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Who Does the Review?

The largest question before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America this year centers on the method for reviewing the work of the committees, boards, and agencies of the highest court of the church. Who shall be responsible for reviewing the ministries and the finances of the committees of the General Assembly?

The new proposal is simple. Take the principal power of review from the representatives of the presbyteries and give it to a subcommittee of the Administrative Committee, whose membership may be determined by the stated clerk. To accomplish this goal, three changes in our present way of operating must be made.

First, a change must be made in the role of the "committees of commissioners." For right now, these committees are the agents for reviewing the permanent committees, boards, and agencies of the GA. Each year for the past seventeen years, these "committees of commissioners" have gone over the previous year's work of the boards, agencies, and permanent committees of the GA and have reported their findings, with recommendations, to the GA.

There is a tendency to forget the origin of the "committees of commissioners," and who they represent. Someone must have "commissioned" these commissioners. But who?

Their commission comes from the various presbyteries of the church. They are the elected officials representing the people of our churches. If the name were not so cumbersome, these committees should be called the "committees of commissioners from the presbyteries."

It's a matter of accountability. It's a lesson we learned from history.

In the "old denomination," the permanent committees of the GA led our church down the primrose path of liberalism. They lost touch with the people, and with the commitments of the past. So they led the old church away from its moorings to the truth.

When the PCA was formed, the determination was made to avoid that pitfall if at all possible. All the churches would have a voice in the General Assembly. A delicate "balance of powers" would be established. The permanent committees would have the responsibility of coordinating and spearheading the work of the denomination as a whole. But their work would be subject to the review of the presbyter-

ies. The system was set up with "committees of commissioners from the presbyteries" having the responsibility of reviewing the work of the permanent committees of the GA each year. The idea was one of accountability and balance of power.

Has the system worked?

Indeed, the system has worked well. By and large, the permanent committees have been confirmed in the direction in which they have been going. Sometimes a modification of direction has been effected by the input brought about by the review of the presbyteries. But in the end, the church has maintained a unity of direction and a faithfulness to the Word because the whole of the church through the presbytery's commissioners have been involved in setting the direction of the church. Sometimes the permanent committees have chomped at the bit, wanting to rid themselves of the tugs, the pulls, and the restraints associated with an annual review. But the church is not a modern American business corporation. Speed in directional change is not the greatest necessity or the healthiest expedient for the church of Jesus Christ.

But now a change is being proposed.

Lift the restraints of the "committees of commissioners from the presbyteries" from the permanent committees, it is

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Prophecy Today?

by O. Palmer Robertson

If the most critical problems facing Christian churches today were to be enumerated, the "top of the list" would have to include the role of the charismatic gifts in the church and the place of women in the church. These two issues, though hardly finding a mention in the traditional corpus of theology, now draw sparks of controversy as once did the classic disputes over the doctrine of the trinity and the two natures of Christ.

In response to the present circumstance, a respectful attitude among brothers who differ always must be maintained. But at the same time, every effort must be made to return to the Scriptures so that they may speak on these matters. Every issue must be judged ultimately by the Word itself rather than by the opinions and experiences of men.

The current study attempts to look into the phenomenon

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being suggested. Let these "committees of commissioners" continue in an "advisory" capacity. Retain for them some semblance of dignity. Allow them the power to interpret the reports of the permanent committees, which under the new arrangement will report directly to the General Assembly. But take from the "committees of commissioners from the presbyteries" the principal role of reviewing and reporting on the work of the permanent committees.

That's the essence of the change. Instead of letting the "committees of commissioners from the presbyteries" have the principal responsibility of reporting to the General Assembly, the permanent committees will make the principal report, with the committees of presbyteries having the opportunity of contradicting that report with their alternative proposals. The effect of the change will be to put the "committees of commissioners from the presbyteries" on the defensive, having to justify their proposed changes to the reports of the permanent committees. Instead of the permanent committees having an accountability to the representatives of the presbyteries, the permanent committees will stand in the preferred position.

But why the change?

It is stated that these ordained ruling and teaching elders of the PCA, chosen and commissioned by their presbyteries, "are simply not in a position to evaluate every recommendation from the permanent committee with careful diligence during their brief meeting prior to and during the General Assembly" (*Handbook*, p. 418, #7). In other words, the task is so large and the recommendations so complex, the time so limited and the need for care so great, that these commissioners cannot sort out the issues and make appropriate recommendations.

Every aspect of this argument should be challenged. The commissioners from presbytery receive their materials for General Assembly at least a month before their committee convenes. They have adequate time to absorb the issues and make a responsible review. In previous years, the actual issues for serious debate and deliberation have been limited. These issues have been covered in the time provided before and during the meeting of GA.

But there's one great and obvious fallacy to this whole line of reasoning. If these commissioners are "simply not in a position to evaluate" recommendations of a permanent committee in a meeting prior to the Assembly after a month's opportunity for concentrated study, *how then are all the commissioners at General Assembly expected to evaluate the various recommendations that come to them and to vote intelligently on the issues presented?* If the reasoning of this report is correct, then let's all go home and forget the idea of the General Assembly's being a decision-making body. Let's leave the running of the Assembly in the hands of the members of the permanent committees who alone apparently are competent to evaluate the complex issues they face.

It has been stated by some that the commissioners of

presbytery simply are not capable of doing a proper evaluation of the work of the permanent committees. Blame may be laid in part on matters of time-limitation and the complexity of the issues. But it also has been suggested that the "committees of commissioners from the presbyteries" cannot make a proper evaluation.

Let us be careful of the trap of a denomination run by "experts." All the work of the church is the concern of the whole church. We need the devoted service of the members of the permanent committees and their staff. But they also need the church at large. The consistent reevaluation of their work by commissioners from presbyteries can go a long way to ensuring a healthy relation between the whole church and the permanent committees. These ruling and teaching elder commissioners from presbyteries are uniquely fitted to communicate the realities of the church "in the field" to the denominational committees.

Secondly, a change is being proposed with respect to the role of the Administrative Committee of the General Assembly. If the power of review is taken from the presbyteries operating through their chosen commissioners, where is review to be located?

The report being presented to the General Assembly says that a final decision has not yet been made regarding a method for review. But according to this proposal, it has a location in the Administrative Committee of the General Assembly. The arrangement is presented in a new section describing the powers of the Administrative Committee which will be added to the "Rules of Assembly Operation." According to the proposed change, the Administrative Committee will have the power to establish a subcommittee charged with examining "continually" the "various ministries of this denomination" and make recommendations concerning the "allocation of funds" among the various committees, boards, and agencies (*Handbook*, p. 443, proposed new section 5-2e).

~~The significance of the fact that this entire section now is~~ being introduced into the "Rules of Assembly Operation" rather than in the "Bylaws" of the General Assembly must be noted. In the first General Assembly of the PCA, the establishment of an "administrative committee" was hotly debated. The committee was allowed to come into existence only with the understanding that it would deal *exclusively* with the "business affairs" of the Corporation "as distinguished from the ecclesiastical matters" (*PCA Bylaws*, section 10, A1; *Handbook*, p. 18). The Administrative Committee was not to become a centralized force that originated proposals of policy for the church at large. Only with that understanding was an "administrative committee" allowed to exist in the PCA.

But now a new job description of the Administrative Committee is being introduced in the "Rules," which are reserved for *ecclesiastical* as over against business matters. Now the Administrative Committee through a special subcommittee shall exercise continual review over the policies

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and finances of the Mission to the World Committee, the Mission to North America, the Christian Education Committee, and all the other boards and agencies of the General Assembly of the PCA. Precisely the function of review that had been performed by the "committees of commissioners from the presbyteries" shall now be taken over by this subcommittee of the Administrative Committee, whose membership remains undefined. Even from a "worldly" point of view, this proposal is seriously flawed. For the Administrative Committee that has the power to establish this "subcommittee for review" is made up largely of representatives from the various committees, boards, and agencies that are to be reviewed! The people being audited are to hand-pick their own auditors!

The next section of this proposal states that the Administrative Committee shall have "no authority, oversight, or supervision" of the other permanent committees of the church. But if it is "charged with the responsibility of continually examining and making recommendations" to the GA concerning all the other committees, it has by definition a certain form of authority, oversight, and supervision. Even though its recommendations do not take effect until approved by the GA, it would be constantly reviewing the whole work of the denomination.

This model of operation may work fine for corporate America. But the church of Christ is not a corporation, and should not function as a corporation with a board of directors as its head. The proposed changes would take us a long way from our original model for the governance of the church, and can only lead to the same sad conclusions as experienced in our previous denominations.

The third major change being proposed has to do with the job description of the stated clerk. Couched in a simple statement are to be found all the powers necessary to create the office of what may be called the "arch-elder" of the PCA. Since we never would tolerate something called an "arch-bishop," let us have an "arch-elder," for the proposed job description of the stated clerk transfers to him all the powers of review that are to belong to the Administrative Committee. As the italicized section of the new job description for the stated clerk indicates, he shall be responsible "for carrying out and executing the appropriate duties and responsibilities" of the Administrative Committee (*Handbook*, p. 425, article 3-1). In other words, all the powers given the Administrative Committee in turn are to be conferred upon the stated clerk, who would become the "arch-elder" of the General Assembly. According to this formula, he would possess the power to determine the makeup of the subcommittee that reviewed continually the ministries and the finances of all the committees and agencies of the General Assembly. Although he would be subject to the Administrative Committee, the power to initiate would clearly be his.

Is it to be? Are we in one hasty assembly to cast off the biblical strengths and balances of presbyterianism for the

hierarchical system of episcopacy? Has our method of review and control been so feeble and unserviceable that we must depart from a biblical form of government to an unbiblical form? Is it necessary to go back to the foundations and establish again that the Bible knows nothing of "arch-elders?" Having refused to submit this identical proposal to the presbyteries as a proposed change in the *Book of Church Order* just last year, are we now going to enact this drastic change in church government by a single vote in the opening hours of a single assembly?

Let us hope not. Let us realize that there is a better way. Let us "hold fast the traditions" of a biblical form of government in which the powers of accountability are retained for the ruling and teaching elders sent by the presbyteries for the specific purpose of advancing the good of the whole church. Ω

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of prophecy as it appears in Scripture. The role of women in the church is considered as it relates to the specific question of the nature of biblical prophecy. The implications of these questions for the current circumstances in the church hopefully will become apparent in the process.

The Origin of Prophecy according to the Old Testament

Biblical prophecy had its origins in the Old Testament, which is a fact of some significance. Prophecy is not a distinctly New Testament phenomenon, but one which dates back to the most ancient experiences of God's people.

But when and where did prophecy first arise? Surprisingly, prophecy did not have its origins in the age of the great eighth century B.C. figures such as Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea. Instead, prophecy had its origin in a much more ancient setting.

Moses was the fountainhead of the prophetic movement in the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, Old Testament prophecy reached its point of highest glory in its beginnings with Moses. Contrary to all concepts of an evolutionary development of religion in Israel, the apex of the prophetic movement found its expression in Moses, the original prophet and law-giver in Israel. He played a most unique role as mediator of the Word of God to the people of Israel.

In the days before Moses, God spoke personally to the head of the various patriarchal families. The fatherly head would then communicate the Word of God to his clan.

But how was God to communicate His Word to a host of over a million people as they came out of Egypt? Would the Lord reveal himself simultaneously to 600,000 heads of families? Or would he continue throughout the subsequent ages of Israel's history to thunder with his own voice from

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Ruling Elders and the General Assembly

by Kevin Horn

Concern about the lack of representation of Ruling Elders (REs) at the General Assembly (GA) has led to efforts to promote RE attendance at the 18th General Assembly in Atlanta, Georgia, June 10-15, 1990. The purpose of this article is to discuss recent efforts to ameliorate the perceived problem of lack of RE attendance at GA and to explore some of the reasons for the lack of attendance relative to publicity directed at correcting the problem.

Teaching Elders and Clerks of Session received an attractive brochure late in 1989, indicating that "Hundreds of PCA Ruling Elders are being urged to leave their churches this summer for the most powerful, practical, prayerful, refreshing, entertaining, and spiritually renewing event in PCA history." Inside the brochure the June 1990 General Assembly is described as having been created with REs in mind. A "sneak preview" of the GA is described in the following language: "Think of the most inspiring prayer meeting you've ever attended. The most challenging sermon you've ever heard. And the best family vacation you've ever enjoyed. Then imagine all those experiences rolled into one."

The Book of Church Order defines the General Assembly as "the highest court of this Church, and represents in one body all the churches thereof." The promotional brochure makes no reference to GA as a "court." A quotation at the back of the brochure seems to indicate that GA should be perceived as something other than a court: "Ruling elders don't come to the assembly to debate points of order. We want to know how to be better elders, how to be better Christians. If you help us in that then you will make the assembly worth our taking a week of vacation in order to come."

The General Assembly is described in terms of preaching, programs, and prayer. Obviously, all of these activities are vital to the life of Christ's Church.

However, should promoting these activities be linked with encouraging RE attendance at GA under the motivation of "Fun and Fellowship for Your Whole Family," while no mention is made of the importance of the workings of the denomination's highest court to promote the peace and purity of the church? Should not elders attending the highest court of the church be concerned with the larger issues as well as with points of order in so far as they affect the orderly deliberations of the court?

Following last year's GA, our Session received a request to complete a questionnaire from a PCA individual concerned about low RE participation at GA. The questionnaire had two parts: "Why do you think the RE participation is low and declining?" and "How do you think we can encourage greater RE participation?"

These are important questions if asked and answered in a framework that will allow for correct specification of the problem, ostensibly RE lack of participation at GA. Once the problem is correctly defined, biblical solutions can be offered.

Identifying the Problem: Low RE participation at GA or low RE participation in the church as such?

This writer thinks that low RE participation at the highest court of the church is not significantly different from low RE participation in lower courts of the church. At the presbytery level one may observe churches that seem to have no RE participation. Many delegates arrive late and leave early following lunch. Where there are REs who do not actively participate in the leadership of the Session or attend local meetings of presbytery regularly, the issue of attendance and participation at another non-local court does not seem particularly unique. Low attendance of REs at GA may be symptomatic of a more pervasive lack of commitment to our system of church courts and the vital function of oversight by a plurality of elders.

In fairness, however, to committed REs who are legitimately unable to attend GA, our system of "parity" between REs and teaching elders (TEs) seems most strained over issues of court attendance. For example, consider an "average" RE who is a wage earner with an annual income of \$25,000 per year and two weeks paid vacation. Is the local church willing to assist this man by some compensation for lost wages if he forgoes a week's pay to attend GA? Probably many churches would find this out of order or not affordable. Indeed, attendance of REs at GA may be somewhat hindered by the travel and per diem costs to the local congregation. How committed are our congregations in budgeting for GA participation by a plurality of elders?

RE attendance and participation at GA will not be particularly effective if this is perceived as a one-time phenomenon. GA participation should be extended over several years so that the RE can understand the workings and continuity of the process. Attending GA once is probably not very conducive to the learning curve associated with court proceedings involving nearly 1,000 commissioners. Unfortunately, REs who are regularly rotated off the local court may see little purpose in a continuation of service beyond the local church. GA participation is a long term investment and commitment that does not begin June 10 and terminate June 15, 1990.

Though our denomination is outwardly committed to some form of parity of TEs and REs, there are subtle distinctions that tend to convey non-parity to the RE. REs are a distinct minority in the context of socialization. Most of the TEs have long associations renewed at GA among their peers with whom they often have common seminary backgrounds. Some of this exclusiveness is natural among persons with similar shared interests. There can be dangerous side effects, however, if this exclusivity is visibly imparted

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to the interloping RE commissioner.

Encouraging greater RE participation at GA: Publicity and programs or commitment to the responsibilities of church office?

RE participation at GA can be encouraged by what can be broadly viewed as positive or negative inducements, depending on one's perspective. Positive inducements include instilling in REs a commitment to all the duties of the office of the elder, including participation in our system of courts and the willingness to attend all courts as the opportunity arises. This will involve sacrifice by both the RE and the local congregation to assist men to attend GA. Some of the REs may have financial needs or be unable to fully absorb the personal sacrifices that should be borne by the local church.

Negative inducements to some would involve a system of delegated assemblies so that representation of REs and TEs from each presbytery were kept in proportion by an enforced balance. An assembly with an enforced balance between teaching and ruling elders would encourage TEs to get more ruling elders to attend if proportional RE representation were required.

I would hope that the PCA does not resort to gimmicks to promote RE participation in the highest court of the church. RE participation in the highest court of our denomination should not be determined by what the individual expects to benefit from court attendance, but on what he has to contribute to the court's deliberations and decisions, all done for the glory of Christ in His Church.

The integrity of our system of courts rests on the sacrificial faithfulness of the men who serve. Where men serve the court for self-gratification found in impressive programs and stimulating entertainment, our courts are in jeopardy. Nothing is sinful per se about attending programs, seminars, or appending some family vacation to a trip to GA. However, if these appeals are used as the primary reasons for RE attendance at GA, the strength of our denomination's highest court will likely be weakened as the number of RE delegates increases in response to such inducements.

Ultimately we can enhance RE participation at all our denomination's courts by encouraging a sacrificial commitment to the duties of the offices we hold. The alternative is to promote RE participation in our courts as having advantages similar to attending a Christian carnival: inspiration, entertainment, and challenge for everyone! There is nothing wrong with these ideals, but they should not be promoted as being more compelling than the duty of REs' to fully participate in the all of the courts of this denomination.

Sacrifice is needed by the individual elder and by congregations. The commitment to service in the highest court of the church is for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and not primarily for the benefit of the participants. Attendance at GA by ruling elders should not be perceived as vacationing in a Christian Disneyworld, but analogous to the weighty

burden of the cupbearer to Artaxerxes for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Heaven as he did at Sinai?

God's people themselves had strong feelings on this matter. They pled with Moses: give us a substitute for this terrifying experience of hearing the thunder of God's voice (Deut. 18:16). In response to the plea of the people, God provided a prophetic mediator and established the prophetic office. One man would receive the word of God in the mountain and subsequently mediate the word to the trembling people below. In this way prophecy had its origins.

Several significant conclusions may be reached about the nature of biblical prophecy as a consequence of the circumstances surrounding its establishment. The origins of prophecy reveal matters of continuing significance about the essence of the phenomenon.

First of all, the small, simple voice of the prophet substitutes for all the awesome signs of Sinai. The thunderous voice of God, the lightning, the fire, the smoke, the earthquake, the peal of the trumpet growing ever louder—all these frightening phenomena find their replacement in the voice of a single Israelite speaking among his brothers. Despite its relatively quiet quality, every word of the prophet comes as the very voice of God.

Secondly, the origin of the truly prophetic word is not to be found in the subjective experiences of a man. The prophet is not hallucinating when he declares, "Thus says the Lord." God's own word has come to the prophet, and finds its vehicle of communication in the chosen man's voice. God, not the subjective experiences of man, originates the prophetic word.

Thirdly, the word of the prophet is not primarily predictive in nature. Moses' main task in delivering the law at Sinai was not to predict the future, but to declare God's revealed will. Not a single prediction is found in the "ten words," the heart of the revelation communicated through Moses.

The common distinction between the "forth-telling" of the prophetic word and the "fore-telling" of the future by the prophet must be understood correctly. From the beginning, the "telling forth" of God's word was just as much a revelation of the infallible, inerrant, and perfect word of God as was his fore-telling of the future. It simply is not the case that the speaking forth of the prophet on various issues of the day was a kind of "preaching" with diminished authority, while his "fore-telling" of the future was inspired, inerrant, and infallible in its character.

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As a matter of fact, the essence of prophetism always is defined in the Bible in terms of this “speaking forth” of the very Word of God, whether or not it involved a fore-telling of the future. Occasionally the prophet might predict a future event. Obviously, this kind of insight could occur only by divine revelation. But the essence of prophecy was not determined by the predictive element, but by the nature of the prophet’s utterance as being the very Word of God.

Geerhardus Vos addresses this subject in his article on “The Idea of ‘Fulfillment’ of Prophecy in the Gospels.” With respect to the nature of prophecy, he says:

In connection with [the idea of fulfillment of prophecy], the question may be raised, What is precisely the force of the “pro” in the name “prophet”: does “prophet” mean “foreteller,” or does it mean “forthteller,” i.e., “The one who speaks forth a word revealed to him by God”? In the Hebrew *nabhi* the latter idea finds expression, and it is, so to speak, an unexpressed circumstance that the word forthspoken in many cases happens to be a “prediction.” [G.Vos, “The Idea of ‘Fulfillment’ of Prophecy in the Gospels,” in Richard B. Gaffin, ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, N.J., 1980), p. 354]

Prophecy should not be defined essentially as a foretelling of the future. Instead, it is the forthtelling of a revelation from God which on occasion also may involve the prediction of future events.

This perspective on the essence of prophecy is important for evaluating the question of the continuation of prophecy today. Obviously no one can foretell infallibly the specifics of a future event, as was the case in Biblical prophecy, unless he has experienced a direct revelation from God. But it is equally true that no one can “tell forth” the word of God in the prophetic sense apart from experiencing a direct revelation from God. Whether as “fore-teller” or “forth-teller,” the prophet communicated revelation from God. If a person affirms that Biblical prophecy continues today in either of its basic forms, it should be clear that he is expressing belief that revelation also continues today. While a contemporary preacher may be “prophetic” in his pulpit ministry, he is not “prophesying” in the Biblical sense as seen in the history of the origins of prophetism.

A fourth conclusion may be reached with respect to the nature of prophecy on the basis of its origins as preserved in Scripture. The ultimate goal of God’s covenant cannot be realized so long as a prophetic figure must stand between the Lord and his people.

God’s purpose in the covenant was to be one with his people. In establishing a covenant relationship, the Lord binds himself intimately to his people.

But that closeness of relationship which God intended by the covenant cannot be achieved so long as a prophetic mediator must stand between God and the people. So long as a mediator must run from the top of the mountain to the

people below, covenantal unity has not been fully realized.

This very point is emphasized by Paul in his statement that “a mediator does not speak of one” (Gal. 3:20). The presence of a mediator implicitly suggests a separation of people from one another. So long as a mediator must run down the mountain carrying the Word from God to the people, the oneness intended by the covenant has not yet been realized. Only if God himself should become the one who mediates the divine word could the oneness of fellowship intended by the covenant be fulfilled. Then the need for the intermediary work of the prophetic figure would come to an end.

This perspective on the final goal of prophetism is confirmed by the testimony of the new covenant documents. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the finality of the prophetic revelation as it is found in Jesus Christ. Previously God spoke in many different ways through many different prophetic mediators. But now he has spoken with finality in a son (Heb. 1:1). When the prophetic revelation comes directly through Jesus Christ, then the ultimate goal of the covenant has been realized. Experiencing the revelation of God through the son means being one with God himself.

Foundational Passages on Prophecy in the Old Testament

The historical context of the origin of prophetism in Israel provides a firm foundation for understanding the true nature of prophecy as it is manifest in subsequent history. This understanding finds significant elucidation in several other foundational passages on prophecy in the Old Testament. Essential to an appreciation of the role of prophetism in the new covenant is this old covenant background. Consider the following passages:

(1) Exodus 7:1—Then the Lord said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.”

In this passage Moses is as God, Aaron is his prophet and pharaoh is the recipient of the prophetic word. Though the word of God originating with Moses is mediated through Aaron, it comes to pharaoh with undiminished authority. Pharaoh’s land is devastated because he does not heed the infallible, inerrant word of God communicated through Aaron who serves as Moses’ “prophet.” Mediatorship in no way diminishes the authority of the prophetic word.

(2) Exodus 4:14,15—And you shall set the words in his mouth. And I shall be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach both of you what you shall do. And he [that is Aaron as “prophet” for Moses] shall speak to the people for you. And it will be that he shall be to you for a mouth and you shall be to him for God.

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Mouth to mouth. The descriptive phrase underscores the immediacy of the relationship that exists between God's word and the prophetic word. The divine revelation goes directly from the mouth of God to the mouth of the prophet. The word of the prophet is the very word of God. God does not communicate his revelation to the prophet "thought to thought," or "mind to mind," but "mouth to mouth." Prophetism by definition is concerned not merely with the reception of the Word of God, but its communication as well. This description of the mode of communication of the prophetic word underscores the absolute perfections of the prophet's speech in representing God's word. By a "mouth to mouth" communication, God's word is preserved in its integrity as it passes through the vehicle of the prophet.

(3) **Numbers 12:6,7**—God said, "Listen to my words: If your prophet is Yahweh, then I, Yahweh, will speak to him. In a vision unto him I shall make myself known; in a dream to him I shall speak."

The poetic parallelism of the original text underscores the revelatory character of the message that comes to the prophet:

- a. In a vision
- b. unto him
- c. I shall make myself known;
- a. In a dream
- b. to him
- c. I shall speak.

God shall take the initiative in making himself known by vision and dream. This mode of divine communication will characterize the experience of the prophet through the ages. The "vision" and the "dream" of the prophet originate with God, not with the insight of man. Although the context indicates that distinctive favor will be shown to Moses in that God will speak to him "face to face," there can be no discounting of the fact that all the prophets will receive their message by a revelatory experience. That is the meaning of the word's coming through "dream" and "vision."

Strikingly suitable to this idea of prophetic revelation that comes through "dream" and "vision" is the fact that written prophecy in the Old Testament is presented vividly as a thing "seen." The writings of Isaiah the prophet are described as a "vision" (*hazon*) which he "saw" (*haza*). Subsequently, the "word" (*hadavar*) which Isaiah "saw" (*haza*) describes a particular message he received (Isa 2:1).

The prophets experienced this form of revelation repeatedly. Isaiah "saw" the Lord's "burden" (Isa. 13:1). Amos and Micah "saw" their word from the Lord (Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1). Habakkuk speaks of his entire book as a "burden" that he "saw" (Hab. 1:1). The prophets regularly "saw" through "vision" and "dream" the word they were to communicate.

In contrast with this visionary reception of God's Word by a revelatory experience, the false prophets speak out of

their own hearts. Jeremiah vivifies the major characteristic of the origin of the word of the false prophets. He declares: "A vision from their heart they speak, not from the mouth of Yahweh" (Jer. 23:16). The word of the false prophet originates with the machinations of his own heart, not with the visionary experience granted to the true prophet of the Lord.

(4) This contrast between true and false prophet is continued in the fourth foundational passage, **Deuteronomy 13:4,5**. Rather than heeding the false prophet who originates his own dreams, Israel must keep God's commands as delivered by His prophets. God's nation must observe the way God commanded them to go. The false prophet "must be put to death," because he has attempted to turn Israel from the revealed way they must follow.

Over against the false prophets are set the commands, ordinances, and statutes that have been revealed through Moses and his true successors. The most basic test of the prophet is his adherence to the "forth-telling" that already has come by divine revelation.

The prophets were not primarily predictors. No matter how spectacular a prophet's words might appear, he must be put to death if his statements contradicted the rather non-spectacular commands revealed to Moses the prophet *par excellence*.

This respect for the divine character of the prophetic word needs to be carried over into the context of the new covenant. The denigration of prophecy to the level of non-revelational or "forth-telling" finds no encouragement in the foundational texts on prophecy in Scripture. Prophecy is a speaking forth of the revelatory word of God, whether this word predicts the future or declares God's commands. Prophecy in its most basic form is a "forth-telling" of the revelatory truth of God. Prediction of the future indeed will occur, but it functions secondarily to the essence of prophecy.

(5) The fifth foundational passage on prophecy is found in **Deuteronomy 18**. This passage reads like a section from a Hebrew version of Roget's *Thesaurus*. Every possible word describing a method by which men might attempt to determine, control, or predict the future is designated as an abomination to the Lord. Any proposed substitution for the revelatory Word of God that comes through his prophet must be utterly rejected.

In today's pluralistic society, people find it almost impossible to express a categorical "no" to any form of experience promoted in a devotional atmosphere by Christians. But God's Word says "no."

An unyielding resistance is required of the people of God with respect to any proposed substitutions for the divinely inspired prophetic Word. In this case, God's people must speak with an absolute negation. No exception shall be allowed. Every form of non-biblical prophecy must be roundly condemned. Any effort to substitute man's fallible word for the divinely inspired prophetic Word must be rejected.

This passage further declares that in the future a

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“prophet” like Moses shall arise. This expectation anticipates in part the long history of prophetism in Israel that developed after Moses. In response to the continuous stream of false prophets that would develop in history, the Lord would raise up true prophets to give answer to their false counterparts. Ω

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Signs and Wonders: A Postscript

The thesis of an earlier article (*Session to Session*, Vol. 3, No. 4) attempted to show that there is a curious affinity between the theonomic and charismatic movements which may be explained, in part, by their similar approaches to the interpretation and application of Scripture. In that article, the statement was made that “theonomists have a radical principle of unity which fails to distinguish any historical uniqueness in the various epochs of redemption.” While the statement appears to us to be accurate as one encounters popular theonomic teaching and practice, it ought to be modified with regard to more careful theonomists. It would be more accurate to say “theonomists have a radical principle of unity which fails to distinguish adequately the historical uniqueness in the various epochs of redemption.” This modification does not, in our view, affect the thesis of the original article. —The Editors

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