

THE MONTANIST CRISIS: A KEY TO REFUTING THIRD-WAVE CONCEPTS OF NT PROPHECY

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The Signs and Wonders Movement, also called the Third Wave, has made tremendous inroads into evangelicalism since the early 1980s. After initial arguments against it in the late 1980s and early 1990s, debate has mostly subsided. Current general opinion has been acceptance, indifference, or tolerance of the movement and its view of spiritual gifts, especially its form of "prophecy." The prime justification for the revival of what this group terms the "prophetic gift" has been the work of Wayne Grudem. Many articles, including those of the present writer, have examined the exegetical, theological, and doctrinal errors of his position. The present article uses a unique approach to refuting Grudem's viewpoint of non-authoritative congregational prophecy by examining the earliest "charismatic" crisis in the early church, the one caused by the Montanist movement. The earliest ancient sources to refute Montanism reveal how the early church immediately after the apostolic period understood the gift of prophecy. An examination of the ancient churches' understanding of prophecy and refutation of Montanism also supplies a striking condemnation of Grudem's viewpoint and strongly reinforces the argument that he has imposed a novel as well as unorthodox interpretation of the NT gift of prophecy.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTROVERSY

Throughout church history, the nature and practice of spiritual gifts have acted as a proverbial lightning rod for controversy. In recent times, the early to mid-twentieth century witnessed the rise of Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, and charismatic movements that brought the so-called gifts of "tongues" and "prophecy"

into church controversy.¹ This practice of so-called tongues and prophecy was confined generally to those groups favorable to their practice. Furthermore, in church history a sharp divide existed between those termed “cessationist” who believed miraculous gifts had ceased and “noncessationists” who argued for their continuance in some form.

Now in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, sharp boundaries between noncessationists and cessationists have been blurred or broken with the rise the Signs and Wonders Movement. C. Peter Wagner, a professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, coined the expression “Third Wave,” when he classified the rise of Pentecostalism as the first wave, the rise of the Charismatic Movement as the second wave, and the current Signs and Wonders Movement as the third wave.² The Third Wave has so greatly influenced the practice of controversial gifts, especially prophecy, that a unique brand of “prophecy” has become accepted practice among many former cessationists. Recent interest in the prophetic gift has caused some to cross the traditional boundaries in an apparent attempt to find a mediating position between the cessationist and noncessationists perspectives.

Wayne Grudem has probably been the most prominent advocate of attempted mediation. Belonging to the cessationist Reformed tradition, Grudem has been influenced by the Third Wave. His work on the NT gift of prophecy has made significant inroads into traditionally noncessationist groups. On the back cover of

¹The following discussion uses quotation marks and also the term “so-called” in reference to these current practices of “tongues” and “prophecy,” because a careful examination of the NT reveals data about the nature and practice of these NT gifts that contrasts with such practices as presently displayed. For instance, an exegetical examination of the biblical phenomenon of tongues in Acts 2:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 12–14 (especially 14:1-19) indicates conclusively that “tongues” were human languages that the speaker had not learned by natural means and not non-cognitive, non-understandable speech that is currently labeled as such. See Normal L. Geisler, “Appendix 5. Were New Testament Tongues Real Languages,” in *Signs and Wonders* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1988) 165-68; Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) 53-68; Thomas R. Edgar, “Tongues: The Nature of the Gift,” in *Miraculous Gifts, Are They for Today?* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1983) 108-70; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Prophecy and Tongues,” in *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979) 55-87; Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999 [1978]) 186-91.

²Under the auspices of Fuller Theological Seminary, Wagner helped develop MC510—“Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth,” a course taught by John Wimber. Wagner said about the “third wave,” “I see the third wave of the eighties as an opening of the straight-line evangelicals and other Christians to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that the Pentecostals and charismatics have experienced, but without becoming either charismatic or Pentecostal. I think we are in a new wave of something that now has lasted almost through our whole century.” Wagner disassociated himself, however, from charismatics and Pentecostals, claiming, “I myself have several minor theological differences with Pentecostals and charismatics, which don’t mar any kind of mutual ministry but keep me from saying I’m a charismatic” (C. Peter Wagner, “The Third Wave?” *Pastoral Renewal* (July-August 1983): 4-5. For a succinct treatment of the similarities and/or differences between such groups, see also Wayne Grudem, “Preface,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, ed. Wayne Grudem [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996] 10-12).

his work, several endorsements reflect that impact: former cessationist J. I. Packer commented, "Careful, thorough, wise, and to my mind, convincing;" Vern Poythress, NT professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, wrote, ". . . a fresh, biblically sound, readable contribution . . . its depth of scholarship, pastoral solidity, and cautions against abuses are special strengths. Highly recommended"; L. Russ Bush, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Southeastern Theological Seminary, related, "If Grudem's convincing thesis could be heard, a new path of dialog could perhaps be opened up in the Christian community. The research, clarity, and typical Grudem candor continue to make this the finest book of the subject to date." As a result, Grudem's efforts in the area of spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, may now be considered *the main theological justification* for the breakdown of barriers between cessationists and noncessationists.

To provide a counter to such a breakdown, the present writer has written a dissertation as well as several articles that focused on the controversy and significant problems surrounding the nature and function of the NT prophetic gift, especially as described by Grudem.³ Those writings contain a more comprehensive discussion of the crucial issues involved in the debate. The cited works highlight enough exegetical, contextual, and theological problems in Grudem's approach to cast grave doubt upon the viability of his hypothesis regarding NT prophecy.

The present discussion will focus on significant historical problems with his approach. More specifically, it will examine the post-apostolic period and the *great "charismatic" crisis* of the mid-second century known as Montanism, a crisis that was a watershed occasion in analyzing the *immediate* post-apostolic church's understanding of NT prophecy. More specifically, the church's handling of the crisis reveals how the very early church, right after the period of the apostles, conceptualized the NT gift. Such an analysis discloses whether the early church's handling of the prophetic crisis gives any credence to Grudem's view.

Two key areas are decisive in revealing the post-apostolic church's understanding of NT prophecy: First, how did the early church respond to this crisis? Second, what arguments did these early church fathers use to reject such a movement as Montanism? Simply summarized, the basic question regarding Montanism centers in the following issue: does the post-apostolic church exhibit agreement with Grudem's definition of prophesy in its handling of Montanism? The

³See F. David Farnell, "The New Testament Prophetic Gift: Its Nature and Duration," unpublished PhD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 1990; idem, "When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?," in *Vital Contemporary Issues*, vol. 2, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994); idem, "Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" (4 parts), *Bibliotheca Sacra*: Part 1, "The Current Debate about New Testament Prophecy" 149/595 (July-September 1992):277-303; Part 2, "The Gift of Prophecy in the Old and New Testaments" 149/596 (October-December 1992):387-410; Part 3, "Does the New Testament Teach Two Prophetic Gifts?" 150/597 (January-March 1993):62-88; Part 4, "When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?" 150/598 (April-June 1993):171-202; idem, "Fallible New Testament Prophecy/ Prophets? A Critique of Wayne Grudem's Hypothesis," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 2/2 (Fall 1991):157-79.

logic of argumentation, of course, would be compelling⁴ and would be twofold: (1) the Montanist crisis was the greatest struggle over NT charisma, especially prophecy, that the post-apostolic church experienced up to that time and (2) because it occurred so very early in period, immediately after the time of the apostles and the close of the NT writings, the church's handling of the crisis would reflect how the post-apostolic church understood the nature of that prophetic gift. At the very least, key elements of Grudem's hypothesis should be reflected in the early church's handling of Montanism if Grudem's position has any validity (e.g., authoritative NT apostolic prophecy vs. non-authoritative congregational prophecy; true prophets who could err in their prophecies). How the church handled that situation would also most likely reflect a view that more closely mirrors apostolic teaching on such a gift since it was so near to the apostolic period. If the primitive church's handling of the crisis reveals no correspondence with Grudem's supposition, the conclusion would be greatly strengthened that Grudem has imposed a *novel, unorthodox definition* of prophecy, and his conception of prophecy is, therefore, *unorthodox*. In discussing the issue, a review of Grudem's approach is necessary to permit a comparison of the early church's understanding with that of Grudem.

CURRENT CONTROVERSY OVER THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

A Definitional Compromise between Cessationist and Noncessationist Groups

Grudem crossed traditional lines of understanding by proposing a compromise between the cessationist and noncessationist regarding prophecy. In the second edition (2000 [1988]) of his work on the subject, he writes,

In this book I am suggesting an understanding of the gift of prophecy which would require a bit of modification in the views of each of these three groups. I am asking that charismatics go on using the gift of prophecy, but that they stop calling it "a word from

⁴In the nineteenth century, Lightfoot argued against the Tübingen School of F. C. Baur and his hegelian (*Fichte*) dialectical approach (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) with his assertions of opposition between Gentile Christianity represented by Paul and Jewish Christianity represented by Peter. He also opposed Baur's theory that the two factions produced early second-century incipient Catholicism—"The Christ-Party in the Corinthian Church" (F. C. Baur, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde," *Tübingen Zeitschrift für Theologie* V/4 [1931]:61-206). Baur had also used this concept to place the dates of large portions of the NT after A.D. 130. Lightfoot successfully demonstrated the genuineness of the writings of Clement and Ignatius (post-apostolic church fathers) were genuine and that they exhibited no trace of any such conflict. The church fathers decisively refuted foreign ideas imposed on the NT by Baur, and they also do so in the case of Grudem. For further information on Lightfoot's refutation of Baur's assertions through his use of the early church fathers, see Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1961-1986*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1988) 56-60; Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. MacLean Gilmour and Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972 [1970]) 127-43.

the Lord”—simply because that label makes it sound exactly like the Bible in authority, and leads to much misunderstanding. . . .

On the other side, I am asking those in the cessationist camp to give serious thought to the possibility that prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone’s mind. And I am asking that they think again about those arguments for the cessation of certain gifts. . . .

I should make it very clear at the beginning that I am not saying that the charismatic and cessationist views are mostly wrong. Rather, I think they are both mostly right (in the things they count essential), and I think that an adjustment in how they understand the nature of prophecy (especially its authority) has the potential for bringing about a resolution of this issue which would safeguard items that both sides see as crucial.⁵

By calling for a compromise between cessationists and noncessationists regarding prophetic and related gifts, Grudem stirs up a “hornets’ nest” of discussion on the gifts.

As the above quote notes, Grudem offers his own novel definition of Christian prophecy that he admits is a “somewhat new definition of the nature of Christian prophecy,” and by developing it, he hopes that “both pro-charismatic and anti-charismatics may be able to find a ‘middle ground’ with a considerable potential for reconciling their current differences.”⁶ His concept differs markedly from traditional orthodox understanding of the gift throughout church history, when he contends, “[P]rophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority but was simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone’s mind.”⁷ In other words, prophecy consists of “telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.”⁸ He traces his definition to both cessationists and charismatics. In common with the former, he takes prophecy as noncompetitive with the authority of the canonical NT because of the close of the canon at the end of the apostolic era, but he concurs with the charismatic understanding that prophecy preserves “the spontaneous, powerful working of the Holy Spirit, bringing things to mind when the church is gathered for worship, giving ‘edification, encouragement, and comfort’ which speaks directly to the needs of the moment and causes people to realize that

⁵Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000 [1988]) 18. Grudem has produced other works in the last ten years that have done much to bring this discussion to the forefront: idem, “The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians” (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1978) also published as *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Lanham, Md.: Scholars Press, 1982) with only minor modifications. See also idem, “Why Christians Can Still Prophecy: Scripture Encourages Us to Seek the Gift Yet Today,” *CT* (16 September 1988):29-35.

⁶Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* xv.

⁷Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* 18.

⁸Grudem, “Still Prophecy” 29.

‘truly God is among you’ (1 Cor. 14:25).⁹ Consequently, NT prophets were “Speaking Merely Human Words to Report Something God Brings to Mind” and “these prophecies did not have the authority of the words of the Lord.”¹⁰ Grudem argues,

Much more commonly, *prophet* and *prophecy* were used of ordinary Christians who spoke not with absolute divine authority, but simply to report something God had laid on their hearts or brought to their minds. There are many indications in the New Testament that this ordinary gift of prophecy had authority less than that of the Bible, and even less than that of recognized Bible teaching in the early church.¹¹

In another place, he terms NT prophecy as “an unreliable human speech-act in response to a revelation from the Holy Spirit.”¹² Hence, NT prophets at Corinth were sometimes accurate and sometimes not. In certain circumstances, even a genuine NT prophet, like Agabus, could make “mistakes.”¹³ Only NT apostles spoke inspired prophetic words.¹⁴ The very words of NT prophets were not inspired as were those of OT prophets.¹⁵

This leaves Grudem with two kinds of NT prophecy: nonauthoritative “congregational” prophecy and authoritative (i.e., apostolic) prophecy.¹⁶ The crucial

⁹Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* 18-19.

¹⁰Ibid., 51, 77.

¹¹Grudem, “Still Prophecy,” 30 [emphasis original].

¹²Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* 76.

¹³Grudem, in a markedly strained effort to impose his concepts on the NT, goes so far as to assert, “[B]y Old Testament standards Agabus would have been condemned as a false prophet, because in Acts 21:27-35 neither of his predictions are fulfilled” (Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament* 77-78).

¹⁴Grudem, “Still Prophecy” 30.

¹⁵Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* 69-70.

¹⁶In a more popular edition that largely reflected his technical treatise on prophecy, Grudem attempts to disassociate himself from advocating two kinds or forms of prophesy: “If I argue, as I do in this book, that the apostles could ‘prophesy’ with absolute divine authority, but that ordinary congregational prophets did not have that kind of authority, am I then saying that there are two kinds of prophecy in the New Testament? Some could make that distinction, and in fact I did speak that way in an earlier, more technical book on this subject, in keeping with the terminology that had been used in previous scholarly discussion of prophecy.

“However, I have decided in this book not to speak of ‘two kinds of prophecy’ in the New Testament because such language can be misunderstood to imply that the ‘kinds’ of prophecy were different in many ways, with large differences in the prophet’s own experience, etc. But the New Testament does not support such differences (and I did not affirm them in the earlier book)” (Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* 47-48). This equivocation is a telling admission on Grudem’s part that actually buttresses the dubious nature of his assertions. It also reveals a weakness in his hypothesis: its self-contradictory nature. On one hand, he advocates a bifurcation of the gift into two parts and, on the other, he denies it—a tenuous position. See also (Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*

point of his thesis is that apostles, not NT prophets, were the true successors of the OT prophets and, like their earlier counterparts, spoke under the authority derived from the inspiration of their words.¹⁷ He distinguishes that kind of gift from the one exercised at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 12–14), Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:19–21), Tyre (Acts 21:4), Ephesus (Acts 19:6), and other places (e.g., Agabus, Acts 11:28; 21:10–11). Only the general content of this secondary prophecy is reliable, with allowances made for its partial error. As a result, it was allegedly open to being disobeyed without blame (Acts 21:4), to being assessed critically by the whole congregation (1 Cor 14:29), and to being rejected outright as subordinate to Paul’s apostolic revelations (1 Cor 14:37–38). According to Grudem, “these prophecies did not have the authority of the words of the Lord.”¹⁸ Therefore, his position posits a sharp discontinuity between OT prophets and NT prophets/prophecy. NT prophets did not stand in line with their OT counterparts. Qualitative differences exist between OT and NT prophets and prophecy, especially in terms of their accuracy and authority.¹⁹ The net result is advocacy of NT prophecy as an inspired utterance that may well contain error—a *contradictory and tenuous position*.

The Montanist Crisis: An Important Key to Understanding the Primitive Church’s Understanding of NT Prophecy

In connection with the basics of Grudem’s hypothesis, an examination of the primitive church’s great prophetic crisis is vital, for *how* and *why* the church refuted this crisis in its very early history becomes key to understanding *how* the early church conceptualized NT prophecy and the prophetic gift as a whole. Though subjective and speculative hypotheses exist as to the developments of Montanism in relationship to the rise of Romanism and alleged reasons why the early church rejected it,²⁰ objective, reasoned scholarship must allow the church fathers and their

in 1 Corinthians 3-5, 110-13).

¹⁷Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* 1-113.

¹⁸Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* 51, 77.

¹⁹Maudlin adds the following to this thought revealing that this is a general understanding of Grudem’s position, “According to Grudem—and KCF [Kansas City Fellowship] and Vineyard leaders agree—there is a discontinuity between canonical revelation found in the Bible and the revelation received by modern-day prophets” (cf. Michael G. Maudlin, “Seers in the Heartland,” *CT* (January 14, 1991):20.

²⁰Klawiter delineates three explanations of the origins of Montanism, all connected with the rise of Romanism: (1) an expression of primitive Christianity; (2) an expression of heterodox Christianity, and (3) an expression of Oriental religion, chiefly the cult of Attis-Cybele. Klawiter comments, “[T]he attempt to define the influence of environmental factors on Montanism has taken place predominantly within the context of a concern which has dominated ecclesiastical historiography since the time of Ferdinand Christian Baur, namely, the desire to answer the question of how the ancient catholic church evolved. Depending upon the religious inclinations of the historian, Montanism was either seen as a

writings to tell *how and why* the early church refuted Montanism. Allowing the fathers' writings a full hearing without silencing them by attributing dubious motives provides an important key to unlocking the early church's understanding of the nature of the NT prophetic gift.

In the early church, shortly after the mid-second century A.D.,²¹ the heresy known as Montanism or the Cataphrygian heresy created a serious crisis with the expression of charisma, especially the NT prophetic gift.²² In the later second century, the movement began in Phrygia of Asia Minor and spread quickly to other parts of the Christian world, including Rome and, by the early third century, North Africa. Before the church checked the heresy, it had spread to all the Greco-Roman world,²³ with Montanist groups surviving into the fifth century A.D. in North Africa and still longer in Phrygia. The heresy became so acute that it eventually swept away even the church father Tertullian. The movement, founded by a prophet named Montanus and two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, claimed to be a prophetic

valid reform movement protesting a corruption in the catholic church or as an enthusiastic self-deceived movement rebelling against the legitimate representatives of the church. This is to say that the understanding of Montanism was in some sense shaped by whether the particular historian considered the development of the ancient catholic church as valid or not" (Frederick Charles Klawiter, "The New Prophecy in Early Christianity: The Origin, Nature and Development of Montanism, A.D. 165-200" [PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1975] 36). Since many *a priori* assumptions about Romanism and the origins of Montanism are very subjective, reasons for its development and rejection connected with Romanism are not nearly as certain as the clearer reasons given by the fathers. More important, such speculation about Romanism does not allow the church fathers to speak for themselves by attributing acutely subjective motives to them.

²¹The exact date is uncertain because Eusebius and Epiphanius appear to disagree. Eusebius places the beginning of Montanus' prophecies around A.D. 171, while Epiphanius places it about twenty years earlier. For further information regarding important dating issues, consult, Klawiter, "New Prophecy in Early Christianity" 48-63; T. D. Barnes, "The Chronology of Montanism," *JTS* 21 (1970):403-8.

²²Eusebius calls it the "Phrygian heresy" because of its place of origin (cf. *HE* 5.16.1). For succinct reviews of the beliefs and condemnation of the Montanists, consult David F. Wright, "Why were the Montanists Condemned?," *Themelios* 2 (September 1976):15-22; Douglas Powell, "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians," *Vigilae Christianae* 29 (1975):33-54; Ronald E. Heine, "The Role of the Gospel of John in the Montanist Controversy," *The Second Century* 6 (Spring 1987-88):1-19; Karlfried Froehlich, "Montanism and Gnosis," in *The Heritage of the Early Church* (Rome: OLA 195, 1973) 91-111; A. Dauntton-Fear, "The Ecstasies of Montanus," in *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982):648-51; James L. Ash, "The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976):227-52; J. Massyngberde Ford, "Was Montanism a Jewish-Christian Heresy?," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 17 (1966):145-58; Christine Trevett, "Apocalypse, Ignatius, Montanism: Seeking the Seeds," *Vigilae Christianae* 43 (December 1989):313-38; Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendricksen, 1997 [1969]) 178-212; Robert M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1946) 94-108.

²³⁰For further information, Klawiter, "New Prophecy in Early Christianity" 1-2.

expression of the Spirit.²⁴ Previously, Montanus had been a priest in an old Asiatic cult known as Cybele. Claiming the prophetic gift for himself, he was joined by the two women, who also prophesied in an ecstatic state.²⁵

Because no writings of Montanus and his two prophetesses have been preserved,²⁶ the sources for understanding the earliest developments of this movement are the writings of the early church fathers. Two of the earliest and most helpful sources are (1) Eusebius and (2) Epiphanius.

Eusebius quotes two sources that preserve the earliest information. The first source is unnamed by Eusebius, and contemporary scholars refer to him as “the Anonymous.”²⁷ The Anonymous wrote his treatise against the Montanists thirteen years after the death of Maximilla.²⁸ Prior to this, according to Eusebius, the Anonymous “had also taken part in oral controversy against them.”²⁹ Apollonius is the second source cited by Eusebius, who notes, “This same Apollonius . . . says that it was forty years from the time when Montanus plotted his fictitious prophecy, to the time when he wrote his book.”³⁰

Eusebius prefaces his introduction to the Montanist controversy by indicating his own disdain of the movement with the following caustic words:

The enemy of the church of God, who hates good and loves deeply all that is wicked, left untried no kind of plot against men and again strove to raise up strange heresies against the church. Of these some like poisonous reptiles crawled over Asia and Phrygia, and boasted that Montanus was the Paraclete and that the women of his sect,

²⁴According to Klawiter, “Montanism probably appeared sometime around A.D. 165. . . . By A. D. 179 the foremost leaders—Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla had died. Hence, the period A.D. 165-179 marks the first phase of the movement” (Klawiter, “New Prophecy in Early Christianity” 63).

²⁵According to Apollonius, Priscilla and Maximilla had been married previously, but Montanus persuaded them through his prophetic prowess to leave their husbands and join his movement (Eusebius *HE* 5.183-84). It is rumored by the one known as “the Anonymous” that both Montanus and Maximilla may eventually have committed suicide (see *ibid.*, 5.16.12-15).

²⁶Heine notes, “There is evidence in early Christian literature that the Montanists produced numerous treatises. All have perished, however, except those treatises written by Tertullian after his adoption of Montanism” (Ronald E. Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia*, North American Patristic Society, Patristic Monograph Series 14 [Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1989] xi). For sources that have been collected, edited, and translated, see *ibid.*

²⁷Apparently, “the Anonymous” wrote approximately at the end of the second century as a contemporary of Montanus (cf. Eusebius *HE* 5.16.1).

²⁸Eusebius *HE* 5.16.18-19.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 5.16.2-3.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 5.18.12.

Priscilla and Maximilla, were the prophetesses of Montanus.³¹

In this quote, Eusebius labels the movement as a “strange heresy” (αἰρέσις ξένας, *hairesis xenas*), an indication that the movement was *never accepted within mainstream Christianity*.

The Anonymous

Although Eusebius relates that there arose “many . . . learned men of that time” who refuted the heresy and left behind “abundant material for history” in refuting Montanism,³² he focuses his discussion on two sources to illustrate how the church dealt with the heresy. Eusebius does not indicate why he limited his discussion to only two of the “many.” Perhaps he quotes these because they are typical of those “learned men.”

He first quotes from the Anonymous who gives this account of Montanism’s origins. Labeling Montanistic teaching as “the lie,” he relates, “[W]hen I [the Anonymous] had just come to Ancyra in Galatia and perceived that the church in that place was torn in two by this new movement which is not, as they call it, prophecy but much rather, as will be shown false prophecy [ψευδοπροφητείας, *pseudoprophēteias*]. . . .”³³ This statement shows that Montanism had caused quite a schism in the early Galatian church where it began. The Anonymous denied their activities were true “prophecy.” Instead, he marked them as “false prophecy.” He also says that his dispute with Montanists went on “for many days continuously in the church” and that the elders of the regional orthodox churches, to help them in the future, asked him for a written guide of how he had refuted the Montanists.³⁴

The Anonymous describes the beginnings of Montanism as follows:

Their opposition and their recent heretical schism from the church had the following origin. In Phrygian Mysia there is said to be a village called Ardabav. There they say that a recent convert called Montanus, when Gratus was proconsul in Asia, in the unbounded lust of his soul for leadership gave access to himself to the adversary, became obsessed and suddenly fell into frenzy and convulsions. He began to be ecstatic and to speak and to talk strangely prophesying contrary to the custom which belongs to the tradition and succession of the church from the beginning. Of those who at that time heard these bastard utterances some were vexed, thinking that he was possessed by a

³¹Ibid., 5.14.1. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from Eusebius come from the Loeb Classical Library series. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. II, trans. J. E. Oulton (Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University, 1932).

³²Eusebius *HE* 5.16.1-2.

³³Ibid., 5.16.3-4.

³⁴The Anonymous did not compose this written record for the elders immediately while at Galatia but promised “to write from home if the Lord permitted” (ibid., 5.16.4-5).

devil and by a spirit of error, and was disturbing the populace; they rebuked him, and forbade him to speak, remembering the distinction made by the Lord, and his warning to keep watchful guard against the coming false prophets; but others, as though elevated by a holy spirit and prophetic gift, and not a little conceited, forgot the Lord's distinction, and encouraged the mind-injuring and seducing and people-misleading spirit, being cheated and deceived by it so that he could not be kept silent. But by some art, or rather by such an evil scheme of artifice, the devil wrought destruction for the disobedient, and receiving unworthy honours from them stimulated and inflamed their understanding which was already dead to true faith; so that he raised up two more women and filled them with the bastard spirit so that they spoke madly and improperly and strangely, like Montanus.³⁵

From this quote, one learns that Montanus, who was a recent convert to Christianity, began the heresy. He conveyed his prophecies in an ecstatic manner that involved "frenzy" as well as "convulsions." The prophecies of Montanus differed markedly from accepted standards in the early church, for his ecstatic prophecy caused considerable alarm in the church with "some . . . thinking that he was possessed by a devil and by a spirit of error." The Anomymous attributed the activity to Satan himself.

The standard upon which the Anonymous (and the orthodox church that he represented) rejected Montanus' prophesying lies in the phrase "contrary to the custom which belongs to the tradition and succession of the church from the beginning."³⁶ "From the beginning" most likely refers to the biblical prophetic eras of the OT and the NT. First, that the Anonymous had those Scriptural periods in mind with his phrase "from the beginning" is strongly reinforced by his reference to Scripture, specifically Matt 7:15, where Jesus, during His earthly ministry, had warned that false prophets would come and that the church must guard against them: "[T]hey [those who opposed Montanus in Galatia] rebuked him, and forbade him to speak, remembering the distinction made by the Lord, and his warning to keep watchful guard against the coming of false prophets."³⁷

Second, he later countered the Montanists' ecstatic prophecies by pointing to the pattern of prophets in both the OT and the NT as well as those who stood in the same biblical tradition: "But the false prophet speaks in ecstasy, after which follow ease and freedom from fear. . . . But they [the Montanists] cannot show that any prophet, either of those in the Old Testament or those in the New, was inspired in this way; they can boast neither Agabus, nor of Judas, nor of Silas, nor of the daughters of Philip, nor of Ammia in Philadelphia, nor of Quadratus, nor of any

³⁵Ibid., 5.16.6-9.

³⁶Ibid., 5.16.7-8.

³⁷Ibid., 5.16.8.

others who do not belong to them.”³⁸ For the Anonymous, the biblical precedents of prophecy must furnish standards to examine any claim of prophecy. For the Anonymous, such ecstatic, irrational prophesying violated scriptural standards for prophecy, a thought that accords with Paul’s instruction in 1 Cor 14:30-33, that prophecies should come in an orderly and rational manner—“and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace”—although the Anonymous does not refer to the passage.

Another important refutation of Montanism by the Anonymous relates to the fulfillment of prophecy. The Anonymous noticed that Maximilla had made predictions that did not come true. He had catalogued predictions of Maximilla “in which she foretold future wars and revolutions” that did not come true.³⁹ The Anonymous related, “Has it not been made obvious already that this is another lie? For it is more than thirteen years today since the women died, and there has been in the world neither local nor universal war, but rather by the mercy of God continuing peace even for Christians.”⁴⁰ For the Anonymous the biblical standard of true prophets was that their predictions were fulfilled.⁴¹ This standard also reflects close attention to OT and NT patterns that the predictions of true prophets always came true as evidenced in Deut 13:1-5; 18:20-22; and 1 Cor 14:29 where prophecies were to be examined.

Another important standard that the Anonymous used against Montanism was their misinterpretation and misuse of Scripture. He relates that the Montanists applied Jesus’s warning in Matt 23:34 to themselves: “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city.” The Montanists explained the early church’s hostility to their prophets as a fulfillment of this Scripture. The Anonymous relates that the Montanists called those who opposed them “murderers of the prophets because we [the anti-Montanists like the Anonymous] did not receive their chattering prophets (for they say that these are those whom the Lord promised to send to the people), let them answer us before God.”⁴² The Anonymous gave a scathing critique of this tactic by noting that the details of this text did not fit the the Montanists:

Is there anyone, good people, of those whose talking began with Montanus and the women, who was persecuted by the Jews or killed by the wicked? Not one. Or was there anyone of them who was taken and crucified for the name? No, there was not. Or was

³⁸Ibid., 5.17.3-4. This appears to be a quote taken by the Anonymous from a man named “Miltiades” who also wrote a treatise against the Montanists and was in agreement with the Anonymous.

³⁹Ibid., 5.16.18.

⁴⁰Ibid., 5.16.18-19.

⁴¹Ibid., 5.16.19.

⁴²Ibid., 5.16.11-12.

any one of the women ever scourged in the synagogues of the Jews or stoned? Never anywhere. It was a different death that Montanus and Maximilla are said to have died; for the story goes that each one of them was inspired by a mind-destroying spirit to commit suicide, though not together.⁴³

Montanus and his two women prophets apparently influenced a few sections of the Asian churches. The Anonymus attributes such influence directly to a laxity in not knowing or heeding the Scriptures that warn against false prophets: “[O]thers, as though elevated by a holy spirit and prophetic gift, and not a little conceited, forgot the Lord’s distinction, and encouraged the mind-injuring and seducing and people-misleading spirit, being cheated and deceived by it so that he could not be kept silent.”⁴⁴ The Asian churches, as well as the early church as a whole, however, were decidedly negative to Montanus and his “charismatic” movement, for the Anonymus notes that “few of the Phrygians were deceived. But when the arrogant spirit taught to blaspheme the whole Catholic church throughout the world, because of the spirit of false prophecy received from it neither honor nor entrance, for Christians of Asia after assembling for this purpose many times in many parts of the province, tested the recent utterances, pronounced them profane, and rejected the heresy,—then at last the Montanists were driven out of the church and excommunicated.”⁴⁵ Once again, the fact surfaces that the early church examined such prophets in accordance with OT/NT stipulations.

Another important observation from the Anonymus’s discussion is that the early church *did not* allow for alleged prophets who prophesy false or ecstatically to be considered true prophets, i.e., *no person was considered a true prophet who prophesied incorrectly or inaccurately*. For the Anonymus and those whom he cites, *the issue was starkly black and white: two kinds of prophets existed—either true or false; no hybrid prophets who prophesy falsely or contrary to OT/NT standards could still be considered true prophets or acceptable*. Failure to adhere to biblical standards brought rejection and excommunication of the prophet. The issue always centered on discerning true from false prophets in the Anonymus’s discussion.

Finally, a careful, honest examination of the Anonymus’s discussion leads also to the conclusion that he allowed for the possibility of prophetic activity at the time of his writing against Montanism, but his arguments focused on the issue of distinguishing true from false prophets rather than refuting the possibility of prophecy.⁴⁶ For the Anonymus, however, genuine prophets had to abide by scripturally designated standards if they were to be accepted by the church.

⁴³Ibid., 5.16.12-13.

⁴⁴Ibid., 5.16.8.

⁴⁵Ibid., 5.16.9-10.

⁴⁶Ibid., 5.17.4.

Apollonius

The next early source cited by Eusebius for early Montanism is Apollonius, who refuted Montanism forty years from the time that Montanus appeared.⁴⁷ Eusebius wrote that Apollonius “composed a refutation and published it as a separate work against them [the Montanists],” using a twofold tactic: (1) “proving word by word that their alleged prophecies were false” and (2) “showing the true character of the life of the leaders of this heresy.”⁴⁸

Regarding the first tactic, Eusebius gives no details as to how precisely Apollonius scripturally refuted Montanist prophecies. Since he discusses Apollonius’s refutation of Montanism right after his survey of the Anonymous, one may reasonably conclude that he may not have given details because this would have overlapped of much material already covered in the discussion of the Anonymous.

Instead, Eusebius focused on Apollonius’s exposure of the lifestyle of Montanist leaders.⁴⁹ Apollonius argued,

[T]he deeds and the teachings of this recent teacher [Montanus] show his character. It is he who taught the annulment of marriage, who enacted fasts, who gave the name of Jerusalem to Pepuza and Tymion, which are little towns in Phrygia, and wished to hold assemblies there from everywhere, who appointed collectors of money, who organized the receiving of gifts under the name of offerings, who provided salaries for those who preached his doctrine in order that its teachings might prevail through gluttony.⁵⁰

He further asserted regarding Priscilla and Maximilla, “[W]e prove that these first prophetesses themselves deserted their husbands from the moment that they were filled with the spirit. What a lie it is then for them to call Priscilla a virgin,” and “Does not all Scripture seem to forbid a prophet from receiving gifts and money? Therefore when I see that the prophetess has received gold and silver and expensive clothes, how should I refrain from blaming her?”⁵¹

Apollonius next cited other followers of Montanism, whose central focus was on money or greed, arguing, “[W]e will show that their so-called prophets and martyrs make gain not only from the rich but from the poor and from the orphans and widows.”⁵² After delineating such activity, Apollonius twice alludes to a combination of Matt 12:33 and 7:15-17 about testing: “it is necessary to test all the fruits of a

⁴⁷Ibid., 5.18.12.

⁴⁸Ibid., 5.18.1.

⁴⁹Ibid., 5.18.1.

⁵⁰Ibid., 5.18.2.

⁵¹Ibid., 5.18.3-5.

⁵²Ibid., 5.18.7-8.

prophet.”⁵³

Apollonius scrutinized the activities of Montanus and his followers with data from Scripture. Those who claimed to be prophets but whose lifestyles did not correspond to Scripture were to be rejected outright. Heine makes this important observation: “While we cannot see the Scriptures used in the debate between Apollonius and the Montanists, we can see that it is the same debate that is present in the Anonymous and in the source drawn on by Epiphanius. The question at the center of the debate was whether the Montanist prophets were genuine or false prophets.”⁵⁴ *Important for this discussion are Apollonius’ views: either the prophet is true or he is false. No middle ground existed. He did not entertain a hybrid concept of a true prophet whose activities contradict Scripture.*

Epiphanius

Besides “the Anonymous” and Apollonius, the other important source for an understanding of earliest Phrygian Montanism is Epiphanius. The chief writings about Epiphanius’s life are his own works and correspondence, references in Jerome who was Epiphanius’ friend, Palladius’ work called *Dialogue*, Basil of Caesarea, Theophilus of Alexandria, the ecclesiastical histories of Sacrates and Sozomen, and the anonymous preface to the ancient editions of Epiphanius’s *Ancoratus*.⁵⁵ Somewhere perhaps between A.D. 310 and 320 he was born in Palestine at a village called Besanduc. According to his *Letter to Theodosius*, he indicates that he was raised by Christian parents “in the faith of the fathers of Nicaea.”⁵⁶ He received his early education from monks who imparted to him a Christian and scriptural rather than a classical education. At the age of twenty, Epiphanius founded a monastery in Palestine at Eleutheropolis and presumably served as its abbot. Although little is known of his governance of the monastery, he diligently kept the community free from heresy and fostered the beliefs of Nicene Christianity. In A.D. 367, he moved to Cyprus to become bishop of Salamis (Constantia) near the modern Famagusta. During his many years in Cyprus, he battled against Apollinarius and his disciples and dealt with disputes between eastern and western Christianity. The Origenist crisis with its effect on the church consumed the last years of Epiphanius’ life. Although he respected Origen’s scholarship, he considered Origen’s doctrine

⁵³Ibid., 5.18.8-9, 11.

⁵⁴Heine, *Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* 10.

⁵⁵For a modern biography of Epiphanius, consult Jon Frederick Dechow, “Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen” (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1975).

⁵⁶Cited in Nicephorus, *Adversus Epiphanium* XV.61; cf. also Frank Williams, “Introduction,” in *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, ed. J. M. Robinson and H. J. Klimkeit (Leiden: Brill, 1997) xi-xvi. All quotes from Epiphanius in this article are from Williams’ work.

Gnostic in character, the source of Arianism, and a danger to the church.⁵⁷ Around A.D. 402-403, Epiphanius journeyed to Constantinople to defend orthodoxy and expose Origenism, but died at sea on his way home to Cyprus.⁵⁸

His major literary effort was the *Panarion*, meaning “Medicine Chest.” He began the work in A.D. 374 or 375 and finished it in three years. It is basically a heresiology or refutation of religious bodies, systems, and views that Epiphanius considered dangerous. He wrote concerning the purpose of this work,

I shall be telling you the names of the sects and exposing their unlawful deeds like poisons and toxic substances, matching the antidotes with them at the same time—cures for those who are already bitten, and preventatives for those who will have this experience—I am drafting this Preface here for the scholarly, to explain the ‘Panarion’ or chest of remedies for the victims of wild beasts’ bites.⁵⁹

Epiphanius divided this work into three books totaling seven sections (or, “Anacephalaeoses”) and undertook the monumental task of listing all pre- and post-Christian heretical sects, totaling eighty, from Adam to Epiphanius’s own lifetime. He sketched their chief doctrines as he understood them, advising his readers how to refute them.⁶⁰ Epiphanius was of great importance in that he was a rigorous Christian apologist whose work reflected primitive, orthodox Christianity (Nicean), which he defended against many heretical movements that threatened the church.

In the second book, Epiphanius dealt with Montanism. His source of information is difficult to identify. In *Panarion* 48.15.1, he acknowledges drawing on both oral and written sources and notes that he had gleaned the information “by word of mouth, and from treatises, documents, and persons.” He does not indicate, however, when or whom he is quoting. The generally accepted conclusion among scholars is that the source for his discussion of Montanism runs from the middle of 48.1 through 48.13.⁶¹ Researchers have advanced various theories on the specific identity of the source, including the Anonymous, Apollonius, Rhodo, a native of Asia, and also Hippolytus.⁶² Such attempts, however, are speculative, and the

⁵⁷Cf. *Panarion* 64 where he discusses at length his objections to Origen.

⁵⁸For further information on Epiphanius’s life, see Williams, “Introduction” xi-xvi.

⁵⁹*Panarion* Proem I, 1, 2.

⁶⁰Epiphanius based the figure of eighty on Song of Songs 6:8-9: “There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number; but my dove, my perfect one, is unique: she is her mother’s only daughter; She is pure child of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines also, and they praised her.” To Epiphanius, the eighty concubines were these heretical sects while the “dove” is the true church. See *Panarion* 35. 3. 6.

⁶¹Heine, “The Gospel of John” 3.

⁶²For a list of proposals about who Epiphanius’s source was, consult Pierre de Labriolle, *Les Sources De L’Histoire Du Montanisme* (Fribourg: Librairie de L’Université, 1913; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1980) LIII-LIV.

identity of the author of Epiphanius's source remains unknown.

Epiphanius's source follows a line of argumentation very similar to the Anonymous, but it reveals much more detail. The source acknowledges that the Montanists were orthodox in some parts of their teaching, for they "accept every Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and affirm the resurrection of the dead."⁶³ Furthermore, "they agree with the holy catholic church about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."⁶⁴ The source, nevertheless, draws a sharp distinction between the orthodox church and the Montanists in the area of spiritual gifts: "But they boast of having Montanus for a prophet, and Priscilla and Maximilla for prophetesses, and have lost their wits by paying heed to them. . . . [They] have separated themselves by 'giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils' and saying 'We must receive the gifts of grace as well.'"⁶⁵ It goes on to separate qualitatively the Montanists understanding and practice of spiritual gifts from that of the orthodox community: "God's holy church also receives the gifts of grace—but the real gifts [ἀλλὰ τὰ ὄντως χαρίσματα, *alla ta onōs charismata*], which have already been tried in God's holy church through the Holy Spirit, and by prophets and apostles, and the Lord himself."⁶⁶

For Epiphanius's source, the Montanists' practice of spiritual gifts differed sharply from the genuine gifts of the orthodox, because the orthodox practice corresponds to that handed down from the NT period. Important, the source affirmed a *direct continuity between the current orthodox community's practice of spiritual gifts and those exhibited by Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets*. A NT expression of spiritual gifts was markedly different from that exhibited in Montanism. The source cites 1 John 4:1 where the apostle John warned against false prophets—"Try the spirits, whether they be of God"—and 1 John 2:18-19 where John warned regarding coming antichrists who would separate from the orthodox community.⁶⁷ The source relates, "The Phrygians are truly not 'of' the saints themselves. They 'went out' by their contentiousness, and 'gave heed' to spirits of error and fictitious stories."⁶⁸

Epiphanius's source then launched a twofold attack on the Montanist prophecies: (1) prophecies of true prophets are fulfilled and (2) true prophets, unlike the Montanist prophets, spoke in full possession of their understanding. Regarding

⁶³ *Panarion* 48.1.3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.1.4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.1.3-4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.1.5. All Greek citations from Epiphanius are from *Epiphanius II*, *Panarion* haer. 34-64 (Herausgegeben von Karl Holl, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* [Berlin: Akademie-Verlage, 1980] 220. [transliteration added])

⁶⁷ *Panarion* 48.1.6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 48:1.7.

the first argument, the source starts with a minor argument to demonstrate a logical inconsistency in the Montanist viewpoint of spiritual gifts. Montanists insisted on the continuance of spiritual gifts like prophecy when they asserted, "We must receive the gifts of grace as well." Yet Maximilla had prophesied that no prophet would arise after her because of the end of the world. The source argued,

For look here, their religion is itself proof that they cannot keep their contentiously made promises. If we must receive the gifts of grace, and if there must be gifts of grace in the church, why do they have no more prophets after Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla? Has grace stopped working, then? Never fear, the grace of the holy church does not stop working! But if the prophets prophesied up to a certain time, and no more after that, then neither Priscilla nor Maximilla prophesied; they delivered their prophecies after the ones which were tried by the holy apostles, in the holy church.⁶⁹

The source goes on to argue,

Their stupidity will be exposed in two ways, then. Either they should show that there are prophets after Maximilla, so that their so-called "grace" will not be inoperative. Or Maximilla will be proved to be a false prophet, since she dared to receive inspiration after the end of the prophetic gifts—not from the Holy Spirit but from devils' imposture—and delude her audience.⁷⁰

The logic of the source's argument seems to be that though the Montanists insist that one must receive spiritual gifts like prophecy, they insist that it ended with Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla. For Epiphanius's source, they cannot have it both ways. Either they must prove that prophets exist after the three passed away and that the gift continues presently if one must receive the gifts of grace, or face the alternative of admitting that neither Priscilla nor Maximilla were prophetesses because of Maximilla's prophecy of no prophecy after her own. Since the end did not occur and since prophesy continues, then the three must be false prophets because of her prophecy that the end would come after her.

Admittedly also, as with the Anonymous discussed above, the continuance of prophesy in the church is not the issue, for Epiphanius's source argued that "Never fear, the grace in the holy church does not stop working!," which admittedly implies that he might not have been arguing against the continuance of the prophetic gift *per se*, but the argument hinges on distinguishing the genuine spiritual gift of prophesy from that practiced by the Montanists. One cannot overstate that an overwhelmingly crucial issue for Epiphanius's source is his insistence that the genuine spiritual gift of prophesy does not err, *i.e.*, does not prophesy inaccurately. This factor of non-erring prophesy serves as a clear demarcation between genuine

⁶⁹Ibid., 48:2.1-2.

⁷⁰Ibid., 48.2.3.

and Montanist prophecy. After exposing this logical contradiction, Epiphanius's source contends,

And see how they can be refuted from the very things they say! Their so-called prophetess, Maximilla, says, "After me will be no prophet more, but the consummation." Look here, the Holy Spirit and the spirits of error are perfectly recognizable! Everything that the prophets have said, they also said rationally with understanding; and the things they said have come true and are still coming true. But Maximilla said that the consummation would come after her, and no consummation has come yet—even after so many emperors and such a lapse of time! There have been about 206 years from Maximilla's time until ours, the twelfth year of Valentinian and Valens and the eighth of Gratian's, and we have yet to see the consummation announced by this woman who boasted of being a prophetess, but did not even know the day of her own death.⁷¹

In this quote, the phrase "the things they have said have come true and are still coming true" is strategic. For Epiphanius's source, the mark of a true prophet is accuracy and consistency of fulfillment.

One must also draw attention to the fact that from the discussion of Epiphanius's source that *he firmly held that someone who claims the prophetic gift and prophesies falsely is a false prophet. No hybrid category exists for a genuine prophet to prophesy inaccurately and still be a true prophet.* He reinforces this later in his discussion when he notes regarding the NT prophet Agabus's prophecy regarding a worldwide famine (Acts 11:27-30), "And in turn, prophets came down to Antioch and declared that there would be a worldwide famine, and their prediction did not fail; to show that they were true prophets, the scripture adds at once, 'which thing came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.'"⁷² Here, he perceptively recognizes Luke's affirmation of the fulfillment of the prophecy that reinforces the genuineness of Agabus as a NT prophet.⁷³

One other discussion deserves mention regarding accurate prophecy. Epiphanius's himself wrote that "Phrygians also venerate a deserted spot in Phrygia, a town once called Pepuzza though it is now leveled, and say that the heavenly Jerusalem will descend there. And so they resort there, celebrate certain mysteries on the site, and, as they suppose, sanctify themselves."⁷⁴ He continued with the

⁷¹Ibid., 48.2.4-7.

⁷²Ibid., 48.8.4-5.

⁷³This is in direct contrast to Grudem's contention that genuine prophets may be inaccurate. He criticizes Agabus' prediction by describing it elsewhere in Acts 21:10-11 as "a prophecy with two small mistakes." For Epiphanius's source, Agabus was a genuine prophet because he was accurate in his pronouncements and Luke reinforced this by noting the fulfillment of his prophecy. In Acts 11:28, Grudem overlooks the impact of this phrase as it relates to Agabus' prophecy (cf. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy* 77).

⁷⁴*Panarion* 48.14.1-2.

following note regarding some whom he recognized as a Montanist sub-group.⁷⁵

The Quintillianists in their turn, who are also called Pepuzians and known as Artotyrites and Priscillianists, are the same as the Phrygians and derive from them, but in a certain way are different. For the Quintillianists or Priscillianists say that either Quintilla or Priscilla—I cannot say for certain, but one of them, as I said, slept in Pepuzza, and Christ came to her and slept beside her under the following circumstances, as the deluded women said: “Christ came to me dressed in a white robe,” she said, “in the form of a woman, imbued me with wisdom, and revealed to me that Jerusalem will descend from heaven here.”⁷⁶

Since the descent of Jerusalem at Pepuzza had not occurred, Epiphanius adds this as an another proof of Montanist false prophecy.

A crucial question arises at this point. Upon what basis would Epiphanius's source have derived such a contention that true prophets must prophesy accurately? The context of his discussion reveals the answer, when in contrasting accurate predictions with unfulfilled Montanist prophecies, the source anchors his argument by comparing Montanist prophecies with data of the OT and the NT: “By comparing what they [i.e., the Montanists] have said with the teachings of the Old and New Testaments—which are true, and which have been delivered and prophesied in truth—let us determine which is really prophecy, and which is false prophecy.”⁷⁷ Briefly stated, for Epiphanius's source, if prophecy and prophets do not measure up to OT and NT stipulations and examples of prophecy, they are false prophets. He based his standard on biblical stipulations regarding prophets (Deut 13:1-5; 18:20-22; 1 Sam 3:19; 1 Cor 14:29-32) and the example of behavior and practice of OT/NT prophets. Also, the source reveals through this statement that only two categories of prophets exist: *one is either a true, genuine prophet or is a false prophet. There exists no middle ground for a genuine prophet who does not conform to these prophetic protocols/standards.* No shades of gray allow one to be an inaccurate prophet and still be a genuine prophet.

Epiphanius's source's use of the OT and NT texts regarding prophets and prophecy as a basis for evaluating Montanist prophecy/prophets receives reinforcement in the second argument used: genuine prophets are rational, i.e., they are in full possession of their understanding. He devoted even more space to this argument than the first, arguing “let us determine which is really prophecy and which is false

⁷⁵Williams notes, “Only Epiphanius distinguishes this group from the Montanists. . . . Epiphanius might have conjectured the existence of this sect from the distinctiveness of Priscilla's vision, or from its occurrence in a document different from the collection of Montanist prophecies” (Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies, Books II and III, trans. Frank Williams [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984] 21 n. 1).

⁷⁶Ibid., 49.1.1-3.

⁷⁷Ibid., 48.3.3.

prophecy”⁷⁸ by examining the activities and prophetic expression of both OT and NT prophets. He argued, “A prophet always spoke with composure and understanding, and delivered his oracles by the Holy Spirit’s inspiration.”⁷⁹ Important to note is the fact that the writer bases the rationality of true prophesy on the behavior of the prophet and his inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Epiphanius’s source examined the prophetic activity as well as the prophesies of OT and NT prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, David, Abraham, Agabus, Paul, and Peter as proof that biblical prophets were always in control of their faculties of reason and understanding in their prophetic activity.⁸⁰ *Important for this discussion is that Epiphanius’s source saw a direct continuity between OT and NT prophets by linking both eras of prophecy together*, for as noted above, he related, “By comparing what they have said with the teachings of the Old and New Testaments . . . let us determine which is really prophecy, and which false prophecy.”⁸¹

In contrast to the OT and NT prophets, he contended that much of the Montanists’ expression of prophecy was ecstatic or irrational. He noted,

But when the Phrygians profess to prophesy, it is plain that they are not of sound mind and rational. Their words are ambiguous and odd, with nothing right about them. Montanus, for instance says, “Lo, the man is as a lyre, and I fly over him as a pick. The man sleepeth, while I watch. Lo, it is the Lord that distracteth the hearts of men, and that giveth the heart to man.”

Now what rational person who receives the ‘profitable’ message with understanding and cares for his salvation, can fail to despise a false religion like this, and the speech of someone who boasts of being a prophet but cannot talk like a prophet? For the Holy Spirit never spoke in him. Such expressions as “I fly,” and “strike,” and “watch,” and “The Lord distracteth men’s hearts,” are utterances of an ecstatic. They are not the words of a rational man, but of someone of a different stamp from the Holy Spirit who spoke in the prophets.⁸²

Epiphanius’s source also notes that the Phrygians admitted the ecstatic nature of prophecy and attempted to use scriptural examples to support it: “When the Phrygians are out to combine falsehood with truth and rob those who care for accuracy of their intelligence, they collect heaps of texts to make a false case for their imposture, and to prove their lies from them, say that certain scriptures bear a

⁷⁸Ibid., 48.3.3.

⁷⁹Ibid., 48.3.4.

⁸⁰Ibid., 48.3. Passages referred to, for example, are Num 12:7-8; Isa 1:1; 6:1-3, 8-9; Ezek 4:4, 12, 14; Dan 2:1-10.

⁸¹Ibid., 48.3.3.

⁸²Ibid., 48.3.11-4.2.

resemblance to it.”⁸³ Apparently, the Phrygians cited the sleep of Adam and his response to Eve’s creation in Genesis 2:21-23 as an example of proof for ecstatic prophecy. Epiphanius’s source proceeds to demonstrate that “Adam’s case was nothing like theirs. . . . God brought the unconsciousness of sleep upon Adam, not distraction of mind,”⁸⁴ and “Adam’s senses and wits were not in abeyance.”⁸⁵ He commented further that regarding “the future he prophesied, ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.’ These are not the words of a man in ecstasy or without understanding, but of a person of sound mind.”⁸⁶

Very important for this discussion, Epiphanius’s source reveals that the Montanists appear to have been aware of this charge that their form of prophesy differed substantively from biblical standards and expression. After reviewing OT prophetic activity and demonstrating its rationality, he relates, “But even though they [the Montanists] choose to reply, ‘The first gifts are not like the last ones,’ how can they prove it. The holy prophets [OT] and the holy apostles prophesied alike.”⁸⁷ In other words, the Montanists drew a distinction between OT prophesy and NT prophesy, claiming that the two gifts were different from each other in order to justify their form of prophesy. Epiphanius’s source strongly refuted such contentions: “The holy prophets and the holy apostles spoke alike.”⁸⁸ In other words, the gift of prophesy is the same in the OT and the NT, i.e., one gift that is both rational and accurate. From this statement, Epiphanius as well as his source maintained not only a continuity of OT and NT prophesy/prophets but their equal authority as well. One can see this affirmed when Epiphanius’s source then proceeded *immediately* after refuting distinctions in eras of prophecy to examine NT prophets like Agabus, Paul, and John in order to demonstrate the same characteristics shared in common with OT prophets.⁸⁹ He summarizes by concluding,

We find then that every prophet, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, prophesies with understanding, as St. John said in Revelation: ‘The Lord *revealed* these things to his servants through his servant John, and, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ The person who said this was sound of mind and understanding—see how he says the same thing as the Old Testament prophets who say, ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ and ‘the vision which he saw.’⁹⁰

⁸³Ibid., 48.4.4.

⁸⁴Ibid., 48.4.4-6.

⁸⁵Ibid., 48.6.4.

⁸⁶Ibid., 48.6.6.

⁸⁷Ibid., 48.8.1.

⁸⁸Ibid., 48.8.1.

⁸⁹Ibid., 48.8.2-48.9.10.

⁹⁰Ibid., 48.10.1-2; cf. Rev 1:1.

Epiphanius's source next remarks, "But this Montanus, who has deceived his victims with his boast of being a prophet, describes things which are not consistent with sacred scripture,"⁹¹ and a little later, "Montanus is thus in total disagreement with the sacred scriptures, as any attentive reader can see. And since he is in disagreement, he himself and the sect which like him boasts of having prophets and gifts, are strangers to the holy catholic church. He did not receive the gifts; he departed from them."⁹² The source, therefore, equated OT and NT prophetic gifts. Important, *for Epiphanius's source, a direct continuity and authority existed between OT and NT prophecy. Anyone who departed from those biblical data or norms did NOT have the genuine gift of prophecy. Instead, their heterodox departures from these biblical norms regarding prophecy demonstrated they were false prophets.*

The Consequences of Differences in the Use of Spiritual Gifts

Because of such differences between prophecy in the early orthodox church and in Montanism, a sharp cleavage between these two groups developed. Eusebius's sources as well as Epiphanius's source reveal that the early church rejected Montanist claims that their practice of spiritual gifts was orthodox and normative. As a result, Montanus and his followers left the orthodox church because of their practice of spiritual gifts and formed their own movement:

When you Phrygians say you left the church over gifts of grace, how can we believe you? Even though you are disguised with the title of "Christian," you have launched another enemy attack on us. You have taken up the barbarians' quarrel and mimicked the enmity of the Trojans, who were also Phrygians! Things that are different from gifts and—as your own prophets say—not the same kind that the Lord promises, cannot be gifts.⁹³

From this quote, one learns that though Montanists called themselves "Christian," they also apparently *admitted that their expression of spiritual gifts differed from that exhibited in Scripture* ("as your own prophets say—not the same kind that the Lord promises, cannot be gifts").

The movement also became known from the earliest times as "the New Prophecy" (νέα προφητεία).⁹⁴ A debate among patristic scholars questions whether this title was a self-appellation or a name that the early church gave to Montanism.⁹⁵ Klawiter argued, "There is no reason a priori that it was the church

⁹¹Ibid., 48.10.3.

⁹²Ibid., 48.11.4.

⁹³Ibid., 48.12.1-2.

⁹⁴Ibid.; Eusebius *HE* 5.19.2.

⁹⁵For a detailed discussion of this debate, see Klawiter, "New Prophecy in Early Christianity" 63-70.

which attached the adjective new to the Montanist phenomenon.”⁹⁶ Aune argues that the term “‘New Prophecy,’ appears to have been the original self-designation of the Montanists.”⁹⁷ Either way, the term indicates the sharp distinctions in the practice of spiritual gifts between the orthodox church and the Montanists (or Phrygians). Though prophecy per se was not the problem, it was *the sharp departure from accepted biblical norms of prophecy stipulated in both the OT and NT*, in terms of its manner of expression and content—e.g., especially false prophesying and ecstasy as detailed above—which caused alarm in the early church in the period immediately after the apostles. Klawiter summarizes, “By about A.D. 177, the churches in Asia and Phrygia had rejected the New Prophecy. By the end of the second century, the New Prophecy was being combatted also at Hieropolis (Phrygia), Antioch (Syria), and Ancyra (Galatia).”⁹⁸

Although Montanus’ teaching gained many adherents, the early church as a whole rejected the Montanists as false prophets due to these sharp departures from biblical norms of prophecy. The abuse of prophesy by Montanism led to the gradual discrediting and disappearance of prophesy from the beginning of the third century onwards.⁹⁹ As Friedrich observes, “Montanism was the last great flare up of prophesy in the Church.”¹⁰⁰ Hill confirms this, noting “the repudiation of Montanism marks the effective end of prophecy in the Church.”¹⁰¹ Montanus was orthodox in some teachings,¹⁰² but his (and his followers’) deviations from apostolic doctrine in important areas, his false prophesying, and the great excesses of this movement resulted in a growing resistance of the early church to anyone who later claimed to possess the prophetic gift.¹⁰³

One of the first direct references to the early-church belief regarding the cessation of the prophetic gift is in the *Muratorian Fragment*, which most modern scholars now date around A.D. 170. This work contains the oldest existing list of the canonically accepted NT books. Italian historian and theological scholar Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750) discovered this work in the Ambrosian Library of Milan and published it in Milan in 1740. (The Latin document consists of eighty-

⁹⁶Ibid., 69.

⁹⁷David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 439 n. 64.

⁹⁸Klawiter, “New Prophecy in Early Christianity” 84-85.

⁹⁹*NIDNTT*, s.v. “Prophet” by C. H. Peisker, 3:89.

¹⁰⁰S.v. “προφητῆς,” by Gerhard Friedrich, *TDNT* 6:861.

¹⁰¹David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) 190.

¹⁰²For instance, he held to the doctrine of the Trinity, maintained the universal priesthood of believers, and affirmed the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

¹⁰³Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. from the 3rd German edition by Neil Buchanan (London: Williams and Norgate, 1896) 2:53, 98-107.

five lines and is a fragmentary work with the beginning and end possibly broken off).¹⁰⁴ The work refers to both apostles and prophets, stating explicitly that the number of prophets “is complete,” indicating an end to prophetic expression.¹⁰⁵ Heine notes the following regarding the Muratorian list:

It should be noted that the Muratorian canon, which is to be dated at approximately this same time [as the Montanist Controversy] and located at Rome, rejected the *Shepherd of Hermas* for the same reason that Hippolytus advanced against the Montanist prophecy: it is a recent writing, and prophecy ceased with the apostles. There was, then, at Rome, in the late second and early third century a different attitude toward the possibility of contemporary prophecy than we have seen exhibited in the documents coming from the Montanist controversy a little earlier in Asia.¹⁰⁶

The church father Hippolytus (d. ca. 235) was a presbyter in Rome in the early third century. In dealing with the heresy of Noetus,¹⁰⁷ who espoused a modalistic monarchianism, Hippolytus appealed to a closed canon: “There is, brethren, one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures, and from no other source.”¹⁰⁸ Although the word prophecy is not mentioned, such a statement amounts to a denial of the charisma of prophecy. Hippolytus also appeals to a closed canon when he notes about the Montanists,

But there are others who themselves are even more heretical in nature (than the foregoing), and are Phrygians by birth. These have been rendered victims of error from being previously captivated by (two) wretched women, called a certain Priscilla and Maximilla, whom they suppose (to be) prophetesses. And they assert that into these the Paraclete Spirit had departed; and antecedently to them, they in like manner consider Montanus as a prophet. And being in possession of an infinite number of their books, (the Phrygians) are overrun with delusion; and they do not judge whatever statements are made by them, according to (the criterion of) reason; nor do they give heed unto those who are competent to decide; but they are heedlessly swept onwards by the reliance which they place on these (imposters). And they allege that they have learned something

¹⁰⁴For further information, see Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 191-94.

¹⁰⁵For further information, see Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 95. Gamble gives an English translation of the Latin text. The *Muratorian Fragment* associates the termination of the gifts of apostleship and prophecy and, in speaking of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, says, “It cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the prophets, whose number is complete, nor among the apostles, for it is after their time.”

¹⁰⁶Heine, “The Gospel of John” 12-13.

¹⁰⁷Tradition about Noetus is conflicting. Theodoret indicates that he was a native of Smyrna, while Epiphanius says that Noetus was an Asian of the city of Ephesus (*Panarion* 37.1.1). According to Epiphanius, Noetus made his heresy public about 130 years before Epiphanius lived. Since Epiphanius wrote around 375, Noetus would date about 245. For further information, *ANF* 5:223 n. 2.

¹⁰⁸Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus* 9; *ANF* 5:227.

more through these [their own books] than from law, and prophets, and the Gospels.¹⁰⁹

From the demise of Montanism until the turn of the present century, the prophetic phenomenon was never a part of a major movement in Christianity.¹¹⁰ Instead, focus shifted to apostolic doctrine and a study of the Scriptures as the source of Christian doctrine and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction, this discussion has focused on the very early post-apostolic period and the *great "charismatic" crisis* of the mid-second century known as the Montanism. The Montanist crisis constituted a watershed in analyzing *immediate* and primitive, post-apostolic understanding of the NT gift of prophecy. More specifically, the church's handling of this crisis as reflected in tradition through "the Anonymous," Apollonius, and Epiphanius' source revealed how the early church, immediately after the period of the apostles, conceptualized the NT gift of prophecy.

Two areas were decisive in revealing the post-apostolic church's understanding of NT prophecy. First, how did the early church respond to this prophetic crisis? The orthodox church rejected Montanism *outright*. They did not embrace it or tolerate it. They did not dialogue with it—the orthodox church rejected it summarily based on a careful examination and comparison of the biblical data regarding OT and NT stipulations for prophets. They tied their refutation to the biblical data that upheld a direct continuity and authority between the eras of OT and NT prophecy/prophets. When they compared and contrasted Montanistic claims of prophecy to the data expressed in *both* the OT and NT, Montanism failed the test. When the Montanists tried to claim distinctions between OT and NT prophets/prophecy, *the early, orthodox church rejected such attempts and strongly upheld a direct continuity between these eras, especially in the area of prophetic continuity and authority.*

Second, what type of arguments did church fathers use to reject such a movement? Their arguments were also based in the same stipulation of a direct continuity between OT and NT prophets/prophecy. (1) They examined the Montanists' prophetic pronouncements. As stipulated in both OT and NT, prophets who prophesied incorrectly or falsely were considered false prophets with no middle ground for genuine prophets who were sometimes inaccurate. For these sources, the issue was black and white: either one is a genuine prophet who prophesies accurately or one is a false prophet. The early church never accepted the concept of an inaccurate, genuine prophet. This standard reveals that the early church maintained

¹⁰⁹Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* 8.12; ANF 5:123.

¹¹⁰D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 166.

the continuity and authority of OT and NT prophecy. They maintained no distinctions in eras of prophecy.

(2) They also found Montanist prophecy incompatible with biblical data regarding rationality. Biblical prophets were rational, but Montanistic prophets were ecstatic (irrational). Hence, Montanist prophets/prophecy did not correspond to true OT and NT prophets/prophecy.

(3) The early church also recognized the authoritative nature of NT prophets and prophecies. This can be seen in how they perceived Montanism to be an acute danger. Because of the authority inherent in a professed prophetic voice of the Lord, the early church decisively rejected Montanism because of its departures from Scripture in prophetic areas. The fathers perceived Montanism to be leading the church astray by their heterodox brand of prophecy that was irrational and incorrect in its prophetic pronouncements.

Grudem attributes the decline to an alleged neglect of his own peculiar distinction between two types of NT prophecy, one having an authority of actual words and another having only an authority of general content. He suggests that prophets who had only the latter type of revelation mistakenly took it for the former, leading to an eventual downfall of the gift altogether. Grudem asserts, "If our understanding of the authority of ordinary Christian prophecy is correct, then the primary application to our lives today would be to encourage ourselves not to make the same mistake as some made in the early church by overvaluing prophecy and thinking of prophecies as the very words of God."¹¹¹

Grudem's claim deserves several important responses. First, he reveals an Enlightenment-based prejudice against early church tradition by rejecting the orthodox church's stipulations regarding prophecy as "a mistake." Sources cited by Eusebius ("the Anomymous" and Apollonius) and Epiphanius lived immediately after the apostles and most likely reflected apostolic views of prophecy. Those closest to the period most naturally reflect positions corresponding to apostolic views. Why and how they rejected Montanism reveals how the church today should define and understand prophecy today. Grudem has made a grievous "mistake" when he cavalierly dismisses such data since it does not correspond to his own peculiar conceptions of prophecy.

Second, Grudem's statement constitutes a very telling admission. He admits that the early church (post-apostolic) did not reflect his concept of NT prophecy. In contrast to Grudem's assertion, the three early sources discussed above reveal that the orthodox church displayed none of the characteristics of Grudem's view of prophecy. Based on how that church dealt with Montanism, one may confidently assert that second-century orthodoxy would have rejected Grudem's view outright as unorthodox and heretical. Furthermore, because Grudem admits that that church did not recognize his viewpoint on prophecy, the idea is reinforced

¹¹¹Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy* 92.

that his view is an *entirely novel reinterpretation* foreign to the church's traditional understanding of the gift of prophecy.

Third, a careful examination of the primitive sources also reveals the following: Grudem, as well as the Signs and Wonders or Third-Wave Movement who depend upon his position on NT prophecy, have *a priori* imposed a heterodox (i.e., unorthodox) interpretation upon NT prophecy that would not have been countenanced by the very early church. Since in the period of OT prophecy prophets were considered fully authoritative and inerrant (as Grudem admits), and in the church immediately after the NT era, both OT and NT prophets were considered fully authoritative, inerrant, and in continuity with each other (as this study has revealed), then the full continuity, authority, and inerrancy of NT prophets/prophecy in the NT period itself must be maintained. As a result, *Grudem's view must be rejected as unorthodox.*