and dynamic interpretation and implementation of the Christian truth in the church." [103] He sees the prophet's role in edification encompassing both encouragement and correctives which serve to bring to a fuller expression the deposit of faith and the "actualization of revelation" as a means of expressing God's Word anew "in a given historical context."[104] Christian prophets "continue the mission of the apostles, albeit in a less normative way."[105]

Many other theologians have also weighed in on the subject of the role of the Christian prophet. Ben Witherington defines a prophet as a person who receives divine revelations from God and relays that information in the name of God.[106] Witherington surmises that "most prophecies would be ordinary words of comfort, counsel, or conviction inspired by the Spirit to

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[102] Niels Christian Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 78–79.

[103] Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy,* 201.

[104] Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 27.

[105] Ibid., 210.

[106] Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 3.

help Christians in their daily struggles and perhaps convict, convince, and even convert outsiders who might visit Christian worship."[107] Similarly, E. Earle Ellis concludes that exhortation and edification are important functions of New Testatment prophets.[108] Ellis also suggests that teaching and inspired exegesis are likewise important aspects of the New Testament prophet's role.[109] In step with Luther, Quenstedt, Gerhard, and CTCR reports, LCMS theologian Richard Dinda concurs that New Testament prophets are inspired interpreters of Scripture and endowed "with special gifts . . . of insight in plumbing and exploring the depths of Scripture."[110]

Some contemporary theologians hold that the role of the prophet is distinct from other ministers in the church. Witherington bases this conclusion, in part, on Paul's ranking of prophets second behind apostles in authority, and distinct from teachers.[111] Similarly, David Aune believes that prophets held a "special role in leadership" along with apostles and teachers.[112] Ellis points out that Luke reserved the title prophet in Acts for only particular leaders. Ellis likens the ministries of the apostles and prophets to concentric circles in which the prophetic function is somewhat smaller than that of the apostolic. All the apostles were also

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[107] Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer,* 330.

[108] E. Earle Ellis, "The Role of the Christian Prophet in Acts," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce,* ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 57.

[109] Ibid., 58, 61–62.

[110] Richard J. Dinda, "A Study of Prophecy in the New Testament, " (unpublished conference paper, Concordia Lutheran College, Austin, TX, 1998), 8.

[111] Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer,* 316.

[112] David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 201.

prophets, but all the prophets were not also apostles.[113] Ritva H. Williams concurs that the apostolic office encompassed the prophetic office, but that the reverse does not hold.[114]

The *Didache* which formed the basis of church orders during the first through fourth centuries in Syria provides an independent concurrent witness to the prophetic role in the New Testament church. The *Didache* depicts prophets ministering as worship leaders and celebrants along side local bishops. It not only portrays prophets as inspired spokespersons, it also likens New Testament prophets to Old Testament high priests. Equating New Testament prophets to Old Testament high priests is seen throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods where prophetic gifts were linked to the high priestly role.[115] Ronald Kydd concludes that it is likely that prophets presided over the Lord's Supper based on the special role the *Didache* afforded them during the Eucharistic liturgy. Prophets were not limited to the format prescribed for the other leaders and bishops, but were allowed to "give thanks as much as they wished" during the Lord's Supper.[116] There are many additional writings of the early church that bear witness to prophets and testify to their roles.[117]

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[113] Ellis, "The Role of the Christian Prophet in Acts," 65.

[114] Ritva H. Williams, *Stewards, Prophets, Keepers of the Word: Leadership in the Early Church* (Peabody, MA.: Henderickson Publishers, 2006), 109.

[115] For example, in 1 Macc. 14:41 Simon is named "leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should appear." See also: 1 Macc. 4:45b–46; 14:41; Josephus, *JW* 3.351–54.

[116] Ronald A.N. Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers., 1984), 6–10. cf. *Didache* 10:7.

[117] The purpose of this thesis is not to rehearse the numerous writings of the early church which attest to the continuation of prophets. The following will suffice: The early church considered Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch prophets (Aune, *Prophecy,* 292–94). Melito of Sardis and Cyprian bishop of Carthage were also considered prophets (Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church,* 71–72.). Ireneaus wrote about the gift of prophecy stating, "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 who bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God." Ireneaus also spoke of those who "have foreknowledge of things to be, and visions and prophetic speech." Ireneaus sternly reprimands the *Alogi* who wanted to stifle the true Christian prophets because of the fear of false prophets. (Ireneaus, *Against Heresies* 2.4.9; 4.26*)*. Many early Christian writings attest to the continuing role of prophets in the church, for example, the *Didache, 1 Enoch* and *The* (continued next page)

Notably, female prophets have been attested to in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the post-apostolic church. Miriam is called a prophetess (Exod. 15:20) through whom Yahweh spoke (Num. 12:2) and is described as a leader sent by God (Mic. 6:4). Deborah is portrayed as a prophet, ruler, and the spiritual leader of the Israelites. She spoke oracles from Yahweh in the first person and governed God's people in his stead (Judg. 4:4–5). The prophetess Huldah was a contemporary of the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah. Yet King Josiah sought out Huldah for instruction and counsel. She verified Old Testament Scripture, proclaimed the word of the Lord, and foretold the downfall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:14–20). The evangelist Philip had four daughters who were prophets (Acts 21:9). The prophetess Anna is portrayed serving in the temple engaged in continual fasting and prayer. Anna proclaimed the Good News in the temple courts to all who would listen (Luke 2:36–38). A few centuries later in "The Statues of the Apostles," women continue to function in the roles of prayer and prophecy: "Let them ordain three widows, two to continue together in prayer for all who are in trials and to ask for revelation concerning what they require."[118]

In summary, Christian prophets can be viewed as inspired speakers who typically minister within the worship setting for the edification, comfort, consolation, exhortation, and instruction of the church, but in a less normative way than the authoritative prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments. Prophets might also be expected to issue warnings and

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Shepherd of Hermas. These writings were highly regarded within the early church and place a high value on Christian prophets. The *Didache* distinguishes three orders of leaders: apostles, prophets and teachers, ranking prophets below apostles and above teachers. See also Jerome who wrote that "at all times there have not been lacking persons having the spirit of prophecy, not indeed for the declaration of any new doctrine of faith, but for the direction of human acts," and Thomas Aquinas who held that the prophetic role would "never cease." (Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy,* 4).

[118] Karen Jo Torjesen, "The Early Chrisitan Orans" in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J Walker (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 49.

predictions, and engage in symbolic actions and prayer. Some theologians hold that all pastors are de facto prophets, others hold that prophets are distinctive from pastors. The LCMS has held both positions depending on the ultimate question being addressed.

This chapter has also hoped to show that the continuation of prophecy and the prophetic office does not automatically equate with an open canon, nor does the closure of the canon equate with the cessation of the prophetic role. Revelation and inspiration are not tied exclusively to the production of biblical texts, or to the creation of new doctrine. One may hold a cessationist position regarding Scripture, while understanding that other types of revelation and inspiration continue today. Many Old Testament and New Testament prophets never wrote Scripture, nor were all their words inscripturated. But the question remains, if God has continued his gift of prophets in the church, or if they need not cease with the closure of the canon, what might their ministry role be today? More importantly for this thesis, what might be the role of the female prophet? Chapter 3 addresses this question.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ONE MINISTRY

If a thesis that deals with spiritual gifts and that wants to make a case for the continuation of prophecy is not enough, adding the subjects of the ministry and of the service of women in the church into the mix may finally seem too much for some. But this needs to be done. A more adequate approach to answering the question regarding the role of the female prophet requires that the above areas be conjoined and treated in an integrated fashion.

In the previous two chapters I have tried to show that there is room in LCMS theology on both spiritual gifts and the Word of God for acknowledging the possibility of contemporary prophecy and therefore of contemporary prophets and prophetesses. But does this possibility fit with the Missouri Synod's position on the office of the ministry? And does this possibility fit also with the Missouri Synod's position on the service of women in the church—especially its rejection of the ordination of women to the pastoral office?

In this chapter I will take up these questions. First I will show how important LCMS documents on the ministry and on the service of women (including women's ordination) acknowledge the possibility of contemporary prophecy and contemporary prophetesses. With this answer in hand, I will take up the question about how the relationship between the prophetic office and the pastoral office, especially in the case of women prophets, might be understood within the framework of LCMS theology.

Prophecy and the Pastoral Office

A relevant question is how LCMS theology views the relationship between prophecy and the pastoral office. While the Missouri Synod has not produced a detailed study devoted to this question, views on each and sometimes both together have been expressed in studies and statements on other topics.

We have seen already that the three primary theological reports on spiritual gifts produced by the Missouri Synod between 1972–1994 describe prophecy and the ministry of the prophet.[1] In these reports the Holy Spirit is understood as "the Spirit of Power who gives special gifts" to God's people to enable them to serve God as he desires.[2] Prophets in the Old Testament were considered "mouthpieces of God in order to reveal His will to the people." New Testament prophets were considered important for communicating the gospel.[3] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology" defines prophecy, in part, as "the God-given ability to interpret Scripture correctly and to apply its message of Law and Gospel to the needs of men. It is the gift of expressing what the will of God was in a given situation."[4] "He who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. Such a person edifies the church."[5] Prophets are "holy men" to whom God reveals his will immediately through such things as dreams and visions thereby providing guidance and leadership to the church.[6] "Spiritual Gifts" holds that Eph. 4:11 points either to a listing of offices or roles, while 1 Cor.

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[1] See above, Chapter 1.

[2] "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," CTCR, 15.

[3] Ibid., 17.

[4] Ibid., 19.

[5] Ibid., 21.

[6] "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement," CTCR, 6–7, 10.

12:28–30 "ranks in order" the personal ministries of "apostles, prophets, and teachers."[7] "Christ gave some people . . . the office and commission to be . . . prophets . . . within the church."[8] Both "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology" and "Spiritual Gifts" understand exhortation and encouragement as part of the prophetic function, along with "preaching or expounding Scripture."[9] Prophets in the New Testament are understood as a regularly functioning and identifiable group.[10] "Spiritual Gifts" suggests that Paul probably held to a Jewish view of prophets as "Spirit impelled proclaimers of the Word of God to the church, who unfold God's plan of redemption as well as elucidate and impress upon it the significance of the work of God in Christ in a pastoral and paraenetic sense."[11] In summary, synodical reports dealing with spiritual gifts understand that prophets are speakers of the Word who provide guidance, leadership, exhortation, and edification to the church.

But how does LCMS theology view the relationship of prophecy to the pastoral ministry, and also the relationship of the prophetic office to the pastoral office? Here we find varied views.

C. F. W. Walther's seminal work *Church and Ministry* defends the view that "all believing Christians, and they only, are priests (a priestly state)."[12] Walther took this position against the view that the ministry is "a more holy state" as advanced by J. A. A. Grabau of Buffalo, New

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[7] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 21.

[8] Ibid., 29.

[9] Ibid., 22, 24.

[10] Ibid., 26.

[11] Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWill (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 451, quoted in "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 26.

[12] C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry: Witnesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry,* trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 198. This is from the "Scripture Proof" of Thesis 4 concerning the holy ministry.

York. For Walther, it was essential to uphold the ministry in the literal sense, namely, as "a ministry of service," and not as a special or elevated office above that of the entire church.[13]

The relevance for this project comes where Walther cited Martin Luther for support. Luther not only upheld that all believers are priests, but he also maintained that all Christians are prophets. Moreover, Luther held that to deny these positions was in effect to deny God's work in baptism and the Word and to deny the gifts of the Spirit:

> If now we pray thus, we ourselves are prophets or children and students of the prophets. Nor it is necessary that we receive revelations of future events. It suffices for the office of a prophet to understand the Scriptures, teach others, and help one another with our prayers. For whoever is no prophet can neither teach nor pray nor do any other good work. Therefore, the name 'prophet' belongs to all Christians, and whoever denies this must also deny he was baptized and instructed in God's Word. There is only this difference: some have the Holy Spirit more fully and the others less fully. For though He is not as richly in me as He was in Elijah, yet according to His measure He is also in me ("Exposition of Genesis," 20:17–18, St. Louis edition, 1:1366–67).[14]

In a similar way, Francis Pieper, the most influential dogmatician in the history of the Missouri Synod, acknowledged that Christ's prophetic office was still being conducted by all Christians and not only those in the Office of the Ministry. For Pieper what matters is not so much who in the church is a prophet but that all prophecy comes from Christ. "What must be maintained by all means is that Christ remains the sole Teacher. All human teachers, whether they be the Apostles, or ministers, or all Christians, are only the instruments of Christ."[15]

But the concern for both Walther and Pieper was not about the prophetic office and its relationship to the pastoral office. Consequently, the view expressed by Luther and cited by

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[13] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 198.

[14] Ibid., 208.

[15] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 2:339.

Walther, and also Pieper's comments about "all human teachers," do not inform important later claims about "prophecy" and the pastoral office. What does usually inform these claims are persistent questions and concerns about the relationship between church and ministry. For example, Francis Pieper *discussed* the ministry in a different way than Walther when he wrote his *Christian Dogmatics*, but he maintained the doctrine of Walther and the Missouri Synod, and he also identified "ministry" in the strict sense with the pastoral office.[16] It is clear from his discussion that his *concern* was similar to Walther's, namely, to distinguish what belongs to and is proper to *all Christians* (i.e., the whole *Church*) from the special Office of the Word in the Church.[17]

More recently, we find concerns of the same sort motivating discussion about the ministry, and accordingly the same approach is evident in statements and documents from the 1960s to the present day. The concerns are about relationships between all Christians and the rights, responsibilities, and gifts God gives through Word and Spirit, to those called and ordained to the public ministry, by which the Word is spoken, the Sacraments administered, and the Spirit given through these means. The usual approach to these concerns about the relationship of church and ministry maintains the divine institution and therefore perpetual integrity of the pastoral office as the Office of the Public Ministry. Along with Walther it is maintained: "The pastoral ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stems all other offices in the church."[18] The logic of *Church and Ministry* is that the power of keys is held immediately by the

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[16] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:439–40. That he upholds the doctrine of the ministry as laid out by Walther is clear from the bulk of the chapter. See 439–62.

[17] Ibid., 440–43.

[18] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289.

entire church, but administered officially in the name of the church by those in the pastoral office. Since "the keys embrace the whole power of the church," the pastoral office "must of necessity be the highest in the church, and all other offices stem from it."[19]

What are these "other" or "auxiliary" offices? Walther identifies them as either "every other public office in the church" or as "an auxiliary office that supports the ministry, whether it be the elders who do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17) or the rulers (Rom. 12:8) or the deacons (the office of service in a narrow sense) or whatever other offices the church may entrust to particular persons for special administration."[20] In the modern church these include such offices as Christian day school teacher.[21]

From these writings there are two findings to note. The first finding is the identification of the "Office of the Ministry" with the "pastoral office." The identification of the Office of the Ministry and the pastoral office is clear in C. F. W. Walther's *Church and Ministry*, a seminal treatise on the ministry in the LCMS. As the first president of the Missouri Synod, and the first president of Concordia Seminary, Walther navigated the Missouri Synod during its formative years. In *Church and Ministry,* Walther defended ten theses on the Office of the Public Ministry which were subsequently adopted by the Missouri Synod as official doctrine.[22]

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[19] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289.

[20] Ibid., 289–90.

[21] Ibid., 290.

[22] See Resolution 7-17A, "To Affirm Synod's Official Position on Church and Ministry," adopted at the 2001 LCMS Convention. This resolution reaffirms Dr. C. F. W. Walther's book, *Church and Ministry,* as the official doctrinal position of the LCMS on the Ministry.

For Walther, "the preaching ministry [*Predigtamt*] (AC5) is *the* ministry [*Amt*],"[23] and the designation of "pastoral office" is a synonym for "the ministry of the Word," or "the office of preaching." Walther explains that all offices of the holy ministry were originally subsumed in the apostolate. "Hence the highest office is that of the ministry of the Word, with which all other offices are also conferred at the same time. Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry."[24]

In these theses we find that Walther identifies the "ministry" with the "pastoral office." For example, in Thesis 1 he equates "the holy preaching office," (*das heilige Predigtamt*) with "the pastoral office" (*Pfarramt*).[25] Similarly in Thesis 2 he speaks of "[t]he ministry of the Word or the pastoral office."[26]

When Walther identifies the "holy ministry" and the "pastoral office," it is evident that he means that *Pfarramt* is the office of a congregational or parish pastor, and not that the term is for an office of the Word that might take place outside of a congregational setting like "apostle" or "evangelist." This meaning is evident in at least two ways. First, Walther describes "[t]he holy ministry or pastoral office" in the first thesis, which argues for the existence of this office as the office of a parish pastor: "Although Holy Scripture attests that all believing Christians are priests (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10), it at the same time teaches very expressly that in the church there is an office to teach, feed, and rule."[27] Walther also cites Luther who states, "All Christians *are*

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[23] "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature," A Report of the Commission of Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, September 1981), 19n7 (emphasis original).

[24] Walther, *Church and Ministry,* 289–90.

[25] Ibid., 161.

[26] Ibid., 177.

[27] Ibid., 161.

priests, but they are not all pastors, for they must not only be Christians and priests but also be in charge of the office [ministry] and a parish. It is the call and command that makes pastors and ministers."[28] "For though we are all priests, we cannot for that reason all preach, teach, or rule, so we must set apart and select some from the whole assembly to whom the office is entrusted."[29] Second, this meaning is clear from his theses on the call to the office. In Theses 6, he argues: "The ministry of the Word (*Predigtamt*) is conferred by God through the congregation."[30] In other words, he is maintaining that those who are called to the "ministry of the Word," or *Predigtamt,* received a mediate call, not an immediate call as the Apostles received. In the "Scripture Proof" for Thesis 2 Walther had distinguished the Apostles, who received their call "by the Son of God," as well as the Seventy of Luke 10, from "the servants of the church who were called mediately."[31]

The second finding is that relatively little is said about the prophetic office, and what is said sometimes subsumes the prophetic office under the pastoral office. For example, the CTCR document "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature," probably the most significant recent report dealing with the subject of the public ministry produced by the LCMS, says little about the prophetic office. The report maintains "The pastoral office is unique in that *all* the functions of the church's ministry belong to it."[32] Moreover, the report holds that "there is only *one* pastoral *office*, but the office which we formally refer to as 'the office of the public ministry' has multiple *functions*, . . . The pastoral office with all of its functions is mandated for the

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[28] Walther, *Church and Ministry,* 164–65 (emphasis original), quoting Martin Luther, "Exposition of Ps. 82," 1530, St. Louis edition, 5:721–22.

[29] Ibid., 162–63, quoting Martin Luther, "Second Exposition of Ps. 110," 1539, St. Louis edition, 5:1037.

[30] Ibid., 219.

[31] Ibid., 177–78.

[32] "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature," CTCR, 19 (emphasis original).

church. Other offices are established by the church to assist in carrying out pastoral functions."[33] The report adds that Christ's "priestly, prophetic, and royal actions are the essential content and power of the ministry of the church," thus in effect subsuming the prophetic office under the pastoral office.[34] The document does cite Ephesians 4 to help build its case for a distinct divinely instituted office of public ministry, and refers to the ministries listed there as "special offices . . . given by God to equip the saints for the work of serving"[35] But the document's basic distinction is not among offices of the Word (e.g., apostle, prophet, pastor) but between "ministry" in a wider sense, embracing every kind of the preaching or administration of the sacraments done by every Christian, and "ministry" in the narrow sense, "administered by order and on behalf of Christians."[36]

An earlier theological report produced to address the office of evangelist, "The Ministry in Its Relation to the Christian Church," is more helpful for our topic, in part because it includes a few brief reflections specifically about prophets, but also in part because it deals explicitly with distinctions among offices of the Word, rather than primarily with a distinction between church and ministry. This is particularly clear when Eph. 4:11 is cited to show the broad range of terms used for those engaged in the ministry of the Gospel. While the report deals with the office of prophet tangentially, it understands that each office included in the Eph. 4:11 listing holds some distinctive function which sets one office apart from the others, but whose overall task was the

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[33] "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature," CTCR, 19 (emphasis original).

[34] Ibid., 26.

[35] "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature," CTCR, 11.

[36] Ibid., quoting Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:439.

same.[37] While admitting that "the office of the New Testament prophets is not understood in the same way by all Bible students," the report defines the prophet as one who has "the gift of prophecy, or inspired utterance," and who "performed certain necessary functions in the church which served the proclamation of the saving Gospel."[38] While the report does not state what those "certain necessary functions" might be, it understands prophets as "specially called individuals" who serve the same ends as the other offices of the ministry of the Word, namely, the proclamation of the Gospel and "the equipment of the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12)."[39]

Less helpful, however, is the report's conclusion that the prophetic office "was not a structured office which was found everywhere in the church."[40] The report did this to draw a parallel between the prophetic office to that of the evangelist, and then to conclude that because the office of evangelist was not a structured office, it

> does not necessarily call for a separate office. It is a function of the total Ministry and may be carried out even by bishops, and certainly by parish pastors."[41] The report concludes that it would not, however, be inappropriate to ordain an evangelist who would be under the supervision of the pastor. "Christ Himself instituted the office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Many functions belong to this office: evangelizing, preaching, teaching, shepherding, supervision, admonishing, discipling, and administering. . . . According to her needs, the church may under the one Ministry of the Word establish such 'offices' as the situation requires.[42]

This conclusion puts such offices as evangelist and prophet under the Church's discretion.

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[37] "The Ministry in Its Relation to the Christian Church," A Report of the Commission of Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, (CTCR), (St. Louis, March 1973), 6.

[38] Ibid., 18–19.

[39] Ibid., 6.

[40] Ibid., 18–19.

[41] Ibid., 19.

[42] Ibid., 20.

A different view on prophecy and the prophetic office is found in a few of the contributions to the recent collection *Women Pastors: The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*.[43] This book was edited by Matthew C. Harrison, who was elected as President of the LCMS in 2010, and John T. Pless, a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Most relevant for this discussion is the direct assertion of Hermann Sasse on "three offices conferred by God" in his argument *against* the ordination of women to the pastoral office. "[O]ne must remember," he wrote,

> that the early church knew, apart from the local officebearers who were elected by the congregation or appointed by an apostle (e.g., Acts 14:23), three offices which God alone could confer and which were valid in the entire church: apostles, prophets and doctors (1 Corinthians 12:28). The office of the prophet was open also to women. Female prophets in the Old Testament were Miriam, Deborah, Hulda; in the New Testament the four daughters of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven, . . . and others whose names are not mentioned in the Bible.[44]

For Sasse, there was no question about "prophet" as an office or that it had been or could be occupied by women, but only a question about "whether they could exercise their gift 'in church' or only privately at home," a question that we look into later.[45] But Sasse is clear about "prophet" as a divinely established office, and one that God alone confers. He was clear about this point elsewhere, too. In "The Office of Teacher in the Ancient Church," Sasse's inaugural lecture at the University of Erlangen, he stressed that "God alone is the one who makes a man into a prophet, into a bearer of his Word which is happening here and now,"[46] therefore, "what

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[43] Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless, ed., *Women Pastors: The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009).

[44] Ibid., 268.

[45] Ibid., 268–9. Sasse concluded that the New Testament did not suggest that this gift could be exercised in the assembly.

[46] Hermann Sasse, "The Office of Teacher in the Ancient Church," in *The Lonely Way,* vol. 2, 199. Sasse also includes teachers, along with apostles and prophets, as ministers who can only be called immediately by God.

the congregations can and must do by themselves is this: that they recognize these men for what they are. The congregations must determine whether he who comes to them is . . . a genuine or false prophet. . . . But they can never make anyone . . . a prophet . . . God alone can do that. He has the initiative."[47]

Sasse brings out a needed distinction for our topic, namely, that between immediate and mediate calls. "The Ministry in Its Relation to the Christian Church" does not use this distinction, and it is unimportant for Walther and Pieper, but it does appear in important documents on the service of women in the church, and I will turn to these now.

Prophecy and the Service of Women

So far we have yet to address at length the issue of the ministry of prophets who also happen to be female. Very little is said about women in the Confessions or in reports treating spiritual gifts, or in reports dealing with the Ministry. For this we must go to theological writings dealing specifically with the nature and roles of women. When we do, we find that while the LCMS has not always consistently and coherently answered the question regarding the cessation or continuation of prophecy and other spiritual gifts, it has remained consistently opposed to the ordination of women to the Ministry.[48] Further, when a theological report's primary topic is the role of women in the church, the office of prophet, when it comes up, is regarded in a different light.

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[47] Hermann Sasse, "The Office of Teacher in the Ancient Church," 199.

[48] For example, the CTCR report "Women in the Church," 35, reaffirms the position taken in its 1969 report, "Woman Suffrage in the Church," 2, that "Those statements which direct women to keep silent in the church and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office."

As the Missouri Synod addressed the question of woman suffrage in the church, the Synod, during convention in 1953 directed the President of the Synod to appoint a committee to prepare an exegetical study on the question.[49] The committee (known as the "Committee on Woman's Suffrage") presented its report in the 1956 convention.[50]

Tasked with an exegetical study, the committee focused on four New Testament passages: Gal. 3:26–29; 1 Cor. 11:2–16; 1 Cor. 14:33b–38; and 1 Tim. 2:11–15. All of these passages are relevant for our purpose, but especially 1 Cor. 11:2–16, which deals expressly with "women who prophesy," and 1 Cor. 14:33b–38, which prohibits women from "speaking." The committee, moreover, relied heavily on a study by Fritz Zerbst entitled *Das Amt der Frau in der Kirche*, which it regarded "as the most generally satisfactory study of the problem of Woman in the Church that has appeared until now," and it "recommend[ed] that the delegates to Synod secure a copy."[51] Among other things, this study introduced many in the LCMS to the distinction between the "order of creation" and the "order of redemption" in the discussion of the roles and service of women in the church.[52]

The distinction between the orders of creation and redemption played out in Zerbst's study, and accordingly in the committee's report, in dealing with 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14. The committee's report summarized several interpretations for the reference to women prophesying, and it arrived at a definite solution to the apparent conflict between the two

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[49] "Resolution 27," in *Proceedings of the Forty-second Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 484.

[50] Victor Bartling, et al., "Report of the Committee on Woman's Suffrage," in *Proceedings of the Forty-third Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 553–69.

[51] Victor Bartling, et al., "Report of the Committee on Woman's Suffrage," in *Proceedings of the Forty-third Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* 554. Zerbst's book was translated into English and published by Concordia in 1955. Fritz Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955).

[52] "Report of the Committee of Woman's Suffrage," 555–56; Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church.*

passages. Because it bears so directly on this thesis, the committee's report is worth quoting at length:

> 4. The reference to "women who prophesy" (v. 4 f.) has proved troublesome to interpreters. Some think that it conflicts with 1 Cor. 14:34, where women are forbidden to speak in the churches, and hence the latter passage as not written by Paul but inserted by some later copyist. Others think that Paul in v. 4 is either speaking hypothetically, assuming a case that actually did not occur, or is not yet speaking out his real mind, reserving that until his later chapter with its "absolute veto," as it is there understood by these interpreters. Still others suppose the that Paul in Ch. 11 is speaking not of public assemblies but of private gatherings or "family devotions." But there is not a bit of evidence for this assumption in the context. On the contrary, *the whole section from 11:2 to 14:40 pertains to public worship services* (see, e.g., 11:17 ff.: disorders at the Lord's Supper).
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> 5. The solution of the problem seems fairly simple when one recalls the "gift of prophecy" was one of the remarkable "spiritual gifts" spoken of in 1 Cor. 12:1–11 (see also Ch. 14). On the precise nature of most of these phenomena we are largely in ignorance. They are merely alluded to and were for the most part abnormal and transitory. With regard to the "gift of prophecy," however, we are not in complete darkness. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament the "prophet" was one who "spoke forth" for God as God spoke to him (Num. 12:2) and revealed His secrets (Amos 3:7). In 1 Cor. 14:26–30 it is shown that "prophecy" had its correlative, a "revelation," a special act of divine inspiration (cf. 1 Peter 1:12; Eph. 3:5). However much prediction of the future may have constituted the content of prophecy, this element did not exhaust or determine the concept. In 1 Corinthians 14, prophecy is spoken of as a Spirit-given capacity for building up Christian character, quickening wills, and encouraging spirits (v. 3), at times converting unbelievers by unsealing the secret fountains of the inner life (v. 24 f.).
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> Already the Old Testament had its "prophetesses," like Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). At the vestibule of the New Testament there was Anna (Luke 2:36). Later there were the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8, 9). And we need not be surprised that in the church of Corinth, so signally blessed by so many extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, the prophetic gift was granted also to women (this seems to have been a rare phenomenon also in Corinth, since the "prophesying woman" is mentioned only v. 4 f. and never again in the letter, not even in v. 13, where the "praying woman" recurs). This was in literal fulfillment of Joel's prophecy quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:17).
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> In keeping with his own precept: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying" (1 Thess. 5:19), Paul would not have interdicted the "prophesying woman" but would certainly have allowed her to "speak forth for God" (subject to the same regulations laid down for the "prophesying men" in 1 Cor. 14:29–33). In prophecy the human agent retired before God, who spoke by special revelation through the prophet. No veto is therefore laid down for the "prophetess" and her

> particular type of speaking. We may say: "the prophesying woman" in this passage exemplifies the equality of woman with man in the Order of Redemption, while the Pauline command that even this "prophetess" should conform to custom in the matter of the head-covering asserts the subordination of woman, also the inspired woman, in the Order of Creation. God the Redeemer wants to be worshipped as God the Creator and Regulator of His creatures. Hence Paul's concern that all, both men and women always, and more particularly *when engaged in religious activities*, should respect the position or "order" ordained for them by God.[53]

It may be helpful to recast the position advanced here, because it raises themes already discussed in this thesis, and also because it sets out one way to deal with some remaining questions. First, the report advances and defends a clear definition of "prophecy": it is understood as "speaking forth" for God according to God's own action and revealing. Second, it holds that prophecy is a spiritual gift; that is, it understands prophecy as a Word that the Spirit gives and whose very speaking the Spirit prompts. The report says, "In prophecy the human agent retired before God, who spoke by special revelation through the prophet." One important implication of this is that it sets apart "prophecy" from what is often called "preaching," which does not rely on direct personal revelation from God. Another important implication is that it regards prophets and prophetesses as "divinely called" or are "given an office" in a special, thorough, and immediate sense. Third, the document identifies both the "prophet" and the "prophesying woman" with prophets and prophetesses of both Old and New Testaments. Fourth, as a spiritual gift, its purpose is for upbuilding of the Christian community, not simply for personal edification nor merely for information. Fifth, the document locates their activity in the "public worship service," not only in private or occasional settings. Sixth, it suggests that the gift of prophecy, while clear and readily understood, to be relatively rare even in its time. Seventh,

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[53] "Report of the Committee of Woman's Suffrage," 558–60 (emphasis original). The report refers readers to Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church*, 31–45.

since Paul acknowledged prophecy as a special gift of the Spirit and urged that it not be quenched, it is concluded that Paul would have allowed the "prophesying woman" to prophesy, that is, "speak forth for God." Eighth, all prophesying, however, should be done in a manner that also respects not only God's order of redemption, by which both men and women might prophesy, but also the order of creation, in which women are subordinate to men.

The Committee on Woman's Suffrage recommended that the Synod "urge that our congregations continue the Scripture-sanctioned and time-tested policy of administering their affairs through the male voters' meetings."[54] Upon this recommendation, the Synod resolved to maintain this practice.

But questions and disagreements continued. In 1967 the Missouri Synod in convention directed the CTCR to study the matter of woman suffrage, and in 1968 the commission issued the document "Woman Suffrage in the Church."[55] Although the question of prophetesses was not a direct concern, the report did review earlier considerations, include the 1956 convention report on woman's suffrage, and it did its own exegetical review. About 1 Cor. 11:2–16, it concluded with the 1956 report both that Paul understood that women would prophesy and also that their prophesying should respect the order of creation.[56] Its review, however, was much briefer and did not advance beyond the earlier study.

This document also provides an analysis of 1 Cor. 14:34. In this case, however, the analysis makes the determination that the particular speaking which was inappropriate for women to engage in during worship was the asking of questions. The analysis states:

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[54] "Report of the Committee of Woman's Suffrage," 569.

[55] Resolution 2-05; "Woman Suffrage in the Church," CTCR.

[56] "Woman Suffrage in the Church," CTCR, 15.

> A distinction is made between the prophetesses of chapter 11 and women who are present at worship as ordinary members of a congregation. . . . While the former may speak, if properly attired, the latter are to remain silent. The context indicates that Paul was addressing his remarks to married women of the congregation. To suggest, on this basis, that unmarried women could speak in a public service would seem to be an unwarranted conclusion.
>
> It has been suggested that the apostle used the verb *lalein* here to signify idle chatter. While the word at times had this meaning in classical Greek, it is not so used in the New Testament. In the present instance it refers to speaking in an assembly of Christians gathered for worship. The context suggests that, during such worship, questions arose with respect to the revelations given by the Spirit and proclaimed in the congregation. Paul here insists that it is a disgrace for a woman to do this kind of talking, since it would be disruptive. He commands silence in this instance for the same reason that he orders the first man who receives a revelation to be quiet when a second person has such an experience and wants to talk (v.30).[57]

The merit of this particular interpretation is that it relies on the immediate evidence given in the text itself. In verse 31 Paul associates prophecy with learning, "For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged." Then, in verse 35, Paul continues that if the women wanted to learn something more, in other words, if they had questions about anything the prophets said, they should ask their own husbands at home.[58] The report concludes that these questions would be disruptive. An open "question and answer" period appears to be consistent with practices in first century synagogue meetings which were thought to have included a time for open discussion related to the day's Scripture readings.[59] "Woman Suffrage in the Church" concludes that it is not inappropriate for female prophets to prophesy and pray before the congregation. This activity in itself did not bring shame to their husbands and was sanctioned by Paul in chapter eleven, as long as it was done orderly and with proper decorum.

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[57] "Woman Suffrage in the Church," CTCR, 17–18.

[58] 1 Cor. 14:35.

[59] Many in the synagogue at Corinth, including Crispus the synagogue ruler, converted to Christianity. A possible implication would be that the Jewish cohort would want many of the customary Jewish practices for worship implemented into the Christian services. It is thought that rabbis generally taught using a question-answer procedure.

In 1985 the CTCR published another report, "Women in the Church," which dealt with women's roles and also discussed prophecy. Like the 1956 Convention report and the 1968 CTCR document, "Women in the Church" acknowledges that there were both male and female prophets in the early church. But this particular report emphasizes that the roles of prophets and pastors were dramatically different. Only pastors preached and presided over congregations, prophets did neither.[60] The report remarks:

> Commentators differ on exactly what kind of prophesying was done by women in the apostolic church-some take the association of prayer and prophecy as a description of officiating at public worship; others equate prophecy with preaching. While not much is said about the type of prophecy given, these interpretations are deficient. Prophesying is distinguished from preaching in Eph. 4:11. Preaching is a form of teaching, but the distinctive characteristic of prophecy is that it results from God having put His very words into the mouth of the one speaking (2 Pet. 1:21–22). In other words, the prophet depends on special inspiration to speak a message which is more than a product of human thought. While a prophetic inspiration could form the basis for an exhortation, prophecy was a message delivered as words from the Lord. It is evident that there were women in the apostolic church who were moved by the Spirit to prophesy. Certain women exercised a particular verbal gift.[61]

"Women in the Church" also weighs in on the definition of "to speak" (*laleo*) in 1 Cor. 14:34. According to this report *laleo* means "to preach." The report states:

> At first glance the apostle's presumption that women will pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5) appears to be in contradiction to his command for silence in 1 Corinthians 14. Commentators have offered a variety of solutions to the difficulties which arise when 1 Cor. 11 is compared with 1 Corinthians 14. One solution proposed is that a distinction should be made between two kinds of church meetings in these chapters, the one a family, nonplenary, meeting (chapter 11), the other an assembly of the entire congregation (chapter 14). Another solution emphasized a distinction between two kinds of speaking. According to this proposal "to speak" in chapter 14 means "to ask questions," while chapter 11 refers to ecstatic speech. Full clarity perhaps is not possible. However the following conclusions seem warranted.
>
> ...The silence mandated in 1 Corinthians 14 does not preclude their praying and prophesying. . . . It should be noted in this connection that Paul uses the Greek word

[60] "Women in the Church," CTCR, 9.

[61] Ibid., CTCR, 9.

> *laleo* for "speak" in 1 Cor. 14:34, which frequently means to "preach" in the New Testament (See Mark 2:2; Luke 9:11; Acts 4:1; 8:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Cor. 12:19; Phil 1:4; et al.), and not *lego*, which is the more general term. (The claim that Paul has a different meaning in mind and that he uses it here to prohibit disturbing chatter is extremely improbable.) When *laleo* has a meaning other than religious speech and preaching in the New Testament, this is usually made clear by an object or an adverb (e.g., to speak like a child, 1 Cor. 13:11; to speak like a fool, 2 Cor. 11:23). . . . Thus, Paul is not here demanding that women should be silent at all times or that they cannot express their sentiments and opinions at church assemblies. The command that women keep silent is a command that they not take charge of the public worship service, specifically the teaching-learning aspects of the service.[62]

"Women in the Church" concludes "those statements which direct women to keep silence in the church, and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office."[63] In summary, while "Women in the Church" admits that clarity involving the issues involved in 1 Corinthians 14 might not be possible, it nonetheless goes on to state that the text appears to warrant the exclusion of women from the pastoral office because it interprets "to speak" as "to preach."

LCMS clergyman Richard Dinda comes to a very different conclusion in his word study on *laleo.* According to Dinda,

> When Paul uses this verb without an object, he uses it most frequently for conversing, talking, chattering, even babbling unintelligible nonsense. He does use it clearly to mean public proclamation when he states an object: the Word, the Gospel, the mystery of Christ, things proper for sound doctrine, etc. When Paul addresses clearly the public proclamation of the Word, he uses verbs of proclaiming and preaching, . . . *kāryssō* (16 times), *kataggellō* (6 times), *evaggelizō* (21 times), *gnorizō* (15 times), *martyreō* (12 times).[64]

Dinda notes that Paul did not use specific terminology referring to "proclamation" when indicating the type of speech the women were not to engage in. Dinda also points out that the

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[62] "Women in the Church," CTCR, 31.

[63] Ibid., 42.

[64] Richard J. Dinda, "Word Study: 1 Cor. 14:33b–35 and 1 Tim. 2:8–12," (unpublished paper, Concordia Lutheran College, Austin TX, 1990), 12.

passage in question, 1 Cor. 14:34, uses both *laleo* and *lego.* It uses *laleo* regarding the type of speech that women were not to engage in, and *lego* for the type of speech the law engages in. Dinda remarks, "Does not the Law declare, proclaim, when it speaks? Why then does Paul use a different word for whatever the women were or were not doing?"[65] Dinda concludes that Paul is forbidding idle and disruptive speaking during worship.

Yet another position was taken by Gregory Lockwood in his Concordia Commentary on 1 Corinthians. Citing the fact that *laleo* occurs twenty-four times within 1 Corinthians 14, always referring to either "speaking in tongues" or "prophesying," Lockwood concludes that these were the specific types of speech Paul was precluding women from doing.[66] He reconciles this inconsistency with 1 Corinthians 11 by concluding that Paul took a "pastoral approach" to the issue of women prophesying during worship by first allowing that they may prophesy, but then laying the ground work in chapters 11–13 for his final command for their silence in chapter 14. Lockwood then extrapolates what he sees as Paul's injuction against prophesying and tongue speaking to preaching. "Here Paul prohibits the women from speaking in tongues, prophesying, and a fortiori, authoritative (pastoral) preaching and teaching in the worship service."[67] While Lockwood's argument that Paul is silencing female prophets and tongue speakers may have some merit, it would seem that Paul's reference in 1 Cor. 14:26 that everyone has something to contribute to the worship service precludes Lockwood's conclusion.[68] Dinda would also dispute Lockwood's interpretation of *laleo* (see above). On the other hand, Lockwood notes that the

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[65] Richard J. Dinda, "Word Study: 1 Cor. 14:33b–35 and 1 Tim. 2:8–12," 8.

[66] Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians,* Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 533.

[67] Ibid.

[68] "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church." 1 Cor. 14:26.

verb "to ask" in 1 Cor. 14:35 refers to "pressing and probing questions" and acknowledges that for women to do this would have be "shameful."[69]

The other key text cited in these two CTCR reports to delineate the role of women is 1 Tim. 2:11–15.[70] These reports understand that this passage "makes a more explicit point" that a woman is not to be a pastor.[71] The reports interpret 1 Tim. 2:11–15 to mean that "women are prohibited from **certain types** of teaching or public address, especially from that exercised by the 'teaching office,' that is, the pastoral office."[72] Following German theologian Peter Brunner's work, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*, "Women in the Church" cites the created order as the basis for Paul's proscription. Brunner notes that the theological understanding of 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:12 has been interpreted in various ways by Lutherans. Some of the early Lutheran reformers held that that the issue of women preachers was an adiaphoron, others based the larger part of their proscriptions against women on unflattering opinions about the nature of women. Brunner's opinion was that the roles of women needed to correspond to "the theological doctrine of the nature and relationship between the God-given sexes."[73] Following Brunner, "Women in the Church" concludes, "Assumption of that [the pastoral] office by a woman is out of place because it is a woman who assumes it, not because women do it in the wrong way or

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[69] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians,* 506.

[70] "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." 1 Tim. 2:11–15.

[71] "Women in the Church," CTCR, 31. As early as the 1965 Detroit convention the LCMS has held that 1 Cor. 14:34–35, when combined with 1 Tim. 2:11–15, is to be interpreted that "God forbids women publicly to preach and teach the Word to men and to hold any office or vote in the church where this involves exercising authority over men with respect to the public administration of the Office of the Keys." See: "Woman Suffrage in the Church," CTCR, 11.

[72] Ibid., 32 (emphasis original).

[73] Peter Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 14.

have inferior gifts and abilities."[74] "The creational pattern of male headship requires that women not hold the formal position of the authoritative public teaching office in the church, that is, in the office of pastor."[75] This means that no matter how skilled or gifted a woman might be, because of her created nature she may not be a pastor. But the case of the prophet is different, as Brunner pointed out: "The prophet is exclusively and directly called to his prophetic ministry by God and not by men. It is impossible for the church to 'ordain' one of its members to be a prophet. One either has the gift of prophecy or one does not have it."[76]

Like "Women in the Church," "Women Suffrage in the Church" concludes that women may serve in any capacity that does not engage in the distinctive role of the pastoral office. Offices in the church "exist for the purpose of serving the people of God with that particular measure of authority which is entrusted to each officeholder by the exercise of the franchise on the part of the church members."[77] Therefore, "only offices which usurp the order of creation are prohibited to women."[78] Conclusions drawn from these two reports on women indicate that female prophets would be able to utilize their gifts by serving in a variety of humanly established offices and ministries.

The Prophetic Office, the Pastoral Office, and the Word of God

As I said at the opening of this chapter, if we grant "the possibility of contemporary prophecy and therefore of contemporary prophets and prophetesses," as I had shown in previous chapters, then there are further questions to be addressed:

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[74] "Women in the Church," CTCR, 34.

[75] Ibid., 35.

[76] Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*, 18.

[77] "Woman Suffrage in the Church," CTCR, 25.

[78] Ibid., 2.

> But does this possibility fit with the Missouri Synod's position on the office of the ministry? And does this possibility fit also with the Missouri Synod's position on the service of women in the church—especially its rejection of the ordination of women to the pastoral office?[79]

Answers to these questions have emerged throughout the survey just undertaken, but now I can state them more directly.

First, "the possibility of contemporary prophecy and therefore of contemporary prophets and prophetesses" fits with the Missouri Synod's position on the office of the ministry when we recognize, as the Missouri Synod has, that "prophecy" represents a special form of the Word of God. This special form of the Word is as a direct revelation to someone, that is, as a particular spiritual gift. This answer fits not only what was seen in chapter one on spiritual gifts, but also the definition of prophecy reflected in such documents as the 1956 committee report on the suffrage of women and supported by direct biblical testimony.

Second, this answer calls for a distinction between the "office of pastor" and the "office of prophet." This kind of distinction is hard to see when the "pastoral office" is identified without qualification as the "office of the ministry," as we see in such important documents as Walther's *Church and Ministry*, and when the "prophetic office" is subsumed under the "pastoral office." But we saw that the reason for such moves had to do with distinguishing the pastoral office from the priesthood of believers. However, when dealing with the service of women in the church, questions about women prophesying in the church had to be dealt with, and we found repeatedly that distinctions were made between "prophets" and "pastors" and between "prophecy" and "preaching." Moreover, we found that these distinctions upheld "the possibility of contemporary prophecy and therefore of contemporary prophets and prophetesses."

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[79] See page one of this chapter.

Third, we saw how the prohibition against the ordination of women to the pastoral office—a position steadfastly maintained by the Missouri Synod—does not rule out the possibility of prophetesses or the office of prophetess, because it is a prohibition about women *pastors*, not about women *prophets*.

This part of the answer, however, leaves as yet unanswered questions about *application* for the life of the church today. I will take those up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

"NEITHER GIFTS WITHOUT TASKS NOR TASKS WITHOUT GIFTS"*

The issue of what women may and may not do in the church has been an area of intense interest and debate within the LCMS. The Missouri Synod desires to firmly ground its doctrine on women based on what the Scripture says, but disagreements about what the Scriptures do and do not say about women often run deep, and the church's call to maintain unity has been at times challenged. As has been demonstrated, the LCMS's understanding of the role and function of the office of prophet has been, for the most part, consistently treated within reports dealing with spiritual gifts, even when those reports subscribed to a cessationist view. However, some reports dealing with the Ministry hold that the modern day pastoral office contains all of Christ's offices, inclusive of Christ's prophetic office. Similarly, some reports dealing specifically with women do not find room for "prophets" as such, but rather regard prophecy as a function that the church may assign as she sees fit. The basic challenge for this paper is to assess whether there is room in the theology published and used in the Missouri Synod to accommodate God's prophets who are also female and if the function of the prophetic office is to be based on the gender of the person called into it.

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* Boyd Hunt, *Redeemed! Eschatological Redemption and the Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 49, quoted in "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 31.

My response to this challenge came in the last chapter, where I concluded that the theology of the LCMS does leave room for the possibility of contemporary prophecy (a spiritual gift) and for the possibility of contemporary prophets *and prophetesses*.

But the answer leaves open some questions of application. One question is about recognizing speech as prophetic. Just because a person in the church says she has a revelation from God does not mean that she does. Moreover, is there a distinction to be made between the revelation itself and what the prophet or prophetess says? Another question is about rendering this prophecy. Most pointedly is Paul's prohibition to women speaking in church (1 Corinthians 14). We have already seen that opinions vary on what this means and its applications. A third question is about recognizing prophetesses as office holders. It is one thing to say that prophecy is a spiritual gift, as has been established. But what about the one to whom the gift is given? May that person ever be recognized? And if so, what does that recognition "count as"? Most pointedly, would that be equivalent to the "ordination of women"? And if so, how would that fit with the theology of the Missouri Synod?

Recognizing Prophecy

How is speech to be recognized as prophetic? A complete answer to that question is beyond the scope of this thesis but essential for the church. For example, one matter that I cannot deal with is the practical question of defining prophetic speech. Without such a definition, one invites all kinds of speech to be taken seriously as candidates for "divine discourse," and one thereby opens an avenue that could be easily misused for people to express personal opinions. This issue raises a second question, which is instructing the church in prophecy, but that, too, is something I cannot address here.

My answer to this question begins by reiterating that the reason a prophet, male or female, can legitimately speak is because a prophet's authority is not his or her own. Any prophet, male or female, has been called and sent by God. "Spiritual Gifts" explains that the offices listed in Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:28–30 emphasize "what these persons or groups of people do . . . their roles rather than . . . their persons."[1] The personages referenced in 1 Cor. 12:28–29 and Eph. 4:11 are "those whom God has appointed in the church."[2] The prophetic office is a divinely mandated office whose corresponding divine authority attaches not to the person, but to the office. Therefore it would be inappropriate to consider the prophetic ministry an office within the category of humanly-established offices. Prophetic gifts may operate beneficially within numerous ministries, and they should, but the prophetic office, itself, is not a humanly established office.

At this point, there are at least two important questions to answer. The first is the claim of *any* person that her word is God's Word. This leads us to ask what we mean by the public speaking of God's Word and whose authority is attached to that Word. The second question is to ascertain whether any particular claim to prophecy is indeed authentic.

To answer the first question, we may begin by recognizing that we use the term "Word of God" because our God is a speaking God. But God has shown us that he can communicate to his creatures in a whole host of ways.[3] Scripture tells us that God's Word is living and active,

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[1] "Spiritual Gifts," CTCR, 21.

[2] Ibid., 25.

[3] For example: visions and dreams (Num. 2:6; Acts 2:17); symbolic actions (Hosea 1:2; Jer. 32:6–15); miracles (Exod. 7:8–11:10); angels (Dan. 9:20–23; John 20:12); a burning bush (Exod. 3:1–4); fleece (Judg. 6:36–40); writing on the wall (Dan. 5:24–25); a donkey (Num. 22:21–35); nature (Gen. 9:11–17; Rom. 1:18–20).

creative, powerful, incarnational, and that God has culminated his Word in his Son.[4] God's Son tells us that his words are spirit and life.[5] In short, by God's Word we mean God's communication to us.

How is it, then, that words of creatures can be considered the Word of God? Here philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff in his book *Divine Discourse* gives us help in explaining this claim.[6] Especially helpful in regard to our concern is his notion of "deputized discourse."[7] To grasp these notions, it is necessary to understand his distinction between "locutionary acts" and "illocutionary acts": "locutionary acts are acts of uttering or inscribing words. *Il*-locutionary acts are acts performed *by way* of locutionary acts, acts such as asking, asserting, commanding, promising, and so forth."[8] Understanding God's speech as illocutionary actions leaves "open how God performs those actions."[9]

An example of "deputized discourse" is the secretary authorized to compose and sign a letter on behalf of an executive. In this case the executive exercises his authority through the "deputized" actions of the secretary. Although the secretary composed and perhaps even signed the letter for the executive—that is, the secretary performed the locutionary act—the letter is the word and action—it counts as the illocutionary act—of the executive, not the secretary. In a similar manner, an ambassador is "deputized" to speak on behalf of the head of state.

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[4] Heb. 4:12; Genesis 1; Heb. 1:3; John 1:1–14; Heb. 1:1–2.

[5] John 6:63.

[6] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections On The Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[7] Ibid., 42–45.

[8] Ibid., 10 (emphasis original).

[9] Ibid., 13.

Wolterstorff sees the deputized possessing the equivalent of the "power of attorney" for the deputizer.[10] Wolterstorff explains:

> If the ambassador was deputized to say what he did say in the name of his head of state, then the head of state speaks (discourses) by way of the utterings of the ambassador; locutionary acts of the ambassador count as illocutionary acts of the head of state. Correspondingly, the listener is presented not merely with locutionary acts of the ambassador but with locutionary acts which *count as* illocutionary acts performed by the ambassador's head of state.[11]

David Scaer understands the authority of the apostles in a similar way to Wolterstorff's deputized discourse. "The disciples of Jesus could be considered His attorneys, deputies, and ambassadors. . . . They were empowered by Jesus to establish His church through their own preaching."[12] Scaer explains the Greek word for "apostle," which means "one who is sent," corresponds to the Hebrew term *shaliach.* As *shaliachs*, the Hebrews would understand that the apostles were Christ's deputies. The authority of the *shaliach* was like the sender's. "The decision of a *shaliach* was binding"[13] within the area deputized.

Scaer notes that Old Testament prophets were also considered *shaliachs.* Prophets were deputized and given authority for their speaking office by God.[14] Scaer sees the commissioning of the New Testament apostles paralleling the "sending" of the Old Testament prophets.[15] According to Scaer, "when Jesus called His disciples 'apostles,' He was implicitly making them the successors of the prophets. This suggestion of Jesus was not wasted on the disciples, because in the early church they were given all the prerogatives that the prophets once had in guiding the

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[10] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 44.

[11] Ibid., 45 (emphasis original).

[12] David P. Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures* (St Louis: Concordia, 1971), 38.

[13] Ibid., 38.

[14] Ibid., 39.

[15] Ibid.

religious life of the Jews, God's people. Like the prophets, the apostles were chose and endowed by God."[16]

Setting aside the problem with the interpretation of the word *authentein*, and for the sake of discussion assuming it means the exercising of authority, the question at hand is who is exercising authority when it comes to deputized discourse? Is it the commissioned prophet, or is it God who is exercising his authority through the prophet? Following Wolterstorff, the speech of the deputized prophet should be considered the illocutionary speech act of the divine commissioner. It is God who is doing the "asking, asserting, commanding, promising, and so forth."[17] The prophet speaks, but it is God who is exercising his authority through the prophet.[18] And if so, in the normal course of carrying out her duty, when the prophet engages in her own speech and also speaks in her own voice, this would also be understood as deputized speech. One may want to ask God why he would want to deputize a female as prophet in the first place. But this is not a question for us to ask. How we accommodate the prophet's speech is the question.

This answers the question about how the prophet's word can be understood as God's Word. But is it? This is a question of *judgment.*

This is an appropriate question, because the prophet's speech is to be judged.[19] In fact, it could be suggested that prophetic speech was not authoritative until properly evaluated. But judging prophetic speech is not something new with the New Testament. The speech of Old

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[16] Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures*, 41.

[17] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 10.

[18] Ibid., 45.

[19] 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20–21.

Testament prophets was also to be judged.[20] Jeremiah informs us that many "prophets" clamored for recognition during his day, but they had not been sent by God.[21] It is also incorrect to think that it is only prophetic speech which is to be judged. Even the speech of the apostles was to be weighted and evaluated.[22]

We may divide the question of judgment in two and ask, "How is the church to judge?" and "Who in the church is to judge?" As to the first question, the church is to judge prophetic speech today the same way as the church in the New Testament did—whether or not it accords with the Scriptures. The Bereans, for example, were commended because they diligently tested Paul's words against the Old Testament Scripture to evaluate whether or not his words were true.[23] Because the New Testament writings were still being formed, Christians were also to judge prophetic speech in light of the apostolic teaching already received.[24] If the words of the prophet aligned with Scripture and apostolic testimony, then the prophet's words would be edifying for the congregation.

Both Wolterstorff and Scaer agree on much concerning deputized discourse. But Scaer's position that the apostles were the sent successors to the prophets can confuse categories, however. Both apostles and prophets existed in the New Testament church. But the apostles were

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[20] "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him." Deut. 18:22.

[21] "Then the LORD said to me, 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.'" Jer. 14:14–15.

[22] For example: Acts 15:1–2, 17:11; 2 Cor. 11:4. Luther and Walther also believed Scripture tells us that laymen are to judge doctrine. See Walther, *Church and Ministry,* 332–38.

[23] Acts 17:11.

[24] Gal. 1:8; 1 Cor. 14:37–38; 1 John 4:2–6. See also 1 Thess. 5:21–22.

sent in that they were commissioned as the authoritative witnesses to Jesus' self-interpretation.[25] They were deputized to represent this revelation of Jesus and to speak in his name. Wolterstorff claims that it is for this reason that the New Testament can be considered "a medium of divine discourse."[26] The apostolic commission attached to the unique revelation of the once for all Christ-event. That corresponding witness, now recorded in New Testament Scripture, is therefore uniquely normative and authoritative. Therefore the norm for the church's faith and life are the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures. But what then of the New Testament prophets? Are not New Testament prophets also, using Wolterstorff's terminology, "divinely commissioned and deputized" by Christ? Again, if we understand passages such as Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:29 to be speaking about New Testament prophets, we must answer, yes. It is the risen Christ who gives "some . . . to be prophets."[27] Peter Brunner concurs. "The Lord has reserved for Himself still a third method by which He can give His Word to mankind: the awakening of prophets."[28] But the task of New Testament Scripture remained with the apostles. And the prophet's words were to be evaluated in light of it.

The revelatory nature of both the apostolic and prophetic offices point to their similarities. This is likely why they are both considered foundational in the church.[29] The "mystery of Christ" has been revealed also to New Testament prophets. But the primary office remained with the chosen apostles, and their words and subsequent writings the uniquely normative authority for the church. Like their Old Testament counterparts who summoned the people back to obedience

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[25] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse,* 291, 293. See John 17:20; 20:31.

[26] Ibid., 296.

[27] Eph. 4:11.

[28] Peter Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women,* 18.

[29] Eph. 2:20, 3:5.

to the original intent of the Law of Moses, New Testament prophets explicate the law of Christ recorded by the apostles. They do not create new articles of faith, but call the people back to the original intention of the New Covenant.

The Bible also provides several different ways to discern between true and false prophets. One test is whether or not what is prophesied comes to pass.[30] "Surely, the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets."[31] But a prophet's foretelling may consist of several layers of promise and fulfillment which complicates the human understanding of prophetic fulfillment. Yet, even if what a prophet foretells takes place, this is not the definitive sign of the true prophet of God. Jesus warns about the rise of false prophets in the church and tells us that true and false prophets can be known by their fruits and their relationship with him.[32] False prophets may even perform great miracles, but their conduct and character will expose their true motives and their lack of relationship with Jesus.[33] Therefore, even if a prophet's predictions come true, if that prophet does not follow God and advocates the following of other gods, the people must not listen to that prophet. He is a false prophet being used by the Lord to test the people's love of God.[34] The *Didache* also instructs that the test between true and false prophets is based on the prophet's behavior. A true prophet follows "the ways of the Lord," is not hypocritical, and is not greedy for money.[35]

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[30] Deut. 18:22.

[31] Amos 3:7.

[32] Matt. 7:20.

[33] Matt 7:21–23; 24:24–25.

[34] Deut. 13:1–4.

[35] Didache 11:16, 20.

Another significant aspect in discerning the true from false prophet relates to the event of the prophet's call. God's immediate call is the foundation upon which the prophetic office stands. For this reason the prophetic call, itself, needs to be evaluated to determine whether it is from the Lord. It could be that what one senses as a "call from God" is really a hallucination or something else. But we do know that prophets of the Old Testament were very conscious of being called and commissioned directly by God, and Scripture contains several call narratives which describe the event of the prophet's calling and commissioning.[36] Jeremiah's call contains the general call pattern found in many prophetic calls: the Word of commission, the Word of assurance, and the sign of the call, which was the divine touching of Jeremiah's mouth.[37] These were the spiritual events which actualized Jeremiah's call to which he was destined from birth.[38] But not all prophetic calls were the same. Sometimes the call included a theophany of the heavenly throne room; some calls record a dialogue between the prophet undergoing commissioning and God.[39] However, sometimes the prophet's call narrative is omitted and the prophet simply appears on the scene.[40] Amos provides us no call narrative. He simply tells us that he was minding his own business tending sheep in Tekoa when the Lord commissioned him.[41] Prophets in the New Testament Scripture also appear to have needed no additional legitimization that the inclusion of a call narrative would have provided. They, too, simply appear on the scene. Luke can write about Agabus, for example, without having to substantiate

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[36] Exod. 3:1–12; Judg. 6:11–17; Isa. 6:1–13; Ezek. 1:1–3; Jer.1:4–10.

[37] Aune, *Prophecy,* 98–99.

[38] Aune, *Prophecy,* 98. See also Jer. 1:9–10.

[39] Isa. 6:1–13; Jer. 1:9–10.

[40] For example Elijah and Amos.

[41] Amos 1:1; 7:14–15.

his call. Agabus was already a well known and established prophet. His inaugural revelatory vision and direct divine commissioning is assumed in the text. As an established and recognized prophet, we never read about Agabus, himself, being judged. Only his words were. To be sure, the Word of the Lord came to Agabus in some manner, a divine commissioning occurred, and that commissioning was recognized in the church. Similarly today, we can expect that the Word of the Lord will come to the prophet in some manner to inaugurate her divine commissioning. At the same time, Scripture also suggests that prophetic calls appear to be uniquely personalized to each prophet in ways that make it deeply significant. Because prophetic calls are experiential and individualized, verifying the event of divine commissioning can pose a problem for the church. Anyone can make such a claim. Nevertheless, in order to verify the genuineness of a prophet's commissioning, it could be maintained that contemporary prophetic calls would have the same basic characteristics that were exhibited in Jeremiah's call: the Word of the Lord in an inaugural revelation, a word of reassurance, a sign, and a very keen sense of awareness of direct divine commissioning.

As for the second question, "Who in the church is to judge?" we must, again, look to Scripture to provide this answer. When we do, we find this responsibility falls squarely to all God's people.[42] First Thess. 5:21 is especially relevant because it specifically refers to the judging of prophecy by the congregation. Walther's speaks to this subject in Thesis 10 of his *Church and Ministry* and concludes that "to the ministry of the Word, according to divine right, belongs also the duty [*Amt*] to judge doctrine, but laymen also possess this right." Walther continues that the judging of doctrine is the laymen's "most sacred duty, as in the first place all those passages of Holy Scripture that command laymen to judge doctrine incontestably

[42] Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21-22; 1 Cor. 10:15–16; 1 John 4:1–3, 6; 2 John 10–11; Matt. 7:15–16; John 10:5.

declare."[43] In Thesis 10 Walther also cites Luther who states, "It belongs to each and every Christian to know and judge doctrine."[44] Luther held that "all who believe and no one else . . . should decide and judge all doctrine, and their judgment should stand, even if it concerns the pope."[45] While Walther's thesis deals with the teaching and preaching of pastors, it would also apply to anyone who claimed to speak the Word of the Lord. Thus, the authority attached to the female prophet's speech would ultimately be exercised by those who have the responsibility for evaluating it.

Finally, it is worth saying something about a practical question: What should the church make of words by a prophet which are not the direct discourse of God? On this question, both Scaer and Wolterstorff can help us, because both differentiate between God's direct speech and the word of the deputy. Scaer explains that when "the Word of the Lord came" to a prophet, this shows that "there must be a distinction between the prophetic word and the direct Word of God to the prophet, so there must be a similar distinction between the direct Word of God and the apostolic word."[46] Using passages from Hosea and Jeremiah, Wolterstorff demonstrates how prophetic discourse moves between the various modes of speech. Prophecy "regularly moves back and forth in just this way between the prophet speaking in the name of God by virtue of having been deputized to do so, the prophet speaking in his own voice but delivering a message from God, and the prophet speaking in his own voice and not delivering a message from God. As

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[43] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 332.

[44] Ibid., 333, quoting Martin Luther, "Against Henry, King of England," 1522, St. Louis edition, 19:341.

[45] Ibid., 340, quoting Martin Luther, " Church Postil: Epistle Portion, "On the Second Sunday After the Epiphany," 1524, St. Louis edition, 12:335–36.

[46] Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures*, 51.

to the first two modes, we usually have both of those at once."[47] Wolterstorff suggests that the understanding that prophecy "results from God having put His very words into the mouth of the one speaking" is a correct one.[48] But at the same time, this understanding should not suggest or require a mechanical type of prophecy which consists of regurgitating the mere repetition of God's utterances. God's typical way of communication with a prophet is through dreams and visions.[49] Sometimes this might include direct speech, at other times this communication would convey ideas in symbolic speech, pictures and similitudes.[50] These symbols, images, and metaphors would require also the words of the prophet.

I am sure that we do not want to insinuate that Samuel or Elijah or Amos or Jonah or Deborah for that matter, never reasoned or provided helpful reflections on what God had communicated to them. The prophet functions much like a deputized ambassador who is given parameters for his speech but not always the exact words to say. Therefore, in the normal course of carrying out his duty, the ambassador will also likely engage in his own speech and speak in his own voice as he relays the message of his deputizer. Wolterstorff explains that much like the head of state who first counsels the ambassador privately, God speaks privately first to the prophet something he wants communicated publicly. The prophet is "*commissioned* to communicate a message . . . and *deputized* so that, by communicating that message, God is then and there once again saying that very same thing, this time in public."[51]

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[47] Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures*, 45–46.

[48] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse,* 48. See also "Women in the Church," CTCR, 9 and Deut. 18:18.

[49] Num. 12:6.

[50] Gen. 40–41; Dan. 7:15, 8:15; Hosea 12:10; Acts 10:9–18.

[51] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse,* 46 (emphasis original).

On the other hand, the question of the *application* of prophecy would seem to fall under the authority of the whole church, and of the pastor called to oversee the community. In other words, what the church should make of the revelation, once it was made known and clearly explained, does not belong to the prophetic office as such.

Recognizing Prophetesses in the Church

As we saw in chapter three, opinions vary about Paul's injunction against women "speaking" in the church in 1 Corinthians 14. This raises the question of when prophecy is to be recognized, especially when the speaker is a woman.

To recap, those opinions include that the injunction against women speaking in 1 Cor. 14:34 refers to: the asking of questions ("Woman Suffrage in the Church"), non-religious speech (Dinda), authoritative speaking associated with the pastoral office ("Women in the Church," Lockwood, Sasse),[52] and includes prophesying and praying (Lockwood, Sasse), or does not include prophesying and praying ("Women Suffrage in the Church," "Women in the Church,"). While all these arguments have merit, I believe some have more merit than others.

Lockwood makes a good point that *laleo* occurs twenty-four times within 1 Corinthians 14, always referring to either "speaking in tongues" or "prophesying." But his conclusion that Paul's injunction against speaking precludes females from both prophesying and speaking in tongues misses the mark. In 1 Cor. 11:2–6 Paul assumes that females will prophesy and he sanctions this activity as long as it is done appropriately. Thus, the type of speaking Paul is prohibiting females

[52] See also "The Creator's Tapestry, Scriptural Perspectives on Man–Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church," A Report of the Commission of Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, December 2009), 45. This report also cites and approves the conclusions of "The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices with Guidelines for Congregations," A Report of the Commission of Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, January 2005) which allows women to serve in all non-divinely established offices which do not involve the unique functions of the pastoral office.

from doing in 1 Cor. 14:34 must be different from prophesying. Following Lockwood's logic, this would leave the other option, speaking in tongues, for the meaning of *laleo* in this passage, and would weaken Lockwood's a fortiori argument that the preclusion to this type of speaking (which would now only be speaking in tongues) would also translate to authoritative pastoral speaking during worship.

More definitive views in the LCMS are issued through its synodical convention proceedings. As noted in Chapter 3, those views agree that the injunction against speaking in 1 Cor. 14:34 does not refer to prophesying, and that prophesying by women was sanctioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. The exegetical analysis presented by the "Committee on Woman's Suffrage" adopted by the 1956 synodical convention was relied upon by the CTCR reports "Woman Suffrage in the Church" and "Women in the Church," which were subsequently adopted by the Missouri Synod at convention, and which also maintained the view of the 1956 committee report that Paul was not prohibiting prophetic speech by women during worship. Nevertheless, "Woman Suffrage in the Church" and "Women in the Church" subscribed to different interpretations of *laleo* in 1 Cor. 14:34. "Women in the Church" held that *laleo* meant authoritative preaching, while "Woman Suffrage in the Church" held that it referred to the asking of questions.

"Women in the Church" defends its position with the claim that Scripture often uses *laleo* to mean "to preach." It then cites seven passages to prove its case. But the passages cited are not definitive for the report's claim. A problem is that in six out of the seven passages cited by the report, *laleo* uses an object which serves to help clarify it as religious speaking or preaching.[53]

[53] Those verses are: Mark 2:2; Luke 9:11; Acts 4:1; Acts 8:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Cor. 12:19; Phil. 1:4. The verb *laleo* utilizes a clarifying object in Mark 2:2 (the word); Luke 9:11 (about the kingdom); Acts (continued next page)

Dinda's analysis suggests that while *laleo* can refer to religious speech and preaching, it does so only definitively when it uses an object which clarifies it as such. The issue is that there are many passages in Scripture where *laleo* means other types of speaking besides preaching.[54] But the report states that an object will be used with *laleo* to clarify when the speaking is not authoritative speaking: "When *laleo* has a meaning other than religious speech and preaching in the New Testament, this is usually made clear by an object or an adverb."[55] Therefore, the report concludes that the use of *laleo* in 1 Cor. 14:34 (which does not utilize an object) refers to authoritative speech.

But consideration needs to be made to the fact that Paul uses *laleo* in 1 Corinthians 14 the majority of the time to refer to speaking in tongues (18 times out of the 24 total times it is used),[56] and never unambiguously to refer to pastoral preaching. Notably, throughout 1 Corinthians 14 *laleo* is used without an object several times related to speaking in tongues.[57] Therefore, when *laleo* is used without an object in verse 34, it is not out of the question that Paul was precluding women from disruptive speaking in tongues without an interpreter, especially since Paul's intention was to elevate prophecy over disruptive and counterproductive tongue speaking. Paul had already relayed in verse 21 what the law had to say about (tongue) speaking[58]

8:25 (the word of the Lord); 1 Cor. 2:7 (God's secret wisdom); 2 Cor. 12:19 (as those in Christ); Phil. 1:4 (the word of God). Acts 4:1 states: "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people." The next verse clarifies that this speaking refers to teaching and proclaiming: "They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead."

[54] For example: Matt. 12:24, 36, 46; Mark 5:36; 7:37; Acts 2:4, 6, 7; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 7:14; 1 Cor. 14:21, 29; 2 Cor. 7:14; 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 5:13; etc.

[55] "Women in the Church," CTCR, 31.

[56] 1 Cor. 14:2(3x), 4, 5(2x), 6, 9(2x), 11(2x), 13, 18, 21, 23, 27, 28, 39.

[57] For example: 1 Cor. 14:9, 11, 21, 28.

[58] "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me." 1 Cor. 14:21.

and concluded that the law forbids unintelligible tongue speaking during worship. It is possible that Paul was referring to this particular injunction of the law when he commanded the silence of women and that they not "speak" as the law quoted in verse 21 prohibited.[59] In summary, the conclusion rendered by "Women in the Church" that the specific type of speaking referenced by Paul in 1 Cor. 14:34 relates to authoritative preaching is possible, but not conclusive based on the word study provided by the report and the context of the text.

"Woman Suffrage in the Church" provides an alternative answer. According to this report, the specific type of speaking women were precluded from during worship was the asking of questions.[60] The advantage of this particular interpretation is that relies more fully on the context of the text to help determine its meaning. The speaking prohibited by Paul is set within the context of submission, the law, learning, asking, and disgrace.[61] Clearly, asking questions so as to learn, if engaged in outside of the law's parameters, would bring disgrace to the husband. Apparently, the women wanted to learn more, so Paul continues in verse 35 that if they did have questions, they should inquire about these things with their own husbands at home. The act of speaking in verse 34 is grammatically linked to learning in verse 35, and by extension the asking of questions. The church at Corinth included many Jewish converts, including the former synagogue ruler in that city. It is likely that they would want to have a "question and answer" period which appears to be a typical practice during first century synagogue meetings. The report concludes that women questioning the prophets would have been disruptive and would not be in

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[59] 1 Cor. 14:35.

[60] "The context suggests that, during such worship, questions arose with respect to the revelations given by the Spirit and proclaimed in the congregation. Paul here insists that it is a disgrace for a woman to do this kind of talking, since it would be disruptive." "Women Suffrage in the Church," CTCR, 18.

[61] "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." 1 Cor. 14:34–35.

keeping with proper decorum during worship, especially in a society where women were not to speak in public generally, and particularly with other men. Regarding learning and education, the expectation during that time was that the education of wives was to be the responsibility of their husbands.[62] We must also note that Paul emphasizes that this particular behavior was disgraceful. The requirement for the women to ask their "own" husbands at home suggests that wives were asking questions of other men publicly, a behavior that would bring disgrace on the woman's husband.

We see a parallel use of the word "disgrace" in 1 Cor. 11:6 where Paul says "if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head."[63] Paul then tells the Corinthians to "judge for yourselves" whether it is proper for a woman to be veiled.[64] Having short hair or long hair is not something intrinsically wrong in itself. The disgrace related to hair length was a matter of community tradition. Likewise, women asking questions directly to other men, or even publicly of their own husbands which might suggest criticism, would not only be disruptive, it would be a disgrace. Lockwood also notes that the verb "to ask" used in 1 Cor. 14:35 implies an intense type of asking involving "pressing and probing questions." Lockwood concurs that for women to do this would have been "shameful."[65] They needed to ask these questions, not publicly, but at home to their own husbands.

In conclusion, because *laleo* can mean a variety of different types of speech, the context of the passage is needed in order to decipher its particular meaning. It is a step too far to simply

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[62] Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment*, (Tübigen: J.C.B Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), 274–77.

[63] 1 Cor. 11:6.

[64] 1 Cor. 11:13.

[65] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 506.

state that because *laleo* frequently means preaching, or because in the created order women are subject to men, the speaking in 1 Cor. 14:34 must refer to authoritative speaking. While women may indeed be precluded from authoritative speaking in the church, this particular passage does not definitively say this. I agree with Lockwood that the fact that Paul uses *laleo* in 1 Corinthians 14 to refer to only tongue speaking and prophesying is an important consideration, but I have to rule out that Paul wanted to prohibit women from prophesying because he had already sanctioned their prophesying in chapter 11. The reference to the Old Testament law against unintelligible tongue speaking cited by Paul in verse 21 could well be the specific law that Paul had in mind in verse 34. It would be shameful for women "to speak" in a way the law in verse 21 prohibited. For these reasons I find a prohibition against unintelligible tongue speaking to be a stronger candidate for the meaning of *laleo* in verse 34 than the prohibition against authoritative preaching. But this solution is not completely satisfactory. Why Paul would single out women and command them to submit to proper worship order regarding tongue speaking after he had already issued a general prohibition against uninterpreted tongues is not clear. Because *laleo* has no object, although most of the other occurrences of *laleo* without an object in this chapter relate to tongue speaking, it is not possible to confirm with certainty the type of speaking Paul was referring to in verse 34.

The interpretation that Paul was prohibiting women from asking questions during worship services might therefore be the better interpretation. This is the option subscribed to in "Women Suffrage in the Church" and it makes good sense contextually. Grammatically, *laleo* in verse 34 is connected with the learning and asking of questions referenced in verse 35. Asking questions of other men in public, and potentially engaging in extended conversations with them, would be disgraceful behavior for women and an affront to orderly worship. However, maintaining that

laleo in verse 34 means asking questions leaves open the identification of the law to which Paul was referring in verse 35. The law cited in verse 21 deals with tongue speaking, not asking questions. Nevertheless, under whatever the unidentified law would be here, women were still allowed to prophesy and pray during the course of public worship, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 11, and as all the LCMS reports and convention proceedings have determined. This means, that although the LCMS holds that women may not engage in authoritative preaching and teaching in the church, prophesying and praying are not viewed as an affront to the created order as long as they are done in an orderly and edifying way. Thus, while it can be admitted that "clarity involving the issues involved in 1 Cor.14 might not be possible" [66] this does not present a problem for this thesis because the LCMS has determined that whatever speaking was being prohibited to women in the assembly was neither prophesying nor praying.

But many questions remain about the practical implications of modern day prophecy. We want to follow Paul and not despise prophetic activity (1 Thess. 5:20–22), but just how do we go about incorporating the gift of prophecy into our congregations? Some of the important questions that still need to be dealt with include: "How might a congregation identify the gift of prophecy?" and, assuming they can do this, "How might a congregation receive prophecy?" and finally, "Should prophets be officially recognized in some manner"?

As for the first question, the answer is complex and multifaceted. It is a matter for study and prayerful consideration and can not thoroughly be answered here. But I offer a few brief remarks. The gift of prophecy is something more than speaking one's opinions about a matter, no matter how heart-felt that opinion might be. Prophets speak by immediate divine call and direct revelation from God. Therefore, a first step towards recognizing the gift of prophecy can start by

[66] "Women in the Church," CTCR, 31.

recognizing the gift of the prophetic office. The congregation, especially its pastoral leadership and those with the gift of discernment, need to determine if the person claiming to speak prophetically has received an immediate call. This can be done by utilizing the criteria for distinguishing immediate calls previously outlined in this paper. However, this does not mean that all the words the prophet speaks are prophecy, only that the congregation might anticipate that this person will speak prophetically.

But someone who is not a called prophet may also prophesy. Prophesying is potentially a gift open to all. So how else might the church identify this gift? Certainly, if what is said includes direct foretelling and predictions, those can be collected and confirmed based on whether what was predicted transpired. But the interpretation of the prediction will require spiritual discernment. All true interpretations of prophecy ultimately belong to the Lord (Gen. 40:8). In the event that the prophetic word contains exhortations or calls for changes in behaviors, those with the responsibility for judging prophecy must know their Scripture well enough to be able to rebuke or accept it (Titus 1:9). Other factors to consider when attempting to identify this gift is whether it contains the testimony and character of Jesus.[67] This means that even if the prophecy is judgmental and calls for repentance, it will also impart words of grace, love, and hope. All in all, the process of identifying the gift of prophecy will be imperfect and likely messy, much like it was in the New Testament church. The call not to despise prophecy will require that we also bear with each other as we struggle together to identify and be blessed by this gift.

Another important remaining question is, "How might a congregation receive prophecy?" An issue for this thesis is whether the answer to this question will be determined by the gender of

[67] "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Rev. 19:10.

the prophet and if prophecy by women needs to be received in a different manner than prophecy by men.

The Missouri Synod allows women to exercise their gifts within the category of the spiritual priesthood of all believers. Within this category a potential spectrum of activity for the female prophet exists. That spectrum extends, traditionally, from the position of relegating a woman's activity to the home, under the authority of her husband, to allowing her leadership roles in both church and society,[68]and also permitting her to prophesy during worship services.[69]

All Christians are spirit-filled children of God. The promise of Pentecost is not only salvific, it is also vocational. Potentially, anyone can prophesy or be called to the prophetic office. One way to accommodate the prophetic spirit within the priesthood of all believers would be to incorporate prophetic prayer and prophecy into the worship service. By doing so, there would be no distinction in the receiving of prophecies dependent upon gender. This seems to be how the New Testament church accommodated prophecy. It can be argued that church services today are pretty different than what we see going on in New Testament Scripture. Many New Testament passages suggest that worship services were more participatory than the typical service in the LCMS.[70]

It is at this point that some may start to experience discomfort. The excesses of Montanism are ingrained in our memories, even though what those excesses were are understood in varying

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[68] "The Bible's clear direction regarding responsible male leadership in the home and male ordination to pastoral ministry may not be assumed to mean that only men can exercise any kind of leadership or authority in home, church, or society. Some view this as an inconsistency, but it is not. In Baptism every believer is called to service in his or her vocations within the various spheres of life. The body of Christ requires that its individual members exercise the wide variety of their gifts, whether that individual is male or female (1 Cor 12:7)." "The Creator's Tapestry," CTCR, 45.

[69] See: "Women Suffrage in the Church," CTCR, cf. 1 Corinthians 11.

[70] For example: 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19–20; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:4–5; 1 Thess. 5:19–21.

ways. But what we can indeed be sure of is the need for order and discipline within the church. While the prophetic spirit is free and unencumbered, it needs some kind of scaffolding for it to function well. Indeed, it was because of the participatory nature of the early worship services that that Paul required the Corinthians to maintain order and to avoid excesses.[71] Paul did not condone run-a-muk out of control worship services. Yet, the Spirit blesses the church with bountiful gifts, and each believer may have "a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation." But Paul instructs that "all of these must be done for the strengthening of the church."[72] For this reason Paul admonishes the church at Corinth that only 2–3 prophets are to speak during any given worship service. Because "the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets,"[73] the prophetic spirit will be evidenced by its humility. That humility will include the submission to Paul's command for orderly and edifying services and to the leadership of the congregation.

The prophetic spirit is also an edifying spirit. This suggests that, when possible, the prophet should make the pastor aware that she has received a prophecy that needs to be delivered for the common good of the congregation. This honors both the prophetic office by giving prophets a definitive opportunity to come forward to speak, and the pastoral office by giving oversight of the congregation's life to the pastor without denying the prophets their office.

Setting aside time for prophesying by the laity, both male and female, during worship services, would positively address Paul's admonition to encourage prophecy within the church. Prophesying would need to be done orderly, one speaker at a time, and emphasize the edification

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[71] 1 Cor. 14:40.

[72] 1 Cor. 14:26.

[73] 1 Cor. 14:32.

and common good of the assembly.[74] Here it should be noted that a positive prophecy does not mean it is automatically genuine. It still requires evaluation. Likewise, a critical prophecy does not mean it is not genuine. After a prophecy is given, time would need to be provided for its examination and interpretation.[75] Prophecy which contained exhortations for specific behaviors or church direction, or which were otherwise challenging or critical may need a longer evaluation period. The evaluation of prophecy should include the congregation because they, too, are responsible for judging it, and also so the process does not inadvertently result in the quenching of prophecy. To recapture the church's prophetic character we need to be careful to guard against the institutional tendency to capture and trample the prophetic spirit. Setting aside a time for prophecy during worship would serve not only for the edification of the congregation, but it would also point to the important value of prophecy within the church.

Yet, even though Scripture teaches that every Christian has at least one spiritual gift and that all Christians are eligible to have the gift of prophecy, all Christians do not have the gift of prophecy. Scripture also tells us that the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows the specific prophetic ministry, giving some, not all, to be prophets in the church.[76] Paul asks, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?[77] The ministry of the prophet, much like the ministry of the teacher, is a ministry with special responsibility. Both offices have distinctives and are specifically given by Christ to his church. Because the office of prophet carries certain divine responsibilities, some congregations may determine that a person whose gift seems to be given on an on-gong basis

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[74] "For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace." 1 Cor. 14:29–33. Paul encouraged prophecy during worship, but insisted that church services also be orderly.

[75] 1 Cor. 14:29.

[76] Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28.

[77] 1 Cor. 12:29.

should be officially recognized in some manner as a person whom God works through in a special way. This would also provide an opportunity for the pastor and the leadership of the congregation to acknowledge that they have examined and determined that a particular person has been duly called by God and is trustworthy and faithful. While the prophet's words would continue to need to be weighed and evaluated, this recognition would serve to help separate the true from the false prophets.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

I began this paper by discussing the tension the topic of revelatory spiritual gifts has created within the Missouri Synod. It took well over three decades, but eventually those claiming the cessation of spiritual gifts like prophecy and those advocating for their continuation came to reconciliation. The Missouri Synod acknowledged that not only had the topic of spiritual gifts been unduly neglected, but also that prophetic gifts may in fact continue. Yet, there has been little movement in the Missouri Synod toward a more comprehensive theology of spiritual gifts and prophecy. I also discussed that a key reason for the discomfort in discussing the on-going nature of revelatory spiritual gifts relates to the dogma surrounding inspiration and revelation created and used in the 17th century by Lutheran Fathers to uphold the attributes of Scripture. While their intentions were admirable, the theologies constructed to justify *sola scriptura* served to isolate inspiration and revelation to the written Word of God. I have also attempted to show that the continuation of revelatory spiritual gifts and inspired speech need not threaten the finality or authority of the canon. One can be both a canonical cessationist and a revelatory spiritual gifts continuist. Prophets in both the Old and New Testaments demonstrate that their speech was not restricted to canonical formation. Prophecy also functions for the edification of the church, for the "strengthening, encouragement, and comfort" of believers, and for conviction

leading repentance and the worship of God for unbelievers.[1] The church has not outgrown its need of these, and Paul tells us that prophets are uniquely gifted to provide this ministry.

The reality that God may still gift his church with prophets, male and female, adds a layer of complexity to the understanding common in the LCMS that all the functions of the one Ministry are contained in the *pastoral office*. One complication is that this understanding makes it hard to recognize an office of the Word such as the prophet that involves an immediate call. Another complication is that this understanding makes it hard to see how a female prophet could have an office of the Word.

In dealing with the first complication, we should also observe that the LCMS acknowledges that the scriptural mandate is not so much to a particular ordering of ministry, but to the command to preach the Word. Ministerial ordering is an adiaphoron "judged only by its usefulness in the proclamation of the Gospel."[2] Dealing with this kind of definition, however, has only been broached in this paper. It suffices to say that Scriptures do not yield a single blue-print for the Ministry.

In dealing with the second complication, it is essential that a distinction be made between the prophetic office and the pastoral office. The way to do this is by distinguishing offices of the Word that come with an immediate divine call, such as prophet, and offices that come with a mediate divine call, such as pastor.

Doing this much, however, leaves open all of the practical questions of implementation. At the end of Chapter 4 I sought to point a way toward answering some of them. Scripture, the

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[1] 1 Cor. 14:3–4, 24–25.

[2] "The LCMS Response to the Commission on Faith and Order of The World Council of Churches to the Text of 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,'" A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (CTCR), (St. Louis, December, 1985), 15.

Confessions, the old Lutheran Fathers, Walther, Pieper, and LCMS reports on spiritual gifts and the Ministry, clearly associate the prophetic office with speaking forth God's Word. Because God also deputizes females as prophets, the issue then becomes, to what end? Why would God call a female prophet if he did not intend her to proclaim his Word? Believing that God would not bestow gifts he did not intend to be engaged, in Chapter 4 I suggested incorporating prophetic gifts into worship services as an avenue in which female prophets might engage their prophetic gifts within the Missouri Synod's strictures. Those strictures disallow the mediated ordination of women, and this paper has not dealt with ordination as a specific topic. Nor did it need to. In the first place, the prophetic office is not the pastoral office, and so the question of calling and ordaining women to the pastoral office is a separate question. In the second place, the Confessions consider ordination "a gift bestowed exclusively on the church" and place onto the church "the right of choosing" those ministers.[3] But prophets and prophetesses, whomever they may be, speak by virtue of a direct, immediate divine call.

I have also suggested that the female prophet be legitimized and recognized in some manner. This is important for several reasons. First, Scripture tells us it is important to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God."[4] Providing a confirmation of her call would be an appropriate way to test and legitimize her prophetic office and provide an expectation of its engagement. Because the Ministry has been instituted by Christ, his immediate call to a prophet is necessarily a proper call. No human mediated ordination can place a person into the office of prophet. The call and divine commissioning has already taken place. But confirming or

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[3] Tr 67.

[4] 1 John 4:1.

recognizing a prophet's call in some manner would serve to honor the God who has deputized and sent her. It would also be a positive step in the incorporation of the prophetic vocation into the life of the church.

In conclusion, this thesis has offered a survey of theological documents in the LCMS which have at times proved to be inconsistent, unclear, or ambiguous regarding prophecy. This thesis has also offered a way to categorize these otherwise ambiguous positions under three major areas: spiritual gifts, canon-based cessationism, and the Ministry. My conclusion is that the theological views in the LCMS expressed in these topics do allow for the possibility of contemporary prophecy and the gift of the office of prophet that is differentiated from both the office of pastor and also from the general privilege of the priesthood of the baptized to speak the Word of God. Further, the office of prophet may be held by a female, and she may be permitted to speak (cf. 1 Corinthians 14). This speaking assumes a view of God's Word which includes direct revelation which must be subordinated to the revealed biblical Word.

Finally, I do not mean to overlook the potential weaknesses or limits of this rather brief study. For example, while I have framed this discussion around the three major categories of spiritual gifts, canonical cessationism, and the Ministry, there are potentially several different ways one might frame this data. Also, because this thesis explores the question whether or not there is space in LCMS theology for prophecy and the office of prophet, I have focused on LCMS documents and theological statements. As such, I have omitted much theological reflection on this subject from those outside of the LCMS. There is a broader conversation that is both critical and constructive. Further, I have limited this study to documents that deal with prophecy or the office of prophet, and have not attempted a broader exegetical investigation of the issue. Finally, while my thesis makes room for an office of prophet which may also be held

by a female, I am aware that the data could potentially be understood to support other positions within the LCMS spectrum of positions on this issue. For example, many in the LCMS maintain that the church is no longer in need of the more extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit and that the historical data indicates that these gifts have passed from the life of the church. Additionally, the injunctions against women "speaking" (1 Cor. 14:34) and "exercising authority" (1 Tim. 2:12) which are understood by the LCMS to preclude women from the office of pastor, could potentially be applied to the female prophet in such a way to disqualify her from holding any officially recognized public office of the Word in the church. This would mean that while the gift may be recognized, in the case of the vocation of the female prophet its operation would be relegated to the private sphere. Ongoing conversation on this issue is needed in order to move the LCMS towards a clearer understanding of prophecy and the prophetic office.

My hope is that this paper will serve to help the Missouri Synod as it continues to grapple with the events of prophecy and called prophets, male and female, in its congregations, partner churches, and affiliates. As one of the foremost confessional church bodies in the world today and a leader in theological orthodoxy, how the Missouri Synod responds to God's initiatives will be highly significant. Jesus is Lord of the Church. May he continue to be Lord in ours.

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