

most extensive, we must give passages elsewhere their due in reconstructing the role of the Corinthians prophets (as typical of prophets in other congregations), rather than concluding, when these other passages clash with a picture derived exclusively from I Corinthians, that they present a different "kind" or diverging conception of prophecy.

To balance our discussion as a whole, we should recognize first of all that according to the New Testament all believers are prophets; the whole church is a congregation of prophets. . . .

Apparently without exception, however, the New Testament vocabulary for prophecy is not used in this sense. There, applied to the church, it refers to a gift or function having two basic characteristics: (1) it is a gift given only to some, not all, in the church; it is a gift present on the principle of differential distribution; (2) it is a revelatory gift; that is, it brings to the church the words of God in the primary and original sense. Prophecy is not, at least primarily or as one of its necessary marks, the interpretation of an already existing inspired text or oral tradition but is itself the inspired, nonderivative word of God. . . .

New Testament prophecy is revelatory. The issue is not whether or to what extent prophetic revelations are "new" in the sense of disclosing content not previously revealed (any more than, say, a given passage in Luke is not fully revelatory because a parallel is found in [presumably earlier] Mark). Rather, the issue is the inspired, Spirit-worked origin of prophecy and its correlative authority. The words of the prophet are the words of God and are to be received and responded to as such.

In general, the prophets are associated with the apostles in disclosing to the church the "unsearchable riches" and "manifold wisdom" of the mystery revealed in Christ (Eph. 3:5, 8-10). . . . Prophetic revelation of the mystery involves both "forthtelling" (e.g., Acts 15:32; I Cor. 14:3) and "foretelling" (e.g., Acts 11:28; 21:10). This is no warrant for finding in these two broad functions a distinction between two essentially different kinds of prophecy, whereby the former ("forthtelling") lacks the fully inspired origin and authority of the Word of God. Leaving room for differences in the actual outworking and relative prominence of these two functions from place to place, the material in Acts and Paul provides a picture of a single, unified prophetic activity present in the various church centers (Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, and elsewhere) mentioned in the New Testament, and that picture is one of marked continuity with both the apostles and the Old Testament prophets.

Our conclusion can be summarized in terms of the fundamental difference between preaching (teaching) and prophecy. Non-prophetic proclamation is based on a text; it receives its legitimation as (proper) interpretation of the inscripturated Word of God or, as the case may be, at the time the New Testament was being written, authoritative, apostolic oral tradition. Prophetic proclamation, in contrast, is Spirit-worked speech of