Prophecy

God’s gift of communication to the Church

S Fourie
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A project of the Institute for Theology and Religion

University of South Africa

 Pretoria
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This publication contains the result of research on the gift of prophecy as seen and practised within Pentecostal churches and charismatic circles. The author discusses this gift in terms of its history and significance for the church. This leads to results which should be taken note of by interested individuals and groups. His emphasis on the relational dimension in the exercising and judgement of prophecy is especially worthy of careful consideration.

This book will serve as an introduction to the academic discussion of this relevant issue: who in our country and in our churches are the prophets, where do we find them and how do we recognise them? I trust that this presentation will serve a very positive purpose both inside and outside the Pentecostal churches.

This is another of the more recent publications of the project on Pentecostalism and charismatic movements which is being conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Theological Research at the University of South Africa.

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Dr Jacques Theron
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Writing a lengthy essay like this on 'prophecy' proved, to say the least, to be a difficult venture. Approaching it from a Christian viewpoint and limiting the scope to a biblical context, while staying true to traditional Pentecostal thinking on the subject, made it even more difficult. The reason for this was that biblical prophecies and prophets (and their modern day companions) were so often discredited. At times the critique proved to be legitimate; sometimes, however, it was not. Through the ages, prophecy, as a phenomenon of the Holy Spirit, has survived the test of time, although it has constantly been endangered by many factors.

Because of the many viewpoints, definitions and practices (as well as malpractices) concerning prophecy, the church has from time to time had to reinterpret this gift for its age and situation. I believe that today is once again such a time. If we believe that God still wants to communicate with us, we will certainly have to acquaint ourselves with the ways and means by which he wants to accomplish this, as well as how this is to be understood and evaluated. I believe that prophecy represents one of these possible ways.

The purpose of this research therefore was to determine whether prophecy changed its form and content as well as its criteria and practice from the Old to New Testament times (and even from the New Testament up to recent times). In order to understand and define prophecy properly, these differences (if any) should be accounted for in any scientific approach.

It was determined, however, that prophecy, like theology today, can no longer be described in any other way than as a ‘relational’ experience. This implies that any religious experience (such as theology or prophecy) is experienced firstly within one’s own frame of reference (paradigm), which naturally results in different interpretations by different receivers. From there the experience is usually transferred into other peculiar paradigms which inevitably leads to the same process of interpretation repeating itself. This of course opens the door to the danger of relativising all differences between paradigms by simply referring them back to one’s own peculiar paradigm.
Consequently it is the responsibility of this research both to determine clear, practical, and scripturally sound criteria by which to judge prophecies, and to develop an acceptable and workable relational model which allows for different paradigms, while providing ways and means of weighing one's own peculiar interpretation against the sovereign will of God through the Holy Spirit. This incidentally proved to be a rewarding aspect of this research, namely that it created a loving tolerance for the unique paradigms of others, while furthering the process of trying to create meaning out of the broken reality that surrounds us all. The seemingly difficult task of investigating a phenomenon as problematic as this, therefore, in the end proved to be a little easier than first anticipated, yielding rich rewards of new insight and tolerance. In addition, a relational model for prophecy creates room for spiritual exercise, and also a way to relate to God and one's fellow Christians without having to become a supernatural being. Discovering this proved to be a liberating experience and provided the stimulus for pursuing the gift of prophecy more fervently.

This work is dedicated to the late Pastor Frank Cronjé, former Rector of the Theological College of The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, who was such an inspiration to me in the study of, and love for, Pentecostal theology.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

If a reason needs to be given for research of this kind, the remark of Yocum (1976:25), a leading figure in a charismatic Christian community in London, will suffice:

Prophecy has at times come into disrepute through abuse ... While in the early church prophets were held in honor, they have since become more and more subject to suspicion.

This, I believe, is already justification enough for research of this kind on a topic as much debated and (at times) as controversial as this.

However, a most dangerous tendency of late should be taken note of. Within second and third generation Pentecostal circles, as well as the more contemporary charismatic circles, a strange nonchalance concerning the correct use of the gift of prophecy has become evident. Not only is this wonderful gift casually accepted as obvious, but most of the interpretations of prophecy adhered to seem, to say the least, to be incorrect. On the other hand, in circles other than Pentecostal and charismatic, a new interest is evident, sometimes coupled with a naive acceptance of every message as 'words from God' or at least as 'prophetic words'. 
Much can also be said about the dangerous misconception within still other circles that everything attacking social, economic and political evils or other undesired structures of society be hailed as prophetic. Although many of these verdicts are declared to be ‘prophetic’, and appeal is even made to biblical passages for confirmation, they sometimes lack thorough exegetical support.

Schatzmann (1987:102-103), a lecturer at Oral Roberts University, makes the rather painful observation ‘that the most pertinent contributions to a better comprehension of Paul’s concept of charismata come from outside the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition’. What better reason then is needed to undertake research like this precisely from a Pentecostal viewpoint, attempting to affirm anew that experience without exegesis and conceptualising, and vice versa, are both lacking in some vital dimensions. ‘Balance will come about only when experience and exegesis interact in the body of Christ’ (Schatzmann 1987:103).

It should be clear by now, even after mentioning only four important problems facing prophecy as a spiritual gift, that much injury has already been done to one of God’s most wonderful vehicles for communication. The harm done originates mostly from either overreaction by some or pure ignorance and indifference by others, both tragic in their own way.

Mcllwraith (1982:8-11), Director of Resources of the Student Christian Movement in Birmingham, states that prophecy either intervenes or makes explicit or even generates dispute and that prophets are continually struggling to fashion human words into words of God. This is all the more reason for us to ensure that those words attributed to God are really his and worthy of him.

In accordance with Yocum (1976:11) and others, I believe that ‘God [still] has an intense desire to speak to his people’. Through all the ages of Christianity, God has sent his prophets to make known his will. And throughout the Old Testament, the promise is echoed that a new age will eventually dawn when God will reveal himself more completely through the Holy Spirit. This promise was fully realised on the Day of Pentecost (Ac 2). If God is not trying to hide his will from us, many a Spirit-filled believer would agree with Yocum (1976:preface) when he states: ‘we are convinced that our own experience of prophecy is in harmony with the experience of the first Christians, and that it is an experience which God wishes to bestow widely upon his people.’

It is therefore essential that the modern-day church develops a new sensitivity towards the Holy Spirit, and especially towards the gifts of the Spirit, of which prophecy is hailed by Paul (1 Cor 12-14) as the most desirable.
This research represents a humble endeavour on my part to be of some service in restoring prophecy to its proper place in the church of our day. I will endeavour to re-emphasise old truths, admitting that not much that is innovative can be said, while hoping, nevertheless, to advance some new ideas and guidelines. All of this is dedicated to each and every committed believer with the prayer that some sensitivity towards the promptings of the Holy Spirit, especially concerning prophecy, might be rekindled in the church.

I will not disguise the fact that a 'Pentecostal paradigm' is being employed. At the same time, however, I express my firm conviction that every sincere exegete of the Bible should be able to transcend his or her denominational confession in an attempt to work trans-confessionally and exegetically which, for me, is an indispensable prerequisite for reaching a credible result. Exegetically then I will rely on several renowned scholars in this field, as well as on my own experience gained over a number of years as a member of the Pentecostal family.

As a basis for discussion, the first letter to the Corinthians (ch 12-14), and especially chapter fourteen, will serve the purpose (see Addenda A-C). Aune (1983:220) remarks very appropriately that this letter is the 'single most important source for our knowledge of first-century Christian prophecy'. Other applicable passages will be treated only in passing as a means of strengthening, or differing from, some or other viewpoint.

It is also a clear and stated conviction that my essay cannot and does not in any way claim to be exhaustive, nor do my exegetical insights represent the only correct or acceptable model. It can even be claimed that an endeavour of this kind cannot make full use of any particular exegetical or hermeneutical model, simply because of a lack of space. In an attempt to address this problem, several addenda had been added. Thus, Addendum A provides a useful guide to the thematic structure of 1 Corinthians 14:1-40, by exposing the antitheses between tongues and prophecy. Addendum B is presented as a help for those who are interested in the way Paul structured this passage. The third addendum (Addendum C), is explicitly meant as guideline for the use of students attempting a linguistic analysis of the different pericopae (see p 66). It determines the different rotation points, thus strengthening the arguments advanced in this research as well as opening up new propositions. Addendum D needs no explanation while Addendum E surprisingly reveals the (unconscious) homiletic structure in which prophecies are delivered. The interpretation presented as Addendum E mainly concerns the AFM of South Africa. The concluding addendum (Addendum F), merely contains some biblical references in connection with prophecy, most of which could not be treated in
this research. This explanation ought to put the use of addenda in this research into perspective. It must ultimately be clear, however, that the right to differ, and even to differ sharply, from viewpoints considered to be incorrect is taken for granted.

Nevertheless, as Moses (Nm 11:29) did, I express the desire that all God's people may be prophets and that the Holy Spirit may work freely in their lives, justifying Paul (1 Cor 14:5) when he says: 'Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified' (my emphasis).

Against the background of this introduction, the chapters which follow can now be attempted. A very short synopsis of the history of Christian prophecy as a gift of the Holy Spirit (in chapter 1) will serve to affirm the consistent occurrence of this gift in the Christian church through the ages, as well as to open up the discussion of what this gift really involves and what significance it could have for the church in our technological age.
CHAPTER 2

A short history of Christian prophecy

This synoptic discussion of the history of the gift of prophecy as a phenomenon in the Christian church is neither meant to be an exhaustive historical account, nor to cover every aspect of its development, such as for instance, the reasons why prophecy at times fell into disrepute. (For a full discussion of this, the interested reader is referred to the impressive study by Aune, 1983). The purpose here is rather to illuminate the fact that this phenomenon accompanied the church throughout its history. Although suppressed at times and not always as visible as it could have been, the gift of prophecy was nevertheless there, even if only in the background. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to indicate that this phenomenon is not a novelty, but a gift present and active throughout the whole tradition of the Christian church.

McIlwraith (1982:16), referring to 1 Samuel 10, claims that Christian prophecy as a phenomenon dates back to the Old Testament and specifically to 1000 BC. Aune (1983:103) points out that prophecy never ceased during the period from 516 BC to AD 70, the period of the second Temple, although it underwent a number of far-reaching and even radical changes.

Looking at the New Testament, Yocum (1976:20) observes that Christian prophets emerge from the pages of the New Testament as a major element in the church. In this respect Aune (1983:190-191) specifically mentions 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22, dating it as early as AD 49, as the earliest surviving piece of Christian prophecy. The book of Acts (ch 11), dated about AD 65, also relates Agabus’s prophecy concerning an impending famine, which incidentally was
fulfilled. In Acts 13, Barnabas's prophecy concerning Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem is also mentioned. Three more instances are recorded, in Acts 15, 21:4 and 21:9 (see also, for example, 1 Cor 11:4-5, 12:10, 12:28-29, 14:1-3; Ac 19:6; Rm 12:6; Eph 2:20, 3:4-6, 4:11-12; 1 Tm 1:18, 4:14 and 1 Th 5:20).

The Didache also mentions prophetic activity, and in AD 162 Justin confirms the same (Yocum 1976:21; Sullivan 1982:109-111). In the late second century, Irenaeus of Lyons attested to the presence of the gift of prophecy (Yocum 1976:21; Sullivan 1982:111-112; Brooke [s a]:39).

Since the third century, prophecy has been neither continuously manifest in the church, nor common to the whole church at any one time (Yocum 1976:22; Sullivan 1982:114-115). The fourth, fifth and sixth centuries saw the occurrence of prophecy within the Ascetic movement, while the twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed the same phenomenon within the Cistercian movement (Yocum 1976:23). This of course does not rule out the fact that it could also have existed within some minor movements, but this is not at all certain.

Prophecy as a phenomenon reappeared strongly in the twentieth century, especially in Pentecostal and later in charismatic circles (Yocum 1976:24). Two things are worth noticing, however, namely, that prophecy resurfaced mainly in the context of a broader revival of spiritual gifts, and that, alongside these other gifts, prophecy flourishes in an atmosphere of expectant faith (Yocum 1976:24).

Of course the church of all ages has had to deal with false or impure prophecies too, but the criteria for such prophecies were always at her disposal (see, for instance, 1 Jn 4:1-2). The church enjoyed the benefits of prophecy, while guarding against its abuse.

Grudem (1978:15-20), who did his doctoral work at the University of Cambridge, discusses prophecy in the period from 100 BC to Josephus in AD 37-38 (see also Yocum 1976:20-28). He attests to the continued revelatory activity called prophecy:

First, one could say that the cessation doctrine is in error ...

Second, one could take the opposite approach and attempt to minimize or deny the reported occurrences of revelatory phenomena. But the examples are so numerous and widespread that such an argument seems forced and unconvincing ...
Third, it is possible to reconcile the two strands of tradition by concluding that the Jew understood contemporary revelatory phenomena to be something different than Old Testament prophecy. This solution, it seems to me, best accounts for all the data.

(Grudem 1978:18-20)

It must certainly be clear that the point of the continuity of prophecy through the ages proves most likely. Since the time Paul so earnestly instructed the Corinthian church about congregational prophecy (1 Cor 12 and 14), this spiritual gift has never really been absent from the church. It re-emerged from time to time and today is one such time.

It is essential, however, to distinguish with Grudem (1978:264-266) between the temporary and the permanent character of prophecy. According to Grudem, prophecy is a temporary phenomenon in two minor cases:

Prophets cannot prophesy at will, but only when a revelation is received. In this sense then nobody can ‘possess’ the gift of prophecy.

The absolute Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the distribution of the gifts. It must be admitted therefore that it is indeed possible to receive the ability once and never again.

Apart from this, according to Grudem (1978:265), prophecy can be considered to be a permanent, or at least a semi-permanent, gift: ‘While admitting that no prophet can prophesy at will, we nevertheless find indications in 1 Cor 12-14 that there were people who were able to prophesy frequently over an extended period of time’.

This brings us to the next chapter in which some of the prevailing definitions of prophecy will be considered.
CHAPTER 3

Some definitions of prophecy

3.1 SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS

It is essential to discuss definitions of prophecy against the background of the differences between Old and New Testament prophecy. This will enable us to detect the basis and point of departure of some of these definitions as well as to provide a point of departure for our own discussion.

Both the person of the Old Testament prophet and the message changed considerably in the New Testament. Aune (1983:103), for instance, claims that these differences in prophetic form and function were considerable. The fact, he says, that Christian prophets were subject to the authority of the Christian community in the New Testament, is but one difference from the function of the Old Testament prophets who exercised virtually unlimited authority over the people of Israel (Aune 1983:217).

The ‘ecstatic’ or ‘trance-like’ figure of the Old Testament is also absent in the New Testament (although some like Cronjé [1988], a classical Pentecostal and former Rector of the Theological College of the Apostolic Faith Mission, would hold that Ac 10:10; 22:17; 26:25 and 2 Cor 5:13 indicate otherwise). Gone too is the stern symbol of moralism and the prophet as the conscience of the people, as well as the designation ‘seer’ indicating someone who can ‘see into things’ or predict future events (Yocum 1976:29-31).
The New Testament *prophetes* can furthermore also be termed an interpreter, or one who speaks on behalf of another. Hence Hagin (1978:20), a prominent non-denominational charismatic leader from Oklahoma, designates him spokesman for God or the Holy Spirit, while McLlwraith (1982:7) sees his message as a 'burden'. Like his Old Testament counterpart, he is not a prophet so much because of what he says, but because of his relationship to God (Yocum 1976:33).

It needs to be stressed finally that the Old Testament prophet had a unique position because of the direct communication he had with God through the actions of the Holy Spirit - something the rest of the people did not experience themselves. This changed dramatically in the New Testament, specifically after the Day of Pentecost when all believers were filled with the Spirit, effecting a transformation into a prophetic society where everyone could experience direct communication with God for him or herself.

The office of prophet now came to mean that, among the many having the ability to prophesy, one could be chosen by God to speak on his behalf (Yocum 1976:34-35; Hagin 1978:22). In other words, such a person remained the official spokesman authorised to publicly declare the word of God. Another attestation of this fact is found in the language or formula the prophet used when commencing a prophecy, for instance, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit ...'.

Some changes occurred in the New Testament prophetic message too. Grudem (1978:65) distinguishes not only between Old and New Testament prophecies, but also between prophecies in the New Testament itself, saying 'Paul thought of prophecy at Corinth as something different than the prophecy we see, for instance, in Revelation or in many parts of the Old Testament.'

In the New Testament, prophecy itself assumes the role of encouragement, consolation and the building up of the body of Christ, as well as of convicting sinners (1 Cor 14:24,25; see Addenda A-C). In Acts 5:1-11, it even comes as a 'judgment' given directly by God, but the moral side of prophecy and the aspect of predicting the future no longer function as prominent parts of the gift (Addenda A-C).

Against this short background, a discussion of some of the more important prevailing definitions can now be attempted.
3.2 SOME DEFINITIONS OF PROPHECY

3.2.1 The prophet as symbol of morality and social conscience

Hastings (1982:44-45), professor of Religious Studies at the University of Zimbabwe, and Winter (1982:71), Bishop of Namibia till his forced exile in 1972, equate modern-day prophets with their counterparts in the Old Testament, especially as symbols of morality and the social conscience of the people. Hastings (1982:44-45), for example provides the following list of ‘prophets’:

- C F Andrews, a prophet against imperialism in British India in the 1920s.
- D Sheppard, a prophet of peace in the 1930s.
- D Bonhoeffer, a prophet against nationalism in the 1940s.
- B Naude, a prophet against racialism in South Africa in the 1980s.
- A Solzhenitsyn, a prophet against Soviet oppression.

Winter (1982:71) would complement this list with names like that of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners.

In Hastings’s (1982:46-47) own words, prophecy would function best in an ‘oppressive’ and ‘authoritarian’ society within a ‘reactionary church’. Hastings (1982:47) portrays a true prophet as follows: ‘A prophet is a sour fellow whom the ecclesiastics don’t like and the media don’t like and, probably, the general public doesn’t like, no more than the government.’

3.2.2 The prophet as social analyst

Francis McHugh (1982:51-64), at present busy doing research at Sussex University on the social thinking of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in England, advances another viewpoint in close connection with the previous one. He argues for a sociocontextual kind of prophecy which takes human and historical reality into account, not just the isolated and solitary relationship of the individual to God. For him, ‘Christian prophecy influences the social context and is, in its turn, influenced by it’ (McHugh 1982:54).

Defining first prophecy and then the social context thereof, McHugh (1982:54-56) states: ‘Christian prophecy is forced to include criticism of structures inherited from the past’. According to him, the social context of prophecy concerns the following seven sectors:
* industry and unemployment
* violence, peace and war
* urbanisation and inner-city problems
* race and community relations
* the place of women in church and society
* health and healing
* the political process and the welfare state.

In conclusion McHugh states that no theology or philosophy can provide in advance an understanding of the human situation which Christian values seek to influence. He concedes, however, that an exhaustive study of the social context can likewise not become a complete guide to Christian prophecy (McHugh 1982:62). Yet he still replaces theology and philosophy with 'contextualism'. For him, Christian prophecy acquires its meaning at the hands of Christians engaged in the process of social justice within the human situation. It would seem therefore that McHugh is weighing a kind of social ethics against the community ethics of the New Testament.

3.2.3 The prophet as spokesman for the oppressed

Winter (1982:65-79) argues along more or less the same lines as McHugh. He is concerned with questions like: Do prophets exist today? Are there any to be found in the churches? What is it that forces the prophet to speak out? In an attempt to furnish the reader with some answers, Winter (1982:66-67) expounds at length the viewpoint that God sides with the oppressed and opposes royalty. This clearly represents a consensus among contemporary liberation theologies.

Winter (1982:70) defines prophecy against this background as follows: 'Christian prophecy is concerned with bringing the real world into divine focus. Christians can no longer seek a solely Christian solution to problems that surround us'. If we were to take this viewpoint seriously, the judging of false prophecies would of course become a very easy task, because it could be done on the basis of someone's commitment to social justice and the oppressed. This is precisely what Winter (1982:69) seems to think when he claims that prophets can even arise from among non-Christian ranks, solely 'because they speak inspired words on behalf of suffering humanity and are the conscience of a new society which are [sic] to be created'. Winter (1982:71,75) therefore ranges himself on the side of those resisting, and standing with the oppressed masses in our land, explaining: 'I am a Christian and, therefore, a revolutionary' (Winter 1982:78).
3.2.4 The prophet as voice to the community

Gaybba (1987:233ff), a Roman Catholic theologian at present lecturing at Rhodes University, develops another interesting theory in defining the way prophecy functions as follows: ‘... to address a word to the community concerning its present life, its present needs (1 Cor 14:3).’ Here, as elsewhere (for instance, Gaybba 1987:234), Gaybba does not clearly define the ‘community’ which is to be prophetically addressed, although one gets the impression that he is thinking in terms of Roman Catholic theology by regarding this community as broader than a mere worshipping (or congregational) community. Tappeiner (1977:26), however, narrows this community somewhat by stating: ‘The context of present day prophecy is worship in the Christian community’ (see also Addenda A-C). At times, Gaybba (1987:234) seems to be suggesting this too, but in further developing his idea of prophecy he does not limit it to the worshipping community (church). This becomes even more clear when he states that prophecy need not be exercised only during a prayer meeting. According to him, prophecy can be contained in a text, a talk, or even a film, in order to reach the ‘community’ and build it up (Gaybba 1987:235).

3.2.5 The prophet as preacher

A last viewpoint to consider is one held for a long time in Reformed circles (following John Calvin) and is even today still expounded by some theologians, such as Beukes (1979:28-47), Director of Kital, a Reformed institution, and Baxter (1983:101-102).

Basing his argument on Scriptures like Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:10-29; and Ephesians 4:11, Beukes (1979:37) concludes that prophecy can only be the gift of preaching which, for him, means interpreting the will of God. This consists of the sermon delivered by the minister of the church and takes place according to the regula fidei or accepted norms of faith (Beukes 1979:37). This view naturally rules out any suggestion of prophecy as ‘revelation’ as defined earlier in this study, while it also seems in need of more exegetical support (see Addenda A-C).

3.3 A PENTECOSTAL CRITIQUE OF THE VIEWPOINTS ADVANCED

None of the above-mentioned viewpoints would be accepted within a Pentecostal paradigm without criticism - and even some severe criticism. Some positions would be met with total rejection. The following points therefore represent a Pentecostal critique of the viewpoints concerned:
Although it cannot be denied anymore that classical Pentecostals are increasingly becoming involved in sociopolitical engagement (Lederle 1987:88-89), this engagement is specifically determined. Hence issues like, for instance, 'liberation' are specifically defined. For them liberation refers especially to the process of breaking the chains of sin, demon-possession, disease, and so forth. Freedom can therefore be experienced without necessarily overthrowing the secular powers or government of the day (see Clark 1984:8). The perception that the social ills of society do not originate from oppressive systems, but that they are symptomatic of the apostasy of humankind, is also a firm belief with Pentecostals. Clark (1984:13-14) aptly describes this view: 'The reform of structures is a futile exercise if the components of the structure are not first renewed.' The following points also need to be seen against this background.

While it can be condoned that a prophet may (and should) speak out against anything contrary to the will of God in church as well as in society, some of the definitions of prophecy confine it to this narrow view, thereby depriving it of its full significance. There is also the danger that only moralistic or socio-politically inclined individuals may be considered to be prophets (see also Addenda A-C).

Furthermore, even if we agree that prophecy can have, and even should have, sociocultural, socioeconomic and sociopolitical consequences, some of the definitions (for instance, those of McHugh [1982:51-64], and Gaybba [1987:233ff]) seem to extend the parameters (context) of prophecy too far. This study will maintain that the context of prophecy as used (as a technical term throughout) is essentially an ecclesiastical one (see 1 Cor 14; Addenda A-C; Tappeiner 1977:26).

The question may also be asked whether a view like that of Winter (1982:65-79) would not lead to a position where (in a society simply divided into oppressed and oppressors) the content of prophecy would become predictable and lack biblical criteria and 'revelation' (see Addenda A-C). Christenson (1987:26) broadens the perspective somewhat by observing that, in the Old Testament, God's prophets also attacked social injustice and the oppression of the poor. This still has relevance for today. But then again: What is justice and how can it be achieved? Christenson (1987:261) maintains: 'As Christians we can do better than simply pick up our social agenda from the editorial page of the local newspaper.' Through the prophetic gift we can dis-
cern God's priorities and plans and therefore serve him more effecti­vely in the social arena.' This is in harmony with the view held by Pentecostals that prophecy is born out of revelation and not the social environment.

Christenson (1987:262) also notes that Old Testament prophets not only addressed these matters. They also attacked false spiritual security, superficial worship and empty religious traditions. He therefore claims that prophecy has the power to jar people out of their complacency.

Returning to Beukes (1979:28-47) and those who are like-minded, one notices that ministers and prophets are equated without sound biblical verification, and also that the urging, spontaneity and revelation of the Holy Spirit are, on the same basis, equated with human knowledge (see 1 Cor 14:30). In contrast to this view, many seem to be reasoning just the opposite way round. In this respect I propose to quote four scholars.

Mallone (1983:36), a Teaching Elder at the Emmanuel Christian Community near Vancouver (in his own words an evangelical who believes in the fullness of the Spirit), comments: ‘But prophecy is not the exclusive prerogative of the biblical preacher .... Immediacy in receiving and declaring God's present message to men is the hallmark of New Testament prophecy, as of its Old Testament counterpart’ (see also Gaybba [1987:233-234] and Fullilove [1973:30]). In this he finds support from Tappeiner (1977:25), a professor of Systematic Theology, who maintains that ‘Prophecy... is not preaching, teaching or our prediction, but an especially appropriate and powerful spontaneous utterance provided by the Holy Spirit, in one's own language, given to the group, for the moment, for purposes of upbuilding, encouragement and consolation’ (see also Möller 1975:210). Schatzmann (1987:39), a theologian from the Oral Roberts University, supports this viewpoint by saying that preaching 'lacks recognition of the element of spontaneity which characterizes the activity of the Spirit. Prophecy, for Paul, meant not so much a prepared sermon, as a word of revelation from God for a specific occasion or situation and spontaneously uttered for the upbuilding of the body .... The prophets, not bound by Scripture or tradition, speak to the congregation on the basis of revelation.' We can therefore safely agree with Christenson (1987:256), Director of the International Lutheran Renewal Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota, when he states: 'Prophecy is different from the
prophet's own general wisdom, biblical insight or recognition of needs among those that are being addressed' (see also Grudem 1978:143-144).

Christenson (1987:259) then concludes that inspired prophecy has been exchanged for theological and scientific wisdom, for churchly and worldly methodologies. And even though Henry (1971:34), a minister of the Baptist church, also believes that prophecy is preaching, he agrees with Christenson when he states that 'liberal Protestants decided that the scientific method rather than the Holy Spirit would lead men into all truth.' Although not everything said by the last four commentators can be endorsed without criticism, their views are much more in accordance with Pentecostal thinking on the subject of prophecy and preaching. Except for the criticism already expressed in previous paragraphs, it should be made unmistakably clear that this research does not embrace the viewpoints advanced by many liberation theologians today. If only for the sake of clarity, it is now repeated that prophecy, especially within Pentecostal circles, is not viewed as a phenomenon (or gift) operating within society. Although its consequences should and must reverberate through and permeate society as such, prophecy is limited to the congregational context only. Nowhere does Paul allow so-called prophets to exercise their prophetical gifts outside the congregation of Corinth. This research, therefore, would maintain that prophecy is received by way of revelation and communicated within the ecclesiastical context it serves.

3.4 WHAT ABOUT THE CESSATION THEORY?

A last point for consideration is to what degree the theory claiming the cessation of spiritual gifts bears on some of the above-mentioned definitions. If this theory can be proved, of course, all of the arguments above would be redundant. Du Toit (1979:197), a Reformed theologian and exponent of the cessation viewpoint, argues that only certain aspects of prophecy, especially the aspect of revelation, have ceased in the light of the New Testament canon. Thus, according to him, the early church rejected the Montanist prophets of the second century. The Canon of Muratori did likewise with the Shepherd of Hermas, claiming that the ranks of the prophets had been closed. My point is clear: if this view is true, prophecies addressing the social context by speaking inspired words on behalf of suffering society (Winter 1982:69-70), or prophecies addressing the community (Gaybba 1987:233), in fact, all prophecies claiming revelation as a basis, would have ceased too.
It is therefore essential to find a clear answer to this problem of cessation in order to continue to investigate prophecy based on revelation - otherwise it becomes unnecessary. Did prophecy of this kind cease once the New Testament canon was established in about the first century AD? Baxter (1983:99-102) would unhesitatingly say yes. An interesting comment comes from a Pentecostal pastor by the name of Brooke ([s a]:6-7) who notes that although the early church had the Old Testament in full as well as the Epistles of Paul, prophecy continued (see Ac 11:27-30; Eph 3:5; and 1 Cor 14). With this Aune (1983:106) fully agrees.

3.5 THE CONTINUATION OF PROPHECY

It must be stated, however, that this research agrees with the viewpoints of Brooke and Aune, and especially with that of Grudem (1978:215-224). Aune (1983:106) concludes that ‘early Christianity itself was a sect within Judaism that revered the Old Testament and yet was characterized by a flurry of prophetic activity’. Grudem (1978:215-224) successfully argues that prophecy will continue until, but not beyond, the time the Lord returns. He paraphrases 1 Corinthians 13:10 as follows to strengthen his case: When the Lord returns, the gift of prophecy will cease. Baker (1976:223-234), a former doctoral student in Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, best expresses the view which I hold by arguing that 1 Corinthians 14, which is the main point of disagreement between Pentecostals and the rest of Christianity, can now, due to the phenomenal expansion of the Pentecostal movement, no longer be disposed of by saying that the gifts of the Spirit ceased in apostolic times. He states, and I agree, that the gifts have a proper place in church: ‘The Pentecostal movement has relearnt one of the truths of the Bible in its study of 1 Corinthians 12-14 and the rest of the church should also learn once again the importance of the dynamic working of the Holy Spirit’ (see also Addenda A-C).

Finally Brooke ([s a]:6-7) states that the fight against the prophetic ministry was most severe throughout the ages because it demonstrates the presence of God in the midst of his people. This, he says, is too much for Satan to endure (Brooke [s a]:38). He summarises his belief aptly by saying ‘It is a great fight to break from the place of formality where the Spirit does not operate, and seek the place where the Word of the Lord is spoken by His prophets, and received’ (Brooke [s a]: 33). I concur with this conviction.
In summarising this chapter, a few observations are pertinent. It is clear that the concept 'prophecy' takes on different meaning for different people and their denominations. Some would confine its occurrence to congregational life only, while others would extend the parameters to the whole social community. Some believe that it originates by revelation, while others would firmly hold that doing thorough exegesis is enough to enable one to prophesy. A few even believe that the gifts ceased once the New Testament canon was established, while others would reject this. On a more practical note, some of the definitions are divorced from the context of 1 Corinthians 14 in such a way that the practicability (feasibility) thereof is questioned. All in all, it seems to me that the problem arises from the fact that some definitions are based wholly on the Old Testament, while others are totally dependent on the New Testament, and all are in some way or another denominationally and exegetically biased.

Prophecy (used as a technical term in this research) therefore requires a much more nuanced definition than has been forthcoming thus far. I believe that prophecy will occur until the return of Jesus. In the meantime the church is found wanting (and sometimes even impotent) because of a lack of knowledge concerning the real purpose and intent of prophecy, which I believe functions as a communication gift between God and his people. A solution therefore has to be found - something I hope to achieve in the last chapter by way of a relational model.

The following factors are, however, essential in our search for this solution, especially with a view to the New Testament (see Addenda A-C):

2. Some of the prophetic characteristics so prominent in the Old Testament for instance, the ecstatic or trance-like figure, the stern symbol of moralism and the functioning as the conscience of the people, do not feature as prominently in the New Testament.
3. In the New Testament, the function of prophecy seems more to provide means of encouragement, consolation and the building up of the congregation, although the idea of conviction (of sin) is not totally abandoned.
4. The most important change was nevertheless the fact that the whole Christian congregation now seems to function as a prophetic community.
This implies that the office of prophet now came to mean that, among the many having the ability to prophesy, one can be chosen by God to speak on his behalf. This in turn is achieved through revelation by God.

It is against this background that an attempt to find a definition that is as bibli­cally and exegetically sound as possible concerning prophecy, can now be launched. This is what the next chapter will endeavour to do.
CHAPTER 4

An attempt towards a Scriptural definition of prophecy

4.1 INTRODUCTION

It has already been determined that the New Testament prophet can be viewed as an interpreter or one speaking for another, in this case for God (Yocum 1976:357; Hagin 1978:20; and Möller 1975:202-203). Both the Greek and the Hebrew words for prophecy seem to convey this meaning 'to speak forth' or 'proclaim on behalf of someone else' (Christenson 1987:255; Baxter 1983:97; and Grudem 1978:28-39). It seems reasonable to accept that it is generally understood that prophets perform the function of linking Christ and his body, the church - 'they transmit the mind and will of the head to the members' (Christenson 1987:262). Or as Aune (1983:339) has it: 'Prophecy is a specific form of divination that consists of intelligible verbal messages believed to originate with God and communicated through inspired human intermediaries.' Thus in almost every definition it seems to be a general principle that prophecy in a Christian context, consists of someone (a prophet) speaking forth (to the congregation) on behalf of someone else (God). This is exactly what Paul had in mind in 1 Corinthians 14:3: 'On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation' (RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament 1978:694).

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Grudem (1978:39), however, cautions that the New Testament term *prophetes* is never used in such a strict sense, the context usually determining the exact nuance of the word. Up to this point, everyone seems to be in agreement. It is in departing from here that difficulties and differences seem to surface. While some hold that prophecy embraces only preaching, combats social injustice, or that it can only function in a sociocontextual environment, Vandervelde (1984:2-5), a Canadian Reformed theologian, on the other hand, declares prophecy to be revelation, that is, originating with God only (1 Cor 14:26, 29-30). This kind of revelation, however, is revelation subject to human judgment (weighing) or discernment and is manifested by way of intelligible speech. Thus prophecy can only be both spontaneous, and controlled (1 Cor 14:32), for the Holy Spirit is sovereign in initiating prophecy, but voluntarily subject in the communication thereof. Culbertson (1964:25), President of the Moody Bible Institute and editor-in-chief of *Moody Monthly*, even says: ‘Prophecy is also the Lord God omnipotent sharing with the child of God something of what He intends to do in the history of man’.

In describing the meaning of the word revelation (*apokalupto*) in this context, Grudem (1978:57-59) defines it as divine authority of general content rather than actual words. For him revelation would enable the prophet to know something from a divine or heavenly perspective. He describes the meaning of *apokalupsis* in the New Testament as always having an eschatological emphasis. To ‘reveal’ something, is to make it known in the way in which it will be known in the consummation (Grudem 1978:128-129). This he then calls ‘kingdom-knowledge’ or a ‘kingdom-perspective’ (Grudem 1978:129). This is supported by 2 Peter 1:20-21: ‘First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.’ (See also Romans 12:1-21.)

He would, however, also concede that this does not restrict revelation to a knowledge of things in the future, or the things of heaven only. ‘Thus if a believer's sinful disposition is made clear to him, he has come to see it from a kingdom perspective: it has been “revealed” to him (Phlp 3:15)’ (Grudem 1978:129), and ‘Prophecy can at times include simply the statements of a known fact or verse of Scripture which needed to be called to the attention of the congregation at that particular moment’ (Grudem 1978:225). He then concludes that not every revelation results in a prophecy (for instance, Rm 1:17-18, and 1 Pt 1:12), but that every prophecy requires a revelation (1 Cor 14:24,25, 14:30,32, and throughout the rest of the New Testament).
A short summary of what has been said up to now would be in order. Firstly, it was determined that a prophet must be viewed as an interpreter, speaking on behalf of God. Secondly, prophecy must be born of revelation, but then revelation of general content rather than of actual words. This allows for prophecy to be both spontaneous and controlled at the same time. Thirdly, prophecy cannot be viewed as prediction only, although the latter may be part of prophecy.

A prerequisite for defining ‘prophecy’ is to come to grips with the real meaning of the word. This, I believe, can be achieved by making a distinction between the person and message of the prophet, followed by a closer examination of the function of prophecy in the congregation. Clearly defining prophecy is not as easy as the first glance would suggest.

4.2 THE ROLE AND QUALIFICATIONS OF THE PROPHET

4.2.1 Introduction

It is worth noting at the outset that a distinction between ‘prophecy’ and ‘prophetic office’ is made by many (see Sullivan 1982:81; Hagin 1978:16; and Yocum 1976:48). This argument is usually based on a comparison between Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 14:1. Grudem (1978:237-241), however, insists that no such offices existed. For him prophetes simply means someone who prophesies - a functional term and not a formally recognised ‘office’ or position. In other words, those who prophesy regularly are ‘prophets’ (Grudem 1978:271). Aune (1983:346) in turn views the term ‘prophet’ as ‘a designation for inspired mediums of divine revelation’.

Paul himself did not distinguish rigidly between the gift of prophetic utterance and the prophet as such (Schatzmann 1987:39). From 1 Corinthians 14:31 it is clear that Paul believed that all can prophesy, but that not all are necessarily prophets, that is, not all can occupy an official prophetic office like that of the Old Testament (1 Cor 12:29; Gaybba 1987:232-233; Addenda A-C).

Sullivan (1982:92) correctly designates the whole congregation as a prophetic society, which of course must be qualified by saying that only Spirit-filled people in any congregation could be called that. This Mallone (1983:33), a Teaching Elder at the Emmanuel Christian Community near Vancouver, highlights as follows: ‘The outpoured Spirit on the day of Pentecost made the prophetic potential of every believer a reality (Acts 2:17-18) ... All members of the eschatological community without distinction are called to prophecy’ (see also Grudem 1978:242).
Despite Paul's emphasis on the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, he also expected the Corinthians to take some positive steps to seek out the gift of prophecy for themselves (1 Cor 12:31, 14:1, 14:39). What this involves Paul does not say. He only gives various hints throughout the passage (Grudem 1978:268-269; Addenda A-C). Some of these in Corinthians, are:

* Prayer (14:3).
* Be content with present gifts (12:14-19, 12:20-24).
* Be mature (14:37).
* Have the right motives (14:1, 14:12).
* Use your present gifts (14:12, 14:26)

It would only be fair, however, to mention that others would disagree with this. Aune (1983:201), for instance, believes that 'to regard all Christians as potential prophets is a theological dictum which cannot be confirmed or denied by historical or literary criticism, since it is an implication read into the early Christian belief system'. Nevertheless, Sullivan (1982:92-93) is correct in saying that a prophet would normally prophesy, but that all who prophesy are not necessarily official prophets. Thus Yocum (1976:147) states that everyone may seek to experience prophecy, but not to be a prophet. Prophets are appointed by God. He also lists five interesting points concerning the role of the prophet (see also Grudem 1978:267-269):

* Receiving and proclaiming the 'word' or obeying the promptings of the Spirit (Ac 16:9, 21:11)
* Actively seeking out God's word and will, placing himself continually in the presence of God, seeking his guidance (1 Cor 14:3)
* 'Stirring up' the prophetic gift by arousing and calling into action the gift that has been given to him (2 Tm 1:6)
* 'Watching over' the prophetic word by continuing to speak until there is a response whether positive or negative (Ezk 3)
* Unceasing prayer for the Christian community


This agrees with Sullivan's observation (1982:95) that the Book of Ephesians stresses the role of the prophet as the mediator of revelation, while the Book of Acts stresses the more practical role, namely, that of directing the church.

Concerning the role of today's prophets we can then assume that a distinction between the so-called prophetic office and prophecy as such must be maintained. This enables the whole congregation to be viewed as a prophetic
society, given the fact that they are Spirit-filled. This is further endorsed by the fact that Paul urges the worshipping community to seek out the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 12 & 14). What is significant though, is that believers are urged to prophesy, not to be prophets. In the end prophecy is all about mediating God’s revelation and directing the church.

4.2.2 Some qualifications of prophets

In trying to determine some qualifications for a New Testament prophet, Yocum (1976:54-55) searches for them in the person and the spiritual gifts of the prophet (see also Möller 1975:215). He envisages someone free of emotional and psychological problems, at the same time living a strong and consistent Christian life (see Mallone 1983:42). It is clear, however, that some of the biblical prophets certainly would not have fitted into such a pattern easily. One can at once think of Miriam, the jealousy-filled woman; Jonah, the disobedient; Balaam, the money lover; and Caiaphas, the hate-filled man. In their cases it is clear from Matthew 7:21-23 as well as from 1 Corinthians 13:1-2, that God did not so much count their prophecies wrong but rather themselves (Brooke [s a]:50-51).

These were men and women hiding their sins behind their gifts. It was therefore possible to succeed before people, but before God they had failed. Their prophecies (by grace) were right, but they were wrong (Brooke [s a]:51).

4.2.2.1 The prophet’s life

That the moral uprightness of the prophets, the orthodoxy of their prophecies, and their general way of life serve as criteria for true prophets, however, would be supported by many (see Sullivan 1982:105-108; Christenson 1987:255). Sullivan (1982:117-118) also stresses the fact that the prophet must be well known, not emotionally unbalanced or disturbed, and most important of all should not be an ‘attention seeker’. This is underscored by Matthew 7:16: ‘You will know them by their fruits’ (see also Mallone 1983:45-46).

It is therefore desirable that the quality of the prophet’s life and character must be tested. The gift of prophecy does not necessarily indicate holiness, and holiness, on the other hand, does not automatically mean exercising the gifts. Nevertheless, there is a definite connection between the holiness of a person’s life and the gifts he or she exercises (Yocum 1976:111-112). In applying this kind of ‘moral test’, Mallone (1983:41) confirms Matthew 7:15-20 with the con-
clusion that Jesus called us to be ‘fruit inspectors’. Naturally then, unknown prophets should be under strict scrutiny. It is obvious that neither the ability of prophets to work signs and wonders or cast out demons, nor even the truth of their teaching can be sufficient criteria for their trustworthiness. A prophet’s teaching must be backed up by his or her life (Sullivan 1982:104-107). Mallone therefore argues (see also Aune 1983:226):

In a community which practices relational Christianity, such testing is quite possible (Eph 4:1-6:9). But within the realm of media-Christianity, globetrotting superstars, and oligarchic leadership styles, such a check is not possible. Prophecies that come through the electronic church are suspect.

(Mallone 1983:41)

4.2.22 Revelation

Grudem (1978:142), however, would insist that only one distinction could be legitimate, namely, that the revelation from God which the prophet displayed, was what distinguished true prophesy from false in the Old Testament (Dt 18:20; Ezk 13:3; and 1 Ki 22:23 [false prophecy], over against Am 3:7 [true prophecy]). For him, several cases confirm that the distinguishing characteristic of a prophet is possession of information which could only have come through a revelation. A few scriptures are applicable:

- Luke 7:39 assumes that a prophet knows by revelation.
- John 4:19 implies the same concerning Jesus’ knowledge.
- Acts 2:30 David is designated as a prophet for the same reasons.
- John 11:51 Caiaphas’s prediction is treated likewise, designating knowledge that could not have been known otherwise as prophecy.

It is therefore a fair conclusion that while the question of revelation plays a considerable part in distinguishing true from false prophets, it is not to be denied that the life of the prophet is equally important. No man known to be openly or secretly sinning, or to be unreliable, can ever hope to be accepted as a prophet of God. If their lives exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (G1 5:22,23), their prophecies will be valued. If they do not, their prophecies will be counted worthless. And even if God does by grace count their prophecies right, they will be counted wrong by God as well as by the people to whom they prophesy.
4.2.2.3 Spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit

Concerning the spiritual gifts of the prophet, Yocum (1976:55-56) lists four primary characteristics of an abiding prophetical gift:

* An ongoing and consistent exercise of prophecy
* A powerful and effective exercise of prophetic gifts
* An ability to ‘stir up’ the gift by songs and hymns
* A true gift of revelation which operates consistently

What is absent from this list is the fruit of the Spirit (G1 5:22-23). Although the fruit cannot be termed essentially ‘gifts of the Spirit’, it can surely serve as a biblical criterion for measuring a true prophet. The prophet, moreover, must be known as a man or woman of prayer and dedication to God as well as to the believing community. The love with which he treats both is in fact the basis and cornerstone of true prophecy (1 Cor 13).

Summarising the whole issue, Aune (1983:229) suggests that prophets and their prophecies in early Christianity were weighed in terms of behaviour, teaching, and prophetic protocol, that is, not to provide oracular responses to enquiries from clients, nor to do so in private, or for money. In short, everything a prophet says and does - or even does not say or do - the way he or she walks and talks and behaves, is part and parcel of being a messenger of God. In my own opinion a prophet must receive his or her prophecy from God by way of revelation. This naturally can only be true of a prayerful and dedicated believer whose words are backed by his or her moral uprightness and unblemished character. The exercising of other spiritual gifts is not a prerequisite for prophecy, but it surely enhances the credibility of someone delivering what we could term ‘words from God’.

4.2.2.4 The question of false prophets

The fact that true prophets were called, sent and controlled by God alone, is precisely what distinguished true from false prophets in the Old Testament (see Jr 14:14, 23:21; Ezek 13:3-6). But in saying this, it must be remembered that the title ‘false prophet’ is simply the report of one audience’s evaluation (and rejection) of a prophet’s claim to divine authority. No prophet in the Bible ever applies the title ‘false prophet’ to him or herself. Rather, even those who are judged by the biblical narrator to be ‘false’ continually claimed for themselves legitimate divine authority (see 1 Ki 22:11-12, 24; Jr 28:10-11; [Grudem 1978:5]). In his definition of a false prophecy, Tappeiner (1977:29)
terms it a phenomenon driven by psychological or social needs without any ‘anointing’. It is, however, only after the time of Paul that the evaluation of prophetic utterance became largely a negative task (Aune 1983:222). This is borne out by the fact that Old Testament criteria did not pose the same problem. In summing up those criteria, Mallone (1983:33) states:

* if a prophet invites you to worship another God, he is false (Dt 13:1-5). (A test for orthodoxy, according to Tucker [1978:441]).
* if a prophet’s word is exposed as not coming from God, he is to die (Dt 18:20).
* if a prophet’s word does not come true he also is false (Dt 18:22).

Aune (1983:87-88) terms these: message-centred criteria, criteria focusing on the person, and chronological criteria. The first two Old Testament criteria are obvious, while the third one only had a bearing on short term prophecies.

What does create a problem, is the fact that even false prophets can exercise great power and even perform miracles or ‘psychic phenomena’ (see Yocum 1976:105). Various forms of mind control, positive thinking and other cults nowadays claim to have spiritual powers. The question, therefore, is of what spirit are they? In these cases they are clearly not from God (see Yocum 1976:106).

The Elder (1 Jn 4:1-3) explicitly warns his readers that every spirit ought to be tested concerning its origin. ‘Prophecy is inspired speech, and “distinguishing between spirits” has to do with determining by what spirit the speaker is inspired’ (Sullivan 1982:105). The question as to how this is to be done will be treated in more detail during the discussion of the prophet’s message and the function thereof. What is relevant for our determining the role of the prophet, is the remark by Vandervelde (1984:18) that this kind of discernment requires a ‘community of prophets’, which confirms the point made at the beginning of this chapter that the whole congregation ought to be seen as a prophetic community exercising their potential to prophesy. This is a community or society, therefore, where no one official prophet can operate, but rather what Mallone (1983:35, 41) would call ‘relational Christianity’ should come into being (see Grudem 1978:183). Lategan (1975:322), professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Stellenbosch, says it aptly when he claims that the unity of the congregation forms the space within which the different gifts emerge, function and receive their meaning. The gifts are projected on to this space and wish to serve this unity. Aune (1983:193) confirms this with his remark that an
expectation widely held in early Judaism was that, at some time in the future, the Spirit of God will be poured out on all Israel and all Israelites would have the gift of prophecy (see Nm 11:29; Jl 2:28; Ac 2).

The rest of the assembly therefore has to be taught to discern true from false prophets (Sullivan 1982:105; Christenson 1987:255). Of this 1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and Acts 17:11, for instance, emphatically give testimony. Prophets are not given absolute truth, but are to be open to criticism (Wilkinson 1978:18). Even prophets should continually study the Scriptures. Whether the testing is done by way of a theological test, that is by judging in terms of a thorough examination of the speaker’s doctrine of Christ (Mallone 1983:39), or by way of Aune’s doctrinal test (1983:222-224), or even by some other criterion, will have to be determined later on. As Grudem (1978:54) has it ‘... 1 Corinthians 14:29 indicates that the whole congregation would listen and evaluate what was said by the prophet, forming opinions about it, and some would perhaps discuss it publicly’. Paul’s hoi alloi diakrinetosan (1 Cor 14:29) therefore disallows ‘official’ prophets, clearly indicating that ‘the others’ who are to evaluate, are each prophets in their own right (see Addenda A-C).

True prophecy brings one face to face with God. The whole evangelistic outreach of the early church was closely linked with the ministry of prophets appointed by God himself (see Ac 13:1-3; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11).

Nowhere do we find any suggestion that God wants this ministry dispensed with prior to the second coming of Christ (Christenson 1987:262). When the early church faced important choices, they sought God’s guidance through prophets, and so should we (Christenson 1987:263). Especially applicable is Vandervelde’s remark (1984:1): ‘One prophet at a time, not no prophet at any time.’ This means then that we can safely conclude that the role of the prophets consists of being in the first place interpreters speaking on behalf of God. What they say is received by revelation from God. This must be backed up by their behaviour and the gifts they continually exercise within a community of potential prophets which is given authority to judge their words and intentions. This community of potential prophets is to distinguish between true or pure and false prophets by way of discerning the ‘spirit’ by which the prophets are moved to speak.

When Christenson (1987:264) makes the following observation, he leads us into a discussion of the prophetic message and its function: ‘Prophets should seek to be sensitive not only to the context of the message, but also to the most appropriate way to convey it, for that, too is a part of the wisdom of God’.

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4.3 THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE AND ITS FUNCTION IN THE CONGREGATION

4.3.1 Introduction

Having considered the role and qualifications of the prophet, the message the prophets bring and the way it operates in the congregation now deserve attention. Because of the close link between these two aspects they will be discussed as a unity.

An observation worth noting at the start, is the fact that tongues followed by interpretation seems to be elevated by Paul to the level of prophecy (see Gundry 1966:305; Fullilove 1973:45). This becomes clear from the identical requirements Paul lays down for tongues and prophecy (Brooke [s a]:14). Exactly at this point some (like Gaybba 1987:225-226), fail to make the distinction which classical Pentecostals maintain between tongues as a phenomenon following the baptism in the Spirit and experienced by all who participate in this specific experience, and tongues as a gift of the Spirit which, accompanied by interpretation (another gift of the Spirit), serves to build up the congregation in the same way as does prophecy. Some, like Wilkinson (1978:9), even interpret the glossolalia (tongues) on the Day of Pentecost (Ac 2:1-13) as understood by Peter to be prophecy (see Möller 1975:98, 212). This may prove a debatable issue, but nevertheless poses an interesting hypothesis. Glossolalia, however, being an independent and quite vast field of study in itself is passed over with this preliminary observation, since the criteria for prophecy and interpreted tongues, in my opinion to a great degree concur. (For discussion on this issue, interested readers are referred to Robertson 1975:43-53; Grudem 1979:381-396; Johanson 1979:180-203; Sullivan 1982:101-102 and Thiselton 1979:15-36).

4.3.2 The function of prophecy in the congregation

As shown previously, interpreters of the Bible generally seem to agree that prophecy is born of a revelation from God: 'the person begins to prophesy with no premeditated plan' (Tappeiner 1977:27). The prophet's message therefore denotes the idea of something received from an external source, and relates to sudden emergence, usually in the context of deep prayer and worship (Baxter 1983:98; Tappeiner 1977:27). To put it very simply: prophecy can be described as God-inspired and Spirit-anointed. It does not originate from the human mind (see Fullilove 1973:45). In this context, 1 Corinthians 14:31 indicates that every Spirit-filled Christian has the potential to prophesy (see
Addenda A-C). Therefore, 'the essential difference, then, between prophecy and any other kind of speaking by which the community can be built up is the element of inspiration that is proper to prophetic speech (Sullivan 1982:101).

Paul himself alludes to this fact (1 Cor 14:29-30) emphasising that the difference between prophecy and every other kind of edifying speech is to be found in the close association of prophecy with revelation (see Sullivan 1982:101; Christenson 1987:254). It is exactly this that compels Paul (1 Cor 14:29-30) to declare that revelatory prophecies are to take precedence over those which are judged not to be revelatory (see Addenda A-C).

Grudem (1979:116, 395) also sees the distinctiveness of prophecy in that it must be based on revelation, which means that it generally comes spontaneously and comes from God only (see Wilkinson 1978:16 who relates revelation to prophecy and knowledge to teaching). Therefore Wilkinson (1978:17) includes the aspect of divine insight into the will of God with reference to the congregation. In this 1 Timothy 1:18 comes to his aid by proclaiming prophecy as guidance for church leaders in making practical decisions, as well as the revelation of God's intention concerning the role of certain persons (see Sullivan 1982:102).

The question as to what this revelation implies is of course unavoidable. Tappeiner (1977:26) uses an interesting quotation from Lindblom:

Typical of the revelatory state of mind is the feeling of being under an influence external of the self, a divine power, the consciousness of hearing words and seeing visions which do not come from the self, but from an invisible world ... This feeling of being subject to an external influence is perhaps the most constant element in the revelatory state of mind.

The point is clear: the prophet's message is 'given' and not constructed by the busy mind of the prophet. The issue, however, does not suggest a state of mind where the prophet loses control of his own mind and is driven by an automatic mechanical urge. The idea is rather that prophecy is experienced in a relational way and is always objectively orientated and not essentially subjectively and psychologically preoccupied or focused. This, being compatible with a variety of mental states, is very important because it allows for the variety of attitudes towards prophecy observed in Pentecostal churches today. These include mental exaltation varying from ecstasy to that which approximates normal consciousness (Tappeiner 1977:26).
Having said this, Schatzmann (1987:38) considers prophecy to be the preferred form of communication in the context of the corporate gathering of the church (see also Roberts 1971:26; Mallone 1983:35-41). Sullivan (1982:95) uses the very apt term ‘congregational prophecy’. In this context it clearly has priority over uninterpreted tongues (1 Cor 14:1-6), because it communicates God’s word to the church directly and without the aid of other gifts to clarify what has been said (Schatzmann 1987:40). Nowhere does Paul indicate that prophecy needs something else as a supplementary gift to edify the church (Aune 1983:219-220; Mallone 1983:42). The only restriction is that it be subject to orderliness (1 Cor 14:26-33, 37-40), and that the number of speakers be restricted to three. According to Cronjé (1988) it must, however, be granted that this cannot be considered a rigid rule. God, being sovereign, may at times transcend this Pauline rule and allow exceptions.

Prophecy can also be checked (Gaybba 1987:225), because of the fact that the prophet’s spirit is subject to him or herself (1 Cor 14:32-33). Brooke ([s a]:53) maintains that prophets have to learn to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to hold back the message until the right moment. Concerning the function of prophecy in a general sense, it can be termed as revelation in order ‘to bring men to a knowledge of the reality of God, and to a consciousness of his presence in the midst of the assembly’ (Brooke [s a]:25). It is not given in the first instance to bring new doctrinal truths, but it applies and expands biblical truth. It must be clear, however, that Scripture does not prescribe the limits for prophetic revelation (Christenson 1987:260). The Bible has nothing to say about space travel for example. Although Wilkinson (1978:17) finds no indication of the aspect of prediction in the prophecy Paul has in mind at Corinth, and Christenson (1987:261) believes that prophecy normally deals with current situations in that it uncovers hidden things or applies biblical truths to a present need, prophecy can at times illuminate the future, preparing people for what is to come (Jn 16:13). Some, like Sullivan (1982:99), therefore believe that Luke stresses the aspect of prediction, while Paul does not. However, prophecy highlights God’s nearness and concern for his people. It proves that God really does speak to us (Christenson 1987:260); this is what the prophet’s message should incorporate.

In a more specific sense, no better definition of prophecy exists than the one Paul offers in 1 Corinthians 14:3: ‘On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their *upbuilding and encouragement and consolation*’ (my emphasis).
This is generally accepted (Yocum 1976:39-40; Baker 1976:233; Wilkinson 1978:12-18), although Sullivan (1982:99) would add that the idea also allows for words of stern rebuke and admonition (see Roberts 1971:32). The whole point is best stated by Lategan (1975:320) when he says that the value of the different gifts and their mutual relationship to each other, are solely dependent on their usefulness, their ability to build up the congregation.

Prophecy could, however, also function as the bearer of conviction (1 Cor 14:24), especially where several people are prophesying. In this case, the outsider is convicted of sin and called to account by several different people (see Grudem 1979:394). The secrets of his or her heart are disclosed and such a person will come to worship God and declare the presence of God (1 Cor 14:25). This seems to imply that specific mention of one or more of his or her particular sins is made. Paul seems to be thinking of something very striking and unusual, a knowledge acquired only by supernatural means, not merely the general conviction of sin (see Grudem 1979:394-395; Addenda A-C).

In addition to this, Yocum (1976:36-38) believes that congregational prophecy initiates the action of God (Ac 11:27f), awakens God’s people to hear his word (Rv 3), proclaims God’s word publicly, and unleashes the power of the Holy Spirit (Jr 5:14; Ps 33:6). More than this, it also inspires the community to worshipful response to God and guides the congregation according to his will (Yocum 1976:39-45). To this the fact can be added that prophecy is given to glorify Christ, to equip the church, and to arm its soldiers (Baxter 1983:75-81).

It seems clear, therefore, that the phenomenon of interpreted tongues is elevated by Paul to equal prophecy, and that prophecy is still preferred above uninterpreted tongues. Apart from the fact that prophecy is born from revelation or divine insight, it is furthermore spontaneous or ‘given’ and not constructed by the prophet’s mind. It must also be understood that prophecy can be controlled although it is a way of bringing God near to us and proves that God still wants to communicate with his people. This communication builds up, encourages, consoles God’s people, but can also rebuke, convict and correct them. It can even include some prediction or information about the future, but is always precipitated by the action of God.

It must be clear by now that the prophet’s message and the function thereof cannot be defined by a stroke of the pen. Much more will have to be said before a credible definition can be formulated. In spite of all the definitions already mentioned, McLwraith (1982:8) maintains that ‘in the end prophecy is not the knocking down of distant idols, but the knocking down of oneself, of one’s own world’. If prophecy is to build up, encourage and console, it will,
most of the time, first have to knock down our own carefully constructed selfish and ungrateful little worlds where the ego reigns supreme. Only then does prophecy as revelation, as a word from God, have the potential to convict of sin, to precipitate the action of God, to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in order that God can reign supreme in the hearts and lives of men and women.

4.4 THE FORM OF PROPHECY

How prophecy destroys one's own world, the forthcoming research will attempt to show. Mowvelcy (1982:25), deputy principal of Bristol Baptist College, correctly states that different people will see things in different ways, and therefore may speak different words. This leads up to the main question, which is, How we are to know whether the prophet's message truly comes from God or not? To determine this a number of preliminary observations are again essential, starting off with a study concerning the forms which biblical prophecy might adopt.

It is a known fact that prophets of all times performed dramatic actions to communicate their messages received from God (Yocum 1976:88). Sometimes songs were composed, at other times, their children were given prophetic names, and acts were performed, like Agabus (Acts 21:11) binding Paul's feet and hands with his own girdle. It does seem, however, that the element of ecstasy is absent from most of these actions. Thus Grudem (1978:177) declares: 'An examination of data in 1 Corinthians and then elsewhere in the New Testament church, indicates that certainly at Corinth, and quite probably elsewhere in the New Testament church, prophets do not seem to have had estatic experiences while prophesying' (see Gaybba 1987:225).

As stated previously, incidents like Acts 10:10, 22:17, 26:25, and 2 Corinthians 5:13 may be interpreted to indicate otherwise (see for example, Cronjé 1988).

What is present, however, is what Tappeiner (1977:26), describing a typical Pentecostal service, calls a natural preparation for receiving revelation which, according to him, results from prayer, or fasting and prayer: 'People come with jubilation and expectancy and a spirit of praise ready to overflow. The meetings are characterized by freedom, openness, singing, accompanied by a longing and expectancy to hear the preached word as well as the words of God in the gifts of the Spirit' (see also Aune 1983:266).

Nevertheless the question remains: How can we expect prophecy to occur in the congregation? Several interesting possibilities are listed by Yocum (1976:89-101) and discussed here:
(1) Oracles

Oracles represent the simplest form of prophecy and may or may not contain the familiar prophetic phrases, ‘The Lord says’ or ‘Thus says the Lord’. The word is direct from God and is given in a direct way.

Christenson (1987:263) supplements the list of prophetic formulae with the phrases ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit’ (Ac 21:11), ‘through the Spirit’ (Ac 21:4), and ‘I was in the Spirit’ (Rv 1:10-11; see also Mallone 1983:22). Nowadays these formulae seem to have been rephrased to include something like ‘Hear, my people’ or ‘It seems to me the Lord is saying’ (Tappeiner 1977:26), or even ‘The Lord gives us to understand’ (Cronjé 1988).

Concerning the question of the authority underlying prophetic phrases, Grudem (1978:3) makes a very important contribution in distinguishing between two types of prophetic authority, namely an ‘authority of general content’ and an ‘authority of actual words’. The formula used by the prophet then, depends on what kind of authority is involved. Grudem (1978:236) firmly believes that prophecy of the type found in 1 Corinthians will not include claims of divine authority concerning actual words, but material that came through revelation and would edify the congregation.

A last point to ponder is the one observed by Mallone (1983:35) that ‘some pentecostal conditioning has taught us to believe that the gift of prophecy must be uttered in first-person singular, Elizabethan English’. This was of course never implied by Paul. Paul would rather have insisted on naturalness (see Addenda A-C). Cronjé (1988) declares that Paul would have insisted on inspired speech.

(2) Exhortation

Very much like Acts 15, exhortation revives, renews, and strengthens God’s people, giving new hope and courage. It allows for great freedom of expression just as direct, first-person prophecy would.

(3) Inspired prayer

An example of inspired prayer can be found in Luke 1 and 2 where Zechariah and Simon prayed prophetic prayers through which God revealed his plan of salvation. Hagin (1978:16) confirms that inspired prophetic praying leads to inspired praise and worship.
A prophetic word can be received along with a melody and the urge to sing it. Sometimes this order is reversed, with the melody being received first, followed by the words. A prophetic song is therefore not composed, but received (see Yocum 1976:92), and communicates an experience rather than a word (see Addenda A-C). It functions rather like a prayer or an exhortation.

From time to time God reveals things to us which would not otherwise have been known (see Jn 4). In the congregation this can become a powerful, convincing act of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 14:24, 25). As was stated previously, it is revelation that makes prophecy different from all other forms of speech (see Grudem 1978:186). The utmost caution should naturally be taken with situations of this nature. False notions can be devastating, while God sometimes wants us to keep silent about what we have learnt until such time as he chooses to reveal it. In this respect, God's guidance is of the utmost importance.

Sometimes a specific Word for a particular person is received (see Hagin 1978:18-19). It may provide direction, encourage, console, or even convict of sin. This, of course, must similarly be examined and judged very carefully, especially because of the dangers of misuse.

Through visions like those of Revelation 4:1-3, for instance, God opens up to mankind his mind and actions. These visions must be shared and properly evaluated.

Mistakes can occur, but this does not mean that visions should be discounted or ignored. Grudem (1978:185-186) maintains that the common conception of a prophet as one predicting the future, plays no part in Paul's definition in this respect.

It would therefore be unwise to rely on emotionally unstable persons for prophecy of this kind (see Brooke [s a]:65-68). It must be made clear, however, that dreams and visions can be called prophecy too. Both represent media through which God conveys his revelation (Mallone 1983:32).
Prophetic actions

Prophets of both the Old and the New Testaments, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, performed actions vividly portraying their messages (see Jr 13:1, 27, 32; Ac 21:10, 11). They can be termed inspired dramatisations and they too derive their power and meaning from the Holy Spirit.

Tongues and interpretation

Often a message in tongues will be interpreted by someone other than the speaker (1 Cor 14:27). On some occasions though, the speakers themselves will interpret the message (1 Cor 14:13). In both cases, the interpreted message is elevated by Paul to the level of prophecy (1 Cor 14:5).

4.5 THE WEIGHING OF PROPHECY

In our search for the content and function of the prophet’s message, the next question now emerges. If the above-mentioned manifestational facets of prophecy are so clear, why do we have to determine what is true or false? Brooke ([s a]:37) feels that prophecy is sometimes termed false because of a wrong interpretation placed on an otherwise true prophecy. If the prophetic word had been rightly judged from the beginning, the wrong interpretation could have been obviated to a great extent. Furthermore, fulfilment of prophecy is generally dependent on faith, obedience, preparation and readiness on the part of those concerned (Brooke [s a]:75).

However, it also seems to be clear (Aune 1983:217) that the emphasis on testing the prophet and his or her prophecy appears to have arisen only within the framework of private prophetic conflict. This was not a normal procedure or a normal response, but occurred when two prophets or messages were at variance with one another. In such a case, it had to be determined if the lying spirit of a deceitful prophet was at work (Aune 1983:217). But even within this framework the question as to criteria for evaluation remains.

Vandervelde (1984:5) believes that the concept of weighing prophecy entails evaluation with a view to its trustworthiness and the practical implications for daily life. Yocum (1976:63-64) believes that prophets rather than prophecies should be weighed. He gives three arguments in support of this view:
* Most prophecies do not require any decision as to whether they are inspired, exhortatory, consolatory and so on.
* A community rarely has to rely upon a single utterance, because most often, several people receive the same testimony.
* Testing prophets and then trusting the words of accredited prophets was the main method of the early church.

Paul's word for judging (krino) in 1 Corinthians 14:29 suggests 'the ability to recognize the influence of the Holy Spirit or that of demonic spirits in a person' (Grudem 1978:46) or even a 'distinguishing between spirits' (Grudem 1978:114). The whole congregation is involved in this process with no indication whatsoever that judging is limited to those with one particular office or gift (see Addenda A-C). To put it in other words: 'Especially hard to believe is the idea that teachers, administrators and other church leaders without special gifts of prophecy would sit passively awaiting the verdict of an elite group before they knew whether to accept a prophecy as genuine' (Grudem 1978:48-49).

Moreover, and I believe Grudem is right in this regard, the process of weighing approximates to a kind of evaluation whereby each person would judge on an individual basis what is good and helpful, rejecting some of it as erroneous or misleading.

What must be stressed, however, is that 1 Corinthians 14:29 does not, like other passages (for instance Mt 7:15-20, 24:11, 24; and Jn 4:1-6) refer to strangers coming into the congregation. It is therefore 'unlikely that they would be "judged" and declared "true" prophets again and again, every time they spoke, month after month' (Grudem 1978:50). And yet 1 Thessalonians 5:9-21 indicates that prophecies are also to be judged, not only prophets. An observation by Grudem earlier on, distinguishing between the authority of actual words and the authority of general content, now becomes even more important. To quote Grudem (1978:55): 'So the prophets at Corinth must not have been thought to speak with a divine authority of actual words, but rather with just a divine authority of general content, which made the prophecies subject to evaluation and questioning at every point (see Addenda A-C).

This is a sound conclusion, for it is clear that those prophesying would differ in ability among themselves. Moreover they would experience growth in their prophetic abilities over a period of time. Some would therefore prophecy more frequently and at greater length. More clear and forceful revelations
would be received and the content of their prophecies would shift, more important subjects becoming more and more relevant (see Grudem 1978:268).

In conclusion, 1 Corinthians 14 exhibits a clear absence of any warning concerning false prophets, as well as a lack of criteria for judging them (see Addenda A-C). Furthermore nothing is said about strangers coming from outside the congregation (see Grudem 1978:51). There is, however, mention of an evaluation of utterances by any prophet. Du Toit (1979:191) states that Paul had definite criteria for the exercising of the charismata as a whole. This becomes clear from the substructure of 1 Corinthians 12-14 (see Addenda A-C). The explanation by Du Toit (1979:194-200) of Paul's criteria is especially applicable to prophecy as the 'main' charismatic gift. The following can therefore be accepted as normative in judging congregational prophets and their prophecies:

(1) Confessional criterion

True prophecy always expresses the confession that Jesus is Lord (Kurios) (1 Jn 4; Rm 12:6). This Möller (1975:215) and Aune (1983:221) and others endorse. This does not mean that people are only to parrot the words 'Jesus is Lord', but that the theological content of their prophecy should be measured (Mallone 1983:40). People should listen to the 'spirit' of prophecy to see whether the character of Jesus can be heard in it. 'Practically this means that we should be listening for a balance between judgment and grace in prophecy' (Mallone 1983:40). The confession of Jesus as Lord must furthermore be experienced as a profession of personal faith, given credibility by some reasonable indication of accompanying sincerity and understanding (Grudem 1978:171). This was naturally never intended as a foolproof system, although it does facilitate the process of judgment, especially in cases where one's theology clearly does not emanate from Scripture or God's love and grace.

(2) Service to the body of Christ

Prophecy, like every other gift, must be practiced in total selfless service to the congregation. Originating with God, the purpose can be nothing else than service, consisting of upbuilding, encouragement and consolation, something without which no congregation can hope to endure in its spiritual life.

(3) Love

In Paul's discussion of love (1 Cor 13:1-8), no less than eight gifts are mentioned. Without love, God's gifts become valueless (see Grudem 1978:179-
No prophecy driven by hate and inflicting injury can be classified as true prophecy. Even if the words of the prophets have to be stern words at times, the love of God for his people will temper and fashion them into words of grace.

(4) **Building up the congregation**

This constitutes one of Paul's strongest criteria. The *oikodome* motif refers to the extensive and intensive work of God in the church. Therefore true prophecy can partly be judged by the manner in which it contributes to the building up of the congregation. This in turn consists of exhortation and encouragement (1 Cor 14:3) as well as teaching (1 Cor 14:19, 31). The latter concerns the intensive building up of the congregation (see also Grudem 1978:184; Roberts 1969:31).

The extensive part of building up the congregation is addressed in 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 where outsiders, through prophecy, are brought to repentance and the confession that God is in the midst of the congregation. Prophecy therefore serves to build up both insiders and outsiders and can be judged accordingly (see Addenda A-C).

(5) **Usefulness**

Paul's term 'common good' (1 Cor 12:7) denotes something that is able to benefit others (the whole congregation). This is the full intent of the Holy Spirit in gifting people. Where this does not happen, the gifts become irrelevant and abused. This is a very important factor to keep in mind, especially in our time when some churches are torn apart because of 'prophetic' words.

(6) **Orderliness**

According to Paul, God is not a God of chaos (*akatastasias*), but of peace (1 Cor 14:33). In 1 Corinthians 14:10 he warns that everything must be done in a decent and orderly fashion. This does not mean that the idea of order can be interpreted merely on the basis of one's own tradition and then taken, for instance, to mean an orderly liturgy. Nevertheless, elements of uproar and lack of control seem to be out of order in this context.
Another salient aspect featuring in this context is appropriateness. This clearly is not meant to suppress or eliminate the charismatic gifts, but to regulate their use for the maximum benefit of the whole congregation. Therefore a prophet may even be silenced in order to take part in a revelation by someone else (1 Cor 14:30), or even just for the sake of an orderly meeting (1 Cor 14:32). What must be stressed in this respect, however, is the fact that the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet (1 Cor 14:32), but that the Holy Spirit is subject to no one. He willingly subjects his gifts to the judgment of the congregation. But in so doing the danger also arises that a true prophet's words can be lost forever through a wrong choice by the congregation or its assignee (see Grudem 1978:55-57). However, orderliness ranks high on Paul's list for any congregation, but especially for that of Corinth.

In summarising then, the conclusion is that the prophet's message originates with God and is received by revelation. It has a fairly broad general function, but more specifically it was meant to build up, exhort and console. It can manifest itself in different ways, but is always subject to weighing and evaluation by the congregation, to whom a few general rules are available. I must agree with Grudem (1978:137), however, that any attempt to classify prophecy as 'more directly' from God than any other charismatic gift is exegetically invalid. We have nevertheless determined that prophecy is the preferred form of communication in the context or the corporate gathering of the church (see also Schatzmann 1987:38). It needs to be added that 'Prophecy, therefore, cannot be distinguished from other speech activities simply by means of its functions, for there is no one function that will serve as a distinguishing characteristic' (Grudem 1978:185).

In the end I believe that both positive and negative factors concerning prophecy should be taken into account (see Sullivan 1982:117-119). Negatively those factors that would rule out, or cast doubt on the genuineness of prophecy come into play. Positively those factors favouring acceptance, as well as the prophet's previous successes, dedication, and responsiveness to God would count.

Regarding the message itself, it should not be at variance with the essence of Scripture, not contrary to charity, peace and unity, and without negative effects on the congregation. Instead it should build up, exhort, rebuke and the like.
Christenson (1987:260) would add that prophecy makes the Word of God more effective for people, especially in certain situations (1 Cor 14:25), above all in our society which is virtually oblivious to the biblical concept of sin, having created its own (see Yocum 1976:65-68).

Concerning 1 Corinthians 14, a few last remarks by Grudem (1978:65, 247-284) will have to suffice (see also Addenda A-C):

* Any prophet’s word can be challenged and could at times even be wrong. An occasional mistake, however, does not make him or her a false prophet (1 Cor 14:29).
* Prophets are refused the right to make rules for worship, other than the existing ones given by Paul (1 Cor 14:36).
* No Corinthian prophet had divine authority equal to that of Paul (1 Cor 14:37-38).
* Women’s prophecies are acceptable, but women are denied the right to enforce obedience or belief on the congregation (1 Cor 11:5, 14:34-35).

That concludes this part of the research, apart from one more question which keeps recurring. If all the criteria mentioned thus far are accepted and abided by - and they have surely proved to be scripturally and exegetically sound - what are we to do when faced by an outright challenge caused by a prophecy during a church service, affecting our lives directly and dramatically? Can we act solely on the guidelines we have examined so far? I will endeavour to provide an answer, and hopefully a new look at prophecy, in the following chapter, by explaining my theory on prophecy as a ‘relational’ experience.