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Prophecy from the Apostles to the Second Century Church: A Paradigmatic Expression of Historical Inquiry

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PROPHECY FROM THE APOSTLES TO
/ THE SECOND CENTURY CHURCH:
A PARADIGMATIC EXPRESSION
OF HISTORICAL INQUIRY

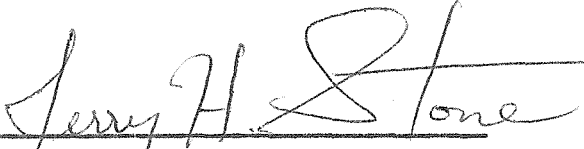
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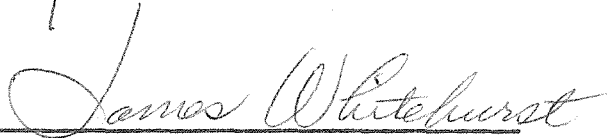

Department Head

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "OFF THE RECORD"	3
II. EVALUATION OF CHARISMATIC POWER IN ACTS . .	8
III. PAUL AND HIS DISCUSSION OF THE CHARISMATIC EXPERIENCE	17
IV. THE LATE FIRST CENTURY, EARLY SECOND CENTURY CHURCH COMMUNITY	26
V. HOW NORMS FUNCTION	33
VI. DESCRIPTION TODAY	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY	47

CHAPTER I

"OFF THE RECORD"

The historian impatiently awaits inspiration for adequate expression to convey the meaningful patterns his catalogue of dates and names has become for him. How can he convince another that his interpretation "corresponds to the facts"? The problems of New Testament historical investigation, sharpened since the probings of Bultmann, remain with us. How much is one justified to build beyond the cold facts and still call it history, not fiction? Can one ever presume to exhaust the question of what really was going on behind the historical facts? Once the details are enumerated in a few established theories, unless significant new factors are discovered, do further historians serve a function at all? In the opinion of the writer of this paper those who have interpreted the role of the charismatic prophet in the New Testament are handicapped by a fatigued imagination.

An analysis of language, concerning the proper words leading to certain conclusions about a specific occasion and excluding other conclusions demonstrates a nuance of the complexity of the historical question: How does one share an experience with another who did not go through the event with the speaker?

Take the following hypothetical situation for example. Mr. Jones attends a concert where works by Britten and Mozart are performed. For some reason the Mozart leaves him totally unrelated to what is taking place on the stage; the Mozart doesn't "come off." But the Britten does come alive, involving Mr. Jones in such a way that he becomes excited by the piece and is thoroughly pleased that he decided to attend the concert. The next day he attempts to describe the difference in his reaction to Mozart and Britten to another who missed the concert.

The questions raised by the friend to discover more about the occasion, or by Mr. Jones in deciding which information the friend must have to understand the circumstances and also the answers given in reply to the questions qualify the answers in terms of their application in any general sense and their further use as pieces of information. Suppose the friend asks, "Was the technique of the musician poor in the case of the Mozart and not poor in the case of the Britten?" If Mr. Jones replies that the technique was very poor in the Mozart and very good in the case of the Britten, then obviously the musician either did not practice hard enough on the Mozart or the music contained technical requirements beyond the talent of the musician.

At any rate, the answer here focuses upon the musician and not upon the two composers. On the other hand, if Mr. Jones evaluates the musical technique to be approximately equal in both instances, then something else must have been the cause of Mr. Jones' varying reaction to the two pieces. This calls for a further question, such as, "Is an orchestra necessary instead of a piano to make a Mozart concerto really effective?" Mr. Jones then states his opinion of the effectiveness of the piano, etc. The recreating of the experience approximates perfection in terms of containing more or less of the actual situation, but never with even the best questions will the friend stand in the existential reality of the concert and never will Mr. Jones find himself in the existential reality of the same concert again.

Turning now to the function of the answers, let us assume that they were put on tape or written down at the time of the discussion between Mr. Jones and his friend. There are at least two aspects involved in using the answers which must be kept in mind. On the one level are the conclusions, the particular body of information collected, and on the other level is the limitation implicit in the conclusions, "as interpreted by Mr. Jones," subject to his fallibility in understanding what was going on. The latter level describes the

situation of the historian; the memory of Mr. Jones remembers only portions of the total event. Within this framework the use of the answers or conclusions must also be qualified. In the case of the first question, that of technique, how inaccurate it would be to conclude that Mozart's works are not aesthetically pleasing (even when one is interpreting for a single member of the audience) and Britton's works are. The problem did not center in the music and the composer, but in the performer. If the technique is determined to be equally good, then one is ready to raise the question about the necessity of an orchestra to make Mozart come alive. The conclusions derived in this case are normative, that is, they are intended to state something about the way one should or should not perform Mozart, and imply that the information can be applied in other situations of a similar nature. The conclusion in the first case related to the musician's technique is descriptive of a specific situation, but the conclusion that Mozart's works are not aesthetically pleasing is normative. One cannot move from language which is fulfilling the descriptive function in this way and make conclusions which are normative, in other words, generally applicable to the works of Mozart.

Let us keep in mind that normative statements are not all equally inclusive. A statement about how

Mozart's works should be performed does not attempt to state anything particularly significant about the nature of the universe, but it is still normative because it implies that everything which belongs to the class of performing Mozart falls under its jurisdiction. Normative statements can only be criticized from within the frame of reference of their implied categories. To reject the normative statement about performing Mozart with an orchestra on the basis that Vivaldi should always be accompanied by harpsicord is clearly nonsense; the implied category of the application of the norm must be kept in mind.

With this distinction established, that is, a situational definition of the difference between normative and descriptive language, we are ready to investigate Acts, the letters of Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Didache with regard to the prophetic experience to discover whether the two types of language are used consistently throughout all four sources.

CHAPTER II

EVALUATION OF CHARISMATIC POWER IN ACTS

Certain patterns emerge in the treatment the author of Acts gives to the charismatic leader. By posing the question to focus on the person reflecting some special spiritual qualities one limits the use which can be made of the conclusions. One temporarily forgets about the rest of the material in the source which supplies information on the whole Christian experience, involving a much wider scope than just the question of the prophet. When the artist has taken her paints and canvas, filled in her trees, shrubs, and clouds to reproduce the valley scene, then the person looking on must decide whether it says anything about the world.

There are two types of prophetic utterance in the book of Acts which must be distinguished at the outset. The word "prophet," used only in a few passages, places one immediately in the Old Testament framework, looking at a subsidiary function of the prophet and missing even the dynamic of Old Testament prophecy.¹ Agabus, in Acts 11:27, foretells a great famine. Here the prophet is one possessing the ability to predict something about a specific event in the future. In Acts

21:10-11 he again predicts in his statement about Paul's seizure at the hand of the Jews in Jerusalem. One studies these passages convinced that Agabus could not effect a modification in the church's basic movement; he deserves but an honorable mention.²

The fundamental conception of the nature of spiritual expression for the early Christians relates directly to their experience of the presence of Jesus:

But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.' (Acts 5:29-32)

Those who are witnesses to the things which God has done, who are shaping the meaning of their experiences with Jesus while he was living by the decisions which they make about the church community, are the persons who qualify to be named the prophets of the New Testament. The disciples are aware that their power comes through the Holy Spirit upon which they are totally dependent for their ministry. Paul admonishes the church at Ephesus in the following manner:

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

But at the same time, the disciples possessing the Holy Spirit have something to say about the persons upon whom they will lay their hands.

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with Money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.' And Simon answered, 'Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.' (Acts 8:14-24)

It is not exactly clear who was in control here, that is, whether the Holy Spirit did not come to Simon because Peter would not lay his hands upon him also, or whether Peter saw that the Holy Spirit could not come to Simon until he had a change of heart. Perhaps both took place at the same time. Another instance, however, the question of the inclusion of the Gentiles, describes the disciples as working totally at the direction of the Holy Spirit:

While Peter was still saying this the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 'Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' (Acts 10:44-47)

The fact that the Holy Spirit came in this way to the Gentiles as well as the circumcised played a crucial role in the decisions which the leaders at the council of Jerusalem made concerning the question of whether or not the Gentiles must first be circumcised before they could be baptized.³

In spite of the fact that there are other passages dealing with the Holy Spirit and the way that it was imparted to the leaders of the early church,⁴ these would serve merely to add further corroboration to the examples given; the basic form of the account is plain enough so that we can turn to a consideration of the language used in Acts and the approach which the writer of Acts takes to the events which he discusses.

Recalling now the distinction made earlier between language which is descriptive of a particular situation and that which is normative language, that is, applicable across the board to any situation which falls under the category to which the norm applies, let us clarify what the author of Acts is saying about the nascent church and

the way his statements can be used by other members of the church at a later time.

The passage quoted from Acts 5:29-32 tersely defines the meaning of the Holy Spirit and how it is connected with the experience of Jesus' ministry in terms of what it means now for the church community. This language is normative. It defines an aspect of the faith of these early Christians and could well be prefaced by a sentence such as "the meaning of the Holy Spirit is as follows," because that is actually Peter's purpose in speaking in this way, to clarify for the people gathered at the trial by the chief priests of the Jewish religion exactly what the disciples meant by their ministry. The language is normative because it states a concept about the Holy Spirit which applies directly to that on which the faith of the early Christian centers. The words themselves do not possess any particular charm; a synonymous statement could replace this one. Rather, the language means that the experience of Jesus Christ and his connection with the spirit of which the disciples now are aware is the norm to which their language points. The situation concerning the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-47) is also normative, although its scope is not as comprehensive as the statements about the Holy Spirit. Here the words themselves contain more of the intent of the norm, because the norm's application refers

to a specific relationship of the Gentiles to the rest of the body of believers. The incident where the Gentiles receive the spirit determines the regulations which are agreed upon by the council. Thus in situations in the future after the Gentiles spoke in tongues through the Holy Spirit when the question of inclusion arose, the norm had been established that they were fellow-heirs. This decision is recognized later by Paul in a situation where the problem again arises:

When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Ephesians 3:4-6)

On the other hand, some of the language of the author of Acts is descriptive in nature. Consider the following:

And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them. (Acts 15:32)

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:3-4)

The language here describes what took place at specific times in the activity of the church. This is not to say that these passages are non-informational; that is, they do contribute a great deal to our understanding of the church, but they do not comment on the theological understanding which determines the ministry carried on by the Christians. The crucial need to maintain sensitivity to the language limitations was indicated earlier in the case of Mr. Jones and the concert. If language establishes norms in terms of defining the faith of the Christian community, then it can rightfully be used in other situations to determine acceptance or rejection of a specific policy. If the language falls into the category of descriptive language, then it primarily adds color and richness to our understanding of the situation, but should not be used to prove the accuracy of a certain position and the inaccuracy of a contrary position, in other words, to establish the norms of the community.

In addition to the point concerning the language, let us not fail to keep in mind the difficulties which tangle the historian, that is, a distinction between taking part in an event and reflecting on that experience, between being alive at 2:00 on November 3, 1966 and talking about being alive at 2:00 on November 3, 1966.

The author of the book of Acts is a historian in this sense and his language cannot reconstruct any more of the actual situation than Mr. Jones can of his concert. The statements in Acts are significant because they direct the later church and determine its growth in new communities, but they should not be criticized from the basis of something like, "Oh, is that all that happened." The language does not contain the dynamic of the event; there is no special charm about the words themselves. Obviously something more happened which cannot be expressly stated, but which maintained the enthusiasm and commitment of the disciples.

¹Based on the idea of the prophet as God's spokesman for the prophet's contemporaries, as supported by Bernhard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1957), p. 184:

The purpose of God's speaking through his prophet was not to communicate information about a timetable of events for the distant future . . . The prophet was primarily concerned with the present. His task was to communicate God's message for now and today.

²D. Gerhard Delling, Worship in the New Testament (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1962), p. 29-30. Delling attempts to make a case for Agabus as more than a fortune-teller by linking his message with 1 Cor. 14:32 and Paul's passage on the upbuilding of the church. Here he attempts to give credit to the influence of Agabus by making a connection which is unwarranted.

³See Acts 15:7-11. T. Henshaw has a fine explanation of the problem of the Judaizers in New Testament Literature (London: George Allen and Unwinn Ltd., 1952), p. 214-216.

⁴Acts 2:32-33; 2:38; 9:17; 13:1-12; 13:42-43; 19:1-7; 20:32.

CHAPTER III

PAUL AND HIS DISCUSSION OF THE CHARISMATIC EXPERIENCE

Moving on now to the letters of Paul and his conception of the prophet, the writer of this paper limits her discussion chiefly to an investigation of his language, suggesting ways that Paul might be read, but not attempting to state his theology succinctly. Consideration of a portion of Paul's letters without regarding the whole fundamentally misses the meaning found in the dependency of one of his ideas on the rest, yet this only way to understand him is at the same time impossible. For comprehensive treatment the task demands knowledge of the Greek texts and intensive, extended study. If one possessed the ability to complete the commentary on Paul's writings and life there would be no need for him to comment on Paul; he would have gone beyond Paul's interpretation of the meaning of Jesus Christ.

Consideration of the character of prophecy in the letters of Paul¹ is necessarily more difficult than in Acts for several reasons:

First, more extensive source material expands the scope of the subject.

Second, Paul addresses in several of the letters a problem situation in a specific church and in other letters he discourses to the Christian community in general (the shift may take place within one letter); one experiences difficulty in some instances in sorting the directive statements for a local problem from his more general view. This instructional type of language is not found in Acts. Consider these passages:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus to God the Father. (Ephesians 5:18-20)

Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. (Romans 12:11-13)

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil. (I Thess. 5:16-22)

Paul, because of his sensitivity to the Spirit, is in a position to interpret for the community where a less precise meaning is all they can discover. Paul's interpretation for these communities is accepted by them on faith because of the things which he has accomplished for the church in other places. Thus the Christians look to him as one specially qualified to lead them

because of his reputation for helpful insights. Paul also recognizes this criterion concerning the witness of the man of charisma:

For we know, brethern beloved by God, that He has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (I Thess. 1:4-7)

The value of Paul's sharing these particular instances is that they exemplify the type of attitudes which are in accord with the upbuilding and strengthening of the community.²

The third difficulty in understanding Paul is that he at times speaks in direct contradiction to a statement made earlier.³ This is related closely to the second difficulty because without understanding the intricacies of the specific church situation, complete comprehension of his meaning is lacking. Often only personal preference influences the option concerning which contradictory opinion one desires to have dominate his interpretation.

Paul indicates the folly of attempting to understand the Holy Spirit without experiencing the Spirit oneself:

For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. (I Cor. 2:12-13)

He cannot reproduce his experience of Christ and the Holy Spirit for others and in that sense the process in each person is unique. But because Paul activates his faith by answering questions of the churches and imparting information about what his new life in Christ means, he does record his reactions to problems encountered by the Christian community in their new life together.

Some of the statements which Paul makes to the churches are theological, in other words, akin to the normative language used in Acts concerning the Holy Spirit:

. . . Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about obedience to the faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:5-6)

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code, but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life. (II Cor. 3:4-6)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!,' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
(Romans 8:14-17)

. . . but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.
(Romans 8:26)

Many other passages would have to be discussed in order to state Paul's theology concerning the role of the Spirit and the relationship of the man of charisma to the community. The main purpose of citing these examples is to demonstrate the type of language Paul uses to communicate his message and to suggest ways in which this language can be authentically interpreted by the later church and ways in which perhaps it was not.

The instructional language helps the local church interpret the problems which they encounter; the normative language forms the basis for the faith in terms of outlining the principles which are the foundation of the faith.⁴ A third type, which was seen in the book of Acts, describes different manifestations of the spirit in specific situations or in collected experiences of a similar nature. Consider these passages:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (I Cor. 4:1)

And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.
(I Cor. 2:3-5)

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.
(Romans 1:11-12)

These passages contribute to the texture of the faith and add to its meaning, but they are not normative. For example, if one considered the passage from Galatians 5:22 as a rule instead of as a pattern of what happens when men are influenced by the Spirit, he might conclude that if a person were full of love, joy, peace, and patience, he is a very good Christian and not another question needs to be asked. The language becomes quickly confused as we hasten to say, "No, that couldn't be what Paul means." Paul here is describing what takes place when one is of the right spirit, he is not saying, "Cultivate these things and you will have the Spirit."

Paul's language does not all fall into one neat category or another, especially considering the fact that

these are rather arbitrary areas distinguished by the writer of this paper to demonstrate some of the problems in interpreting the historical records which we have to consider. The process of discerning the spirit and the inter-relationship between the various aspects of the faith defies an outline and categories of clear cut analysis. Paul cannot even state the exact importance of one manifestation of the spirit on the life of the community in any precise manner:

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? But they have not all heeded the gospel; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ. (Romans 10:14-17)

Apparently in his interpretation in this passage Paul sees the sufficiency of the preacher coming as a result of his being sent by God; but in terms of those who respond and how they respond, the issue is not so easy to analyze.

The chief purpose in discussing these passages from Paul is not to exhaust the possibilities of what Paul could have meant by the charismatic person and how he can be recognized. But, rather, the purpose is to demonstrate how, as in the case of Acts, there is an accurate way to use the various passages to help shape

the later church: to use language which is descriptive to establish the norms for the church misses the thrust of what possession of the Spirit could mean in the life of the community. The crucial need, again, is to maintain sensitivity to the language used.

In neither Acts nor in the letters of Paul is the man of charisma identified by specific patterns of behavior because, as we have seen, when he is mentioned he is described, not limited to a special pattern of behavior. The prophet in Acts and Paul does not possess a certain Gestalt. Neither source applies normative language to its discussion of the charismatic experience; both treat it only from a descriptive point of view. When Paul speaks of the disciples as "stewards of the mysteries of God," he implies that their function as servants is not strictly definable; their role is not obvious as, in contrast, the function of the battery in the operation of a car can be clearly shown.

There are many things about his faith in Christ which baffle Paul. This does not bother him to the point that his ministry becomes ineffective and inactive; he continues to preach and work, but one never considers that he has all of God's plans worked out. True, Paul was convinced that God had a plan, he was convinced that the grace was given to the Christians and was manifest

in different forms in the community.⁵ But Paul treats such subjects with awe and describes what he has seen taking place; he never presumes to prescribe the way in which the Holy Spirit must operate.

¹Based on ten authentic letters as recognized by T. Henshaw, New Testament Literature, p. 209: Galatians, I and II Corinthians, I and II Thessalonians, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philipppians.

²The passages quoted in connection with this discussion (Eph. 5:18-20; Ro. 12:11-13; I Thess. 5:16-22) do not exemplify the most specific attention Paul directs to individual problems (see I Cor. 1:10-17; 5:1-13; Gal. 1:6-7; I Thess. 2:14-16) but they do reflect difficulties in the communities to which they are directed. For instance, at Ephesus there must have been a problem of drinking, at Rome, with continuing enthusiasm for the faith, etc.

³Compare I Cor. 11:5 where women are spoken of as prophesying and I Cor. 14:34 where they are told to keep silent.

⁴The normative passages intended here are Ro. 1:5-6; II Cor. 3:4-6; Ro. 8:14-17; 8:26; I Cor. 2:12-13. The words which make up these normative passages are not the essential, but, rather, the statements point to the faith norms: "But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" is normative because of what it expresses about how the Spirit operates, not that the words which come in the Spirit are a norm. No words come here, but "sighs too deep for words."
(Ro. 8:26)

⁵See I Cor. 12-14.

CHAPTER IV

THE LATE FIRST CENTURY, EARLY SECOND CENTURY CHURCH COMMUNITY

There is a distinct shift in the type of language used in the Pastoral Epistles to instruct the new churches in the methods of recognizing the true men of God. For the first time offices in the church receive basic patterns, in terms of the way a person serving in one role or another should act:

The saying is sure: If anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church: He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (I Timothy 3:1-7)

For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. (Titus 1:7-9)

The analysis of the language used in the Pastoral Epistles and later in the Didache depends on some rather subtle distinctions, but the writer of this paper is of the opinion that they are nevertheless significant. These passages reflect some of the practical problems which were arising in the church groups in terms of controlling the conduct of Christians in the community to protect the welfare of all and to guarantee quality of leadership. Our position is not to be critical of their approach, but rather to show a variation from Acts and Paul in terms of the meaning of the language used and the way in which the church could interpret it.

The language here discussing the bishop is not descriptive in the same sense as when Paul spoke of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), but rather the language is prescriptive. For Paul the given was the fact of a Christian living out of the Spirit of Christ and the result was the possession of the qualities of love, joy, etc. For the writer of Timothy, the given was a man above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, etc, and the result was that this man could rightly be called a bishop. The same criteria for identifying the bishop is used in the Didache to distinguish the true prophet:

Now about the apostles and prophets: Act in line with the gospel precept. Welcome every apostle on arriving, as if he were the Lord. But he must not stay beyond one day. In case of necessity, however, the next day too. If he stays three days he is a false prophet. On departing, an apostle must not accept anything save sufficient food to carry him till his next lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet. (Didache 11:3-6)¹

While a prophet is making ecstatic utterances, you must not test or examine him. For 'every sin will be forgiven,' but this sin 'will not be forgiven.' However, not everybody making ecstatic utterances is a prophet, but only if he behaves like the Lord. It is by their conduct that the false prophet and the (true) prophet can be distinguished. For instance, if a prophet marks out a table in the Spirit, he must not eat from it. If he does, he is a false prophet. (Didache 11:7-9)

Here the language appears to be descriptive in nature by stating the characteristics of how long the true prophet remains in one community. Or in the quote from Timothy, the statement that the bishop is gentle and not quarrelsome supplies information about the bishop, but the thrust of the statement implies that the bishop conforms to these patterns or else, and likewise in the case of the prophet in the Didache. One is reminded of the paint sets with numbered pictures and a certain set of colors which are to be used. The object is to come up with a certain picture and if one plays the game properly, then he works according to the numbers and puts the right colors in the right sections

until the complete picture contains the right shape and color. The strength of the statements quoted above lies in the fact that in the administration of the church the right painting was the criteria for acceptance or rejection of a certain Christian.

Now you should welcome anyone who comes your way and teaches you all we have been saying. But if the teacher proves himself a renegade and by teaching otherwise contradicts all this, pay no attention to him. But if his teaching furthers the Lord's righteousness and knowledge, welcome him as the Lord. (Didache 11:1-2)

This passage is followed immediately by the consideration of the true prophet as one who remains only two days; it is not clear which received the most emphasis by the local church directing its work by the Didache, but the practical consideration of how long the prophet stays certainly sounds easier to follow than the more difficult decision as to whether or not the work of the prophet or teacher furthers the Lord's righteousness and knowledge.

Concerning the extinction of the men of prophecy in the second century church, Harnack's conclusion that the prophetic powers became more and more identified with the office of the bishop as the structural nature of the church became more concrete is generally accepted.² In connection with this theory--as with any rival one--the enigma of the historical question of finding a way

to get behind the documents prevents proof of one approach over another. It is not clear whether prophecy was not taking place at all when the Didache was written, in the same way as the time of the disciples, or whether the author of this church manual merely did not mention the influence of the charismatic leaders; his concern was to comment on the structure of the local church and help set the patterns to operate the work of extending the faith through these definite structures.

The notable thing about the sources on the church at the end of the first century and beginning of the second century is that the language is primarily descriptive with the force of a prescriptive intent. The Didache functions as a church manual to direct the young churches and remind the older churches of the way that the church program should be carried out. The descriptive language serves a normative function; a definite Gestalt is developing for the way that baptism, the eucharist, teachers, and the law should be comprehended. The emphasis of these documents does not center chiefly around faith statements such as the ones which formed the concern of the author of Acts and of Paul.³ The reason for this cannot be easily singled out. Perhaps the lessons of faith were so commonly known that emphasis upon them was no longer necessary. Perhaps the authors

of our sources occupied themselves with other concerns and the ministry was continuing along the lines of Paul and the earlier disciples. But, actually, discovering the reasons for the shift at the time of the Didache and the Pastoral Epistles is not the relevant question for our contemporary situation.⁴

One additional comment must be made concerning prescriptive language and the influence which it has in the life of the community. In the tendency to turn to authoritative statements for recognizing the true man of God, for giving sanction to one person's efforts and withholding approval of another person's work, patterns are established to look for particular types of expression. One molds his clay pot and prays for God to fill it. The question posed requires a certain answer. God must fill the pot with a certain liquid or God's presence is not felt in the community. The principle importance of studying the shift in language in the Didache and the Pastoral Epistles is to be aware of how much the basis of approach determines the type of question asked and the type of answers for which one seeks. If the word of God is identified more and more with specific structural patterns, if the man of God must wear a certain clerical garb, then the clay pot which is held up to be filled requires a more and more specialized type of liquid.

¹Cyril C. Richardson (ed.), The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. 1, Early Christian Fathers (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), p. 161-178.

²Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 342-346.

³The comparison of the Didache, Paul, and the book of Acts here refers only to the actual texts with the minimum of speculation concerning the actual activity to which the texts refer. The fact that the writer of the Didache may not reflect the total situation in its actuality was just mentioned, which is a historical question no scholar (whose works I have read) has answered conclusively.

⁴The problem of the contemporary situation is the bulk of the concern of Chapter VI.

CHAPTER V

HOW NORMS FUNCTION

Assuming that a parallel exists in the attributes of the individual and the state as suggested by Plato,¹ the problem of meaningful interpretation of the past of an individual can sharpen understanding of the difficulties the historian encounters. Suffering the embarrassment of tripping on the sidewalk only to discover that someone was watching is obviously different from thinking back later with an idea of what it is like to be embarrassed by such a mistake. Something is lost in the transmission; the decision to make one's pulse beat as rapidly as it did or to blush in recollection of the event to recreate it is clearly nonsensical. A study by concentration on the methods of increasing the pulse beat or by a lesson on "six ways to blush" contains little of the dynamic of embarrassment. The problem centers in the difference between living through an event actively involved in something at the time of its occurrence and, on the other hand, hearing or formulating a report about what took place.

As the time distance increases between an event

and the occasion when one recalls that event ideas about the event come more to the fore and play a larger role as the actual event is less and less decisive. There is a definite comfort in allowing symbols to dominate:

The power of thought enables us to construct symbols of things apart from the things themselves. This includes the ability to make a symbol, an idea of ourselves apart from ourselves. Because the idea is so much more comprehensible than the reality, the symbol so much more stable than the fact, we learn to identify ourselves with our idea of ourselves . . . Social convention encourages the fixity of the idea because the very usefulness of symbols depends upon their stability. Convention therefore encourages him to associate his idea of himself with equally abstract and symbolic roles and stereotypes, since this will help him to form an idea of himself which will be definite and intelligible.²

Making decisions by a rule book never requires the same resourcefulness demanded by facing life without rules.

H.I. Marrou suggests a paradox in education:

by the time the ethic and code of the society are precisely delineated, sufficiently to be passed on to the next generation or a neighboring culture, they are necessarily removed from the growing edge of the culture. Education tries continually to grasp the dynamic of the society's direction of development which, by the definition of education, is always just beyond its grasp.

He states:

I must try to explode the modern myth that Greek civilization achieved a harmonious

synthesis between 'racial beauty, the highest artistic perfection, and the most elevated flights of speculative thought.' This ideal of a fully-developed mind in a superb body may not be entirely imaginary: it was at least in Plato's mind when he was creating his unforgettable young men . . . But it must nevertheless be realized that if this ideal was ever achieved, it could only have been for a fleeting moment of unstable equilibrium between two opposite tendencies which could only grow at each other's expense.³

Education in a society which becomes lax in maintaining the quest for its ideal and rests more and more on one code or set of ideas about the significant things in the culture declines in effectiveness in terms of influencing the life of the growing community.

Education is a collective technique which a society employs to instruct its youth in the values and accomplishments of the civilization within which it exists. It is therefore a secondary activity, subordinate to the life of the civilization of its epitome. I say 'normally' since irrational societies exist which impose on their youth an absurd education that has no relevance to life. In these cases any real introduction to the culture of the society takes place outside the official educational channels. The result is a certain time lag. A civilization must achieve its true form before it can create⁴ the education in which it is reflected.

Here education, resting more and more on one code or set of ideas about the significant things in the culture, declines in effectiveness in terms of the direction in which the society grows.

Burning bridges behind oneself as one progresses never is easy, but the old bridges never work in new

situations. The requirements for strength and weakness vary with each fresh demand. Imagine a contemporary engineer providing extra supports for his bridges in the same places which the bridges built for the horse and buggy received stress, hoping to provide for the needs of present day traffic that way.

Education which contents itself with passing on the Homeric code to the Hellenistic society is dead. First one must consider whether there are any things worth handing down, and then, if they do apply, the methods for transmitting the norms. Plato is exasperated with Homer:

'Friend Homer, ' then we say to him, 'if you are only in the second removed from truth in what you say of virtue, and not in the third--not an image maker or imitator--and if you are able to discern what pursuits make men better or worse in private or public life, tell us what State was ever better governed by your help? The good order of Lacedaemon is due to Lycurgus, and many other cities great and small have been similarly benefited by others, but who says that you have been a good legislator to them and have done them any good? Italy and Sicily boast of Charondas, and there is Solon who is renowned among us; but what city has anything to say to you?' Is there any city which he might name?

Plato, in questioning the tendency to pattern Greek culture according to the code of Homer, really is asking whether or not there are any norms in what Homer has to say which contribute something to the demands of

his contemporary situation. If Homer describes a particular situation, if he reflects a certain culture only, if he is two or three times removed from the norms, if he is only second-rate imitation of reality, then Plato's contemporaries need to quit determining their morals according to his codes. If Homer does say something about man more than describing one setting, then later societies should be able to find help in reading what he has to say, in using what he has to say prescriptively.

Investigation of the Biblical concept of chronos and kairos may help to illuminate the distinct way in which the Christian faith conceives of its past history. The idea of kairos centers on one moment of time which is qualitatively different in such a way that it has the power to transform other moments which follow. For example, the decision of the Israelites to enter into a covenantal relationship with Yahweh profoundly influences the later development of the nation.

Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him out of the mountain saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Exodus 19:3-6)

The emotional impact for the Israelites rising out of their experience of God's revelation escapes concrete expression in the covenant form, the covenant renewal under Joshua only describes all that Yahweh has done for the community, yet the description is founded on the faith that God does act and is concerned about man. The momentum of this faith becomes the norm, imparting meaning to the statements which man makes.

Knowledge of God exists only in so far as there is a self-disclosure, a self-manifestation of God, that is, in so far as there is 'revelation' . . . The human doctrine of God--which is undoubtedly the doctrine of the Church--is thus only legitimate, and can only claim to be 'truth,' in so far as the divine revelation--that which God teaches about himself--is validly expressed by it. Thus Christian doctrine not only points away from itself to the divine 'doctrine,' i.e., to that which God Himself manifests and teaches about Himself . . . The Apostles, the first teachers of the Christian community know themselves to be witnesses to the divine revelation. The divine revelation is not only the basis and content of their teaching, but is its authorization; their teaching claims to be true and valid because, and in so far as, the divine teaching itself is accomplished in their teaching.⁶

Paul regards Abraham first from the standpoint of his faith. Only following that come circumcision and the prescribed methods for the Israelite community to show their response to God. In Romans Paul states:

For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' . . . He received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness

which he had by faith while he was still
uncircumcised. (Romans 4:3, 11)

Once the moment of kairos begins to work itself out in chronos, or the movement in time, then man's expression of the kairos event must become descriptive. Let us recall Paul's description in Galatians 5:22 concerning what takes place when a man receives the Spirit (the moment of kairos) and comes into contact with Christians in the community (in chronos). Kairos includes the realization of a norm; when this norm is related to specific situations it must be done descriptively.

The relationship between God and man and between man and God is not of such a kind that doctrine can adequately express its abstract formulas . . . It is not a timeless or static relation arising from the world of ideas--and only for such is doctrine an adequate form: rather the relation is an event, and hence narration is the proper form to describe it. The decisive word-form in the language of the Bible is not the substantive, as in Greek, but the verb, the word of action.⁷

When Plato places Homer on the table to investigate whether anything Homer ever said applies to his contemporaries, in specific governments, he is searching for the answer to the question, "Are there any norms in Homer?" Transmitting the Homeric ethic without being conscious of such norms, even supposing that they exist, never will effect government or any other aspect of the life.

Biblical faith is grounded on the conviction that there have been moments of kairos which do significantly affect later cultures. The chronos of the formation of the covenant descriptively expresses man's realization of the kairos event. However, it is crucial to maintain sensitivity to where the Bible speaks in normative language, that is, where it point to the revelation of God, and where the Bible is describing the response in a particular situation.

Unless an awareness of the verity of the norms remains at the center of the community life shaping the course of decisions about the direction in which the community is moving, then the decisions concentrate increasingly upon the methods to recreate the situation of the original event. In terms already stated in this paper, one works to increase the pulse beat, argues about the type of clay pot necessary to receive God's liquid, depends more and more on the rule book, until the result is an educational system with no influence on the community, a warrior ethic which no longer applies, or conceptions of the prophet as the channel of the power of the Holy Spirit which become bogged down by standards of conforming or not conforming to a distinct Gestalt.

¹Only the validity of transferring the characteristics from one to the other is implied here, not the particular pattern which Plato follows:

I will tell you, I replied; justice, which is the subject of our enquiry is, as you know, sometimes spoken of as the virtue of an individual and sometimes as the virtue of a state . . . I propose therefore that we enquire into the nature of justice and injustice, first as they appear in the state, and secondly in the individual, proceeding from the greater to the lesser and comparing them. (Republic, Book II, Lines 368-369)

²Alan W. Watts, The Way of Zen (Vintage Books: New York, 1965), p. 119-120, 122.

³H. I. Marrou, A History of Education in Antiquity (New York: Mentor Books, 1964), p. 73.

⁴Ibid., p. xiii.

⁵Plato, Republic, Book 10, Lines 599-600.

⁶Heinrich Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), p. 14-15.

⁷Heinrich Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), p. 47.

CHAPTER VI

DESCRIPTION TODAY

At the close of a superb performance the renowned organist silences the applauding audience to announce that he would like to do something a little unusual for his final number of the concert. A member of the audience has placed in a sealed envelope on music paper one melody line which will now serve as the theme for an extemporaneous composition. He opens the envelope, places the theme before him on the organ, and plays the theme through once. Fifteen seconds of silence. Eyes fixed on the performer watch the organist adjust the stops. The music begins with repetition of the theme and continues through modulations and tempo changes for ten minutes. Had one not witnessed his recent reception of the theme, one would have been unable to detect any difference in the quality of the piece from that of any of the other contemporary compositions of the program. The suspense made this one different. At every moment the artist poured all of his talent into the composition, actively held in tension the recollection of what he had played, and projected his thoughts to the development of the theme that would best follow the notes which he

now played. He modulated to the original key, restated the theme and brought his composition to a close in a series of scale passages and final restatement of the theme.

The qualities exhibited by this musician resemble those possessed by the person who is unwilling to pattern his life after the past, who instead has the courage to rely upon his training and talents to express his thoughts --musical or otherwise--in a fresh form which rests on his creative ability. Certainly the musician depends on his musical training, skills that he has developed over a long period of time; the individual has a certain degree of maturity stemming from growth in past experiences. Each must have the courage to place his unique expression before the public and stand in the confidence that his insights are important for being just that. The person who is willing to take his insights from the past, his training, and his creative ability and through them cope in his unique way with the demands which each day brings is the person who stimulates and excites others to do the same. The simple but profound fact is that through this process both grow. Paul says:

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.
(Romans 1:11)

Evangelism today has moved beyond the point of coercing another through fear of the after life or the authority of the church. No man can decide for another whether he should be open to the Christian faith, some other religion, or no religion at all. The decision of faith to search for the norms underlying the Christian expression in the New Testament and to recognize the dynamic of the experience of men like Paul who were converted (i.e., turned around) by some element of mystery which we cannot graph, remains an individual one.

For the New Testament community the forms of prophecy which are described take place in a cultural setting where prophecy was a common phenomenon.¹ True, the New Testament prophecy varied significantly from pagan oracles,² but the community of believers did not have the substantiation of historical retrospection to justify their recognition of one man as a true prophet, and the next man as a false prophet. Descriptions of the prophet which for us today seem unusual, so strange that we cannot rebuild completely what was taking place, were meaningful expressions for the early church community, just as in the Old Testament the covenantal relationship was grounded in a cultural understanding of what formed the constituent parts of the covenant.³

Wherever descriptive statements about the faith blend with familiar forms of speech or expression of the culture the decision as to which statement contains the most truth becomes more difficult to make. One depends much more readily upon the proven descriptions of the solutions to problems of the past. The question in the case of the Didache reduces to this: which determined more, looking for one who was "furthering the Lord's righteousness and knowledge," or the concrete statement of recognition by a prescribed Gestalt?⁴

A further complication for our situation is the fact that due to the variety of modes of thinking, the wide diversity of cultures, the same descriptive statements never could suffice in the same way in which the statement of the covenant expressed meaning for the comparatively tightly-knit Israelite community, or descriptions of the prophet for the community of the early church, in spite of their heterogeneous characteristics.

This paper concludes, then, not with a signpost approach saying, "these are the places one might go to find God manifest," but rather with a challenge-- a challenge to search for expanding conceptions of the norms and to express faith in the descriptions today which one considers authentic.

¹Delling, Worship in the New Testament, p. 27.

²H. A. Guy, New Testament Prophecy: Its Origin and Significance (London: Epworth Press, 1947), p. 78.

³B. W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament,
54.

⁴See pp. 28-29 above.

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