

TOWARD A
PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY OF
PREACHING

EDITED BY
LEE ROY MARTIN



CPT Press
Cleveland, Tennessee

FIRE IN THE BONES: PENTECOSTAL PROPHETIC PREACHING

Lee Roy Martin*

If I say I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name, there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. — Jeremiah 20.9

Introduction

Soon after God called me to preach, I stopped by the church parsonage to visit with my pastor, Rev. Dewey F. Miller, and to get his advice about my preaching. I was interested particularly in learning the appropriate method for choosing a sermon topic. Pastor Miller was not in, but his wife was there. Sister Miller was a great preacher in her own right, so I proceeded to ask her my question: ‘The Bible supplies an endless number of preaching topics; so how do I know what I should preach? How do *you* decide what to preach?’ Without any hesitation, she replied earnestly: ‘I pray until the Lord lays a burden on my heart that is so strong I cannot get away from it. That burden becomes the message that I preach’. I did not know it at the time, but Sister Miller’s words were my first introduction to what I am calling here ‘prophetic preaching’.

I was mentored in prophetic preaching not only by Rev. Cleo Miller, but also by Rev. Mae Terry, a woman evangelist who had planted my home church in the 1940’s. Sister Terry was a genuine

* Lee Roy Martin (DTh, University of South Africa) is Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, TN, USA.

prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament, and her models were Isaiah and Jeremiah. She remarked often that her ministry was patterned after that of Jeremiah, who was appointed ‘to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant’ (Jer. 1.10).¹ When criticized for being too loud (inappropriate especially for a woman), she would add that her mode of preaching conformed to Isaiah’s injunction: ‘Cry aloud, do not hold back, lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins’ (Isa. 58.1). My perspective on prophetic preaching was shaped by these mentors, combined with my observations of other prophetic Pentecostal preachers and in conjunction with my study of the biblical prophets.²

In this chapter, I will describe what I have come to regard as the chief characteristics of Pentecostal prophetic preaching. Prophetic preaching, as I understand it, does not consist necessarily in foretelling the future or preaching about the last days. Furthermore, it can not be reduced to social criticism.³ For purposes of this chapter, prophetic preaching is preaching that finds its model in the proclamation of the biblical prophets. Therefore, my discussion will unfold in two steps. First, I will develop a broad working definition of prophecy. Second, I will suggest a number of key correspondences between the biblical model of prophecy and Pentecostal preaching.

Defining Prophecy

The word ‘prophecy’ is difficult to define precisely.⁴ It displays a wide range of meanings throughout Scripture, in history, and in

¹ Biblical quotations are translations of the author.

² I could point to well-known Church of God ministers Ray H. Hughes and F.J. May as exemplary prophetic preachers. Through his campmeeting preaching and his instruction at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary, May influenced a generation of preachers. Ray Hughes’ own monograph on preaching, *Pentecostal Preaching* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1981), includes an entire chapter devoted to prophetic preaching (pp. 129-46). However, while Hughes would seem to characterize all Pentecostal preaching as prophetic, I would limit prophetic preaching to only one model among many models of Pentecostal preaching.

³ John Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, *The Spirit & Church* 3.1 (May 2001), pp. 27-46 (pp. 34-36), points out that the primary audience of the biblical prophets was the people of God, not the world outside the faith community.

⁴ Cf. Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, p. 27.

contemporary usage; therefore, it is impossible to formulate a single definition that is appropriate to every context. In the Bible, prophecy can refer to the books of the Bible (2 Pet. 1.19-21; Rev. 22.18-19), glossolalia (Acts 2.16-18), songs of praise (Exod. 15.20; 1 Sam. 10.5), divine instruction (Judg. 4.6; 2 Sam. 12.25), predictions of future events (1 Kgs 16.12; 20.13; 22.17; Acts 21.10-11), and performance on musical instruments (1 Chron. 25.1). Prophecy can even be expressed through symbolic actions like tearing a garment (1 Kgs 11.29-31), wearing an animal mask (1 Kgs 22.11-12), marrying a prostitute (Hos. 1.2), giving symbolic names to children (Hos. 1.3-9), walking naked (Isa. 20.1-3), wearing a yoke (Jer. 27.1-12), cooking over dried dung (Ezek. 4.9-17), and tying one's hands and feet (Acts 21.10-11).

The ministries of biblical prophets varied greatly. Prophets like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha were known for working miracles, signs, and wonders, while other prophets were not. Moses, Samuel, and Deborah were recognized as prominent leaders, but most of the prophets held no official position of power. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos exercised a public preaching ministry; while others, such as Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, and Huldah ministered mostly one-on-one. Isaiah and Jeremiah served as prophets for virtually their entire lives, but other prophets like Amos, Haggai, and Malachi apparently prophesied for short periods of time.

In the New Testament, not only were John the Baptist and Jesus Christ named as prophets, but so also were Anna (Lk. 2.36), Philip's daughters (Acts 21.9), and other early Christian leaders (Acts 11.27; 13.1; 15.32; 1 Cor. 12.28; 14.29, 32, 37; Eph. 2.20; 3.5). The gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was interpreted by Peter as the gift of prophecy for all Christians (Acts 2.16-18), and we read that when the Ephesian believers received the Holy Spirit, they prophesied (Acts 19.6). Paul writes that Christ gave prophets to the Church, along with apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4.11).

The *Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*,⁵ one of the earliest Christian documents, shows that itinerate prophets were part of the experience of the second-century church, and the continuation of

⁵ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004). For an online version, see <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html>.

prophetic gifts has been traced throughout church history.⁶ The exercise of prophecy among classical Pentecostals and Charismatics has been modeled largely after Paul's instructions to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 12-14).⁷ However, a number of new and diverse models of prophetic ministry have arisen in recent years, all of which demand the Church's discernment.⁸

⁶ See, for example, Niels Christian Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *Prophecy in Carthage: Perpetua, Tertullian, and Cyprian* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1992); Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984); *idem*, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989); *idem*, *The Holy Spirit: Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997); and Dennis Lum, 'Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition', *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 30.1 (2010), pp. 113-14.

⁷ See Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), pp. 146-280; *idem*, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, rev. edn, 2014). Yongnan Jeon Ahn, 'Prophecy in the Pauline Communities', *The Spirit and Church* 3.1 (May 2001), pp. 71-95; *idem*, *Interpretation of Tongues and Prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12-14* (JPTSUP 41; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2013). On Pentecostal-Charismatic prophecy, see Meredith B. McGuire, 'Social Context of Prophecy: "Word-Gifts" of the Spirit among Catholic Pentecostals', *Review of Religious Research* 18.2 (1977), pp. 134-47; William Kay, *Prophecy!* (Mattersey, UK: LifeStream Publications, 1991); *idem*, 'Perspectives on Prophecy', *Paraclete* 26.1 (1992), pp. 1-7; Mark J. Cartledge, 'Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994), pp. 79-120; John McKay, 'Pentecost and History', *The Spirit and Church* 3.1 (May 2001), pp. 113-28; and Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, 'Prosperity and Prophecy in African Pentecostalism', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20.2 (2011), pp. 291-305.

⁸ Given the diversity of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement and the lack of a universal structure for overseeing the churches and ministers, claims of prophetic gifts can sometimes get out of hand and border on the bizarre. Works that illustrate today's broad range of viewpoints regarding prophetic ministry include Jacob D. Dodson, 'Gifted for Change: The Evolving Vision for Tongues, Prophecy, and Other Charisms in American Pentecostal Churches', *Studies in World Christianity* 17 (2011), pp. 50-71; R. Loren Sandford, *The Prophetic Church: Wielding the Power to Change the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2009); S.S. Maimela, *The Emergence of the Church's Prophetic Ministry: An Essay on Modern Trends in Theology* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Skotaville Publishers, 1990); Clifford S. Hill, *Prophecy, Past and Present: An Exploration of the Prophetic Ministry in the Bible and the Church Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1st American edn, 1991); John Eckhardt, *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Power* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1st edn, 2010); John S. Huckle, 'The Contemporary Use of the Gift of Prophecy in Gatherings of Christians in Comparison with Their Use in the 20th Century', *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 29.1 (2009), pp. 72-86; Rick Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry* (Charlotte, NC: Morning Star Publications, 1997); and C. Peter Wagner, *7 Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005).

Despite the uniqueness of each biblical prophet and the many ways that prophecy is manifested in Scripture and in church history, scholars continue to search for a core definition of prophecy by elaborating on the common characteristics of biblical (and post-biblical) prophecy. Four writers in particular have defined prophecy in ways that intersect with Pentecostal preaching. These helpful discussions of prophecy have come from celebrated Jewish author Abraham J. Heschel, renowned Old Testament scholars Walter Brueggemann and John Goldingay, and eminent Pentecostal scholar Rickie D. Moore.

Abraham J. Heschel

No one comes closer to describing the heart of the prophetic experience than Abraham Heschel.⁹ At a time when scholars portrayed the Old Testament prophets as either guardians of traditions, religious innovators, social reformers, passive receivers of revelation, or psychologically disturbed visionaries, Heschel expounds a perspective on the prophets that goes against virtually every scholarly and popular view. He argues that the prophets are best understood as bearers of the pathos of God. Heschel writes,

... the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a *sympathy with the divine pathos*, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos ... The prophet hears God's voice and feels His heart. He tries to impart the pathos of the message together with its logos. As an imparter his soul overflows, speaking as he does out of the fullness of his sympathy.¹⁰

According to Heschel, the prophet is not a mere passive recipient of revelation, who then preaches a rote message to the listeners. Instead, 'The prophet claims to be far more than a messenger. He is a person who stands in the presence of God ... who is a participant, as it were, in the council of God'.¹¹ On the one hand, as a

⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1962). Heschel's insights are applied to the experience of Hosea in Scott Ellington, 'When God Gets too Close for Comfort: Hosea's Prophetic Ministry of Sharing God's Suffering', *The Spirit & Church* 3.1 (May 2001), pp. 5-26.

¹⁰ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 26 (emphasis original).

¹¹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 21; cf. p. 25.

partner with God, the prophet embodies God's passions (love, hate, anger, disgust, joy, hope) toward God's people and suffers with God. On the other hand, as an Israelite, the prophet endures rebuke, alienation, and exile with the people of God. To be a prophet is not a task to be checked off or a role that can be picked up on one day and ignored on the next day; rather, it is an all-consuming vocation. Consequently, Heschel can write that Jeremiah experienced 'the overwhelming impact of the divine pathos upon his mind and heart, completely involving and gripping his personality in its depths, and the unrelieved distress which sprang from his intimate involvement'.¹²

Walter Brueggemann

Just as clearly as Heschel describes the experience and consciousness of the prophets, Walter Brueggemann sets forth their essential goal and message. Brueggemann resists the common reductionistic stereotypes of the prophets as either predictors of the future (a Fundamentalist approach) or social reformers (a Liberal approach). He argues that even though the prophets often foretell future events, 'they are concerned about the future as it impinges upon the present'.¹³ Furthermore, he acknowledges that prophecy demonstrates deep concern for society, but it 'cannot be reduced to righteous indignation'.¹⁴ Therefore, Brueggemann insists, '*The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us*'.¹⁵ This work is accomplished through two basic forms of the prophetic message: prophetic 'criticizing' of the 'dominant consciousness' and prophetic 'energizing' of the community of faith. The prophet, therefore, encourages the community both to envision and to move toward an alternative world of justice and righteousness in which God is the central and determining factor. Brueggemann concludes that all acts of ministry (not just preaching) should be 'seen as elements of the one prophetic ministry of formation and reformation of alternative community'.¹⁶

¹² Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 26.

¹³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 12.

¹⁴ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 13 (emphasis original).

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 14.

Brueggemann insists that prophetic proclamation is a challenge to the dominant worldview that God is either remote and uninvolved in the world or a domesticated God who exists to serve our agendas. The prophets declare that the world of self-reliance, autonomy, and death stands in rebellious opposition to God. The message of the prophets, then, combats the apathetic ‘numbness’ of God’s people, forcing them to embrace the pain and to lament the loss incurred by judgment.¹⁷ Once the people have passed through the experience of grief, the prophet then generates hope through the creative vision of newness, a newness that is ultimately embodied in the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁸ The new, redemptive, and just community is a gift of God, who is a genuine participant in the life of the world.

John Goldingay

John Goldingay argues that prophetic ministry is not limited to the biblical period but continues in the church today. He points to Joel 2.28-29 as evidence that ‘the exercise of prophecy will be a feature of the full life that God intends for the chosen people of God’.¹⁹ Goldingay outlines the ministry of the prophet in nine points. First, he points out that ‘A Prophet Shares God’s Nightmares and Dreams’.²⁰ That is, the message of the prophet is not generated by the prophet’s political observations or religious acumen, but it is revealed to the prophet from God. Therefore, the prophet communicates God’s message to the people of God. The message, whether threatening judgment or offering hope, is a creative re-statement of Israel’s earlier story.

Second, in positing that ‘A Prophet Speaks like a Poet and Behaves like an Actor’,²¹ Goldingay highlights the imaginative methods of the prophets. Prophetic messages are couched in the symbolic language of imagery and figures of speech. In addition to their use of metaphorical language, they often utilize symbolic actions that are sometimes shocking.

¹⁷ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, pp. 44-61. This point reflects Brueggemann’s engagement with Heschel.

¹⁸ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, pp. 62-79, and 96-108.

¹⁹ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, p. 28. Cf. Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, p. 4.

²⁰ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 28-31.

²¹ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 31-32.

Third, ‘A Prophet Confronts the Confident with Rebuke and the Downcast with Hope’.²² Echoing Brueggemann’s terminology of prophetic ‘criticizing’ and prophetic ‘energizing’, Goldingay explains the twofold mode of prophetic speech that is implied in Jeremiah’s call to ‘tear down’ and to ‘build up’.

Fourth, Goldingay declares that ‘A Prophet’s Task Is Mostly to Speak to the People of God’.²³ Popular (and sometimes scholarly) perspectives on the prophets have mistakenly viewed prophecy as a critique of secular culture; however, the biblical text shows that the prophet’s primary audience was the people of God.

Fifth, ‘A Prophet Is Someone Independent of the Institutional Pressures of Church and State’,²⁴ which means that the prophet was not beholden to kings, priests, and nobility. The kings apparently employed advisors who were called ‘court prophets’, but prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Jeremiah were ‘not on the payroll’.²⁵ Therefore, they had the freedom to confront the authorities.

Sixth, because s/he embodies the authority of the almighty God, ‘A Prophet Is a Scary Person Who Mediates the Activity of a Scary God’.²⁶ God’s majesty, awesomeness, and power are projected through the life and ministry of the prophet.

Seventh, ‘A Prophet Intercedes with Boldness and Praises with Freedom’.²⁷ The prophet mediates between heaven and earth, and, sometimes, that role requires the prophet to intercede on behalf of the people of God. As a member of God’s ‘cabinet’,²⁸ the prophet’s influence is felt by God.

Eighth, ‘A Prophet Ministers in a Way that Reflects His or Her Personality and Time’.²⁹ Although the prophets speak words that are given to them by God, their words take on the personality and character of the individual prophet and/or the character of the prophetic community to which the prophet belongs.

Ninth, and finally, ‘A Prophet is Likely to Fail’. When Goldingay speaks of failure, he means two things. First, the prophet is fallible

²² Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 33-34.

²³ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 34-36.

²⁴ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 36-39.

²⁵ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, p. 37.

²⁶ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 40-41.

²⁷ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 41-42.

²⁸ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, p. 42.

²⁹ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 42-44.

and liable to make mistakes. Second, the message of the prophet often goes largely unheeded when it is spoken; consequently, the prophet suffers at the hands of rebellious hearers. However, the message can benefit later generations who may learn not to imitate the stubbornness of their ancestors.³⁰

Rickie D. Moore

According to Rickie D. Moore, the Old Testament prophet fulfills the complicated and connected roles of ‘messenger’, ‘minstrel’, ‘madman’, ‘martyr’, and ‘mentor’.³¹ The prophet’s primary role as messenger can be discerned from the Hebrew word for prophet (נביא), which, Moore argues, can mean both ‘one who is called’ and ‘one who calls’ (that is, speaks forth God’s message). The role of messenger is further illuminated by the common prophetic use of the phrase ‘thus saith the Lord’, which scholars call the ‘Messenger Formula’.

If the prophet is a messenger, then the prophet’s message can be described by three terms: ‘word of the Lord’, ‘vision’, and ‘burden’. According to Moore, the word of the Lord (דבר יהוה) is more than ‘information’ but is an experience of ‘transformation’ that comes powerfully to the prophet as a divine encounter.³² The word ‘vision’ (חזיון), which can be used of individual revelatory experiences or of the entire corpus of a prophet’s work (cf. Isa. 1.1), suggests that ‘all of the discrete revelations that came to the prophet ... come together to generate, to comprise, and to reflect an overarching perspective, a kind of God-induced view of reality or world view’.³³ The third term, ‘burden’ (בטא), is ‘a heaviness that is carried before (and sometimes after) it becomes a message that is delivered’.³⁴ Through the process of prophetic revelation, God is transforming the prophet, infusing the prophet with God’s passions (cf. Heschel).

³⁰ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 44-46.

³¹ The first four roles are described in Rick D. Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling: An Old Testament Profile and Its Relevance for Today’, *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 24 (2004), pp. 16-29. The role of mentor is explained in *idem*, ‘The Prophet as Mentor: A Crucial Facet of the Biblical Presentations of Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah’, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15.2 (April 2007), pp. 155-73. The articles are reprinted in *idem*, *The Spirit of the Old Testament*, (JPTS^{Sup} 35; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2011), pp. 56-68 and 69-85.

³² Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling’, p. 18.

³³ Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling’, p. 19.

³⁴ Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling’, p. 20.

Moore argues that the prophet's communication of God's passions is cast appropriately in poetic forms. Therefore, the prophet can be called a 'minstrel'.³⁵ The creative, emotive, and illusive language of poetry is perfectly fitted for expressing the passionate message of the prophets.

The strange speech and abnormal behavior of the prophets leads to the charge that the prophet is a 'madman'.³⁶ Moore cites biblical texts like Hos. 9.7, 'the prophet is a fool; the man of the Spirit is mad', to show that the accusation of madness is not uncommon. The madness of the prophets originates in their possession by the Spirit of God, which lifts them into God's presence, into God's sanity. God's sanity, however, is insanity to the prophet's hearers.

The uncompromising message of the prophet often results in persecution, and even execution, by the audience. Thus, Moore declares the prophet to be a 'martyr', one who is killed for the sake of his or her witness (in the Greek sense of the word *μάρτυς*). The prophet, however, is a martyr in still another sense. The prophet's dramatic encounter with God is an apocalyptic event that effectively ends the prophet's life as it was before the encounter. No one can see God and live; therefore, the prophets die because they witness God.

In assigning to the prophet the role of mentor, Moore argues that the popular characterization of the prophet as a lonely and isolated figure who has little to no contact with society results from a misunderstanding of the biblical text.³⁷ He finds evidence from the biblical portrayals of Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah that the prophets were surrounded by colleagues and followers who supported the prophetic ministry and who participated in carrying on the prophetic tradition. For example, the book of Deuteronomy demonstrates that Moses was profoundly concerned to mentor the next generation.³⁸ Another example is Elijah, who mentored Elisha and a group of disciples who are called 'the sons of the prophets'. Finally, the book of Isaiah is structured in a fashion that emphasizes the mentoring of subsequent generations, the 'holy seed' (Isa. 6.13).³⁹

³⁵ Moore, 'The Prophetic Calling', pp. 21-23.

³⁶ Moore, 'The Prophetic Calling', pp. 24-26.

³⁷ Moore, 'The Prophet as Mentor', p. 156.

³⁸ Moore, 'The Prophet as Mentor', pp. 157-61.

³⁹ Moore, 'The Prophet as Mentor', pp. 161-64.

Prophetic Preaching

Among the biblical prophets, those whom we call the Latter Prophets (Isaiah-Malachi) are the most notable as preachers. For these Latter Prophets, biblical prophecy is largely the preaching of a message from God by means of a special messenger who is called a prophet. However, it is clear from biblical and historical precedents that the concept of prophecy is much broader than preaching alone. Therefore, the Evangelical cessationist view that reduces prophecy to preaching has no warrant in the biblical text.⁴⁰ I conclude from the above discussion that even though preaching and prophecy overlap at certain points, not all prophecy is preaching, and not all preaching is prophecy. The purpose of this chapter is to examine those places where prophecy and preaching overlap and to develop from those intersections a theology of Pentecostal prophetic preaching.

The observant Pentecostal reader has, no doubt, already taken note of numerous ways that the works of Heschel, Brueggemann,⁴¹ Goldingay, and Moore might bear upon the subject of prophetic preaching. While I cannot address here every one of those connections, I will discuss what I consider to be the most crucial elements of Pentecostal prophetic preaching, organized under the following headings: Prophetic Calling, Prophetic Message, Prophetic Passion, Prophetic Artistry, and Prophetic Community.

Prophetic Calling

The biblical prophets experienced dramatic encounters with God that ‘radically transformed’ them and initiated their entrance into prophetic ministry.⁴² These encounters are reported in the form of call narratives that bear similarities to the testimonies of many Pentecostal preachers. Moses, the paradigmatic Old Testament prophet,

⁴⁰ Cf. Gerald T. Sheppard, ‘Prophecy: From Ancient Israel to Pentecostals at the End of the Modern Age’, *The Spirit & Church* 3.1 (May 2001), pp. 47-70 (p. 64); Ahn, ‘Prophecy in the Pauline Communities’, pp. 77-87; and Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (JPTSUP 21; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 36-37.

⁴¹ Brueggemann has followed up his studies on the prophets with a recent work that describes what he understands to be a Christian approach to prophetic preaching. See Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012).

⁴² Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 28.

heard the voice of God from the midst of a burning bush. There, on the back side of the desert, God called Moses and sent him to Egypt where he would bring the Israelites out of bondage. Moses questioned and resisted the call, but God persisted and assured Moses, saying, 'I will be with you' (Exod. 3.12). In his role as prophet, Moses would represent God to Pharaoh and to the Israelites. Isaiah's equally impressive calling took place in the context of the temple. Isaiah saw a majestic and glorious God 'sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up', engulfed in smoke, and surrounded by reverential seraphim who praised God's holiness (Isa. 6.14). Isaiah was cleansed through the scorching of his lips with a hot coal from the altar, and then he was commissioned as the Lord's messenger to deliver the prophetic word. Jeremiah's calling, while not as dramatic as that of Moses or Isaiah, was no less powerful. In a visionary experience, Jeremiah was told that he had been set apart as a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1.4-19). Like Moses, Jeremiah objected strongly to the call, but the Lord would not be refused.⁴³ Heschel comments on the prophetic call, alluding to Jeremiah's experience:

The call to be a prophet is more than an invitation. It is first of all a feeling of being enticed, of acquiescence or willing surrender. But this winsome feeling is only one aspect of the experience. The other aspect is a sense of being ravished or carried away by violence, of yielding to overpowering force against one's own will. The prophet feels both the attraction and the coercion of God, the appeal and the pressure, the charm and the stress. He is conscious of both voluntary identification and forced capitulation.⁴⁴

Ezekiel received his calling while living among the exiles in Babylon. He introduces his call narrative with these words: 'Now it happened ... that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God' (Ezek. 1.1). God appeared in a whirlwind, riding upon a mobile throne, carried by four cherubim. It was a vision of 'the glory of the Lord' (Ezek. 1.28) out of which the Lord commissioned Ezekiel to be a prophet to Israel.

⁴³ The significance of Jeremiah's calling is explored by Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 18-21.

⁴⁴ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 114.

Powerful call narratives are not limited to the Old Testament. The baptism of Jesus bears similarities to the pattern found in the earlier prophetic encounters (Mt. 3.13-17). Furthermore, the calling of the apostle Paul is equal in splendor to that of Moses, Isaiah, or Ezekiel (Acts 9.1-20).⁴⁵

The prophetic calling fills the preacher with a compelling urge to proclaim the divine word.⁴⁶ The apostle Paul declares, ‘Although I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me. Yes, woe is unto me, if I do not preach the gospel’ (1 Cor. 9.16). When Peter and John were ordered by the Jewish authorities to cease preaching about Jesus, they replied, ‘We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard’ (Acts 4.20). The prophet Amos writes, ‘The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who can refuse to prophesy?’ (Amos 3.8). When Amos was ordered to prophesy no more at Bethel, he responded, ‘I am not a prophet, neither a prophet’s son ... but the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel’ (Amos 7.12-15). Early Pentecostal leader, A.J. Tomlinson, wrote in his diary of a similar compulsion to preach: ‘The Holy Ghost put a great yearning in our hearts to go and teach and preach the gospel that souls might be saved’.⁴⁷

Jeremiah, seeking relief from constant opposition, criticism, and defiance, decides that he will refrain from further preaching. He writes, ‘I said I would not mention him, or speak any more in his name, but there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot’ (Jer. 20.9). On the one hand, prophetic preaching produces intense opposition, and the prophet suffers as a consequence.⁴⁸ On the other hand, any attempt to refrain from preaching produces an acute in-

⁴⁵ I would certainly acknowledge that not every minister experiences the kind of extraordinary calling event that characterizes the prophets, but then not every minister is called to a prophetic ministry either.

⁴⁶ Cf. Hubert Black, ‘Clarifying the Call’, in Robert E. Fisher (ed.) *Pressing toward the Mark* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1983), pp. 9-26 (p. 17).

⁴⁷ A.J. Tomlinson, *The Diary of A.J. Tomlinson: 1901-1924* (The Church of God Movement Heritage Series; Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2012), p. 18.

⁴⁸ Cf. Rickie Moore’s designation of the prophet as a ‘martyr’ in Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling’, pp. 26-27.

ner fever, resulting in even more severe suffering. In either case, the prophet is likely to experience times of excruciating emotional pain.

Not unlike the biblical prophets, many Pentecostal preachers have received their callings through remarkable encounters with God. Recounting her call experience, Cora A. Nelson, writes, “This was in 1904. I began to fast and pray for more power. On the fourth day of fasting and prayer at 9 o’clock in the morning, Aug. 27, Jesus appeared to me ... He said to me, I have chosen you to preach my Gospel.”⁴⁹ In one testimony after another, Pentecostal ministers have related their call narratives, telling how they were set apart as preachers of God’s Word. Many of these preachers have testified to resisting the call and even running away from it, but they could not escape the forceful work of the Holy Spirit.

I am well aware that other traditions also bear witness to powerful experiences of calling; but for Pentecostals, the call narrative often includes an element not found in other traditions – the experience of spirit baptism. Spirit baptism is the quintessential prophetic encounter that transforms the believer,⁵⁰ resulting in a reordering of all of life in terms of a derivative apocalyptic spirituality.⁵¹ On the day of Pentecost, Peter connected the reception of the Spirit with the continuation of prophecy. After being filled with the Spirit, Peter stands and says,

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants and on my maid servants I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy (Acts 2.16-18).

Furthermore, Pentecostals would also want to appropriate the connection between the Holy Spirit and prophecy that is found in Num. 11.25; 24.2; 1 Sam. 10.6; Isa. 61.1; Joel 2.28-29; Ezek. 2.2; 11.5; 37.1; Zech. 7.12; 1 Chron. 12.18; 2 Chron. 15.1; 20.14; 24.20;

⁴⁹ Cora A. Nelson, ‘From Sin to My Pentecost’, *Church of God Evangel* 5.39 (Sept. 26, 1914), pp. 6-7 (p. 7).

⁵⁰ See again Moore, *The Spirit of the Old Testament*, pp. 58-59. See also Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, pp. 23-26.

⁵¹ Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), pp. 50-63.

Neh. 9.30; Acts 19.1-6; 1 Cor. 12.8-10; and 14.1-5, 39. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the preacher is enabled to proclaim a Spirit-inspired message with boldness and effectiveness.

The prophetic preacher's experience of divine calling serves several important functions. First, for the prophet, the call is the end of one life and the beginning of another; it is the initiation to ministry. The call experience is the necessary divine ordination and authorization for ministry. Second, the testimony of call is a sign to the community. The fact that Scripture records many prophetic call narratives suggests their importance for the faith community. Furthermore, those who were called would sometimes use their calling as a way of establishing their credentials. When Moses arrived in Egypt, he immediately reported to the Israelites his experience at the burning bush. One of the most notable elements in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles is the repetition of Paul's testimony regarding his call on the road to Damascus. Not only was the experience valuable for Paul, but it carried authority in the Christian community and beyond. Third, a clear sense of calling provides stability and assurance to the prophet when challenges arise. Just as Jeremiah faced opposition, so will all prophetic preachers.⁵² Fourth, the divine call is a transformative, apocalyptic encounter that effectively destroys and then rebuilds the prophet (cf. Isa. 6.5, 'Woe is me, for I am undone!'). As Heschel puts it, 'The prophets must have been shattered by some cataclysmic experience in order to be able to shatter others'.⁵³ Fifth, the divine encounter makes the prophet a fertile field in which the germination of prophetic messages can take root and grow. The prophet's call is only the initial prophetic experience, but it opens the prophet to the possibility of further revelations and messages.

Prophetic Message

The Prophetic Message Originates in God, Not in the Prophet.

As an indication that they were messengers of God and that the message did not originate with them, the prophets often prefaced their proclamations with the Messenger Formula: 'Thus says the Lord ...' (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה). At other times they would conclude their

⁵² Cf. Black, 'Clarifying the Call', p. 24.

⁵³ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 12.

message with the words, ‘... declares the Lord’ (נאם יהוה). More than 240 times in the Old Testament, the prophetic message is characterized as ‘the word of the Lord’ (דבר יהוה), a designation which strengthens the prophetic claim to inspiration.⁵⁴

Prophetic revelation is also called a ‘vision’ (חזיון), as we find in Isa. 1.1, ‘The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem ...’ Prophetic vision is the transformation of the prophet’s view of the world. Instead of seeing the world from the human perspective, the prophet is enabled to see the world from God’s perspective.⁵⁵ Heschel argues, therefore, that ‘prophecy consists in the inspired communication of divine attitudes to the prophetic consciousness’.⁵⁶

Anyone who claimed to be a prophet but preached something other than the Lord’s message came under God’s judgment. In Jeremiah’s day, the Lord warned the people about deceitful prophets. The Lord said, ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility. They speak a vision out of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord’ (Jer. 23.16).

In pursuit of the prophetic ideal, Pentecostal preachers have preferred to call their preaching a ‘message’ rather than a ‘sermon’. Furthermore, they have traditionally relied upon the Holy Spirit to supply them with the inspired message appropriate to each unique occasion. The following entry in A.J. Tomlinson’s diary illustrates the Pentecostal practice:

I had been waiting on God all morning for a message for the meeting. Could get nothing. Meeting commenced. I felt all broken up ... and knelt in prayer ... God gave a message from the life of Joseph. The Holy Ghost and fire fell upon us and we had an old fashioned Pentecost.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ It should be noted, however, that the ‘word of the Lord’ consists of much more than words, as Rickie Moore has pointed out. The phrase refers to the entire revelatory experience of the prophet, which may include dreams, visions, and life experiences such as Hosea’s marriage. See Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling’, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁵ Cf. Moore, *The Prophetic Calling*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, p. 223.

⁵⁷ Tomlinson, *The Diary of A.J. Tomlinson: 1901-1924*, p. 13. Cf. Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching*, p. 144.

On another occasion, Tomlinson writes, ‘Tuesday night was rainy and only a few came out, but I delivered the message He gave me’.⁵⁸ Cora A. Nelson, in her narrative mentioned above, goes on to testify that Jesus not only called her to preach, but he also pointed her to Colossians 3 as the text for her first message. She went to church that night; and the pastor, without knowing her story, invited her to preach. She stood up and preached from Colossians 3 as the Lord had instructed her.⁵⁹ My own experience coincides with that of other Pentecostal preachers, and my first message was given to me in a dream. I awoke from the dream and wrote down the outline for a message entitled, ‘The Works of the Flesh and the Fruit of the Spirit’, based upon Gal. 5.16-26. I preached the message the next Tuesday night at a worship service that took place in a home in Alpharetta, GA.

Pentecostal preachers continue to use prophetic terminology when describing their ministry. For example, as I was writing this chapter, I was pleased to hear Dr. Welton Wriston introduce his chapel sermon with the following words:

I have a message for you this morning that the Lord has laid on my heart for several months ... You know, as a person who is called to preach, ... You know when God deposits something in your spirit, and you know when God will not let you get away from it.⁶⁰

Wriston’s personal disclosure reflects his thoroughgoing Pentecostal traditioning. For a prophetic preacher, the sermon must be a message that God has ‘laid on’ the heart, a message that the prophet cannot ‘get away from’.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Tomlinson, *The Diary of A.J. Tomlinson: 1901-1924*, p. 45.

⁵⁹ Nelson, ‘From Sin to My Pentecost’, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Welton Wriston, ‘Tithing (Mal. 3:8-12)’ (Chapel Sermon; Cleveland, TN: Pentecostal Theological Seminary, Apr. 2, 2015). <https://vimeo.com/124343450>.

⁶¹ Sheppard, ‘Prophecy: From Ancient Israel to Pentecostals’, p. 64, seems to suggest that prophetic preaching has more to do with the Spirit’s work during the act of sermon delivery. He writes that preaching may be prophetic ‘when the preacher feels like a channel of the Holy Spirit and words seem to flow in an effortless manner’. I would not agree that the delivery of a prophetic message is necessarily any more ‘effortless’ than any other well-prepared sermon. However, I certainly understand and appreciate the times when the Holy Spirit moves powerfully and makes preaching both easy and effective.

Although both Tomlinson and Wriston stick with the term ‘message’, Pentecostals also speak of the prophetic word as a ‘burden’, which is still another Old Testament prophetic label. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Nahum, Zechariah, and Malachi all describe their messages as a ‘burden’ (מִשָּׂא). Although some translations understand the word to mean ‘oracle’, the Hebrew comes from the verb ‘to lift or carry’ (נָשָׂא), and it is used in various places with the literal meaning of ‘a burden or load that is carried by a person or animal’. For example, the priestly sons of Kohath are assigned the ‘burden’ of transporting the tabernacle (Num. 4.15). All of this suggests that the prophetic burden is a responsibility that is to be carried by the prophet until it is delivered to the intended audience.⁶²

Pentecostal prophetic preaching, therefore, is more than a sermon; it is an inspired message, given for a specific time and place, a word from the Lord. Therefore, while study is necessary in building an effective sermon, and knowledge of the times and context is essential for making the sermon relevant, neither study nor insight can give birth to a prophetic message.⁶³

The Prophetic Message Is a Biblical Message.

The fresh messages of the biblical prophets were grounded in the Torah of Moses; and, in corresponding fashion, the Pentecostal prophetic message is rooted soundly in Scripture. Prophetic preaching is scriptural preaching, and it should focus on the biblical text.⁶⁴ Brueggemann contends that prophecy, though creative and imaginative, is not a ‘personal invention. Rather, these poets probe and mine the tradition in ways that cause the old tradition to articulate a newness.’⁶⁵ Similarly, John Goldingay argues that prophetic messages are creative restatements of Israel’s earlier story.⁶⁶ Therefore,

⁶² Cf. Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling’, p. 20.

⁶³ David S. Bishop, ‘A Competent Workman’, in Robert E. Fisher (ed.) *Pressing toward the Mark* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1983), pp. 27-59 (p. 27), explains that prophetic inspiration does not exclude study: ‘Studied proficiency is not to be set against yielded dependence upon the Holy Spirit in ministry. They are not mutually exclusive.’ Cf. Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching*, p. 132.

⁶⁴ Cf. Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, pp. 1-2. Cf. Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching*, p. 136.

⁶⁵ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, p. 31.

each prophetic message can be new, unique, and contextual, while, at the same time, remaining faithful to the scriptural tradition.

The prophets reimagined the Torah for their context, and today's prophetic preacher must do the same. All faithful preaching is the proclamation God's Word, but prophetic preaching is God's Word for the present context – given by the Holy Spirit for a particular moment and for a particular audience. Often, the new message is compared to the old by way of analogy, as in Hebrews 3, where the writer of Hebrews links the exodus and Moses to the situation of the early Hebrew congregation. In light of the story of the exodus, the hearers of the book of Hebrews are admonished to receive God's Word by faith and to continue forward in their journey to the promised land.

The Prophetic Message Situates God at the Center.

Not only can prophetic preaching be described in terms of its origin in God and its focus on Scripture, it can be described in terms of its content. Much of today's preaching consists of reflection on current events, self-help advice, and inspirational anecdotes that paints the Christian faith as utilitarian and consumer-oriented. Prophetic preaching, however, deals with deeper and more urgent matters. Brueggemann writes, 'At the center of prophetic imagination is YHWH' as an active agent in the world.⁶⁷ Consequently, he defines prophetic preaching as 'an attempt to imagine the world as though YHWH – the creator of the world, the deliverer of Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we Christians come to name as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – were a real character and an effective agent in the world'.⁶⁸ Brueggemann's thesis that God is 'a real character and an effective agent in the world' is easily confessed by Pentecostals and might even be considered to be the heart of Pentecostal epistemology and the core message of Pentecostal preaching.

God's personal involvement in the life of the world and in the life of God's people is the message of the Torah. The world is God's world, created by God and for God; and Israel is God's people, also created by God for God. The Torah stands in stark contrast to the world's 'dominant narrative' and contends that the 'dominant narrative of the world is not adequate and so cannot be

⁶⁷ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, p. 42.

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, p. 2.

true' because it omits the character of YHWH, without which there is no authentic life or viable hope.⁶⁹ The Torah states the 'ethos' of Israel as a people separated unto the Lord; and, as such, is a definitional statement about the character of the community.⁷⁰ The Torah is a given and not negotiable among new generations. The Torah requires Israel to be a new kind of community, an 'alternative community'.⁷¹ The alternative community created through the Mosaic covenant is a community of justice and righteousness in which God is the central and determining factor.

The Prophetic Message May Point to Judgment or Salvation.

The prophetic work of revisioning the Torah is accomplished through two basic forms of the prophetic message: prophetic 'criticizing' of the 'dominant consciousness' and prophetic 'energizing' of the community of faith.⁷² Prophetic criticizing is the confronting of God's people with their violations of Torah. As long as Israel adhered to the Torah and the Mosaic covenant, they enjoyed the blessings of God and prophets were not required. However, the criticizing message of the Old Testament prophets was necessary because Israel departed from the Torah's representation of God and from Israel's commitment to the Mosaic covenant with its stipulations and consequences.

Similarly, all Christians confess their belief in the Bible and their commitment to the God of the Bible, but their lives betray their unbiblical allegiances and their acquiescence to the 'dominant narrative' of the world. Brueggemann, therefore, sees prophetic preaching as a confronting of the Church's hypocrisy⁷³ and an attempt to bring the Church back to the 'alternative consciousness' that is found in Scripture.⁷⁴ He writes,

⁶⁹ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 12.

⁷¹ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 14.

⁷² Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 14. The two modes of the prophetic message correspond to the form-critical categories of the judgment speech and the salvation speech. See, for example, Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (trans. H.C. White; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), and *idem*, *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament* (trans. K. Crim; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1991).

⁷³ Cf. Goldingay, 'Old Testament Prophecy Today', p. 33, who argues that the prophet 'Confronts the Confident with Rebuke'.

⁷⁴ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 13.

Prophetic proclamation is the staging and performance of a contest between two narrative accounts of the world and an effort to show that the YHWH account of reality is more adequate and finally more reliable than the dominant narrative account that is cast among us as though it were true and beyond critique.⁷⁵

The fact that prophetic preaching contradicts the dominant narrative has been recognized by Pentecostal preachers from the beginning of the movement. Early Pentecostals were neither Fundamentalists nor Modernists but imagined an entirely different worldview. Brueggemann's perspective is a welcomed reminder, however, because many Pentecostals are now being seduced by the dominant narrative and could benefit from prophetic criticizing.⁷⁶

Prophetic criticizing may go beyond a call to return to the Torah and may consist of a word of inevitable judgment, punishment, and loss. Prophetic preaching, therefore, includes the process of lamenting and grieving over loss until the reality of loss can be faced and the old world can be relinquished. Brueggemann claims that American society either stubbornly denies the loss or has succumbed to despair, and prophetic preaching must show the pathway through grief to new possibility. The value and necessity of lament has been a significant feature of Pentecostal practice. Although the prosperity preachers make a lot of noise, they do not represent the heart of the Pentecostal tradition. Lament has played an important role in Pentecostalism, a fact that Larry McQueen has documented.⁷⁷

As soon as judgment and loss were assured by the exile, the prophets moved from criticizing to energizing. Prophetic energizing is the proclamation of hope where there seems to be no hope. In moving from judgment to salvation, the prophets no longer looked to Sinai as their primary source for prophetic imagination. Instead, they utilized the Genesis tradition with its themes of creation and promise. The story of Sarah and other barren women who were enabled to bear children were particularly useful in this regard. One

⁷⁵ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, p. 3.

⁷⁶ For a recent example of a Pentecostal alternative to the dominant narrative, see Daniela C. Augustine, *Pentecost, Hospitality, and Transfiguration: Toward a Spirit-Inspired Vision of Social Transformation* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012).

⁷⁷ Larry R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009). See also Narelle Jane Melton, 'Lessons of Lament: Reflections on the Correspondence between the Lament Psalms and Early Australian Pentecostal Prayer', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20.1 (2011), pp. 68-80.

key text is Gen. 18.13-14, where the Lord asks, ‘Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?’ The word ‘wonderful’ can be translated ‘impossible’, and Brueggemann lays out a number of prophetic texts that turn on the theme of God’s doing of ‘wonders’ or ‘that which is impossible’.⁷⁸

This newness is apparent in the New Testament story of the life, parables, and resurrection of Jesus. The prophetic preacher must be able to recognize when and how to transition from addressing judgment and loss to speaking about God’s resolve to do something new. Heschel writes,

The words of the prophets are stern, sour, stinging. But behind this austerity is love and compassion ... Almost every prophet brings consolation, promise, and the hope of reconciliation along with censure and castigation. He begins with a *message of doom*; he concludes with a *message of hope*.⁷⁹

The prophet proclaims ‘words of new possibility’ in the face of life-depleting impossibilities.⁸⁰ Brueggemann argues that ‘prophetic preaching is the enactment of hope in contexts of loss and grief. It is the declaration that God can enact a *novum* in our very midst, even when we judge that to be impossible.’⁸¹

The two-fold message of judgment and hope resonates with Pentecostal theology and recalls John Wesley’s frequent references to preaching as both wounding and healing.⁸² As a Pentecostal, I find satisfaction in Brueggemann’s structuring of prophecy in and around these dual modes of prophetic proclamation.⁸³ The heart of the Pentecostal message is the Five-fold Gospel (the proclamation of Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit-baptizer, Healer, and Soon Coming King), and embedded throughout this gospel is the challenge to relinquish that which is old and to receive that which is new. Prophetic preaching does not limit future possibilities on the basis of how things appear now. Are we lost? We can be saved. Are

⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, pp. 101-28.

⁷⁹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 12 (emphasis original).

⁸⁰ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, p. 128.

⁸¹ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, p. 110.

⁸² See, e.g. John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley* (Edited by Nehemiah Curnock; 8 Vols.; London: Robert Culley and Charles H. Kelly, 1909–1916), IV, p. 484, 499; VI, p. 165; VII, p. 248.

⁸³ Cf. Goldingay, ‘Old Testament Prophecy Today’, pp. 33-34.

we bound? We can be set free. Are we sick? We can be healed. Are we weak? We can be empowered by the Spirit!

In the Spirit, the future is open to a new vision of reality in which both individual and society may be saved, sanctified, healed, and empowered – a future in which Jesus rules as King of kings and Lord of lords. ‘For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto fountains of living waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes’ (Rev. 7.17).

Prophetic Passion

Prophetic preaching conveys more than information. As Heschel states, ‘The task of the prophet is to convey the word of God. Yet the word is aglow with the pathos.’⁸⁴ The Old Testament prophet embodies the ‘pathos’ of God, experiencing the passions of God and transmitting those divine passions to the hearers.

Rickie Moore argues that the prophetic passion has its genesis in the ‘radical theophanic encounter’ of the call experience.⁸⁵ The prophet’s vision of God produces a transformation of the affections in which God’s passions are infused into the prophet. The passions of God are further communicated to the prophet through ongoing reception of the ‘word of the Lord’, which, according to Moore, ‘is no mere *datum* of information. It is more like a *quantum of transformation*’ that happens to the prophet.⁸⁶ Therefore, the prophetic preacher is one whose affections have been radically altered by means of divine encounter.

Therefore, bearing the pathos of God, ‘The prophet ... feels fiercely’.⁸⁷ At first, the reception of God’s Word may produce a sense of joy and wonder. Reflecting on his experience, Jeremiah writes, ‘Your words were found, and I ate them; and your word was for me the joy and rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by your name, O Lord God of hosts’ (Jer. 15.16). Soon, however, the weight of the prophetic burden brings pain instead of joy, and Jeremiah complains, ‘My heart is broken within me, all my bones tremble; I am like a drunk, like one overcome by wine, Because of the Lord, and because of his holy words’ (Jer. 23.9). Prophetic preaching is the communication of both the joy and pain of God’s pathos.

⁸⁴ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 26.

⁸⁵ Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling’, p. 27.

⁸⁶ Moore, ‘The Prophetic Calling’, p. 18 (emphasis original).

⁸⁷ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 5.

The prophet experiences pathos from two directions. As the messenger of God, the prophet is filled with God's passions; but, as a member of the community, the prophet suffers along with everyone else. Heschel writes, 'In the presence of God [the prophet] takes the part of the people. In the presence of the people [the prophet] takes the part of God.'⁸⁸ The best prophetic preaching, therefore, is the communication of the pathos of God by a prophet who speaks from a position of solidarity with the people of God.

The nature and character of the prophetic message requires passionate language. When engaged in prophetic criticizing, 'The prophet's words are outbursts of violent emotions' in reaction to the evil and complacency of society.⁸⁹ Even when engaged in prophetic energizing, powerful emotive expression is called for. Prophetic preaching challenges assumptions, interrupts apathetic slumber, exposes sin and hypocrisy, and requires repentance. Dispassionate modes of discourse cannot accomplish the goals of prophetic preaching. Therefore, a prophetic message will be delivered with passion and with an abundance of affective language.⁹⁰

The affective approach, passionate delivery, and unconventional methods have caused the prophet to be 'stigmatized as a madman' by contemporaries.⁹¹ Pentecostal prophetic preachers have been abused in similar fashion and caricatured as fanatics. Although many contemporary Pentecostal preachers have adopted a more refined style of delivery, it is true historically that 'in its sermons, there has been a heavy emphasis on emotional involvement. In this sense, Pentecostal preaching may sometimes be defined as the powerful and passionate proclamation of God's good news.'⁹²

Pentecostals, however, were not the first to appreciate passionate preaching. We might join with nineteenth-century pastor Charles Spurgeon in asking,

Where are the ministers that preach? We have [ministers] that read the manuscripts, and talk essays: but is that preaching? We

⁸⁸ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 24. Cf. Goldingay's point that the prophet intercedes on behalf of the people ('Old Testament Prophecy Today', pp. 41-42).

⁸⁹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 4.

⁹⁰ Cf. Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching*, p. 144.

⁹¹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 18. Cf. Moore, 'The Prophetic Calling', pp. 24-26.

⁹² Leoh, 'A Pentecostal Preacher as an Empowered Witness', p. 45.

have [ministers] that can amuse an audience for twenty minutes. Is that preaching? Where are the [preachers] that preach their hearts out, and say their soul in every sentence? Where are [those who] make it, not a profession, but a vocation, the breath of their bodies, the marrow of their bones, the delight of their spirits? Where are the Whitefields and Wesleys now?⁹³

The goal of prophetic passion is not to entertain or to attract attention to the prophet but to transform the affections of the hearers in the same way that the prophet has been transformed.⁹⁴ Prophetic preaching is an enactment of the Word of God that produces a divine encounter on the same order as that which has been experienced by the preacher. Of course, the prophetic message includes a certain amount of informational content and rational argument, but the message serves not so much to inform as to transform. That is, a prominent role of the prophet is to reorient and to shape the affections of the hearers so that the affections are formed after God's affections. The objective is the full restoration of the covenant relationship between God and the people of God.

Prophetic Artistry

Scholars have long observed that the biblical prophets stage their speech in poetic forms. The passion of prophetic preaching cannot be expressed in flat prose and precise logic; it requires creative and artistic modes of discourse. Prophetic messages are couched in the symbolic language of imagery and in figures of speech. In addition to metaphorical language, they often utilize symbolic actions that are sometimes shocking. Fritz Medicus writes, 'God needs prophets in order to make himself known, and all prophets are necessarily

⁹³ C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Enchanted Ground', in C.H. Spurgeon, *Sermons of the Rev. C.H. Spurgeon* (New York, NY: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co., 20th edn, 1857), pp. 344-63 (p. 350). Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching*, p. 133, laments that fact that 'After one has preached for a number of years, there is danger of relying upon past experiences and on human knowledge which has been accumulated. Preaching may become perfunctory and lose its fresh touch.'

⁹⁴ On the transformative effect of Scripture, see Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges* (JPTSUP, 32; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2008), p. 63. On the transformational character of Pentecostal worship, see Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (JPTSUP 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 129, and R. Jerome Boone, 'Community and Worship: The Key Components of Pentecostal Christian Formation', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8 (1996), pp. 129-42.

artistic. What a prophet has to say can never be said in prose.⁹⁵ Similarly, Walter Brueggemann finds in Jeremiah's poetic style 'an invitation to seek for language that is passionate, dangerous, and imaginative enough to make available the passion, danger, and freedom of God'.⁹⁶ Rickie Moore agrees that the creative, emotive, and illusive language of poetry is perfectly fitted for expressing the passionate message of the prophets.⁹⁷

In light of the biblical models of prophetic speech, I would plead for a re-appropriation of the artistic, emotive, and creative character of early Pentecostal preaching in the place of the more recent turn towards the rationalistic, formal, and frigid approaches.⁹⁸ Cleophus J. LaRue, Professor of Homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary, offers the following critique of American Protestant preaching: 'on the whole it is too flat, too horizontal, too colorless – in a word, unimaginative. It too often lacks sparkle, intrigue, provocative thought, and mental images that help us to see and to say the Word in new ways.'⁹⁹

LaRue explains that this complaint is not true of African American preaching, and I would argue that it has not been true of Pentecostal prophetic preaching. Although both African American preaching and Pentecostal preaching are quite varied and diverse, they share many common characteristics that place them in sharp contrast to other preaching traditions. Among these common traits are the dynamic, creative, and artistic approaches to preaching that are described in LaRue's work.

⁹⁵ Fritz Medicus, *Grundfragen der Ästhetik: Vorträge und Abhandlungen* (Jena: Diederichs, 1917), p. 14, cited in translation by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), I, p. 43.

⁹⁶ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, p. 15.

⁹⁷ Moore, 'The Prophetic Calling', pp. 21-23. Cf. Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 6; and Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 13.

⁹⁸ For a discussion of one famous Pentecostal preacher's creative and artistic method, see Donna E. Ray, 'Aimee Semple McPherson and Her Seriously Exciting Gospel', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19.1 (Spring 2010), pp. 155-69.

⁹⁹ Cleophus J. LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 71. Neither LaRue nor myself would approve of unbiblical, shallow, and poorly prepared sermons. The construction of the type of creative prophetic messages that I am calling for demands extensive preparation, even after the heart of the message has been given by the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostals must not allow themselves to be robbed of their valuable artistic models by misguided (albeit well-meaning) critics. The adoption of preaching models that are not compatible with Pentecostal theology and are not conducive to Pentecostal spiritual formation will have far-reaching negative consequences. Walter Brueggemann laments the fact that ministers today are ‘caught in bitter exhaustion because people seem so resistant. That resistance, I submit, comes from a frightened, crushed imagination.’¹⁰⁰ I would argue that the loss of imagination is due, in part, to the failure of preachers to engage their congregations with imaginative and energizing prophetic messages.

Prophetic Community

The biblical prophets did not work apart from the community of faith. As previously noted, Rickie Moore points out that the prophet was not a lonely and isolated figure who had little to no contact with society.¹⁰¹ Moore finds evidence from the biblical portrayals of Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah that the prophets were surrounded by colleagues and followers who supported the prophetic ministry and who participated in carrying on the prophetic tradition. In light of the biblical tradition, Walter Brueggemann connects prophecy to the overall ministry of the Church. He concludes that all acts of ministry (not just preaching) should be ‘seen as elements of the one prophetic ministry of formation and reformation of alternative community’.¹⁰²

The Pentecostal Church Should Be a Prophetic Community.

The Pentecostal tradition, as Roger Stronstad has shown, claims a broad vision of prophetic speech that conceives of the Church as a community of prophets (cf. 1 Corinthians 14).¹⁰³ Moses had wished that all of God’s people would be prophets (Num. 11.29), and Joel had promised that the prophetic Spirit would rest upon sons and

¹⁰⁰ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Moore, ‘The Prophet as Mentor’, p. 156.

¹⁰² Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 14.

¹⁰³ See Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke’s Charismatic Theology* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010). Although Stronstad draws from Luke–Acts, evidence for the Holy Spirit’s creation of a prophetic community is found beyond the Lukan corpus, as Robby Waddell has shown in *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* (JPTSUP, 30; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2006), pp. 34–36, 127–29.

daughters, old and young, and even upon servants (Joel 2.28 [3.1]). The gospel narrative portrays Jesus as the prophet *par excellence*, who then calls his Church to be a prophetic community. For Pentecostalism, prophecy emerges not from individuals but from within the body of Christ.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the prophetic preacher is only one prophet among many.

However, in addition to the prophetic character of the community, the New Testament affirms the calling and gifting of certain individuals as prophets. We read that Christ has given prophets to the Church (Eph. 4.11), and that there is a charism of prophecy (1 Cor. 12.10). Early Christian prophets who are named in the Acts of the Apostles include Agabus (Acts 11.27, 28), Barnabus, Symeon, Lucius, Manaen, Saul (Acts 13.1), and Philip's daughters (Acts 21.9). Pentecostal theology affirms the continued presence of the New Testament gifts, including the gift of prophecy in its various manifestations.

The Pentecostal Church Should Be a Discerning Community.

John Goldingay points out that prophets are not infallible;¹⁰⁵ therefore, whenever a person claims to speak on behalf of God, that claim must be subject to a process of discernment. Therefore, prophetic preaching always invites prayerful scrutiny. John the Elder advises the following: 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world' (1 Jn 4.1). The apostle Paul instructs the Corinthian church to let two or three prophets speak, and let the other prophets respond with discernment (1 Cor. 14.29). Gerald Sheppard suggests that this 'discernment invited by public prophecy hopefully checks the dangers of foolishness, manipulation, and even demonic voices which masquerade as true prophecy'.¹⁰⁶

The process of discernment, however, is not always easy. Rickie Moore looks at discernment through the lens of Jeremiah's conflict with other prophets, especially as found in Jeremiah 28. Moore concludes that those who are under divine judgment will often be

¹⁰⁴ Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching*, p. 129-30, roots Pentecostal prophetic preaching in Joel's prophecy.

¹⁰⁵ Goldingay, 'Old Testament Prophecy Today', pp. 44-45; cf. Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁶ Sheppard, 'Prophecy: from Ancient Israel to Pentecostals', p. 64.

unable to discern truth from error.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, we should be reminded that the Old Testament prophets were seldom believed by their hearers and that Jesus Christ himself was rejected and crucified. The prophetic preacher must be prepared to accept the negative responses and criticisms that will be generated by a prophetic message. Nevertheless, Jesus encourages us: 'Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you' (Mt. 5.11-12).

Conclusion

Prophetic preaching is a challenging and often perilous task. The prophetic message is not always welcomed by the Church. Brueggemann argues that today's preaching context includes both 'a tacit yearning in the church for the prophetic' and a 'practical reluctance or resistance' to prophetic preaching.¹⁰⁸ Heschel observes, 'It is embarrassing to be a prophet. There are so many pretenders, predicting peace and prosperity, offering cheerful words, adding strength to self-reliance, while the prophet predicts disaster, pestilence, agony, and destruction.'¹⁰⁹ The prophetic preacher, therefore, must continually discern the tension between the dominant narrative, which is taken for granted by most people, and the Bible's alternative narrative, with the understanding that both the preacher and the church may have deep commitments and vested interests in the dominant narrative.¹¹⁰ In light of this tension, a Pentecostal preacher might be inclined to cite the apostle Paul's words to Timothy:

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teach-

¹⁰⁷ Moore, *The Spirit of the Old Testament*, pp. 86-100.

¹⁰⁸ Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, pp. 130-31.

¹⁰⁹ Heschel, *The Prophets*, I, p. 17.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Goldingay, 'Old Testament Prophecy Today', pp. 36-39.

ers; And they will turn away their ears from the truth, and chase after myths (2 Tim. 4.1-4).

A few final thoughts are in order. First, although we have isolated preaching as a subject of discussion, a valid theology of preaching must be integrated into the larger context of ministry that includes the entire life and work of the minister and the Church. Second, the Pentecostal movement has historically included a broad variety of preaching models; therefore, not all Pentecostal preaching should be prophetic preaching. God speaks to the Church through various types of preaching, and it is not my desire to elevate prophetic preaching above other paradigms. Third, some preachers have developed hybrid models of preaching in which a single sermon may include more than one type of preaching. The hybrid sermon may contain elements of prophecy, teaching, counseling, and inspiration; and it may move back and forth from one to the other.¹¹¹ Pastors, in particular, may find the hybrid model more feasible than a purely prophetic model for the demands of week-to-week parish ministry. Fourth, the loss of prophecy may be a harbinger of the decline of the church. John McKay makes such a connection by observing that ‘Whenever the Church has let go of the supernatural dimension of its prophetic faith ... it has weakened, and with it the society it has influenced’, but the exercise of prophecy has led to the Church’s renewal.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Cf. Hughes, who addresses the extemporaneous element of prophetic preaching (*Pentecostal Preaching*, p. 132).

¹¹² McKay, ‘Pentecost and History’, p. 122.